



HILLINGDON  
LONDON

# LONDON BOROUGH OF HILLINGDON

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

## LIFE STRATEGY

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## Aim

Our overall aim is to support children, young people and families to build and maintain strong, stable and permanent relationships, connecting past, present and future through childhood, transitions and on into adult life.

This includes for children and young people to have a sense of belonging and family and community membership, to know and remember their own life story, to feel heard, valued, protected, educated and to have safe contexts in which to live.

At the heart of our Life Strategy in Hillingdon is the focus on inclusivity. Permanence is considered for all children, regardless of their ethnicity, cultural identity, developmental ability and if they are part of a sibling group.

Central to our aim is that permanence planning and practice is not seen as an additional process or a team; but runs through all of Children Services.

## 1 Life-story work

All teams and departments have an important role to play in helping a child or young person make sense of their life story. Children have told us of how central it is to have memories of what has happened to them and of their heritage. Being a victim of trauma such as child abuse in the early years of life or organised crime as a young person can impair memory so this is of central importance. All teams should engage in life story work- from Stronger Families to Referral and Assessment, to the Abacus Contact Service and the Youth Justice Service, Court and Adoption Teams. It is the expectation that all staff have a focus on ensuring that children's records contain appropriate language, photographs, documents and personal items that provide a coherent life narrative and one that can be accessed by the child, young person or adult. Neurodiverse children and children with disabilities will need additional time and support to make sense of their life story.

Good practice includes a note, letter or an accessible item provided directly to the child, young person or family which outlines the involvement of the worker, and observations about the child that will help them to one day understand what was happening in their life. The words should include the things the worker did to evidence care, respect, promotion of choice and protection and bring detail to life such as what clothes the child liked to wear and food and activities they enjoyed.

Essential to lifestory work is preserving the child or young person's links with their racial, cultural and religious heritage.

## 2 Choice and continuity

All practitioners working with children and families are an important part of their lives and their impact on a life story is clear – a professional can retraumatise or they can make a hugely positive impact.

Hillingdon promotes families and young people being able to choose their worker and teams must ensure profiles of their staff members are up to date and to be able to facilitate that choice.

Children and families have told us that it is hard to build up

“My social worker inspires me a great deal because she believes that I have the potential to do well. That belief has given me the platform to start doing positive things with my life.”





relationships with a series of different professionals in their lives, especially when this is within a short space of time. It can be traumatic to re tell stories to a new person and to take the risks with communication that build up trust and connection. Where possible the worker should remain consistent for the child and family.

Our practitioners act as a resource for children, young people and their families, empowering them to make positive changes. To do this they need to have professional curiosity, problem solving ability, take responsibility for self development and use supervision effectively.

Sometimes the practitioner is the only trusted adult in the child's life.

At every stage of a life-story the views of children and young people are integral to the help that is provided around them.

### 3 Stronger Families

Stronger Families is Hillingdon's early help and prevention service launched in 2021. The aims of that service links to this permanence strategy in that it aim is to empower families to overcome the difficulties that can build up over time, helping them to use resources so that children are able to remain permanently within their families.

A key principle of the Stronger Families approach which runs through all teams is that help is provided at the point of need; it should be easily accessible to the child, family and young person and be multidisciplinary. The help provided is to empower and sustain families and to ensure that they will access help in the future if further needs emerge, before those needs progress to concerns requiring statutory involvement. Information and intelligence should be gathered at the point of need such as by Axis to inform permanence decisions about children and young people.

### 4 Responding to Need

Thinking about permanence should be started at the earliest possible stage with MASH and Stronger Families Hub professionals being curious about the family and depending on the need, what support Hillingdon can offer.

An understanding of permanence options should inform the initial assessment.

Permanence can mean:

- A child or young person staying within their family to be supported with a range of individual and family multi agency work.
- Residing with alternative caregivers to immediate family who are deemed 'private' foster carers and who are offered support by the LA.
- Being in the care of the local authority where children are supported to develop connections and relationships with close relatives, foster carers, foster carers who are also approved as adopters and providers of children's homes.
- A Foster to Adopt or Early Permanence placement is where children are placed with carers who are approved for both fostering and adoption. This option must be considered for all children, regardless of their ethnicity, cultural identity, developmental ability and if they are part of a sibling group.
- Being adopted.



