**Kent Access to Resources Panels**

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**1. Introduction**

Kent is one of the largest local authorities in the Country and maintaining consistent practice and keeping a good grip of case work is a huge challenge. Practice and responses to meet the needs of children and young people who are vulnerable or at risk of significant harm require early intervention and planning. Crisis led interventions need to be minimised.

Area Access to Resources panels enable services to be commissioned and allocated according to need, to ensure value for money.

**2. Purpose of Panels**

The Kent Access to Resources Panels aim to simplify all current processes to promote consistency of practice, decision making and value for money across the County.

The panels are part of an overall system of ensuring the effective planning, use of family and friends carers, local authority foster placements, monitoring, evaluation and value for money of placements and services provided to Children in Care, children on the edge of care (0-18yrs) and Children in Need in Kent.

The panels are part of a whole-systems approach to resource allocation, and deliver the key priorities outlined in phase 2 of Kent Safeguarding and Looked after Children Improvement Plan “Putting Children First”. They are a key element of the Children’s Placement Strategy Action Plan.

The scope of the panels is not restricted to just making good quality placements; the intention is to co-ordinate the range of activity across Children’s Services, including a clear focus on supporting families to stay together, wherever it is safe to do so, thus minimising the need for children to become looked after, or supporting their timely return to their families.

There are 2 Access to Resources Panels in each area of the County, which will be responsible for agreeing the placements for children who are in care and high-level family support packages as an alternative to accommodating children.

Through the Access to Resources Panels, senior leadership teams within each area have the lead accountability for ensuring best social work practice and enable resources to be deployed to meet the needs of children and young people of Kent.

All requests for resources require a robust needs assessment of the child/young person and their family.

These Policies and Procedures set out SCS operational guidance to staff and describe how a wide range of resources to support children and young people can be accessed and ensure the delivery of improved outcomes for the children and families of Kent.

**3. Principles in Decision Making by Panels**

The Panel will consider information provided and the following principles and child care practice standards should underpin its decisions:

* Promotion of high standards of childcare practice
* Decisions are based on identified needs and best interests of the child
* Ensuring the child is safe, that decisions promote and safeguard their welfare and are timely, relevant to their age and development
* Clear focus on supporting families to stay together wherever it is safe to do so
* Robust and effective decision making ensuring children have the best opportunity of experiencing permanency
* Giving due consideration to the child or young person wishes and feeling with due regard to his/her age and understanding.
* Giving due consideration to the child or young person’s race, religion/belief, gender, culture and linguistic backgrounds, disability and sexual orientation.
* Determining whether parents/carers’ wishes and feelings have been ascertained and that they are willing or actively engaged in using treatment or support resources offered to resolve identified concerns/issues
* Clarity of planning which includes specifying actions to be taken by all parties concerned to avoid the need for the child to become looked after, where safe to do so
* Effective use of all resources in the child’s network, both professional and family based
* Targeting resources where they can most effectively assist families, and enable children and young people to remain within families or with carers in their local communities
* Monitoring interventions to promote early success and good outcomes for the child or young person

**4. Objectives**

The objectives of the Access to Resources Panels are:

* To ensure that packages of support designed to reduce risk to children and enable them to remain living with their birth families are accessed efficiently in a timely manner and coordinated effectively.
* To ensure only the right children come into care, in the most appropriate placements and using resources efficiently
* To co-ordinate the use of resources for children in care
* To promote a consistent approach to decision making and planning
* To collate information and inform future commissioning decisions/strategies.
* To promote a culture of risk sharing and ownership of risk management at all levels in the organisation.
* To ensure that finite resources are used to best effect and are regularly reviewed and monitored to ensure that desired outcomes are being achieved.
* To assist with management of volatile and high risk budgets.
* Using evidence of trends and patterns in the placement of children, including which interventions produce the most successful outcomes for children.

**5. Scope of Access to Resource Panels**

There will be 2 types of Panels:

**Access to Resources Panels** will have a clearly defined brief to consider alternatives to care and family support services for those children on the edge of care and family support services for children and families including those in the Disabled Children’s Service. This panel will make decisions following carers requesting assessments for financial support linked to adoption, special guardianship and child arrangements orders. The panel will have a key function to oversee plans for children entering the care system and will approve all new CIC placements. Access to Resources panels also acts as a gate-keeper for some commissioned services.

**Children In Care (CIC) Placement Panels** will have the key function of reviewing placements of CIC to ensure they are appropriate and meet the child or young person’s needs, agree placement moves, ensure there is good care planning and that children do not drift in inappropriate placements.

