

LANCASHIRE CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

LASTING HOME PROTOCOL

Purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to set out the key expectations and processes around progressing a child's lasting home, and achieving permanence for them within the home they are currently living.

This document will provide an overview of the process, expectations and tools and guides and make clear the minimum standards required when progressing a child's lasting home.

Lasting Homes and Scope

Lasting Home is the name given by our children, to the process whereby we agree a child's home as their long-term or permanent home, most commonly within a fostering arrangement. The function of the lasting homes process is a way of achieving permanence within children's foster homes, underpinned by Lancashire's Permanence Policy.

The function of the Lasting Home Meeting is to secure children's permanence within their home. The core framework which underpins the function of the Lasting Home Meeting is the Permanence Policy.

Our children have said that they have not always understood what meetings are for what purpose, so we have devised a guide to help them understand the process of lasting homes. There is a guide for children and a guide for young people and a guide for their families, along with a guide for our foster carers also.

Our children have said they did not like the word 'permanence' as this made them feel that they could never return to their parents. To respond to this, this process will now be known as 'lasting homes' – a name chosen by our children.

Our children have told us that they cannot understand why it takes so long to secure their lasting home, so we have streamlined the process to make it easier to progress. We have emphasised that recommendations for lasting homes are based on assessed need and strong matching, not on the length of time already spent living in the home.

Our children have been clear that they do not want a meeting made up of strangers, so we have given them the opportunity to identify and bring along with them those who they would like to be part of their lasting home commitment visit. Children have said that they want the "big bosses" who make the decision to be part of this process, and they would like to choose who else attends along with them.

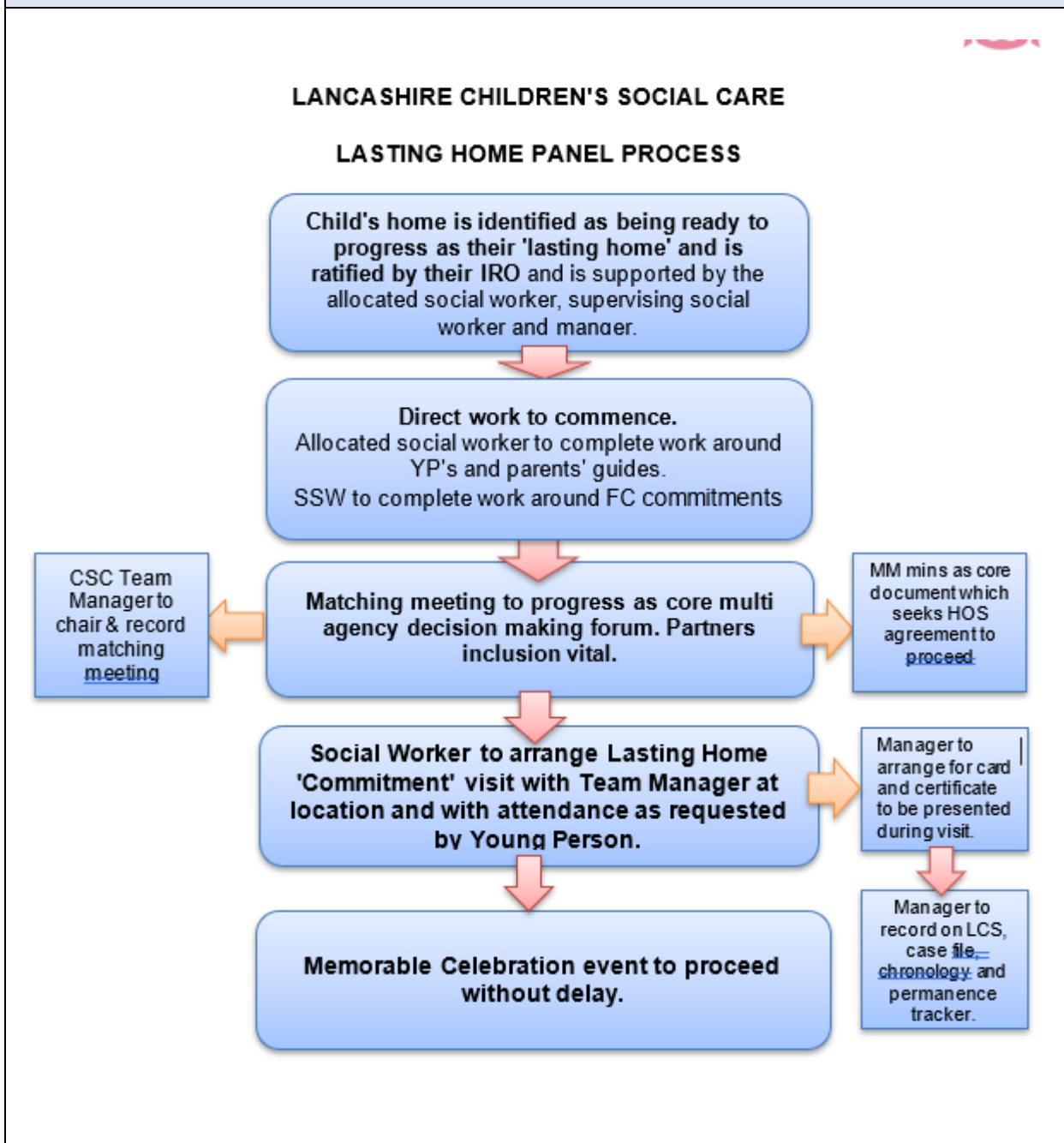
There are three main components to the lasting home process, 1) the matching meeting, 2) the lasting home commitment visit and 3) the celebration event.

