Permanency

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 **1.****Defining Permanence**

Permanence is the long term plan for the child’s upbringing and provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and their families from family support at initial contact through to adoption. It ensures a framework of emotional, physical and legal conditions that gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging.

Trafford Council is committed to ensuring that all children in its care are given the opportunity to live safely and securely in a family. Where this cannot be achieved within birth families, we will, through effective child care planning and monitoring, ensure that alternative families are found to meet the needs of each child as speedily as possible.

 **2.** **Key Objectives in Permanence Planning**

The objective of planning for permanence is to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond. Permanence is a guiding principle for all services working with children and families and provides a framework of emotional, physical and legal conditions that gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity

Early permanency planning is essential for all looked after children to avoid drift and progress plans for security and attachment. Trafford’s overarching permanence strategy requires us to consider permanency planning from the very first contact with a child or young person and their family. Assessments at the front door of children’s services will consider the long term outcome for a child or young person by determining levels of risk alongside identifying significant people in the child or young person’s life. These could be friends; extended family members or a connected person who could potentially care for the child should this be needed.

The question "how are the child's permanence needs being met?" must be at the core of everything we do.

Where it is necessary for a child to be placed away from their parents:

* This should be for as short a time as needed to secure a safe, supported return home; or
* If a child cannot return home, plans must be made for alternate permanent care. Family members, friends or connected people should always be considered in the first instance with the permanence secured through the appropriate legal order to meet the child's needs. This may be a child arrangement order, special guardianship order, or Full care order.
* Where it is not in the child's best interests to live within the family network, it will usually be in the interests of the child for alternative permanent carers to be identified and the placement secured through adoption, long term foster care or special guardianship. Residential group living is provided only when a need for this is identified within the [**Care Plan**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/resources/keywords_online/nat_key/keywords/care_plan.html) and when substitute family care is not appropriate;
* For older children arranging for their independent living must be considered.

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

Wherever possible, care should be provided locally unless clearly identified as inappropriate.

Contact with the family, extended family or connected person should be facilitated and built on (unless clearly identified as inappropriate).

The professionals involved will work in partnership with parents/families to meet the above objectives. The wishes and feelings of the child will be taken into account at all times.  The older and more mature the child, the greater the weight should be given to his or her wishes.

Whilst it is important, when undertaking permanence planning, to promote the child's links with his or her racial, cultural and religious heritage, this should not be allowed to introduce delay in achieving permanence for the child. Note that due consideration no longer has to be given to a child’s religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background when matching a child and prospective adopters.

**3.** **Options for Permanence**

The options for permanence are:

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| 3.1 | [**Staying/Returning Home**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/trafford/cs/chapters/g_perm_plan.html?zoom_highlight=permanency#staying_home) |
| 3.2 | [**Placement with Family or Friends/Connected Persons**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/trafford/cs/chapters/g_perm_plan.html?zoom_highlight=permanency#place_rel_friend) |
| 3.3 | [**Adoption**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/trafford/cs/chapters/g_perm_plan.html?zoom_highlight=permanency#adoption) |
| 3.4 | [**Fostering for Adoption, Concurrent Planning and Temporary Approval as Foster Carers of Approved Prospective Adopters**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/trafford/cs/chapters/g_perm_plan.html?zoom_highlight=permanency#foster_for_adoption) |
| 3.5 | [**Special Guardianship**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/trafford/cs/chapters/g_perm_plan.html?zoom_highlight=permanency#spec_guard_ord) |
| 3.6 | [**Child Arrangements Orders**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/trafford/cs/chapters/g_perm_plan.html?zoom_highlight=permanency#ch_arr_order) |
| 3.7 | [**Long-term Fostering**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/trafford/cs/chapters/g_perm_plan.html?zoom_highlight=permanency#long_term_fost) |

**3.1****Staying/Returning Home**

The first stage within permanence planning is work with families and children in need to support them staying together. Staying at home offers the best chance of stability. Research shows that family preservation has a higher success rate than reunification. This of course has to be balanced with risk of harm to the child or young person. If the long term plan for the child is to return home the practice framework below can offer the appropriate guidance.