This panel will make decisions following carers requesting assessments for financial support linked to adoption, special guardianship and child arrangements orders.

**6. Terms of Reference of Panels**

6.1 Access to Resource Panels

The Access to Resources Panels meet weekly. 10 -15 minutes will be allocated for each case. If a case is identified as particularly complex, it may be allocated a double slot.

6.2 The Access to Resources Panels has the following functions:

1. To operate a gate keeping and monitoring function and manage the thresholds for access to the Children in Care System
2. Authorise all initial placements for CIC from all operational social work teams, disabled children’s service and the unaccompanied asylum seeking children’s service.
3. Agree specific resources or types of placement that will meet the plan for the child in both the short and long term, and commit resources from the following budgets:
4. Placements for CIC – in-house, external or with connected persons
5. Consider financial assessments and potential allowances for prospective adopters, special guardians and proposed child arrangements orders
6. Placements for Parent and Child in – house or external
7. Transport costs associated with the placement
8. Section 17
9. To advise on alternative intervention strategies to prevent children being accommodated unnecessarily and ensure all other means of supporting the child/family have been fully explored e.g. universal services, family support services and family group conferencing etc.
10. Agree funding for Intensive family support or alternative intervention strategies
11. Agree placements with connected persons ensuring thresholds of looked after status are met
12. Agree funding for additional support for residential or fostering placements, or other care/support packages for CIC

6.3 The CIC Placement Panels

The CIC Placement Panels will meet fortnightly. 15 minutes will be allocated for each case. If a case is identified as particularly complex, it may be allocated a double slot.

 6.4 The CIC placement panel has the following functions:

1. To monitor care planning, ensuring exit and transition strategies for CIC are in place
2. To review IFA and Residential Placements to ensure that children are placed in the most appropriate placements
3. Review of all Parent and Child placements
4. To recommend that where a child or young person has needs other than social care needs e.g. health including mental health, or education needs that these cases are referred to the Kent inter agency panel (JRAP) to ensure concurrent education, health planning.
5. Review of CIC accommodated under Section 20 (prioritising those that are of longest duration)
6. Agree requests for Placement moves ensuring placements changes are planned and alternatives placements are appropriate
7. Agree placement moves for CIC including placement moves for young people 16+
8. Consider financial assessments and potential allowances for prospective adopters, special guardians and proposed child arrangements orders

6.5 In addition both panels:

* Coordinate the use of resources for Looked after Children and Children in Need
* Assist in the controlling, management and monitoring of the departments CIC Placement and Section 17 budgets, ensuring best value principles are adhered to
* Identify needs, trends in demand and gaps in service provision that will inform an outcome focused commissioning strategy.

**All resources agreed by panels will be time limited, with a review date.**

**7. Membership of Panels**

7.1 Access to Resources Panel Membership:

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| Member | Roles and responsibilities |
| Chair – Assistant Director  | To chair meetings and facilitate participation in discussion, constructive challenge and decision making Agree the recommendations and action plan proposed by the meeting Provide expert knowledge of child care planning and local resources Provide support in managing risk  |
| Panel administrator | Put in place an effective booking system for panels Receive and collate referrals, and plan agenda Minute meeting and record panel decisions Disseminate paperwork to all panel members Record review dates and agenda in to relevant panel meetings Input panel decisions on Liberi |
| Integrated Families Service Manager | Contribute to discussion and use expertise to find creative solutions to meeting needs  |
| Children and Young Person Service Manager | Contribute to discussion and use expertise to find creative solutions to meeting needs  |
| Early Help & Open Access Representative | Offer advice on what support can be offered to a child or young person on the edge of care, or where rehabilitation home is the plan  |
| Fostering Manager | Advise on placements which are available in-house Ability of carer to meet transport and supervised contact arrangements Work with social workers/teams to access in-house placement services Advise panel on other options which are available Take back needs information to inform ongoing fostering recruitment strategy  |
| FGC Team Manager | Offer advice on level of service available and creative approachesUpdate on status of any referrals |
| Presenting worker and Team Manager | The ARP referral will be approved and signed off by the Team Manager. The Team Manager must ensure: The referral to panel is fit for purpose, and meets the panel remit A clear summary of the case and what panel is being asked to agreeAny decision regarding potential carers allowance (CAO, Adoption or Special Guardianship) is in line with KCC policy and legislation (see Adoption, Special Guardianship and Residence Order Allowances policy).  |

