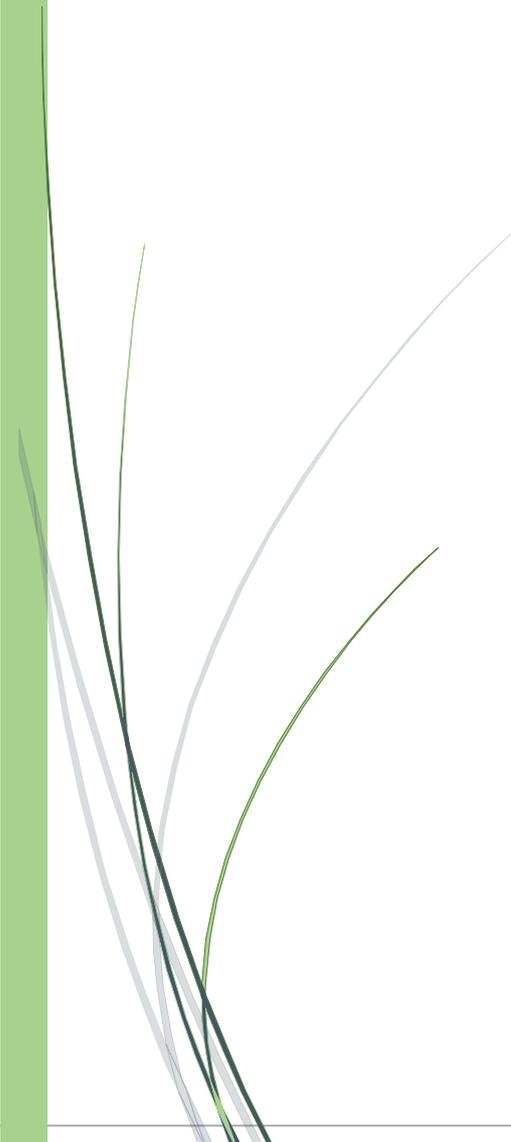




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Resource Allocation: Delegated Decision Making in Children's Services



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Resource Allocation within Peterborough: Delegation of Decision Making in Children's Services

1. Background and Introduction

A wide range of services is available to support children, young people and their families in Peterborough. These may be provided by the Council, our partners including health services and schools, and by the Community and Voluntary Sectors. Most of these services can be referred to directly by social workers and many accept referrals directly from families and young people. Details of many of these can be found in the guide: 'Early Help Process Map – Information for Professionals' available through the Children's Services Hub. The Peterborough Local Offer provides an overview of services to support children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities and their family.

FIS: <http://fis.peterborough.gov.uk/kb5/peterborough/fsd/home.page>

Local Offer: <https://www.peterborough.gov.uk/residents/special-educational-needs/local-offer/>

There are also a number of more specialist services available and many of these need a team manager, group manager or head of service to authorise a referral on recommendation of the social worker. The intention is to delegate as much decision making to team managers as possible, while maintaining an appropriate oversight of the use of scarce public resources and ensuring that these are spent in ways that are likely to have a long term impact on the child or young person's outcomes.

Decisions that have the most significant impact on the life of a child or young person such as whether or not they should become looked after will continue to be made at the Peterborough Access to Support Panel [PASP] or by the Assistant Director, Children's Services in genuinely urgent situations. Decision making at this level allows for a rounded discussion of all available options and, where an alternative to accommodation is agreed, enables risk to be shared between senior managers and front line practitioners.

2. General Principles

It is essential that whenever a request for a resource is made, managers give consideration to whether there are suitable community-based resources that may be able to meet the available need. This is not only because this results in a more efficient use of resources; it also offers the family a more sustainable source of support than specialist support services which will only ever be short term.

Children's Centres, for example, offer outreach services that can visit vulnerable parents of younger children, offer a family support worker to provide some advice and guidance in the home while encouraging the parents to access the Children's Centre and all that this can offer. This support is not time limited and can result in parents making more social contacts and developing informal means of support in a way that a specialist time-limited service.