“ the Social worker is helping nana and grandad to keep us living with them ”

- Children may also return to their families after a period of being in care if this is the right thing for them.
- Ensuring that a child is effectively supported to resettle from custody to reside in a context that will meet their needs for permanence.
- The Stronger Families Hub is located within the wider MASH and is the single point of contact for all referrals for a Stronger Families service delivered by the right person or agency at the time. The Stronger Families service is accessed via the early help assessment. The permanence aim in this work is that sustainable solutions can be created with the family and the help of the agencies around them in a locality so that needs do not escalate.

Within the MASH an initial intervention is around 24 hours, the language used and the record written should be jargon free and detail the efforts made to understand the whole family situation and the documentation in the child's file should reflect that. The term 'permanent' should be used to consider and frame solutions and help offered and this should be documented in case notes.

Workers should speak about permanence giving consideration to how a family/ parent might interpret this.

Legal advice should be proposed as early as possible on a range of issues that a family may have from advice around separation to what is meant by signing Section 20.

Cultural needs must be taken into consideration such as the family's language with all meetings and documents translated.

## 5 Assessment Is Intervention

All assessment provides an opportunity to help the family and the help or support, and its outcome are part of the assessment process.

Where there appears to be a shortfall in the child or young person's care to the extent that there is risk of this causing significant harm, or that the family may meet the threshold to be deemed to be 'in need', and provide consent, an assessment is completed which should serve as an opportunity to provide help at this early point.

Interventions should be tried and tested and either chosen by the family or tailored to the family's circumstances.

It is important that time does not pass in a child or young person's life where we are assessing and not addressing need through help.


'Permanence' should appear as a domain in every assessment with a narrative around risks and solutions.

## 6 Every Plan is a Permanence Plan

All plans must include the term 'permanence' and a narrative around the identification of risks such as the age of family carers, living conditions, likeliness of arrangements breaking down with multiple caregivers and changes and what that will mean for the child. It should be noted that disabled young people are less likely to experience enduring care with a familiar network of caregivers which needs to be factored into planning.

*I started off at my mum's. The house was cluttered and I was getting neglected so I was moved to my Nan's. I was there a few months but because they were too old my brother had to step in and he took over my care. He was young. It was a few months after that when I was taken into care.*





A referral must be made to the FGC service as early as possible with questions set by the social worker with the aid of the FGC coordinator that ask for enduring care contributions and solutions provided by family members.

Multiagency solutions should be drawn around the need by the worker who is closest to the family making use of statutory partners such as education and health and local partners within the voluntary sector or community based organisations.

Every plan must include the voice of the child, young person and/ or family written in language that is supported to be part of their written record.

## **7 Children and young people in need of help and protection**

Child in Need plans should be multiagency and may have a focus on single issues or a range of issues for the family and be oriented around sustainable solutions for the family. The word 'permanence' should appear in the plan with a narrative as to how the help and support that is provided that supports the family's ability to care for the child and any risks identified.

Plans should be concluded with a step down to universal services or other services in the locality depending on need.

## **8 Protection**

In the lifeworld of a child there may be times when assessed needs become a need for protection or where in some cases where the child is at risk of significant harm and child protection procedures are instigated following a strategy discussion. Part of the process for referring a child to an initial CPC is via a consultation with the Safeguarding Manager in the Quality Assurance service. This discussion should record and enable the FGC referral with respect to the permanence plan. At the first review conference a referral to the FGC service is mandatory.

The core group and child protection plans should dovetail with the family plan as drawn up by the family and the FGC service. This plan should provide the opportunity to organise help around the family. The help offered is time limited with success indicators agreed by all and the timeframes agreed for these. The plan includes a parallel element 'Plan B' should the help offered not be successful.


If the child protection plan is felt to be not achieving outcomes for the child, a referral to complex harp is appropriate for a discussion around the need for a Legal planning meeting.

## **9 Care**

For some children and young people their life story will include care partly or wholly by Hillingdon.

