



**Children's Services
Directorate**

**Permanence for Children in
Care in Halton
Policy and Procedure**

Policy Information Sheet	
Name of Document	Permanence for children in care in Halton
Service area	Children in Care and Care Leavers Division, Children & Family Services Department
Target Audience	Children in Care and Care Leavers Division IRM's
Forum Policy/Procedure/Strategy was approved	Children and Families Services Senior Leadership Team
Date policy is effective from	July 2023
Date of review(s)	June 2025
Status: Mandatory (all named staff must adhere to guidance) Optional (procedures and practice can vary between teams)	Mandatory
Location of Document	Halton Borough Council Children and Young People Social Care Online Procedures Manual – tri.x
Related document(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanence Planning Guidance • Fostering for Adoption / Early Permanence Placements • The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations Volume 2: care planning, placement and case review • Fostering for Adoption: Practice Guidance (Coram, BAAF)
Superseded document(s)	NA
Responsible officer(s)	Divisional Manager, Children in Care
Any other relevant information	

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1. What is Permanence?

'Permanence is the framework of emotional permanence (attachment), physical permanence (stability) and legal permanence (the carer has parental responsibility for the child) which gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity'. The objective is to make sure '*that children have a secure, stable and loving childhood and beyond*' (Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Guidance s.2.3).

2. How can Permanence be achieved?

Permanence can be achieved in one of the following ways:

- Successfully remaining at home or returning home to parental care.
- Family and friends care – particularly when this can be secured and supported through an adoption, special guardianship or another appropriate order or agreement.
- Adoption by non-related adopters.
- Long term approved foster care where long term stable relationships can be made or already exist.

The preferred permanence option for an individual child will depend on a comprehensive up to date assessment of their needs and the capacity of parents and wider family to meet their needs including their need for permanence.

3. Basic Principles

There is a Legal and policy basis Children Act 1989. Sections 20 – 23 set out duties in respect of looked after children and arrangements for their care.

Children Act Regulations and Guidance, volume 2 Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Set out detailed regulations and statutory guidance for care planning, placement and review for looked after children.

The Children Act, Regulations and Guidance together make clear that children in care must have a Care Plan, that achieving permanence for the child is a key consideration from that start, and that there must be a plan for permanence by the second review.

4. The Process

All children in care in the authority must have a permanence plan in place by the time of their second review or when they have been looked after for 4 months.

This will sometimes need to be a twin or multi-track plan as it will not yet be clear which option is best at this stage. For example, when plan is adoption, but family are still being assessed and the matter remains under the jurisdiction of the court in care proceedings.

The permanence plan for every child must be presented at the Permanence Panel for review (panel is working through all children).

The Panel will need to be satisfied that return home to parents is not appropriate in order to support and agree the proposed long-term care. The Panel will review all children with a permanence plan until they are placed in a suitably approved long term placement.

The Panel will review any disruptions of permanence placements to learn from what has happened and incorporate this into any future placement matching.

Social workers, other professionals, birth parent/s and the child or young person must be clear what the permanence plan is, and it must be set out in writing in a way that everybody affected can contribute and understand.

The permanence plan will set out clearly:

- The objectives of the plan and key tasks.
- The timescales for achieving the plan.
- Those responsible for implementing the plan and the respective roles of others.
- The criteria that will be used to evaluate the success of the plan.
- The contingency should the plan need to change.
- The child's voice and views about the plan.

You will be invited to panel no less than 2 weeks in advance. The administrator will send out the calendar invites to the social worker and their Practice Lead will be copied in. If the social worker cannot attend for any reason, it is expected their Practice lead will.

The administration and recording of panel will form the shape of the overarching actions and tracker spreadsheet. Individual children's cases will be recorded on a case note in their records by the administrator.

The panel chair and senior management will decide on the thematic approaches for presentation at the panel, for example- looked after children in residential, placed with parents and those in care with no plan or other recorded and children subject to S20.

For Permanency Panel Terms of Reference see appendix a and for Permanency Pathway flowchart see appendix b.