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/research-reports/reunification-implementation-guide.pdf>..

The procedure relating to the placement of children with their parents apply where a looked after child is to be placed:

a. With a parent(s) i.e. mother or father whether or not married;

b. A person(s) who is not a parent, but holds Parental Responsibility (PR);

c. A person in whose favour a Residence Order / Child Arrangements Order was in force immediately before the Care Order was made.

The child will have become looked after as a result of serious circumstances which would have led to an Interim Care Order or a Care Order being granted by the Court. A child remaining or being placed at home or with the parent in a foster placement setting must be part of a robust and considered care plan. Children’s Social Care must be satisfied that the placement is the most suitable way of safeguarding and promoting the child's welfare and will undertake appropriate enquiries and assessments to assist the decision making process.

A [**Placement Plan**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/placement_plan.html) must be robust and developed with parental cooperation. The Placement Plan will contain provision(s) for ongoing work with and support to the family. This should aim to enhance the parents’ role, increasing the scope of parental discretion wherever possible and reviewing regularly the possibility of the Care Order being discharged.

Where it is decided that a child's best interests are met by such a placement, careful consideration must be given as to whether the Care Order remains appropriate. The requirement for the care order should be explicitly considered at each Looked After Review. It is Trafford’s policy to review all Care Orders subject to Placement with Parents regulations at panel after 9 months. If it is considered that it may be appropriate to discharge the Care Order now or in the near future the multi-agency Child and Family Assessment will be updated. If the assessment concludes that the Local Authority no longer has threshold for a Care Order an application will be made to the Courts to discharge the Care Order. At this time a lesser Order such as Supervision Order or Child Arrangement Order may be applied for to assist the family with any outstanding needs.

 If it is considered that the Care Order is still required, it will be reviewed six monthly to ensure that the most appropriate order is in place.

**3.2** **Placement with Connected Person**

* If an assessment concludes that the child cannot safely remain at home, every effort must be made to secure placement with Connected Person. This will be either as part of the plan to work towards a return home or - if a return home is clearly not in the child's best interests - as the preferred permanence option. It is very important to establish at the earliest stage possible which relatives or friends might be available to care for the child, to avoid the kind of delays that can happen during court proceedings where this work has not been done. Convene a Family Group Conference (if not already done so) so family members are given an opportunity to plan and make decisions for a child who is considered at risk. The purpose being to support families to find their own solutions to the issues highlighted by social care as a concern.
* If the child continues to be at risk, potential carers need to be identified which can be a relative, friend or other person connected with a child. The latter is someone who would not fit the term 'relative or friend', but who has a pre-existing relationship with the child. It could be someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity such as (for example) a childminder, a teacher or a youth worker.
* Progress with initial screening, viability checks and connected person assessment for nominated carer.
* Ascertain wishes and feelings of the child or young person

Routes to permanence for children placed with connected persons need to be considered at an early stage. If children are not able to return to their birth families, ideally their placement within the extended family or with friends would be supported by a Child Arrangements Order or a Special Guardianship Order. Our aim is to avoid children remaining on Care orders when placed safely with relatives.

**3.3****Adoption**

See [**Placement for Adoption Procedure**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/trafford/cs/chapters/p_place_adop.html) and relinquished children procedure (embed link to this) for detailed procedures.

Adoption transfers Parental Responsibility for the child from the birth parents and others who had Parental Responsibility, including the local authority, permanently and solely to the adopter(s).

The child is deemed to be the child of the adopter(s) as if he or she had been born to them. The child's birth certificate is changed to an adoption certificate showing the adopter(s) to be the child's parent(s). A child who is not already a citizen of the UK acquires British citizenship if adopted in the UK by a citizen of the UK.

Research strongly supports adoption as a primary consideration and as a main factor contributing to the stability of children, especially for those who cannot be reunified with their birth or extended family.