For a looked after child "permanence" is defined as being a framework of emotional, physical and legal conditions that gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity. Children require consistency and continuity of care in order to provide them with a foundation from which their physical, emotional and developmental needs can be fully met, allowing them to reach their full potential.

All Care Plans should have a separate line for permanence including risks and solutions and how enduring care is to be established for the child or young person. The plan should include the parallel plan 'Plan B' should circumstances change.



Where it is necessary for a child to leave their family, this should be for as short a time as needed to secure a safe, supported return home. If a child cannot return home, plans must be made for alternative permanent care. Family members and friends should always be considered in the first instance with the permanence secured through the appropriate legal order to meet the child's needs. 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 for this to be secured through Adoption, Early Permanence (foster to adopt), Long Term Foster Care, Child Arrangement Orders, or Special Guardianship Orders. The order should be sought in preference of the least invasive and disruptive to family life first, such as a Child Arrangement Order.

The term 'placement' should always be used to describe the provider and not the child or young person. In order to find the right setting in a planned way or carer for the child or young person, information must be shared with the provider that positively describes the child so that enduring and positive care is offered. This is known as the 'profile'. The profile must be written in a way that the child or young person would endorse and should be shared with them. The input to the profile should be a multiagency one, using the language of health, education and youth justice colleagues who know the child or young person's cultural needs, strengths and their challenges and can describe those needs. The profile should also have input from the child or young person's previous care provider. This information should be put together by the social worker and brokerage team officer. At times emergency care arrangements are required and there may not be enough time to write the child's profile.

A child's educational needs must form an integral part of the permanence element in any plan which includes the writing of the profile and the search for any care alternatives to the family. Educational experiences, links with extended family, hobbies and friendships and support from carers, contribute to reducing the risk of disruption and breakdown.

Stability meetings are an essential element of permanence and should be arranged at the earliest opportunity if any provider or child is struggling and outcomes are not being met. The stability meeting should be multiagency and involve health and education representatives as well as the family where this is within the child or young person's best interests. These should be documented in the case file with the outcome and any plan, with the term 'permanence' included.

Residential home living is provided only when a need for this is identified within the child or young person's Care Plan and when substitute family care is not appropriate.

Relevant policies and procedures include

[Decision to Look After, Care and Placement Planning](#) -  
[Permanence Planning Guidance](#)

## 10 Education

A good quality education can compensate for a challenging start in life through providing a wide range of opportunities to achieve and develop personally and socially in a safe and supportive environment. The importance of stability in education is also recognised and reducing the number of changes in school is a priority. Education is therefore an integral part of the permanence in any plan and a child or young person's enduring participation in education is an aim that informs every part of a child or young person's life story.

If a child has to move placements, the virtual school will ensure that there is minimum disruption to their education, whether the child is placed within the borough or in another LA.

Where a child is looked after, the virtual school will:

- liaise regularly with the school, social worker and other relevant professionals to maintain a clear view of the educational needs of the child.
- rigorously track and monitor attainment and progress data, including attendance, behaviour and exclusion on a termly basis for all looked after children and ensure this information is shared with the child's network
- ensure appropriate provision is being made within school both as curricular and extra curricular support.
- work in partnership with the child's school and, where needed, other organisations to maximise educational opportunities, resources and funding, as well as provide training to support specific needs.
- work with relevant professionals to provide support and training to ensure Personal Education Plans are of a high quality.
- ensure that the child, where eligible, is able to access the Pupil Premium Plus Grant and monitor the use and impact of these funds on raising educational standards.
- ensure social workers consider the educational needs of looked after children when a child/young person's permanence is discussed.

The virtual school will provide information, advice and guidance on education matters for children who have been previously looked after.