There are a wide range of community and voluntary sector organisations that can offer support to families also. The Gladstone Community Association offers a wide range of support in community

languages to parents who may be experiencing a wide range of difficulties including with issues such as benefits and and/or housing related issues.

Requests for tasks that are reasonably within the scope of a social worker's role will not usually be agreed. The exception to this would be where there is a serious capacity issue affecting the whole service that does not allow for the task to be completed even through reallocation of work among team members. Examples of tasks that would ordinarily be within the social worker role include:

- Viability assessments;
- Parenting assessments
- Special Guardianship Order Assessments , led by TACT
- Pieces of direct work with families around safeguarding or meeting needs except when outside of the competency of social workers.

Where there is genuinely no capacity to undertake such pieces of work within a particular team, team managers should discuss what capacity there may be elsewhere within the service area with their Group Manager or Head of Service, who can in turn discuss any issues with the Assistant Director.

3. Recording Decisions

It is essential that whenever a decision is made about a child or young person, the decision and the rationale for it is recorded on the child's case file. PASP decisions should always include a rationale. For decisions made outside of panel, the decision maker – whether this is the children's practitioner, social worker, team manager, group manager or head of service, should always provide a rationale for the decision which must be recorded on the case file in case notes and in the chronology if the decision represents a significant event for the child or young person.

4. 'Edge of Care' & Family Support Services

There is a separate and detailed procedure that covers S17 support including urgent cash payments, support with accommodation and other services such as childcare support.

Practitioners and Managers are also directed to the guide: 'Early Help Process Map', which includes detailed information about the wide range of community-based support services for families and children and young people in the City. These options must be considered before considering allocating the following resources to a family.

Childminding/Nursery fees will not be funded as a general rule by Children's Services. In a real emergency, this support can be offered for up to 14 days, but will not be extended. This can be authorised by Group Managers or Heads of Service.

4.1 Family Group Conferences

FGCs can be very helpful in preventing escalation of cases to child protection and from child protection into pre-proceedings. Whether an FGC is appropriate in a particular case should therefore be considered at regular intervals. The FGC coordinator, accessed via TACT is very experienced in working with families where there may have been previous conflict or disagreement and is also very skilled at obtaining information about potential extended families members that may not have been previously forthcoming.

However, Family Group Conferences take a considerable period of time to organise and so planning is required to ensure that once the potential benefits of an FGC have been identified, one takes place within a timeframe that maximises those benefits. Social workers must also do all they can to obtain

the details of family members before making any referral for an FGC as this reduces the administrative work involved in arranging an FGC.

Team Managers need to authorise a referral to TACT for an FGC

4.2 Crisis Family Support

Crisis Support through **Bain and Dahle** is costly and should only be used as a last resort to prevent a child or young person becoming looked after and to provide a brief period during which time other services can be galvanised and put in place. All other community based options, use of resources within the Adolescent Service must be explored first.

Heads of Service have a notional allocation of 10 hours per week **in total** which they can agree for crisis support. This will be for a maximum period of 3 weeks for any young person or family, after which time the service will end unless an application is made to PASP. This means that at any one time, a team can have up to two families supported by Bain and Dahle using 5 hours support on each family per week, or five families supported by up to two hours per week each.

This is not a target! There will be times when one part of the service needs to put in extra support over and above what they are allocated and they will need to 'borrow' this from another area that has capacity.

Requests for this support must be directed through ART; ART will notify the head of service if they have sufficient hours within their allocation. If not, the head of service may be able to re-prioritise some of the support hours they are already using. If this is not possible, heads of service will need to agree with their colleague heads of service whether they can 'borrow' any surplus hours. Where there is no spare capacity identifiable in this way, the relevant Head of Service will need to discuss the need for the service with the Head of Service for Access to Resources and Specialist Commissioning.

