Dudley Children’s Services

Placements for Children Looked After

Process and Guidance

This document has been produced to provide clarity on the placements process and the roles, responsibilities and expectations of those involved. This is a high level document and it is acknowledged that a series of more detailed systems and processes sit underneath this. Where relevant and available, documents and/or links to these have been included.

1. Placement Types

The Placements Team has responsibility for undertaking searches for the following placement types:

- Internal fostering
- Internal residential
- External fostering
- External residential
- Supported accommodation – including CHADD On Route and YMCA Open Door
- Residential family/parenting assessments

Any social worker requiring any of the above placements **MUST** ensure that the search process is coordinated by the Placements Team.

2. Approval to Search

When the need for a new placement is identified the social worker must complete the Access to Resources and Placements Panel (ARPP) referral form.

ARRP is held every Tuesday morning at 9am. To request that a case is added to the agenda the social worker must send an email to ARPPanel.CS@dudley.gov.uk

Requests can be made any time up until 12 noon on the Friday prior to panel providing that a completed ARPP referral form is also submitted by 12 noon.

Any requests made after 12 noon of Friday will be added to the Panel agenda for the following week unless they are considered to be emergencies.

Dedicated time slots will be allocated for any emergency issues subject to agreement by the Chair (Designated Head of Service). Agreement must be received by midday on the Monday prior to Panel.

Outside of Panel any emergencies will need to be agreed by the Head of Service.
Where a child or young person is already placed in an external placement and there is a need to search for an alternative, permission to search can be granted by the Head of Service. However, although ARPP does not need to give approval to search ARPP does need to give approval to place, as per the guidance at Section 7, below.

For further information on the role and function of ARPP please see ARRP Terms of Reference.

Please note: Legal Gateway Panel is able to approve requests for residential family assessments. Any case approved at Legal Gateway Panel does not need to be presented at ARPP.

3. Requesting Placement Search

Once approval has been granted to search for a placement the social worker must complete the Placement Referral Form and email this to placementduty@dudley.gov.uk.

All Placement Referral Forms will be screened by the Senior Placements Officer. If the referral is of poor quality or key information is missing it will be returned to the social worker with an explanation of what additional information or changes are required.

A placement search will not be initiated until a satisfactory referral form has been provided.

4. Internal Placements

Upon receipt of a satisfactory referral form the Senior Placements Officer will allocate the referral to a Placements Officer who will coordinate the search.

Internal placement searches must always be undertaken first unless there is a clear reason why this should not happen and approval for an external search has been granted by the Service Manager or Head of Service.

Similarly, vacancies within the internal fostering service should always be considered prior to searching for an alternative placement type unless this has been explicitly requested and approved.

4.1 Internal Fostering

A list of internal fostering vacancies is held and updated on a weekly basis. To ensure these remain up-to-date all Supervising Social Workers must send details of their vacancies to Group Mail box placementduty@dudley.gov.uk by 5PM every Thursday.
Each Friday the Fostering Team managers will check the vacancy list, once approved they will confirm with the Placements Officers. Every Monday AM they will circulate a copy to the Chief Officer and all Heads of Service for their information.

The Placements Officer will review the vacancy list to identify any potential placements. Where a possible match is identified the Placements Officer will contact the Supervising Social Worker to discuss and inform them that they intend to make contact with the carer(s).

The Placements Officer will then contact the carer(s) to discuss the referral. Where the foster carers are happy to consider the referral, the Placements Officer will share the carers’ details with the child’s social worker and send a copy of the placement referral form to the carer(s).

The child’s social worker will then contact the carer(s) to discuss the referral in more detail and feedback to the Placements Officer the outcome of the discussion.

If the outcome is positive the relevant placement planning activities should then be undertaken.

If at any stage the foster carer rejects the placement the Placements Officer must record the reasons why. This will be collated and monitored and will be shared to inform Foster Carers Reviews, training needs and gaps in service provision.

Internal fostering placements do not need to be brought to ARPP for approval to place.

