**Reunification/Rehabilitation at Home Policy**

**SCOPE OF THIS CHAPTER**

This chapter outlines the policy and procedure for the reunification of children in both short term and long term placements.

This chapter was written in February 2017

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Appendix 1 Reunification –flowchart

**1.** **Policy Statement**

The reunification procedure is based upon a key principle Children Act 1989; ‘Local Authorities should promote the upbringing of children by their family where that is in the child’s best interest’.

The policy is targeted at:

* All children who are looked after where the assessment shows they could, with support, safely return home to the care of their parent(s) or other family members.

This policy is not targeted at:

* Children with a plan for permanence;
* Young people with a plan for independence;
* Children who receive short term breaks.

 **2.** **Principle**

The planning process for children and young people who have just become looked after must be dynamic and, if appropriate, maximise their chance of returning home in future. Every child subject to a care order must have a clear plan which states the outcome being sought which will be one of the following:

* Reunification to immediate family
* Permanent substitute care (this can be with a family member)
* Independence.

In the majority of cases an assessment will have been completed prior to the child’s admission to care and therefore a further period of assessment will not be required other than when a specialist assessment is necessary.

In the case of emergency admissions, an assessment review must have taken place prior to the first Looked After Child Review at 20 working days in order that a plan of reunification or permanence can be considered at that meeting.

 **3.** **Short Term Placements**

**3.1** **Procedure**

A family meeting (including the wider family network) will have taken place immediately after referral to children’s social care at which a family contingency plan will have been identified. This will have been implemented prior to the child becoming accommodated. If this plan needs to be changed and the child/young person accommodated, a future plan for reunification should have been discussed and agreed with the family prior to admission. In the case of an emergency admission this should be considered at the time of arrangement or within 72 hours.

The social worker will complete the assessment and placement plan and work intensively with the family to facilitate a speedy return. A danger/worries statement and safety goals must be completed and must inform the Reunification Plan.

**3.2** **Initial Planning Meeting**

An Initial Planning Meeting must be held within 72 hours of a child’s placement. The meeting will be chaired by the Foster Carer’s link worker and attended by

* The child/young person
* Their parent(s)
* Child’s Social Worker
* Representative from the child’s school
* A representative from Health and wider family network
* Any other agencies actively involved with the family

The meeting will:

* Set out the arrangements for meeting the child/young person’s day to day needs;
* Confirm the timescale for the child/young person returning home and carrying out any further assessment or planning for a Care Order;
* Arrange contact – this should include (*if there is not a risk of significant harm*) planning for the first overnight contact within 15 days and a plan to increase contact week on week until the child’s/young person’s return home;
* Set a date for the first Care Team Meeting which will be held within 5 working days of the Initial Planning Meeting and fortnightly thereafter;
* Ensure all LAC documentation is completed and copies given to child/young person/parent/carer (foster carer/residential staff);
* Agree arrangements to facilitate attendance at school and the completion of the PEP ([Personal Education Plan);
* Arrange initial LAC Health Review and health needs in placement
* Where applicable, notification to out of county authority
* Following the Initial Planning Meeting the social Worker will complete the Danger/Worries statement and will have shared it with the child/young person and family in preparation for the Care Team Meeting.

**3.3** **Initial Care Team Meeting**

The initial ‘Care team’ meeting will be held within 5 working days of the child becoming looked after. The Social Worker will share the danger/worries statement with members of the Care Team and with the assistance of the child/young person, family and care team, safety goals will be identified and incorporated within the Child Plan, tasks will be assigned and a timescale for reunification agreed.

**3.4** **Initial LAC Review (28 Day)**

The aim of the Initial LAC Review is to:

* Review and amend arrangements for meeting the child’s day to day care needs, as agreed at the Initial Planning meeting, for example health, education, contact;
* Review reasons why child/young person became Looked After;
* Review danger/worries statement;
* Establish if it is safe for the child/young person to return home, and what changes need to be made and sustained within the family for this to occur;
* Identify the interventions required to achieve the above changes, including consideration of specialist interventions;
* Identify the timescales within which the interventions can be delivered with the family and evidence gathered as to their effectiveness in creating a safe environment for the child/young person to return to;
* Review the Child Plan;
* Identify a support plan/sustainability plan which will support the family to continue to care for the child/young person in the community after that have been returned home.

If a plan for reunification is not felt to be in the Child/Young Person best interests, a plan for permanence or preparation for independence will be need to be identified and timescales outlined for how this alternative plan will be progressed.

Permanence options are:

* Adoption/Special Guardianship Order/Family Arrangements Order;
* Long term foster care (Matched).

It is recognised that the child/young person needs change as they develop and mature. Likewise parents and family circumstances improve and change and it is for this reason that the CSCA will be completed annually for all Looked After Children who do not have a plan for permanence.

If, following the assessment, the ‘care team’ recommend a change of Child Plan to one of reunification, a LAC Review must take place and, if it is safe to do so, a plan for reunification must be progressed. Social Worker must complete a danger/worries statement and share this with the child/young person, family and Care Team.

If reunification has not been achieved within 6 weeks however remains the plan for the child the IRO’s views must be sought and reunification plan must be reviewed by the Team Manager at the care team at 56 days and if necessary 74th day prior to the 4 month LAC review.

Note arrangements made under section 20 Children Act 1989 in response to child protection concerns should be discussed at Legal Panel if they exceed 6 weeks.

 **4.** **Long Term Placements**

**4.1** **Procedure**

Where a decision has been made for the Local Authority to look after a child in the longer term in either foster care or in residential care, including out of authority placements, an assessment should be undertaken within each 6 month period, or in response to a change in circumstances.

The up to date assessment will re consider if the parents’ capacity and ability to meet the needs of their child have increased sufficiently to enable the child to return to their care. The assessment will also consider how the child’s needs have developed and changed, and to ascertain their current wishes and feelings in relation to their placement and potential reunification. It is important that the assessment includes all people with Parental Responsibility for the child and other significant adults.

If the assessment indicates that a plan for reunification is in the child/young person’s best interests a Risk Statement should be completed with the child/young person and parents. This will then be shared with the Care Team and will inform the plan for reunification.

If the child/young person is subject to a Care Order, Section 31 Children Act 1989, placement with parent’s documentation must be completed and a recommendation for reunification made to the Assistant Director via the Community Arrangements Panel. If the plan for reunification is endorsed by the Assistant Director a brought forward LAC Review is required where the change of plan will be discussed with the IRO and the Care Team.

Following the brought forward LAC Review, the ‘care team’ - team manager, social worker and IRO - should convene to agree the detail of the reunification plan. The ‘care team’ should consider the outcomes for the child/ young person when developing the Child Plan, including:

* Timescales and contact arrangements during the reunification phase;
* How the child/young person’s day to day care needs will be met within the family, including their education and health needs.

What supports are needed to sustain family change and ensure the child/young person remains safe at home and their holistic needs are meet, using the Risk Statement to inform planning.

**5. Exit Review upon Reunification**

Where a decision is made for reunification, an Exit Review should be requested by the Long Term social worker to the IRO, within 5 days of the decision to return the child/ren home.

The purpose of an exit interview is to:

* To ensure the IRO and looked after service is informed of the decision
* To discuss the long term plan for the child
* To formulate a robust plan of support which needs to be recorded, shared and saved on the child’s file
* To discuss the quality of the placement and the child’s/young person’s experience
* To enable action to be taken to improve the service
* To ensure the child’s/young person’s legal status is correctly recorded on the child’s file and the file closed if required

Exit Reviews are voluntary and so will require the agreement of the child/young person.

**End**