**MEDWAY PERMANENCY PLANNING GUIDE FOR SOCIAL WORKERS**

This guide has been produced to help social workers make plans for children in Medway Council’s care.

It should be read alongside the Permanency Strategy.

**WHAT IS PERMANENCE PLANNING**

Permanence is provided by a long term plan for the child's upbringing and provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and their families from early intervention through to adoption.

Permanency is fundamental to a child’s emotional security, stability and wellbeing and should be at the forefront of every Social Workers practice.

For children it means that they know where they are going to be living for the rest of their childhood and who their day-to-day parents are going to be.

**What is the purpose of Permanency Planning?**

* To consider and determine what the right permanency option is for each child based on a careful review of their individual needs.
* All options should be considered for our children.
* To plan the child’s journey to permanency and secure it at the earliest possible opportunity
* To drive the work towards achieving permanency, to ensure pace and reduce drift and delay.

The objective of planning for permanence is to ensure that all children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond and to give them a sense of belonging. It is also important to remember that older children and young people also need to achieve permanence in their lives

For most children permanence will be achieved with their birth parents.

Where it is clear that birth parents and children are unable to live together, planning must be swift and clear to identify permanent alternative settings.

**What options are available?**

The route chosen to achieve permanence will depend on:

* The age of the child, their early childhood experience and any harm they have experienced
* The child's special needs, including disabilities
* The child's relationship with their birth family and the likely relationship available to them once they reach adulthood
* The child’s relationships with siblings
* Any risks posed by the birth family to the stability of a permanent placement
* The child's wishes and feelings

Each route to permanency is governed by legislation and requires different degrees of intervention. They give carers different degrees of parental responsibility and enable the Local Authority to provide different levels of support.

**The options for permanence are**

* **Staying/returning home**
* **Placement with family or friends/Connected persons**
* **CAO**
* **Special Guardianship**
* **Long term fostering**
* **Adoption**

**Permanence Panel**

All children are to be presented to the Permanence Panel 4 to 6 weeks into their care episode or after care proceedings have been issued if the children are still at home with parents.

Each social worker will have a 20 minute slot for case discussion.

Social workers are expected to have completed the relevant paperwork and have discussed it with their line manager before the meeting.

The paperwork is distributed to panel members **two days before panel**.

Social workers present the case and the care plan for discussion/ monitoring.

The panel consists of:

* Group Manager for Children in Care (Chair)
* Group Manager for Adoption and Fostering
* Operational Manager, IRO Service

All cases are minuted and uploaded onto the child’s file within **7 working days** of the meeting taking place.

**Practice Points to consider prior to Panel**

* Can this child safely return home? If you do not have the evidence yet, what do you need to do to get this evidence? What support would need to be in place? What assessments would you need?
* If you do not think the child will be able to return home, or you do not yet have the evidence, have you considered family members? Have you made a referral for an FGC? If family members have been put forward, have these been referred to the Connected Team Manager for assessment?
* What are your other alternative care plans if child cannot return home and family are not viable?
* If there are siblings, have you completed a sibling assessment?
* If adoption is likely, have you begun adoption planning (see separate adoption planning process)

**Permanency Planning Tracking Meetings**

Following the Permanence Panel, each case will be tracked by the Team Manager, social worker, and fostering manager, connected carer manager or worker, adoption manager or link worker when needed.

Each child’s journey must be tracked at least every 8 weeks to ensure there is no delay, but more frequently if necessary.

**Final Evidence Meeting**

At the conclusion of proceedings and once all evidence has been gathered, a Final Evidence Meeting will be held to agree the proposed care plan.

This meeting will be chaired by the relevant Group Manager and will also include as appropriate:

* Child’s Social Worker
* Team Manager
* Connected Carer Team Manager
* Assessing social worker from Connected Team
* Adoption Manager
* Legal Services
* Fostering Supervising Social Worker

If there are any changes following the Final Evidence Meeting, the meeting should be reconvened to discuss these changes.

If the Care Plan is adoption, the case must be booked in for ADM decision and relevant paperwork provided (See separate adoption planning process).

**AFTER FINAL HEARING**

**Permanency Planning Tracking Meetings**

These meeting should continue as before to ensure that the agreed care plan is move forward at pace. Children should be considered at least every 8 weeks and monitored by the Team Manager.

If the care plan is adoption: see separate adoption planning process post order.

Adoption family finding will be undertaken by the RAA after October 2020.

If the care plan is long term fostering:

* Lac review should consider whether current carers can meet child’s needs through to adulthood and are willing to offer permanence
* If yes, child should be booked into Permanence Panel for plan to be agreed by Panel
* Once ratified by Permanence Panel, matching report to be prepared by child’s social worker and supervising social worker and presented to next available Fostering Panel and ADM for approval of the match
* If current carers cannot meet child’s needs long term, or are not prepared to consider permanence, referral to be made to fostering to identify a long term match

If care plan is placement with family or friends under Connected Carer approval:

* Case should be presented to Fostering Panel for full approval as Connected Carers if this has not already happened. This full approval by Panel and ADM is equivalent to matching process for long term fostering
* Lac reviews should continue to explore SGO for the carers to enable child to leave care and be claimed by family

If any placement disrupts following approval as a permanent placement, a Disruption Meeting should be held and the child should return to Permanence Panel for consideration.