Adopters may be supported, including financially, by the local authority and will have the right to request an assessment for support services at any time after the Order is made.  See [**Adoption Support Procedure**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/trafford/cs/chapters/p_adop_support.html) for detailed procedures.

Adoption has the following advantages as a Permanence Plan:

1. Parental Responsibility is held exclusively by the carers;
2. The child is no longer [**Looked After**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/resources/keywords_online/nat_key/keywords/looked_after.html);
3. No future legal challenge to overturn the Adoption Order is possible;
4. The child is a permanent family member into adulthood.

Adoption has the following disadvantages as a Permanence Plan:

1. It involves a complete and permanent legal separation from the family of origin;
2. There is no review process.

The service is committed to preventing delay for children and supports fostering for adoption and concurrency where appropriate in order to prevent delay for the child.

Family finding should begin as soon as adoption is under consideration, and before the Agency Decision Maker decides that the child should be placed for adoption or a [**Placement Order**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/placement_order.html) is made.

**3.4** **Fostering for Adoption, Concurrent Planning and Temporary Approval as Foster Carers of Approved Prospective Adopters**

The Children and Families Act 2014 imposes a **duty** to consider placements with carers who are approved as both adopters and foster carers - see [**Fostering for Adoption, Concurrent Planning and Temporary Approval as Foster Carers of Approved Prospective Adopters Procedure**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/trafford/cs/chapters/p_foster_for_adopt.html).

Early permanence (EP) is an umbrella term which includes both Fostering for Adoption (FfA) and Concurrent Planning placements (CPP). Both schemes enable a child in care under the age of two to find foster carers who are ready and willing to adopt them later if the courts decide they cannot live with their birth family.

Most babies and young children who are adopted have to manage several changes of carer and broken attachments. With early permanence, we avoid that and give a baby the best chance of a settled and secure life.

The great advantage for the children concerned is that, if the courts decide they cannot go back to their birth family, it will prevent them having to suffer the upset and loss of moving from a foster home where they have settled to an adoptive family

Where the local authority are considering adoption for a child, or are satisfied that the child ought to be placed for adoption but is not yet authorised (either by consent or by Placement Order) to place the child for adoption, the authority MUST consider placing the child with a relative, friend or other [**Connected Person**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/connect_pers.html) who is also a local authority foster carer or, where they decide that such a placement is not the most appropriate placement, then they must consider placing the child with a local authority foster carer who has been approved as a prospective adopter.

In such a situation, the requirements under the section 22 of the Children Act 1989 to ensure that placements allow the child to live near the parents’ home, be placed within the local authority area, remain at the same school and to be placed together with sibling(s), do not apply.

The carers may be dually approved by being fully approved adopters and foster carers for any child, or they might be approved prospective adopters who have been temporarily approved as foster carers for a named child under regulation 25A of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. This temporary foster carer approval process can be carried out at the same time as the adopter approval process.

**3.5****Special Guardianship Orders**

See [**Applications for Special Guardianship Orders Procedure**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/trafford/cs/chapters/p_app_spec_guard.html) for the detailed procedures [R:\IBU\CYPS\SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP (SGO)](file:///%5C%5Ctrafford.gov.uk%5Cdfsroot%5CIBU%5CCYPS%5CSPECIAL%20GUARDIANSHIP%20%28SGO%29)

Special Guardianship addresses the needs of a significant group of children, who need a sense of stability and security within a placement away from their parents but not the absolute legal break with their birth family that is associated with adoption. It can also provide an alternative for achieving permanence in families where adoption, for cultural or religious reasons, is not an option.

