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

The authority has a commitment to ensure a child’s need for a permanent home is addressed and a permanence plan made at the earliest opportunity. For some children, the need to implement a permanence plan will be known either before they are born of shortly after their birth. For other children, the need to implement a permanence plan will only be known once they become a Looked after Child. The aim is to ensure that each child has an agreed permanence plan in place by their second statutory Looked after Review.

The expectation is that all children under the age of 16 will have a permanency plan; this can range from an eventual return home, a long term placement with a foster carer, a Special Guardianship order, a Child Arrangement Order or adoption. For those 16 plus, the expectation is that their permanency will be addressed through a path way plan.

**2.** **Permanence Planning Procedure**

**Routes to Permanence**

In order to ensure that options for permanence are fully considered for children, Shropshire Council in collaboration with Telford and Wrekin Council have established Permanency Forums. These forums will consist of senior managers and others with experience of permanency planning. The purpose of the forums is to provide social workers with the opportunity to present their case and to then receive advice and consultation on the steps needed to be undertaken to achieve a plan of permanence.

There are three referral pathways for Permanence Forum, they are as follows:

* Where a mother of an unborn child requests that the Local Authority place her child for adoption following their birth, an immediate request should be made for the case to be referred to Permanency Forum.
* Following the presentation of a case to a Legal Planning Meeting where the decision is made to explore permanency options outside of the birth family.
* Prior to a child’s second statutory looked after review so that the review can then endorse the permanence plan for a child. Where it becomes clear before the first statutory review that permanence will be required outside of the birth family, a permanency forum slot should be booked immediately.

**Purpose**

The permanency forum will ensure that all available routes to permanence are considered fully, and that social workers are made aware of the tasks that need to be completed in order to progress with the permanency plan. It is an expectation that the child’s parents, the child, where appropriate, and other important people in the child’s life, will have been consulted prior to the permanency forum being held.

For those children placed with a connected person, the need to book onto a permanency forum does not apply. It is an expectation that all of these arrangements are by definition ‘permanent’ and therefore from the outset of the placement the focus will be on working towards a permanency outcome, most likely discharge from care through the making of a Special Guardianship order. In the event of a connected person’s placement breaking down, this procedure will apply.

If there is a disagreement about the most appropriate route to permanence, the review should be clearly informed of this and the reasons for it.

**Process**

In order to prepare for presentation to permanency forum, the following tasks will need to be completed:

* The social worker will need to book a permanency forum consultation slot via CPS duty.
* The social worker will then complete the permanency forum consultation part 1 and submit this to CPS duty 3 days in advance of the forum.
* The social worker will present their case to permanency forum. The person chairing the permanency forum will complete Part 2 and return to the social worker with a copy to the IRO. This will clearly outline all the tasks that are required to progress with the permanency plan, including the need to complete a Child Permanence Report for all children requiring permanence outside of their birth family.

**Progressing a Permanence Plan**

Where a child has made significant and strong attachments to their current carers, it may well be that those carers are best placed to provide a permanent placement for the child. However, no assumptions should be made that existing foster carers or other parties requesting to become permanent carers for the child are necessarily best placed to do so, and no requests should be made directly to foster carers to consider becoming a permanent carer for a child. Where this is deemed appropriate, this should first be discussed with the foster carer’s supervising social worker, who can explore this option with the foster carer. If it appears to be a viable option, then the foster carer will undergo an assessment as a potential permanent carer for the child. This process may take place alongside assessments of other applicants.

If a child is placed with a connected person, discussions regarding permanence should already have been undertaken as part of the viability assessment and subsequent fostering assessment. It is our expectation that in the vast majority of cases a Special Guardianship Order will be pursued and completed within 12 months of commencement of placement. All Special Guardianship orders will have a robust support plan and access to support post order.

If the plan for the child is adoption, the case will be allocated to the permanence coordinator for family finding, they will co-ordinate all family finding activity.

If the plan for the child is long term fostering and they are unable to remain with their existing carer, a family finding plan will be implemented by CPS who along with CPS duty will co-ordinate all family finding activity.

If the plan for the child is a Special Guardianship order with their existing carer, the assessment will either be completed by the supervising social worker or another suitably qualified social worker.

If the plan for the child is long term fostering with their existing mainstream foster carer and everyone is in agreement with this plan, then the supervising social worker in conjunction with the child’s social worker will complete all necessary tasks, including presenting the match to Fostering Panel.

If the plan for the child is long term fostering with their existing IFA foster carer and everyone is in agreement with this plan, agreement must be sought from the Assistant Director as to the funding arrangements and CPS duty must undertake the negotiations with the IFA provider. Once agreed the child’s social worker in conjunction with the supervising social worker from the IFA provider will complete all necessary tasks, including presenting the match to fostering panel for approval.

**Identification of Placements**

The identification of a suitable placement is a joint responsibility between the child’s social worker and CPS duty. It will be based on agreed actions to be taken by both parties.

As the identification of suitable placements is an ongoing process, regular progress reviews should be undertaken by CPS in consultation with the child’s social worker.

**Matching Process**

Regardless of which permanency option is pursued, the ability of any carer to meet the long term needs of a child must be addressed through a matching meeting and a matching report must be completed. For children under 16, all permanent matches must be approved either by the Adoption Panel or by the Fostering Panel. For fostering matches, the following papers must be supplied to panel:

* Family’s Form F, completed or updated within the last 12 months;
* The Child Permanence Report, completed or updated within the last 6 months;
* Matching report, based on the outcome of the matching meeting.

For adoption matches, please see the adoption procedures.

**Disruption of a long term placement**

Once Fostering Panel has recommended a match for a child and the Agency Decision Maker has decided this is the most appropriate plan for a child, the placement will become long term. In the event of a disruption resulting in the child having to leave their long term placement, an urgent foster carer review will be conducted within 2 weeks. Whilst this is underway the foster carer will continue to receive their fee element for a two week period with the option to extend for a further two weeks if necessary. This will allow time to determine through the review process whether the foster carer is able to continue to foster, if the answer is yes and they are able to take placements, their terms of approval will be amended and they will continue to receive the fostering fee. If the answer is no, their fee will be stopped and the carer will either resign or they will be presented to fostering panel with a recommendation of de-registration.

**End**