Lasting Homes is mostly appropriate for our children who live in fostering arrangements. In other situations, it may be appropriate to consider the long-term match of a young person to their residential home. A core value of Lancashire's Permanence Service is that if we cannot support children and young people to stay within their own families, we would seek to care for them in foster homes as a preference to residential accommodation. We do however appreciate that for a very small number of our children, residential accommodation is the most suitable home and that this will be unlikely to change before the young person is ready for steps towards more independence. This is particularly the case for our children with complex disabilities. When thinking about lasting homes for our children in residential accommodation, the focus for matching needs to really consider how the proposed home is making a commitment above and beyond to our young person. To be considered as a lasting home, we would expect core values of this policy to be satisfied in that there is evidence of a long-term investment and commitment to the child, until they are ready to move on. Lasting Homes of children within residential provisions should be considered the exception and not the norm.

For children living with kinship carers, these carers are matched specifically to the needs of the child in their care only. Commonly these arrangements are assessed and approved within care proceedings and are a ratified long term care plan through this process. Since these children are placed with family members, assessed robustly through fostering and child and family assessment processes, these children are deemed to be in their Lasting Homes, and have achieved permanence in these arrangements. There may well remain the need for consideration regarding alternative orders that would prevent the need for the child remaining looked after and a core value of Lancashire's Permanence Service remains that for our children who are looked after by family members, legal permanence via the most appropriate private court order should be the preferred legal permanence outcome. However, we recognise that this is not always achievable, or always in our children's best interests, and despite this, these children are experiencing permanence within their family. The only exception to this is those few kinship care arrangements which are time limited and where there is a need for the child to move on in future.

The process of ratifying children's homes as permanent is separate to decision making around 'plans *for* permanence' and 'plans *of* permanence'. These processes are detailed separately within the Permanence Policy.

Process



Expectations

Our lasting homes meetings and visits should stand out and should be memorable for our children and their carers. They represent key commitments and decision making in our young people's stories and there should be good preparation with both the young person and their carer to support this process being seen as extra ordinary.

Our children and young people are the focus of their lasting home journey; this must be meaningful to them, supporting inclusion in decision making and promoting participation.

Our children shared with us that they wanted professionals who were important to them to be part of the process, rather than the meeting itself, so we have refocused the child's matching meeting to be a forum that is multi-agency and one that will produce paperwork that will make the recommendation to the lasting home commitment visit.