The following persons may apply:

1. Any guardian of the child;
2. A local authority foster carer with whom the child has lived for one year immediately preceding the application;
3. Anyone who holds a [**Child Arrangements Order**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/chi_arrange_orders.html) with respect to the child or who has the consent of all those in whose favour a Child Arrangements Order is in force;
4. Anyone with whom the child has lived for a period of at least three years (does not need to be continuous but must not have begun more than five years before, or ended more than three months before, the making of the application).
5. Where the child is in the care of the local authority, any person who has the consent of the local authority;
6. Anyone who has the consent of all those with Parental Responsibility for the child e.g. Anyone, including the child, who has the leave of the court to apply.
7. A relative with whom the child has lived for a period of at least one year immediately preceding the application;
8. Any other person aged 18 or over (other than a parent) may apply for a Special Guardianship Order if he or she has the leave of the court to make the application.

The parents of a child may not become the child's special guardians.

Special Guardianship Orders offer greater stability and security to a placement than Child Arrangements Orders in that - whilst they are revocable, there are restrictions on those who may apply to discharge the Order and the leave of the Court, if required, will only be granted where circumstances have changed since the Special Guardianship Order was made.

Special guardians will have Parental Responsibility for the child and although this will be shared with the child's parents, the special guardian will have the legal right to make all day to day arrangements for the child. The parents will still have to be consulted and their consent required in order to change a child’s name, adoption, placement, going abroad for more than 3 months and any other such fundamental issues.

A Special Guardianship Order made in relation to a child who is the subject of a Care Order will automatically discharge the Care Order and the local authority will no longer have Parental Responsibility.

Special guardians may be supported financially or otherwise by the local authority and, as with adoptive parents, will have the right to request an assessment for support services at any time after the Order is made.

Special Guardianship has the following advantages as a Permanence Plan:

1. The carers have Parental Responsibility and clear authority to make decisions on day to day issues regarding the child's care;
2. There is added legal security to the Order in that leave is required for parents to apply to discharge the Order and will only be granted if a change of circumstances can be established since the original Order was made;
3. It maintains legal links to the birth family;
4. The child will no longer be in care and there need be no social worker involvement unless this is identified as necessary, in which case an assessment of the need for support must be made by the relevant local authority.

Special Guardianship has the following disadvantages as a Permanence Plan:

1. The Order only lasts until the child is 18 and does not necessarily bring with it the same sense of belonging to the special guardian's family as an Adoption Order does;
2. As the child is not a legal member of the family, if difficulties arise there may be less willingness to persevere and seek resolution;
3. Although there are restrictions on applications to discharge the Order, such an application is possible and may be perceived as a threat to the child's stability;
4. Although a parent requires leave to apply for a Child Arrangements Order, they can apply for any other Section 8 Order (i.e. Child Arrangements Order, Prohibited Steps Order or Specific Issues Order) as of right.

**3.6****Child Arrangements Orders**

A Child Arrangements Order may be used to increase the degree of legal permanence in a placement with relatives or friends, or a long-term fostering placement, where this would be in the child's best interests.

Where a child would otherwise have to be placed with strangers, a placement with family or friends may be identified as a preferred option and the carers may be encouraged and supported to apply for a Child Arrangements Order where this will be in the best interests of the child.

A Child Arrangements Order can confer Parental Responsibility, to be shared more equally with the parents than with Special Guardianship, which in some cases may be a more appropriate arrangement.

The holder of a Child Arrangements Order does not have the right to consent to the child's adoption nor to appoint a guardian; in addition, he/she may not change the child's name nor arrange for the child's emigration without the consent of all those with Parental Responsibility or the leave of the court.

Whilst support may continue for as long as the Child Arrangements Order remains in force, the aim will be to make arrangements which are self-sustaining in the long run.

The making of a Child Arrangements Order can now be made until the child is 18 and will have the effect of discharging a Care Order.

The following people may apply for a Child Arrangements Order:

* A parent or guardian;
* A party to a marriage (whether the marriage is subsisting or not) where the child was brought up as a child of the family;
* A person with whom the child has lived for 3 years. (This need not be continuous but must not have started more than 5 years before or ended more than 3 months before the making of the application);
* A local authority foster carer with whom the child has lived for 1 year;
* Where a Child Arrangements Order is already in force, a person who has the consent of those in whose favour the Child Arrangements Order was made;
* Where the child is Looked After, a person with the consent of the relevant local authority;
* In any other case, a person who has the consent of all those with Parental Responsibility.