Relevant policies and procedures include

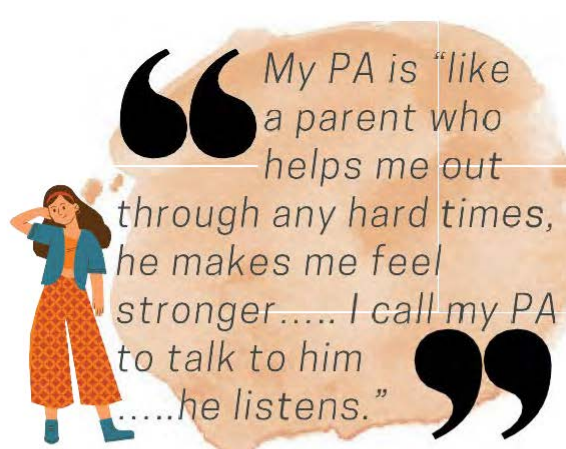
[Hillingdon Virtual School Handbook](#)

[Supporting the Education of Looked After Children](#)

[Guidelines for Promoting the Educational Achievements of Looked After Children](#)

## 11 Independence

Young people moving on into independence is an important part of their life story and it is a time when established supportive relationships change and the young person may experience a variety of losses related to relationships, homes, professional structure and personal possessions. We encourage enduring relationships with our young people and the restoration of relationships with family members and other people in the young person's 'circle' via an FGC referral if this is in line with their wishes. Regarding unaccompanied children, it may not be possible to preserve family and community of origin links however we strive to do so as well as creating a network around those young people after they have arrived in the UK.



The Personal advisor role supports the young person up until the age of 25 providing support and guidance in all areas of need.

Relevant policies and procedures include

[Leaving Care and Transition](#)

[Leaving Care Financial Policy](#)

## 12 Homes and contexts

Providing safe environments and contexts where children and young people live and learn are



an integral part of permanence. Hillingdon involves our in house and external providers, our housing department, our safeguarding and quality assurance team and our brokerage service in resource discussions to ensure that the homes and carers we provide for children, young people and families are safe and meet their needs. The suitability and safety of housing should be part of every assessment and plan considering permanence.

Communities are contexts in which children young people and families live and these connect to permanence planning in that stability follows safety. Contexts are investigated when harm is reported so as to shift the emphasis from individual behaviour and on to how the environment contributes to safeguarding and therefore permanence.

### 13 Language

Spoken and written language should be provided to children and families that assists them to understand their life story. The concept of permanence should be reflected in language and used to frame risks and solutions.

'A child or young person is not a placement'

Families and children are not 'cases' 'stepped down' or up.

A child is never a 'LAC' or a 'UASC' or a 'YJS' young person.

This language should not be in any written records or be spoken in meetings about children as we are talking about life stages, relationships, journeys and contexts.

Children, young people and their families should not be described negatively in meetings and in written material. Instead the language should follow from an understanding of their needs. Common examples include describing a child as 'manipulative' or describing a family as 'hard to reach' or a child as 'hard to place'.

### 14 Planning

We will focus on the long-term outcomes for the child or young person and work with them to understand their wishes and ambitions. This is the platform of a plan that builds the foundations for adulthood. Plans will support the development of strong networks and relationships that will endure, providing young people with the resilience and support that is needed in adulthood. Transitional planning needs to start early so that children and young people do not 'fall off a cliff'. The planning for disabled children needs to start early enough so that the young person is able to contribute and have their needs considered.

A child's needs should be reviewed regularly to ensure the plan is focused on permanence.

Change should be planned for well in advance where possible so as to enable the voice of the child or young person to inform decision making and outcome, such as when a placement is needed for a child leaving custody. Moves in permanence are not necessarily negative – we must

“ Don't use jargon, talk to us and write in a way we understand ”



“ Remember: We can read our files at 18.... So Think: How would you feel if you read this about yourself? ”



listen to what children and young people are saying if they are unhappy in a particular setting.

Last minute and unplanned change for children however can have a traumatic impact and should be avoided at all costs by regularly reviewing needs and sharing information about children and young people.

### **The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)**

The role of the IRO will be to consider each individual child and young person's care planning:

- Length of use of section 20 and appropriateness of this;
- Children who have had more than 3 placement moves within a year;
- Where concerns arise in terms of drift in permanence plans the IRO will escalate

Relevant policies and procedures include

[Looked After Reviews](#)

[Appointment and Role of Independent Reviewing Officers](#)


### **Panels**

Hillingdon has various panels in place for the purposes of ensuring agreements and complex discussions about children and young people are held so that we prevent drift and delay and agree the appropriate resources.