Practice Guidance: How to write a plan for permanence for Children in Care

A good child in care permanence plan should consider the child's safety, well-being, and their long-term future. Each child will have their own specific needs. Here are some examples of what elements to consider in a good child in care permanence plan:

- 1. Placement stability:** The plan should ensure that the child has a stable placement that meets their needs, whether that be with a foster family, an adoptive family, or in a residential care facility. The placement should be able to provide for the child's safety, emotional and physical well-being, and ongoing developmental needs.
- 2. Permanency goals:** The plan should outline clear goals for achieving permanent placement for the child. This could include reunification with their birth family, adoption, or long-term foster care.
- 3. Birth family involvement:** The plan should take into account the involvement of the child's birth family in their life or other lifelong links they have, whether that be through regular contact, visits, or other means.
- 4. Support services:** The plan should identify the support services that the child and their placement will need to ensure their ongoing safety and well-being. This could include therapy, counselling, medical services, educational support, or other services as needed.
- 5. Legal considerations:** The plan should consider any legal requirements related to the child's placement, such as court orders, custody arrangements, or other legal proceedings.
- 6. Cultural considerations:** The plan should take into account the child's cultural background and identity and ensure that their placement is able to support their cultural needs and identity.
- 7. Transition planning:** The plan should consider the child's transition to a permanent placement, including any necessary support and services to ensure a smooth and successful transition including expected timescales.
- 8. The child's wishes and feelings** about where and whom they live with and how they see any long-term arrangements.

Overall, a good child in care permanence plan should be tailored to the specific needs of the child, take into account all relevant factors, and prioritize the child's safety, well-being, wishes and feelings and long-term future.

Terms of Reference: Permanency Review Panel

Every child needs a loving long-term home in which they can thrive, feel safe, rely on the adults who care for them, and learn the independence skills they need for the future. Their need for permanence through the development of loving and enduring relationships and a stable home/placement needs to be achieved through good, early and thorough permanency planning.

In Halton we follow the evidence that tells us the most beneficial hierarchy of permanence is as follows:

- Children stay with or return home to their parents, as soon as possible.
- Children live with relatives on an SGO or another order that allows them to live with a relative for the long term, without CSC involvement.

Where a child cannot return safely to parents or family the choices are as follows:

- Adoption
- Long-term fostering with a view to an SGO with a foster carer
- Long-term fostering with a Halton approved carer
- Long-term fostering with an IFA carer where an established relationship already exists.
- Residential (short term only)

A child will only be placed in a residential care home if there is a specific identified need through assessment and the plan is approved by a senior manager. It will always be for the short term where possible and as a contingent on alternatives being explored at the earliest opportunity. If a child has a disability that cannot be supported in another arrangement, joint funding by the partnership will always be sought for such an arrangement, before it takes place.

In Halton, children services alongside partners in health and education, will actively review children's care plans at a panel in line with the placement hierarchy, at least annually. The purpose will be to support social work decision making and the quality of practice and ensure everything is in place to promote early permanence for all children in care.

The Placement Review Panel (PRP)

Members of the review panel are as follows:

- Senior manager in CSC (Chair)
- The Virtual School Head
- Health Representative
- IRM
- Any other appropriate professionals

The panel will consider the following for each child:

- The child's formative development experience attachments, trauma, and immediate needs.
- The proposed plan and timescale and the contingency plan.
- Education considerations.
- Health consideration.
- Any expert reports and proposed therapy/treatment.
- Family time arrangements.
- Any sibling arrangements and assessment required or completed.
- Any other matching considerations.
- What support would be needed for the child to return home or move to a family member (this should be addressed if this is not the immediate plan).
- The child's voice through their expressed wishes.
- The parents expressed wishes.

Timing and preparation:

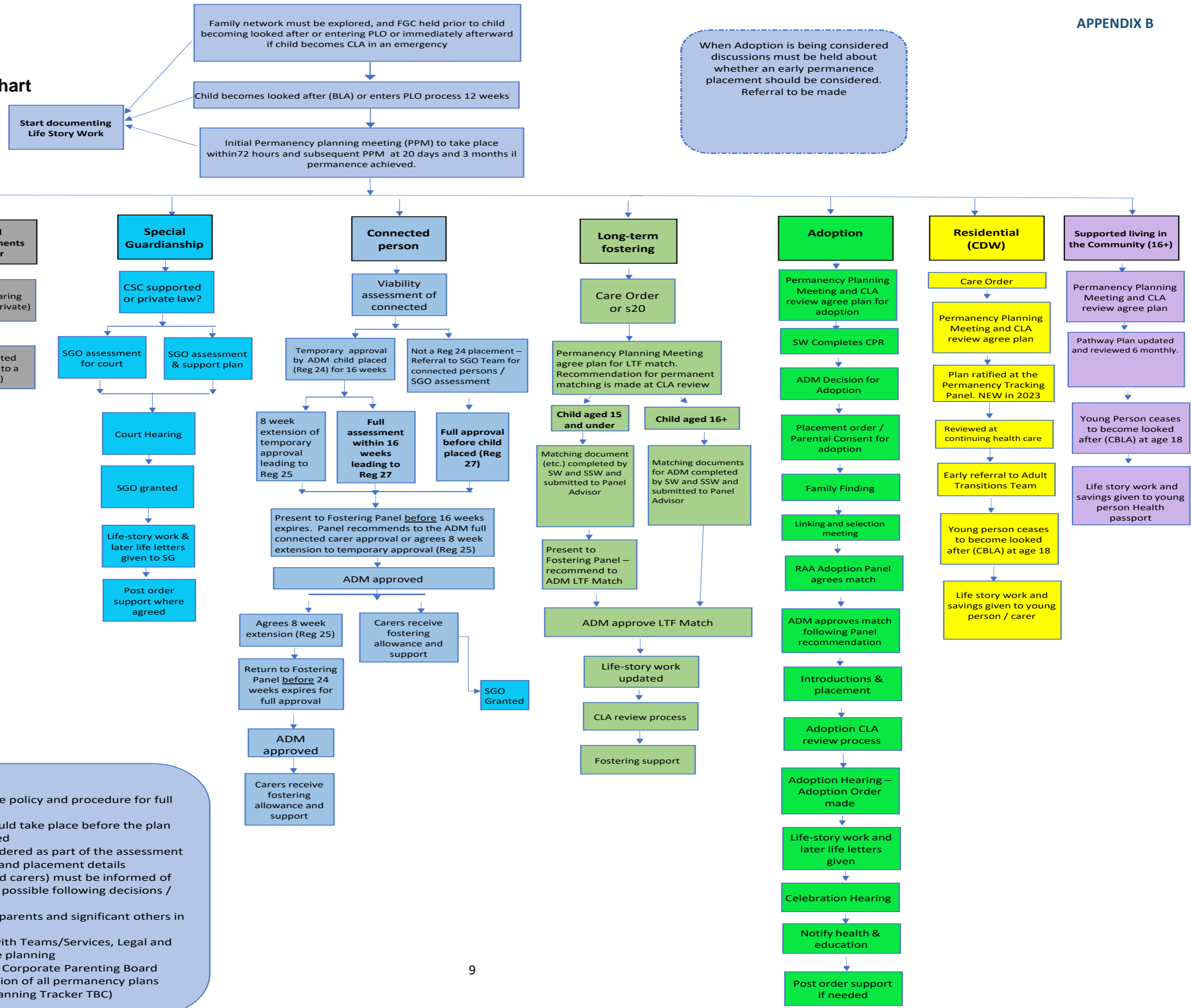
- A list will be circulated two weeks prior to the meeting and will be listed in groupings according to team manager.
- The panel will have all the paperwork in advance of the panel which requires that it will be up to date on the electronic records no later than one week prior to panel.
- Each child will be reviewed in a 15 min timeslot and notes will be made on the recording system of the discussion and any actions.
- After panel, actions will be followed up by the Practice Lead, reviewed by the IRM and shared with the Divisional Manager

Further panels will take place to look specifically at the arrangements for:

- Children placed at home with their parents on an interim of full care order.
- Children who are looked after under Section 20.
- Children in unregulated placements.
- Children who do not have a permanent long-term placement identified.

This list is not exhaustive and will vary depending on the themes directed through the Senior Leadership Team and will also include a review of previous actions and themes to ensure learning and practice improvement.

Permanency Pathway Flowchart



Remember:

- Refer to the permanence policy and procedure for full details on process
- Sibling assessments should take place before the plan for permanence is agreed
- Contact should be considered as part of the assessment
- Change the legal status and placement details
- The child and family (and carers) must be informed of the outcome as soon as possible following decisions / court hearings
- Voice of the child, birth parents and significant others in permanency planning
- Collaborative working with Teams/Services, Legal and assessors regarding care planning
- Permanency panels and Corporate Parenting Board monitor timely progression of all permanency plans
- (Update Permanency Planning Tracker TBC)