Anyone else who wishes to apply, including the child, must apply to the court for leave to make the application for a Child Arrangements Order.

A Child Arrangements Order has the following advantages:

1. It gives Parental Responsibility to the carer whilst maintaining the parents' Parental Responsibility;
2. The child will no longer be Looked After and there need be no social work involvement, unless this is identified as necessary;
3. There is no review process;
4. The child will not be Looked After and so less stigma is attached to the placement.

A Child Arrangements Order has the following disadvantages:

1. It is less secure than Adoption or Special Guardianship in that an application can be made to revoke the Child Arrangements Order. However, the Court making the order can be asked to attach a condition refusing a parent's right to seek revocation without leave of the court;
2. There is no formal continuing support to the family after the Order is made although in some instances, a Child Arrangements Order Allowance may be payable by the local authority;
3. There is no professional reviewing of the arrangements after the Order unless a new application to court is made, for example by the parents for contact or revocation.  (NB New applications to court may be expensive to defend, and the carers would have to bear the cost if not entitled to assistance with legal costs).

**3.7****Long-term Fostering**

(Please see the separate chapter [**Placements in Foster Care**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/trafford/cs/chapters/p_place_fost_care.html) for details regarding the appropriate making of long-term foster placements).

For those children who remain [**Looked After**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/looked_after.html) an important route to permanence is long-term foster care. Where the permanence plan for the child is longer-term foster care this may be where the current short-term foster placement is assessed to meet the long term needs of the child for permanence or where a new placement is identified for a child as a result of an assessment and matching process.

This option has proved to be particularly useful for older children who retain strong links to their birth families and do not want or need the formality of adoption and where the carers wish for the continued involvement of the local authority.

Within long-term fostering, there is an expectation that the placement will continue throughout childhood until the young person leaves care and an aspiration that the relationships between the child and the foster family may endure into adulthood and indeed throughout life, on the basis of voluntary mutual attachments.

This does not mean that a child will necessarily consider the fostering family as a “permanent” family to the exclusion of the birth family. One of the key advantages which long-term foster care can offer is respect for the continuing role of the birth family, and support for the child to maintain a relationship with their birth family unless this is considered detrimental to the child’s interests.

Long-term fostering has the following advantages as a Permanence Plan:

1. The local authority retains a role in negotiating between the foster carers and the birth family over issues such as contact;
2. There is continuing social work support to the child and foster family in a placement that is regularly reviewed to ensure that the child's needs are met;
3. It maintains legal links to the birth family who can still play a part in the decision making for the child.
4. There is also the potential for rehabilitation to birth family if it is in the child’s best interest.

Long-term fostering has the following disadvantages as a Permanence Plan:

1. Lack of [**Parental Responsibility**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/parental_respons.html) for the carers;
2. Continuing social work involvement;
3. Regular [**Looked After Reviews**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/looked_aft_review.html), which may be regarded as destabilising to the placement;
4. Stigma attached to the child due to being in care;
5. The child is not a legal member of the family. If difficulties arise there may be less willingness to persevere and seek resolution;
6. Post care and/or post 18 the carers have no legal responsibility towards the young person.

 **4.** **Permanence and Local Placement**

Where a child is placed with long term carers, it is important that the child has access to the friends, family or community within which they were brought up and which form part of their identity and their long term support network.  For these reasons children should be placed in local provision wherever possible.

Any decision to place a child away from his or her community should be based on the particular needs of the child, and considered within the context of a Permanence Plan.  Where an alternative family placement is sought in the area of another local authority, the likely availability and cost of suitable local resources to support the placement must be explored.  In the case of an adoptive placement, this will be required as part of the assessment of need for adoption support services (see [**Adoption Support Procedure**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/trafford/cs/chapters/p_adop_support.html)), but should be carried out in relation to any permanent placement.