4.2 Internal Residential

Where there is a requirement to search for a residential placement the Placements Officer will email details of the referral to the Service Manager for Residential and Commissioning Resources.

The Service Manager will review the referral and subject to any current or potentially forthcoming vacancies, share with the relevant Home Manager(s).

Upon receiving the referral the Home Manager will undertake an Impact/Risk Assessment, the outcome of which will be shared with the Service Manager, Placements Officer and child’s social worker.

If the outcome is positive the case should be returned to ARPP to gain approval to place. See Section 7 for further details. Subject to approval at ARPP the relevant placement planning activities should then be undertaken.
5. **External Residential, Fostering and Supported Accommodation Placements**

Where an internal placement cannot be identified or is not appropriate an external placement search may be undertaken providing approval has been obtained from the relevant Service Manager. The placement team will require evidence of permission to search and place. **Permission to place can only be granted at ARPP or by the Head of Service in emergency cases.** See Approval to Place (below) for further detail.

### 5.1 Placement Search

Where the request is for supported accommodation, referrals to CHADD and/or YMCA Open Door should be considered in the first instance. If it is agreed that this provision is not appropriate due to the young person’s level of need and/or the referral is declined, then a placement search may be undertaken with framework providers through the WM Placements Portal.

For all external searches the Placements Officer will upload the referral to the WM Placements Portal. In accordance with the requirement of Framework Agreements the referral will be sent to Tier 1 providers in the first instance. If no positive/appropriate responses are received the referral can then be sent to Tier 2 providers and similarly for Tier 3.

If no positive or appropriate responses are received from framework providers then the Placements Officer may search outside of the framework either via non-framework providers who are registered on the WM Placements Portal, or by alternative means.

### 5.2 Reviewing Offers

The Placements Officer will collate details of any placement offers that have been made and discuss these with the Senior Placements Officer, confirming that the offer is appropriate and, where the offer is from a framework provider, that costs are in accordance with tendered prices.

The Placements Officer will send details of any appropriate placement offers to the child’s social worker. The child’s social worker will review the placement offers and identify a preferred option based on a full consideration of all factors, including:

- The ability of the placement to meet the child’s needs including matching considerations with any other young people currently in placement;
- The quality of the provider including the most recent inspection judgement (where the provision is regulated); and
- The cost of the placement in the context of the above considerations, and whether it is felt to offer value for money.
5.3 Pre – Placement Visit

The child’s social worker will be responsible for liaising directly with the provider regarding any points of clarification and arranging to visit the placement.

The child’s social worker will undertake a pre-placement visit to provide initial assurance of the placement and its ability to meet the needs of the child or young person, beyond the desk-based checks undertaken by the Placements Team.

The Quality and Safety Officer within the Children’s Commissioning Team can also be contacted for advice and support in relation to site visits. In some circumstances a joint visit may be undertaken.

The Quality and Safety Officer can provide information on findings from any QA visits previously conducted. If a QA visit has not previously been undertaken and assuming no concerns have been raised from pre-placement checks, then the Quality and Safety Officer will schedule a visit following commencement of the placement.

Where pre-placement checks have raised some areas of concern but there is still a requirement to explore the viability of the placement, a QA visit can be undertaken to support decision making.

Where a young person is placed in an emergency it may not always be possible for the social worker or Quality and Safety Officer to undertake a pre-placement visit. However, where this is the case it is expected that the social worker will arrange to visit at the earliest opportunity and no later than 5 working days after the placement has been made.

6. Residential Family Assessments

Where a Residential Family Assessment has been deemed necessary, approval to search for a placement must be secured either through Legal Gateway Panel or ARPP. Where such assessments have been directed by the court and timescales do not permit attendance at panel, then the Head of Service should be notified of the requirement to search.

The child’s social worker must complete the Placement Referral Form and email this to placementduty@dudley.gov.uk. The referral will be reviewed and allocated to a Placements Officer as per the process outlined in Section 3.

As there is currently no framework agreement or approved provider list in place for residential family assessments, the Placements Officer will contact a minimum of three providers to explore placement availability, costs and quality of provision.