Bain and Dahle support should not be used for things like 'safe and well' checks. These offer no real protection to any child as things may all be well at one point in the day when the visit takes place but very different afterwards. These checks can provide a false sense of security to all concerned. The service should only be used where there is an immediate risk of a child or young person becoming looked after unless the service is put in place. Where that risk is not imminent, other sources of support should be explored and planned into the family.

4.3 Legal Planning Meetings

LPMs must be authorised by the Group Manager or Head of Service. They will need all relevant information including, for example, all assessments, outcomes of strategy meetings or S47 enquiries, CP plans or recommendations, outcomes from the Family Group Conference. It is the expectation that a Family Group Conference is considered at any LPM, and any viability assessments of family members are also complete. Not all of these requirements will apply when there is clear evidence of risk of Significant Harm should the LPM be delayed.

The LPM must be chaired by the Group Manager or Head of Service. Social Workers must be able to provide a clear plan of intervention following an LPM, whether this is through the PLO process or the issuing of proceedings.

Where specialist assessments are requested as part of a PLO process, there must be clear evidence as to why these are required and how they are necessary to support the local authority's evidence or to help us to understand how to work most effectively with the family. They are not a replacement for a high quality social work assessment. Social Workers are expert witnesses in family proceedings and in

many cases, additional specialist assessments only lead to delay and add little to overall understanding of the impact on the child. Such assessments need to be agreed by the Head of Service or Assistant Director and arranged through the Access to Resources Team.

4.4 Issuing Care Proceedings

Where the LPM recommendation is to issue proceedings, final agreement must be sought from the Assistant Director, Children's Services. This should be in conjunction with the Group Manager or Head of Service who chaired the LPM, to enable the legal advice to be properly understood. This is to ensure that there is a final check and challenge that looking after the child or young person concerned is likely to be in their long term best interests.

4.5 Threshold for Accommodation

In most cases, children and young people should become looked after in a planned way – whether they are looked after under s.20 or through court proceedings. The decision in principle that threshold for accommodation should be made through PASP, except when there are genuinely urgent situations that require immediate action, in which case threshold for s.20 or agreement to issue proceeding lies with the Assistant Director, Children's Services.

PASP will discuss the details of the case and will share risk with front line practitioners where the decision is that accommodating a child or young person is unlikely to be in their best long term interests.

PASP will therefore require detailed assessments and care plans for the child or young person on which the decision around threshold should be made. These assessments will need to include exploration of extended family in terms of how they can offer support to enable the child to remain in the care of their parents or whether they may be able to provide alternative care for the child or young person. It would be usual for there to have been a Family Group Conference held by this point, and the panel will want to see evidence relating to the lack of impact of child protection plans where relevant.

Social Workers should have a clear understanding of plans for the child following issuing of proceedings – i.e. a plan that goes beyond the child simply becoming looked after but which is at least beginning to consider permanency options.

Whilst the decision to issue is now made outside PASP, requests for placements must still come to PASP in the usual way. Where urgent agreement has been given outside of the PASP process, the case should be booked in to the next available PASP for confirmation of decision and any accompanying resource requests.

Social Workers must also be prepared to provide the necessary information to the ART via a completed child's profile in order that a placement can be identified.

In all circumstances, your Head of Service must agree that issuing proceedings is indicated before any approach is made to the Assistant Director or an application is made to PASP.

Agreement to S20 accommodation

Agreement to S20 accommodation has the same authorisation process as that outlined for issuing proceedings as above – i.e. in most cases there should be agreement in PASP. Situations that require a same-day decision must be agreed first by your Head of Service and finally authorised by the Assistant Director, Children's Social Care.

It will be necessary to have explored all alternative options before S20 agreement is given. Extended family options must be explored with the family and/or young person and they need to be encouraged to make alternative private arrangements to safeguard the child or provide alternative accommodation for a young person depending on the circumstances.