See also [**Out of Area Placements Procedure**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/trafford/cs/chapters/p_out_area_place.html).

 **5.****Assessing and Planning for Permanence**

Assessments of a child's needs in relation to his or her Permanence Plan must:

1. Focus on outcomes;
2. Consider stability issues, including the child's and family's needs for long-term support and the child's needs for links, including contact, with his or her parents, siblings, and wider family network.

Social workers must ensure the child's Permanence Plan is clearly linked to previous assessments of the child's needs.

[**Appendix One - Identifying Permanence Options**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/trafford/cs/chapters/g_perm_plan.html?zoom_highlight=permanency#app_one) presents a brief, research-based checklist of considerations about Adoption, Child Arrangements Orders, Special Guardianship Orders and Long-term Fostering.

In considering the child's needs, full consultation with family and community networks should be undertaken to establish the child's attachments and supports.

In all cases, the child's own wishes and feelings must be ascertained and taken into account.

By the time of the second [**Looked After Review**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/resources/keywords_online/nat_key/keywords/looked_aft_review.html), the child must have a Permanence Plan (incorporated into the [**Care Plan**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/resources/keywords_online/nat_key/keywords/care_plan.html)), to be presented for consideration at the review.

Where the Permanence Plan includes a [**Parallel Plan**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/resources/keywords_online/nat_key/keywords/parallel_plan.html), the social worker must ensure that the parents are informed of the reasons why two plans are being made to meet the child's needs and prevent unnecessary delay.

**6.** **Good Practice Guidance**

The following practice guidance is not exhaustive  It is drawn from research and consultation with young people, parents, carers and practitioners.

**6.1 Supporting reunification with birth or extended family**

Research points to:

* The importance of clearly communicating to the family what needs to happen to enable the child to return home, and within what timescales;
* The importance of exploring family ties and long term relationships with family, school and community;
* The use of [**Family Group Conferences**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/resources/keywords_online/nat_key/keywords/family_group_conference.html) as an effective way of facilitating both the above.

**6.2 Family Group Conferencing**

Family Group Conferences (FGC’s) are voluntary decision making meetings to help families find their own solutions to problems. These are sometimes referred to as family meetings and can run alongside a child or young person’s Child In Need or Child Protection Plan.

The process empowers a family and their network to draw on their strengths and resources to make a safe plan for their child or young person. The Family Group Conference offers a way of planning and making decisions which ensures that a child or young person, along with parents and extended family, have their views listened to and are involved in decisions directly affecting their lives. It can also be an opportunity to be informed of any resources that could help them improve family life.

The Family Group Conference can also provide the family with an opportunity to contribute to the permanency planning process for their child or young person. The best interest of the child remains the focus and where appropriate, the family may come up with possible alternatives to care plans such as special guardianship, long-term fostering or adoption. Even when it has been decided that it is not safe for the child or young person to remain at home, the family’s increased involvement through a Family Group Conference may enable them to be accepting of the longer term care plan for the child.

**6.3 Identifying the best permanence option**

The permanency planning process, informed by multi-agency contributions, will identify which permanence option is most likely to meet the needs of the individual child, taking account of his/her wishes and feelings.

Issues to consider:

* The assessment process must ask how stability for this child will be achieved;
* Long term stability means the sense of a permanent home with the same family or group of people, as part of the same community and culture, and with long-term continuity of relationships and identity;
* Short or medium term stability or continuity will be important for children who are going to stay in care for a brief period before going home and for children who are going to need new permanent arrangements. The quality of a child's attachments and life will be detrimentally affected by uncertainties, separations from what /who is known and changes of school and placement;
* Educational experiences, links with extended family, hobbies and friendships and support to carers, contribute to guarding against disruption and placement breakdown;
* The importance of carefully listening to what children want from the placement, helping the relationship between carer and child to build, making thorough plans around contact with family, providing vigorous support during crisis times and taking a sufficiently flexible attitude to adoption by carers;
* The older a child is, the less likely it is that the child will secure a permanent family through adoption;
* The larger the family group of children, the harder it is to secure a single placement that will meet all the needs of all the children.