Details of any potential placement options will be collated by the Placements Officer and sent to the child’s social worker for consideration.
7. Approval to Place

Where an appropriate external placement has been identified and all pre-placement checks have been completed the child’s social worker must update the ARPP referral form with details of the proposed placement including a clear breakdown of costs.

The child’s social worker must request that the case is added to the ARPP agenda as per the directions in Section 2 ‘Approval to Search’.

Where the request is linked to a placement move the referral form must include both the costs of the current placement and the costs of the proposed new placement. Any requests coming to ARPP without a full breakdown of costs will be rejected.

If the change in placement is as a result of a young person transitioning to semi-independent provision at a much reduced cost or returning home, this does not need to be presented at ARPP but must be agreed with the Head of Service and the ARPP referral form should still be completed with sign-off from the Team Manager and Service Manager. There may be some exceptions to this, for example if the case is particularly complex, has been tracked at ARPP or if step-down had not previously explored as part of the young person’s plan.

8. Confirming a Placement

Once a placement has been agreed by ARPP or by the Head of Service outside of ARPP, the relevant placement planning activities should be undertaken. The child’s social worker should also complete a case note on CCM stating clearly what was agreed at ARPP.

The child’s social worker is required to notify the Placements Team of the placement start date and confirm the agreed costs. This is critical to ensuring the accuracy of payments made to the provider. The child’s social worker should provide written confirmation by email and send this to placementduty.CS@dudley.gov.uk

The Placements Officer will produce an Individual Placement Agreement (IPA) outlining details of the placement and costs. The Placements Officer will send this to the child’s social worker for checking.

The child’s social worker is required to check the details in the IPA and confirm that they are correct and/or advise of any changes that are required. The child’s social worker has a maximum of seven days to respond unless they are on annual leave or absent for another reason, in which case timescales may be adjusted accordingly.

If this is the first or a new episode of care for the child then the Placements Officer will also notify the relevant Pod Co-ordinator/Admin of the placement and include the LAC Health
Team in this email so that the process for initiating and completing an **Initial Health Assessment** can be undertaken.

If the placement that has been identified is out of borough the Placements Officer will also ensure the process for notifying the relevant local authority is completed.

Once the placement has actually started the child’s social worker is required to notify the Placements Team of this and also complete the change of circumstances on CCM, inputting details of the new placement.

### 9. Changes within Placement

During the course of a placement there may be variety of circumstances which lead to a change in the cost of the placement. Any proposal to increase the costs of an existing external placement must be referred to ARPP for discussion and ratification, in accordance with the process outlined at Section 2.

It is the responsibility of the child’s social worker to notify the Placements Team of **any** change in cost, both increases and decreases, and the date from which this became effective.

The Placements Team will email the placement provider to confirm details of the revised costs. No provider should consider that increased costs have been agreed unless they have written confirmation of this from the Placements Team.

### 10. Ending an External Placement

If consideration is being given to ending an external placement the child’s social worker should contact the Placements Team to clarify what notice period is required. It is important to ensure that notice is served in a timely manner to avoid incurring any unnecessary costs.

Where it has been agreed that a placement will end, the Placements Team will serve notice to the provider in accordance with the instructions and details provided by the child’s social worker.

In the event that a provider gives notice on a placement, where the provider notifies the child’s social worker directly the social worker must request that they also provide written confirmation via email to the Placements Team. The Placements Team will confirm receipt of this email to the provider.

On occasion there may be variations to the formal notice period and children and young people may leave placement earlier or later than planned. **The child’s social worker must always notify the Placements Team of the date that the child actually leaves the placement.**
This should be done on the same day or as close to the day as possible to ensure that records are accurate and up-to-date.

Once the child has left placement the Placements Officer will then contact the provider to request the return of the child’s files. The Placements Officer will request that the child’s file is returned to their social worker and provide the appropriate contact details. It will be the social worker’s responsibility to ensure the file is returned. Upon receipt of the child’s file the social worker should ensure that all documents are scanned and uploaded to the child’s record.