Our standard offer to young people aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless and who want to be looked after is a foster placement – but this must only be made after every attempt has been made to return the young person home with support [through Bain and Dahle, for example] and if this is unsuccessful, for alternative family arrangements to be made with extended family and/or friends.

Social Workers must also be prepared to provide the necessary information to the ART via a completed child's profile in order that a placement can be identified. ART will need as much time as possible for this in order to identify an appropriate placement.

Private family arrangements are not compatible with written agreements that specify living arrangements or contact arrangements. Practitioners must not draft any such agreement.

All children and young people looked after under S20 outside of the PASP process must be presented to the next available PASP. This also includes young people remanded to the care of the Local Authority and Unaccompanied Minors.

4.8 Offers of Placements

TACT will of course seek the best possible placement for the child or young person for whom they are responsible. However, placements may be short supply and too many factors that would rule out a placement match may result in either only a very limited number of placements or no placement being available.

Placements where the child or young person should be the only one in placement, for example, are particularly difficult to source. Adding other requirements such as specific locations or ages of carers will only add to the difficulty in identifying a placement which satisfies all requirements.

This means that we need to be flexible about placement requirements and consider carefully which requirements are essential in order to meet the needs of the child or young person, and which would be ideal but would not rule a potential placement out.

The way that the profile for the child is written will also have a significant impact on whether a suitable placement can be identified. Profiles that contain only negative information about the child will be much less likely to result in a placement being identified. It is important to be honest about the challenges in relation to individual children and young people; however these should be placed in an appropriate context. Information about what particular children and young people are good at or interested in and that give potential carers a sense of what they might be able to help to achieve in terms of outcomes for the child or young person are much more likely to lead to positive results.

Placements are sourced through the Access to Resources Team and will be offered to the child's social worker for them to consider against the needs of the child or young person for whom they have responsibility. However, placements cannot simply be declined by the child or young person's social worker.

Where a social worker is concerned about possible issues relating to the suitability of the identified placement, they need to set out in writing these concerns to TACT.

Where the child's social worker remains unhappy about the ability of the placement to meet the identified needs of the child or young person, TACT will liaise with the social worker and team manager. Where it is agreed that the placement is not suitable, a further placement search will take place.

5 Children and Young People Looked After

Children and young people looked after are able to access the wide range of services available to all children and young people in the City. These may be provided by the Council, our partners including health services and schools, and by the Community and Voluntary Sectors. Most of these services can be referred to directly by social workers and many accept referrals directly from foster carers and young people. Details of many of these can be found in the guide: 'Early Help Process Map.

In addition, the **NSPCC** offers a service to children and young people who are looked after called **Face to Face**. This offers up to 8 sessions with a child or young person and provides a confidential space for them to be able to discuss things that may be affecting them such as coping with rejection or loss, peer pressure, low self-confidence, anger or when they may want to talk more positively about changes that they want to make in their lives. Social workers can refer directly to this service by contacting 01733 207620.

5.1 Child Looked After Psychology Service

There is a bespoke service available to children looked after [and in some circumstances to children and young people adopted] which is provided through the Educational Psychology Service. This can offer a wide range of emotional and mental health support and assessments of needs. For further information, social workers can have an initial discussion with the Psychologist for Children Looked After or the Principal Educational Psychologist.

Referrals can be made directly to the service by the social worker, providing there is evidence that the team manager is in agreement with the request. The service will inform the social worker if they believe that the referral is not appropriate and whether there is likely to be any delay in the service commencing. Where there is any delay that may have significant consequences for the child or young person concerned, the team manager should discuss alternative options with the Head of Service for Access to Resources and Specialist Commissioning.

The **Youth Offending Service** may also be able to offer assessment and on-going support to meet the emotional and/or mental health needs of a child or young person looked after and is an alternative source of support.