Permanency Tracking Panels are held monthly to ascertain how the child’s permanence needs are going to be met. In order to avoid drift, the panel will also ensure there is a permanence plan in place by the second looked after review.

The Panel will:-

* Track permanency planning from the initial point of legal intervention through to the point permanency is secured for the child i.e. Return to family network, Adoption Order, Special Guardianship Order, Child Arrangement Order or approved match of a permanent fostering placement
* Advise and make recommendations to ensure effective care planning takes place and is regularly reviewed
* Focus on plans being progressed in a timely manner
* Monitor FGC contribution to permanency planning
* Endeavour to resolve any presenting issues/obstacles and seek senior manager decisions/view if required and ensure that there is effective communication between the professionals involved

**6.4 Twin Track or Parallel Planning**

Before a plan for permanence is agreed, social workers should multi-track plan and work towards the child returning home wherever possible, whilst developing an alternative Permanence Plan.

Where children's cases are before the court in [**Care Proceedings**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/resources/keywords_online/nat_key/keywords/care_proceedings.html), the Court require twin track planning to be reflected in the [**Care Plan**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/resources/keywords_online/nat_key/keywords/care_plan.html) - see also [**Care and Supervision Proceedings and the Public Law Outline Procedure**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/trafford/cs/chapters/p_care_sup_plo.html).

See also [**Fostering for Adoption, Concurrent Planning and Temporary Approval as Foster Carers of Approved Prospective Adopters Procedure**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/trafford/cs/chapters/p_foster_for_adopt.html).

**6.5 Placement/Contact with Siblings - Issues to Consider**

Wherever it is in the best interests of each individual child, siblings should be placed together. Being able to live with brothers and sisters where they are also Looked After is an important protective factor for many Looked After children. Positive sibling relationships provide support both in childhood and adulthood and can be particularly valuable during changes in a young person’s life, such as leaving care.

A number of factors however, can militate against achieving the positive placement of brothers and sisters together – they may have entered care at different times and/or they may have very different needs related to past experiences, current emotional and behavioural development and age, especially where there are significant age differences. There may be practical difficulties in accommodating large sibling groups together. In some circumstances a child may have been abused by a brother or sister. An understanding of family functioning and family history, providing appropriate support to all parties, as well as listening to the wishes and feelings of children, are therefore key to informing these judgements.

There are often some practical steps that can be taken to overcome some of the more logistical reasons for being unable to place sibling groups together. Where siblings placed together in foster care may be separated when one turns 18, consideration should be given to whether [**Staying Put**](http://trixresources.proceduresonline.com/nat_key/keywords/staying_put_plac.html) arrangements may be beneficial for all the children involved.

There will, however, always be circumstances in which it is not possible to place siblings together and children should be supported to understand why they cannot live with their siblings. In these circumstances where it is in the best interests of each individual child, sibling contact should be promoted and maintained.

If it is likely that brothers and sisters who are not able to be placed together at the start of a care episode will remain Looked After for the medium to long term, arrangements should be made as part of each child’s Care Plan which will enable brothers and sisters to live together, taking into account the other factors.

Where the plan is for adoption, in order to reduce delay, an early decision should be taken as to whether it is in the best interests of each child to be placed together or separately, and the impact on each child of that decision. The decision should be based on a balanced assessment of the individual needs of each child in the group, and the likely or possible consequences of each option on each child. Factors that may need to be considered will include: the nature of the sibling group (do the siblings know each other/ how are they related);  whether the children have formed an attachment; the health needs of each child; and each child’s view (noting that a child’s views and perceptions will change over time).

**6.6 Direct contact with birth family members and others**

Contact must always be for the benefit of the child, not the parents or other relatives.

It may serve one or all of the following functions:

* To maintain a child's identity. Consolidating the new with the old;
* To provide reassurance for the child;
* To provide an ongoing source of information for the child;
* To give the child continuing permission to live with the adoptive family;
* To minimise the sense of loss;
* To assist with the process of tracing;
* To give the adopters a secure sense of the right to parent. This will make the parenting task easier.