The panels enhance permanence for children and young people through:


- Improved quality and consistency in decision making for children and young people;
- Risks and decisions known and shared with senior managers as early as possible;
- Ensuring everything is being done to support the family;
- Ensuring we have plans that are 'front loaded' with evidence if needing to move to legal proceedings;
- Providing scrutiny when agreeing accommodation and legal proceedings;
- Providing a forum for input from other teams towards the support plan for the family;
- Providing a check and balance to ensure there is no drift in case planning or care planning;
- Providing an opportunity to review the quality of providers of social work practice and identify learning to inform outcomes.

Panel name	Overall purpose	Referral route	Chair	Permanence purpose
<b>Fostering and Permanence Panel (including 14 plus)</b>	To ensure carers are approved under the fostering and care planning regulations	Referrals and made by the fostering and kinship teams.	Independent Chair and panel members.	To ensure foster carers, connected carers and prospective adopters in the case of relinquished babies are provided within the statutory and regulatory frameworks and that the local authority have



Panel name	Overall purpose	Referral route	Chair	Permanence purpose
				considered all aspects of children's and carers needs.
<b>Hillingdon HARP (Access to Resources Panel)</b>  Terms of reference can be found <a href="#">HARP and Complex HARP procedure</a>	HARP and Complex HARP ensure that the decisions for children at the verge of accommodation or legal proceedings are appropriate and consistent, that practice is child centred and relationship based, and children are supported at home within their family (including wider family and connected persons) wherever possible. Also the panels ensure the effective and proportionate use of the council's resources.	Via referral form on LCS signed off by the Head of Service.	Heads of Service and Assistant Director of Safeguarding Chair, with an additional 2 Heads of Service in attendance.	For case discussion and planning when a child has been subject to a child protection plan for more than 12 months.  For case discussion and planning where children have been subject to a Supervision Order for more than 9 months  For consideration of specialist assessments and therapy where we are outside of PLO or care proceedings.
<b>Complex HARP</b>  Terms of reference can be found <a href="#">HARP and Complex HARP procedure</a>	Specifically providing a gateway for legal planning and permanence.  Early Permanence/ Foster to Adopt alert (to consider the appropriateness of a referral to Ambitious for Adoption Early Permanence family finding)	Via referral form on LCS signed off by the Head of Service.	Head of Court, Kinship and Children with Disabilities chairs with 2 –3 additional Heads of Service in attendance.	Complex case discussion. Legal permanence considerations.  For children and young people (excluding unaccompanied children) who have been the subject of S.20 arrangements for more than 6 months.  To discuss young people in





Panel name	Overall purpose	Referral route	Chair	Permanence purpose
				custody on the cusp of being remanded into local authority care or where coordination of the support plan between Youth Justice Service and Social Care is needed if and when the young person is released from custody.
<b>High Cost Panel</b>	To consider placement options and resources for young people. HCP is not a care planning panel-but the panel will consider step downs and step ups when looking at what is in the best interests of young people. The panel also serves to hold providers to account around the plan for the young person.	The finance team will flag certain high cost placements and referrals also are made via Hillingdon's other panels.	Head of Service for Looked After Children and Leaving Care. Attended by the Service Manager for the Brokerage Service.	To ensure that resourcing is tailored to the needs of the child and young person regarding their living environment.
<b>Transitions Panel</b>  Terms of reference can be found <a href="#">Implementing the Transitions panel</a>	The panel considers the support and planning for Young People as they move to adulthood.	Referrals should be made after the young person turns 16.	Head of Service for Looked After Children and Leaving Care.	The purpose is to ensure that young people are fully supported as they become adults and that arrangements are enduring and sustainable for the young person.

The terms of reference for these panels are attached.



## 15 Procedures/ Frameworks and Guidance

### Legal Framework

The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations sets out the clear expectation that Local Authorities should (where necessary) secure permanent care arrangements for the children in its care. This has been strengthened in the revised regulations where achieving Permanence for every child must be a key consideration from the day a child becomes Looked After (Care Planning Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010).

For further information [Hillingdon's Children and families procedures manual can be found here](#)