5.2 Supervised Contact Service

Contact with children looked after should take place where the child is placed wherever possible unless this is not in the child's best interests. If there is a need for contact to be supervised, foster carers or residential staff should undertake this unless there are good reasons why this would not be appropriate or practically possible.

When discussing contact arrangements in care proceedings, practitioners should be mindful on the impact of contact on the child. There is considerable research evidence that frequent contact for very young children is damaging as it disrupts the child's routines and creates anxiety as a result. The frequency of contact has no correlation with the likelihood of successful reunification – this is correlated with parental motivation and engagement with services to secure changes in their approaches to meeting the needs of their child.

Consideration must also be given to the impact of transport arrangements when making plans for supervised contact. The expectation is that foster carers should undertake contact as this means that the child is not subject to a number of 'hand-offs' between adults they may or may not know immediately before and after contact with parents or family. Contact itself may be a stressful experience for the child, without adding the additional uncertainty of introducing more adults to the child who may or may not be familiar to her or him.

Where contact is required to be supervised, the expectation is that the social worker will supervise at least one in four of the contacts. This is because such periods are highly valuable in contributing to assessments of whether parents are able to meet the needs of the child as they provide invaluable information about the quality of the relationship, attachment and parental responses to their child.

Supervised contact should be arranged via the Supervised Contact Service but must first be approved by the **Team Manager** responsible for the case. Eleanor Carey has overall responsibility for the supervised contact service and will refuse to progress referrals if her view is that the referral not appropriate. Any disagreements that cannot be resolved should be discussed with the relevant head of service for FST, FRT or Children Looked After.

5.3 Placement Changes

Where a child or young person who is looked after is at risk of experiencing an unplanned placement end, the decision about whether a new placement is to be offered should be considered by the **Care Planning Panel** **except where the request to move to a residential provision** and in urgent situations, when the decision to agree a change of placement requires the following levels of authorisation:

- Foster carer [or connected carer] to foster carer: Head of Service for Corporate Parenting in discussion with TACT;
- Residential placement to residential placement: Assistant Director in discussion with TACT
- Residential placement to semi-independent placement: Head of Service for Corporate Parenting .

All placement changes in urgent situations should be discussed with the Assistant Director. Urgent placement changes should be avoided whenever possible and due regard should be given to the notice periods applicable to the type of placement that is at risk of coming to an unplanned end.

In all cases, the expectation is that a placement stability meeting should be convened in order that any additional support to prevent a placement ending is put into place.

Placement endings are an opportunity to reassess what may be in the best long term interests of the child or young person concerned. Where a child or young person has been looked after for a number of years, their increased resilience combined with changes that may have been made within their birth families may make it appropriate to consider a return to family, perhaps via a period of shared care. Practitioners must remember that where a child or young person is currently subject to an interim or full care order, any such steps need the explicit agreement of the Assistant Director and will need to be planned carefully. **Such arrangements are governed by the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations, 2010.**

These issues will be considered by the **Care Planning Panel** in non-urgent situations whenever a placement change is being considered. Social workers should have explored all possible options including return to family or extended family before presenting this to the Care Planning Panel. **Residential requests or multi-funded placement change requests must still come for agreement to a placement change at CYPQ&E panel.**

In urgent situations, the relevant Heads of Service and the Assistant Director will also explore these issues and social workers therefore need to be prepared to discuss and consider alternative options.

The **Independent Reviewing Officer** should always be consulted when a placement change is likely. This may not always be possible in urgent situations, but social workers should still make every effort to notify the IRO. **The Conference and Reviewing Service must be formally notified of all placement changes in order that statutory reviews can be arranged within the required timeframes.**

5.4 The Decision to Cease to Look After a Child or Young Person

Statutory Guidance issued in March 2015 requires that the decision to cease to look after a child or young person must be authorised by designated senior officers, which in some cases means the Director of Children's Services.¹

Paragraph 5.5g of the guidance says:

Where a child has been looked-after for at least 20 working days, the decision to cease to look after her/him must not be put into effect until it has been approved by a nominated officer **[regulation 39(4)]**. Where the local authority are considering ceasing to look after a child aged 16 or 17 years, who has been accommodated under section 20 of the 1989 Act, this decision must not be put into effect until it has been approved by the director of children's services **[regulation 39(5)]**.