Direct contact will generally work best if all parties accept/agree to:

1. The plan for permanence;
2. The parental role of the permanent carers;
3. The benefit of contact;
4. The adoptive parents being present.

Direct contact is not likely to be successful in situations where a parent:

* Disagrees with the plan for permanence;
* Does not accept the parental role of the permanent carer and their own minimal role with the child;
* Has proved to be unreliable in their commitment to contact in the past;
* Has not got a significant attachment with the child.

The wishes of the child to join a new family without direct contact, must be considered and given considerable weight at any age.

If direct contact is a part of the Permanence Plan, a formal agreement setting out how contact will take place, who with, where and how frequently must be negotiated before placement, and reviewed regularly throughout the child's life.

**6.7 Indirect contact with birth family members and others**

We do not all share the same sense of family - it means different things to different people. It helps when children are helped to understand to whom they are related, especially if they have complicated family trees including half-brothers or sisters living in different places. Identity is built on solid information.

Wherever possible, indirect contact between the child and his or her new family with people from the past should be facilitated:

1. To leave open channels of communication in case more contact is in the child's interests in the future;
2. To provide information (preferably two-way) to help the child maintain and enhance their identity and to provide the birth relative with some comfort in knowing of the child's progress.

Indirect contact must be negotiated prior to placement, and all parties should be asked to enter into an agreement with one another about the form and frequency that the contact will take.  Renegotiations of the contact should only take place if the child's needs warrant it.

All parties to the agreement will need to accept that as the child becomes older and is informed more fully about the arrangements for indirect contact, the child will have a view regarding its continuation.  No contact arrangements can be promised to remain unaltered during the child's childhood.  Those involved need to accept that contact may cease if it is no longer in the child's interests.  Alternatively, an older child may need to change to direct contact.

**6.8 Clearly communicating the Permanence Plan**

* Communicating a Permanence Plan effectively involves setting it out clearly and concisely as part of the Care Plan, in a way that acts as a useful reference to all involved during the Review process;
* Good quality Care Plans set out clear, concise statements about intended outcomes;
* Make timescales clear.

**6.9 Legal routes to permanence**

For younger children unable to be returned home where adoption is the plan, a Care Order and [**Placement Order**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/resources/keywords_online/nat_key/keywords/placement_order.html) are likely to be necessary unless parents are clearly relinquishing the child and are in agreement with the plan and the placement choice

For children for whom adoption is not appropriate, each case will need to be considered on its merits. The decision between Special Guardianship Order, Child Arrangements Order and Long Term Fostering under a Care Order will depend on the individual needs of the child set alongside the advantages and disadvantages of each legal route.

**Appendix One - Identifying Permanence Options**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Child Arrangement Order / Special Guardianship Orders** | **Adoption** | **Long Term Fostering** |
| Child needs the security of a legally defined placement with alternative carers, but does not require a lifelong commitment involving a change of identity | Child's primary need is to belong to a family who will make a lifelong commitment | Primary need is for a stable, loving family environment whilst there is still a significant level of continued involvement with the birth family |
| Child's relation, foster or other carer needs to exercise day to day parental responsibility and is prepared to do so as a lifelong commitment | Child's birth parents are not able or not willing to share parental responsibility in order to meet their child's needs, even though there may be contact | Child has a clear sense of identity with the birth family, whilst needing to be looked after away from home |
| There is no need for continuing monitoring and review by the Local Authority, although support services may still need to be arranged | Child needs an opportunity to develop a new sense of identity whilst being supported to maintain or develop a healthy understanding of their past | There is need for continuing oversight and monitoring of the child's developmental progress |
| Child has a strong attachment to the alternative carers and legally defined permanence is assessed as a positive contribution to their sense of belonging and security | Child expresses a wish to be adopted | Birth parents are able and willing to exercise a degree of parental responsibility.  |