7.2 Children in Care Placement Panel Membership

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| --- | --- |
| Member | Roles and responsibilities |
| Chair – Assistant Director  | To chair meetings and facilitate participation in discussion, constructive challenge and decision making Agree the recommendations and action plan proposed by the meeting Provide expert knowledge of child care planning, local resources Provide support in managing risk  |
| Panel administrator | Put in place an effective booking system for panels Receive and collate referrals, and plan agenda Minute meeting and record panel decisions Disseminate paperwork to all panel members Record review dates and agenda in to relevant panel meetings Input panel decisions on Liberi |
| Integrated Families Service Manager | Contribute to discussion and use expertise to find creative solutions to meeting needs  |
| Children and Young Person Service Manager | Contribute to discussion and use expertise to find creative solutions to meeting needs  |
| Fostering Manager | Advise on placements which are available in-house Ability of carer to meet transport and supervised contact arrangements Work with social workers/teams to access in-house placement services Advise panel on other options which are available Take back needs information to inform ongoing fostering recruitment strategy  |
| Virtual School Kent Team member  | Offer advice and guidance on the most appropriate pathway to ensure the best possible educational outcomes for children and young people  |
| Independent Reviewing Officer Manager or designated Officer  | To offer advice on care planning and ensure follow up action for children where drift may be occurring  |
| Presenting Worker and Team Manager  | The CIC panel referral will be approved and signed off by the by the Team Manager. The Team Manager must ensure: The referral to panel is fit for purpose, and meets the panel remit A clear summary of the case and what panel is being asked to agreeAny decision regarding potential carers allowance (CAO, Adoption or Special Guardianship) is in line with KCC policy and legislation (see Adoption, Special Guardianship and Residence Order Allowances policy).  |

**8. Thresholds for access to the children looked after system**

The panel will ensure a consistent approach to managing the number of children who access the looked after system.

**We should only be looking after:**

Children for whom there is clear evidence of risk of significant harm because neither their parents/carers nor members of their wider family can keep them safe to an acceptable level, and no satisfactory services or arrangements can be put in place to provide adequate safeguards. Such children are likely to have a child protection plan prior to becoming looked after, and may well be subject to Proceedings (including children whose parents require an assessment).

Children who present a risk of serious harm to other children in their household such that their parents/carers who cannot protect the other children to an acceptable level, no satisfactory services or arrangements can be put in place to provide adequate safeguards, and for whom there is no possibility of safe care within their wider family/ community.

 Children who have no-one with parental responsibility, no adult family member nor trusted adult to care for them – e.g. unaccompanied asylum seekers who are under 18 years old; children whose principal carer(s) is/are temporarily or permanently unavailable for a specific reason beyond their control.

Children remanded into care who have no alternative placement within their family, friends or personal networks.

**We should be assessing the needs of, and offering support to, but not looking after:**

Children and young people who are not in the groups described above but whose parents are rejecting them and want them out of the house. Non-school attendance, involvement in offending, staying out late and anti-social behaviour are not in themselves reasons to accommodate a child, even if their parents refuse to take up other offers of help.

**In considering and assessing what is best for the child the panels will always explicitly consider the following:**

1. What alternative family members, friends, neighbours, connected persons have been explored and why this is not sufficient to keep this child out of the looked after system
2. Which resources have been considered and why these are not sufficient
3. What other agencies/resources have been considered
4. What resources would be required in order to prevent this child being looked after – including financial

This applies whether the perceived need for accommodation is a sudden or anticipated event.

Where there is an immediate risk to the safety of the child, there will be no delay in making a decision to safeguard and protect them.

**9. Bringing a case to Access to Resources Panel(ARP)/Child in Care (CIC) panel**

The social worker will be responsible for referring a case to the Panel, following discussion and agreement with their Manager.

**Process for Resource Requests**

1. Social worker discusses the identified need with team manager in supervision
2. Social worker completes an electronic referral form to ARP which will be automatically emailed to team manager and service manager for agreement before it is finally sent to panel administrator.
3. The referral form should be with the panel administrator 3 working days before the panel date unless this is an emergency request.
4. Social workers will be expected to attend panel, and other professionals may be invited if particular support packages which they can contribute to are being discussed.
5. It is not appropriate for parents, children or young people to attend, although the social worker has a clear responsibility to reflect their views, wishes and feelings.
6. Following the panel decision, the panel administrator will have the minuted decision agreed by the Chair, will send copy of decision to case holding social worker and will input the decision made on Liberi.
7. The Social worker is responsible for feeding back the decision to the family

**Process for Requesting Assessment for Financial Support linked to Special Guardianship Orders, Adoption Orders and Child Arrangements Orders**