Expectations of Matching Meeting

- The matching meeting will serve as the professional decision-making forum at which all strengths and concerns will be discussed.
- A recommendation to the Head of Service will come from the matching meeting about progressing a lasting home.
- The Head of Service will be given a period of 2 weeks to consider the matching meeting prior to the lasting home commitment visit taking place.
- The Supervising Social worker will have completed work with the carers around their commitment in advance of this meeting.
- Direct work with the child/young person will have taken place regarding the matching meeting and their lasting home commitment visit in advance of the matching meeting.
- Parents will have been supported to understand the parents guides to lasting homes and been invited to attend the matching meeting, as appropriate.
- All professionals who are working with the child should be invited to attend the matching meeting.
- The matching meeting will be chaired by the Allocated Social Workers Team Manager and recorded in LCS on forms 'Fostering Service matching meeting'.
- The matching meeting document will mostly be completed within the matching meeting itself – specific information about the foster carers will be requested from the supervising social worker, ideally this should be provided before the meeting.

Expectations of the Lasting Home Commitment Visit

- The Team Manager, along with the Social Worker will arrange to meet with the child/young person and their carers at a location of their choice.
- The lasting home commitment visit should take place as soon as is reasonably possible following the period of Head of Service ratification – avoiding delay for the young person.
- Time will be spent considering the impact of the lasting homes process for the Young Person and their carer and the child/young person will be invited to share what this means for them.
- The Foster Carers will share their 'commitment' to the child/young person within the lasting home commitment visit.
- The outcome of the lasting home commitment visit will be clearly communicated to the child/young person and their carer during the visit.
- Clear records will be taken from the lasting home commitment visit and these will be recorded on LCS and the permanence tracker by the Team Manager. The Supervising Social Worker will record the same on the foster carers records.
- The Team Manager will attend the commitment visit with a personalised card and certificate for the child/young person, which explains the outcome of their commitment visit.
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Expectations of the Celebration Event

- The celebration event will be discussed within the matching meeting and there will be a clear understanding of how the child/young person wishes to celebrate.
- Agreements about financial contribution will be given during the matching meeting. The Local Authority is committed to helping the young person and their carers celebrate this key life event by making a small financial contribution to a celebration.
- It should be requested of carers to take pictures of the child and family during their celebration, as this will be important to include in the child's life story/memory box.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Children in Our Care Service

The Role of the Social Worker

The role of the Allocated Social Worker is to ensure appropriate preparation is completed for the matching meeting and lasting home commitment visit in a timely way.

The Allocated Social Worker is expected to support participation of our children. To achieve this, the Allocated Social Worker, through direct work, will need to ensure the child/young person understands the purpose and role of their Lasting Homes process. The Allocated Social Worker will need to spend time carefully preparing the child/young person. They will need support with considering who they would like to attend their commitment visit, where they would like this to take place and how they would like to celebrate.

The Allocated Social Worker is also expected to work with parents to support them to understand the process and be supported to have access to the parents' guides; research tells us that outcomes of 'lasting homes' are improved when actively supported by birth families.

The Role of the Supervising Social Worker

The role of the Supervising Social Worker is to ensure appropriate preparation is completed with the foster carers before the matching meeting and lasting home commitment visit. This preparation includes the preparation of the Foster Carer's Commitment to the child/young person, along with focused supervision around longer-term expectations of this commitment, i.e., when difficulties and future challenges occur, early discussions around 'staying put'.

The Role of the Childrens Team Manager

The Team Manager is responsible for considering the appropriateness and timeliness of starting any child's lasting home process. This consideration should be done in conjunction with the child's Independent Reviewing Officer. The Team Manager is responsible for the matching meeting and documentation which comes from this. The Team Manager is responsible for presenting a recommendation for Head of Service approval.

The Team Manager is responsible for attending the lasting home commitment visit at a place and time defined by the young person.

The Team Manager is responsible for sending a personalised card to all children and young people following their lasting home commitment visits celebrating the outcome.

A record of all meeting outcomes will be clearly recorded on the child's file by the Manager and the permanence tracker will also be updated following the matching meeting and lasting home commitment visit.

Guides to support lasting homes

Lancashire Permanence Policy

Inc child/young person guides

Parents guides

Fostering guides

Matching meeting temp