The nominated senior officer is the Service Director for Children and Safeguarding, who is the person who must approve any decision for any child or young person looked after for at least 20 working days and who is aged 15 or under to cease to be looked after. Young people aged 16 and 17 and looked after for 20 working days or more require confirmation of this decision from the Director of Children's Services. Before granting this approval the nominated officer or director of children's services must be satisfied that:

- The child's wishes and feelings have been ascertained and given due consideration;
- Decision to cease to look after the child will safeguard and promote their welfare;
- The IRO has been informed; and
- Where the child is an eligible child the appropriate requirements have been met **[regulations 40 – 44]**.

5.5 Agreement to Long term Foster Placements as part of Permanency Plan

Where a child or young person is settled in their foster placement, it is right that the permanent or long term nature of this arrangement is recognised through the permanency planning process. Consideration and planning in this area takes place within the statutory reviewing process.

Where a placement is provided by TACT, there is no need for this issue to come to PASP before a permanency plan of long term fostering is formally agreed. However, where it is proposed that an IFA placement is to be made a permanent arrangement, the arrangement needs first to be agreed by PASP.

¹ Permanence, long-term foster placements and ceasing to look after a child: Statutory guidance for local authorities; March 2015:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/416720/Stat_Guidance_Permanence_2015.pdf

5.6 Staying Put

Requests for young people to 'stay put' within their foster placement will be considered by the **Care Planning Panel and then ratified by PASP** so that we can ensure that we are making long term budgeting provisions.

Social Workers must discuss any proposal for a young person to 'stay put' within a former Independent Fostering Agency placement with TACT **before** beginning any discussions with the carer or the agency. Staying Put rates are equal regardless of whether the placement was previously an in-house or an independent agency foster placement; some fostering agencies may have issues with this element of our policy and so discussions need to be initiated through the Commissioning Service.

6 Other Circumstances requiring Resource Allocation

Although no guide can cover every circumstances, the table in the next section aims to summarise decision making in most circumstances.

7 Summary: Decision Making

The table below contains an overview of who can approve what, and includes a number of areas of decision making in addition to those detailed above.

Please note, however, that where the decision is to be made by the Assistant Director, social workers should not go directly to the AD but should seek agreement from their team manager, group manager, or head of service first. The only situation where this requirement would not apply is where people are not available and the need for a decision is urgent.

Resource	Who Agrees?	Comments
C&F Assessment	Team Manager	The team manager will also provide guidance as to expected length of time for completion of assessment.
S47 Threshold	Team Manager	
Proceed to Child in Need Plan	Team Manager	
Proceed to Initial Child Protection Plan	Team Manager	In consultation with group manager for young people 13+
Recommendation to de-plan at RCPC	Team Manager	
Step-down to Early Help	Team Manager	Where CiN plan has been active for long period, should be agreed within a CiN meeting and LP identified; where stepping down following C&F Assessment and recommendation is for multi-agency support, case needs to be presented at MASG. Consent is always required from family.
S17 spend – up to £100 per family per annum	Team Manager / Group Manager	Note that all other options including applications for crisis support through DWP and referrals to food banks etc. must have been explored first.
S17 spend – up to £500 per family per annum	Head of Service	Note that all other options including applications for crisis support through DWP and referrals to food banks etc. must have been explored first.
Family Group Conferences	Team Manager	Accessed Directly with relevant Manager.
Referral to YOS or Youth in Localities	Team Manager	
Crisis Family Support	Heads of Service up to 10 Hours per Week total and maximum of 3 weeks for any one family	Where heads of service have used up their allowance they need to prioritise according to need – or ‘borrow’ from other heads of service that may have capacity. Application form to be completed and sent to ART – NOT directly to the provider.

Resource	Who Agrees?	Comments
Crisis Family Support needed for more than 3 weeks for a family or YP	Heads of Service for a maximum of a further 6 weeks	This is CRISIS support and should be used only in order to galvanise community resources or other services and not for on-going support
Crashpad	Head of Service for a maximum of 3 days	Alternate plans should be made for young people in this time. If there is a need to consider S20 accommodation, the case should be presented to PASP.
Bed and Breakfast	Head of Service	Finance to be notified of any use
Age assessments	Team Manager	
Request for LPM	Group Manager	Where an LPM is held and the outcome is a recommendation to issue proceedings, the Head of Service, Family Safeguarding or the Assistant Director must confirm the decision to issue proceedings.
Expert Assessments, drug and alcohol testing, DNA and Independent Social Workers	Head of Service	In PLO and Proceedings. Assessments will only be agreed where necessary for the LA to demonstrate adverse impact on child. Drug and substance misuse testing, for example, might be appropriate where this is suspected and is suspected to be a cause of parenting difficulties, but is not going to add anything where parents acknowledge substance misuse. All assessments to be arranged through the Access to Resources Team, except where directed within court proceedings.
Application for EPO	Assistant Director	Legal services need to be informed as early as possible so they are able to ensure that there is court availability.
Application for ICO, Supervision Order or other proceedings	Assistant Director	This will always need to be informed by legal advice and discussion with Head of Service.
Threshold for Accommodation	PASP except when urgent, in which case Assistant Director/Service Director	Where case is agreed outside of PASP, case must be booked into next available PASP. In most circumstances, decisions around looking after a child should be planned, and the expectation is that workers presenting a request for a child or young person to become looked after will need to have an initial care plan prepared
Supervised Contact	Team Manager	Only usually available within active proceedings. All other options including foster carers or family members to be explored first and evidence of this provided. Consideration must be given to impact on child not only of contact itself but on transport arrangements. Expectation is that carers provide transport except where this would result in them being unable to meet needs of other children in placement. Social Workers to supervise a minimum of one in four contacts.
Interim Care Plans	Head of Service	These need to be completed in good time to enable quality assurance processes to be completed. Legal Services also require plans to be submitted in advance of filing dates.
Final Care Plans	Head of Service	The main elements of the final care plan should be agreed before the care plan is drafted.
Secure Accommodation	Service Director	In consultation with Assistant Director, who will chair all secure accommodation legal planning meetings
Placement Changes for Looked after children	Care Planning Panel for same level changes.	In planned situations, all changes should be discussed at the Care Planning Panel before coming to PASP. In urgent situations, agreement is to be sought from those identified in Section 6.3, above

Resource	Who Agrees?	Comments
	Residential requests to PASP	
Temporary Fostering Variation	TACT	
Reg 24 Approvals	TACT	
Medical consents for Children Looked After	Head of Service	Consultation with parents should always be attempted where medical intervention is planned, regardless of whether or not we hold PR.
Special Guardianship Orders, Adoption & Child Arrangement Orders - allowances	TACT	See full information in Section 5 above Head of Service for Adoption and Fostering should be fully involved.
Long Term Fostering as part of Permanency Planning	Team Manager	In discussion with TACT
Staying Put	Care Planning Panel Then PASP	See Section 6.6 above; particular care must be taken in responding to requests for Staying Put arrangements to apply where carers are from Independent Fostering Agencies. Social Workers must discuss proposals with the Access to Resources Team before any firm discussions take place with carers.
Placement of child subject to a care order at home with parents	Assistant Director	
Ceasing to look after a child or young person aged 15 or under & looked after for more than 20 days	Service Director	See Section 6.4 above for further details
Ceasing to look after a young person aged 16 or 17 who has been looked after for more than 20 days	Director of Children's Services	See section 6.4 above for further details