1. Social worker discusses the identified need with team manager in supervision (and considers the criteria identified in the Adoption Order, Special Guardianship Order and Child Arrangements Order allowances policy if an assessment for financial support linked to these orders is being requested). *The possibility of the assessment should not be discussed with the carer before agreement from manager.*
2. Social worker requests that the carers complete a “financial assessment request form”.
3. Social worker completes an electronic referral form to ARP/CIC panel (attaching the carers completed financial assessment request form) which will be automatically emailed to team manager and service manager for agreement before it is finally sent to panel administrator.
4. The referral form should be with the panel administrator 3 working days before the panel date unless this is an emergency request.
5. Social workers will be expected to attend panel, and other professionals may be invited if particular support packages which they can contribute to are being discussed.
6. It is not appropriate for parents, children or young people to attend, although the social worker has a clear responsibility to reflect their views, wishes and feelings.
7. In the event that a request for assessment for financial support for an order is **NOT agreed**, the panel administrator will draft a letter to the carers signed by the Chair with the reasons for not agreeing to assess. An agreement should be made by the panel as to the most appropriate way to inform the carers of this decision (eg: letter sent out from panel or given to social worker to hand deliver.) The panel administrator should input the decision on to the child’s electronic file.
8. In the event that a request for assessment for financial support for an order **is agreed**, the panel administrator should input the decision on to the child’s electronic file. The Child allowances review team (CART) will be notified of this decision through Firmstep.
9. CART will send the carer the financial self-assessment form and will ensure the correct evidence documentations have been included in their response, chasing up any which need more information. CART will then send completed self-assessment form to children’s payments team to complete the means test. CART will update the child’s electronic file on Liberi at each stage.
10. The children’s payments team will aim to inform CART of the completed means test amount within 14 days.
11. CART will then write to carer (cc’ing SW) with calculated means tested allowance amount.

**For agreed ongoing and regular allowances** – The SW should send the confirmation of any Adoption Order, Special Guardianship Order and Child Arrangements Order in order that the CART can set up payments on Controcc payment system.

**10. Electronic links to the electronic ARP referral form**

North Kent:

<https://kentcc.firmstep.com/FAMLogIn/auth.aspx?ReturnURL=%2Fdefault.aspx%2FStages%2FRenderProcess%2F%3FProcessGUID%3D3D92AAF7-A7DA-464D-A264-FC68D45A6DB8%26ReturnURL%3D%2F>

East Kent:

<https://kentcc.firmstep.com/FAMLogIn/auth.aspx?ReturnURL=%2Fdefault.aspx%2FStages%2FRenderProcess%2F%3FProcessGUID%3DFF893503-4FC0-4750-920E-CC9C93893319%26ReturnURL%3D%2F>

West Kent:

<https://kentcc.firmstep.com/FAMLogIn/auth.aspx?ReturnURL=%2Fdefault.aspx%2FStages%2FRenderProcess%2F%3FProcessGUID%3DEB2C446A-E463-4EA7-BAE1-EC4642210AAB%26ReturnURL%3D%2F>

South Kent:

<https://kentcc.firmstep.com/FAMLogIn/auth.aspx?ReturnURL=%2Fdefault.aspx%2FStages%2FRenderProcess%2F%3FProcessGUID%3D15F6BB9D-0B27-4D46-BAB1-D351DAF5E38B%26ReturnURL%3D%2F>

**11.Electronic links to the electronic CIC referral form**

North Kent: <https://kentcc.firmstep.com/FAMLogIn/auth.aspx?ReturnURL=%2Fdefault.aspx%2FStages%2FRenderProcess%2F%3FProcessGUID%3D8962F8CA-21A3-47B7-8F2C-EB0F5B15EA3D%26ReturnURL%3D%2F>

East Kent: <https://kentcc.firmstep.com/FAMLogIn/auth.aspx?ReturnURL=%2Fdefault.aspx%2FStages%2FRenderProcess%2F%3FProcessGUID%3D2DA4AEE1-D5BC-47A1-A3BD-DB20B4835680%26ReturnURL%3D%2F>

West Kent: <https://kentcc.firmstep.com/FAMLogIn/auth.aspx?ReturnURL=%2Fdefault.aspx%2FStages%2FRenderProcess%2F%3FProcessGUID%3D86AEBF0F-AE69-41E3-8612-E224A7F8562B%26ReturnURL%3D%2F>

South Kent: <https://kentcc.firmstep.com/FAMLogIn/auth.aspx?ReturnURL=%2Fdefault.aspx%2FStages%2FRenderProcess%2F%3FProcessGUID%3D6EA96733-9B1D-48D7-A1B7-A5C515B41A52%26ReturnURL%3D%2F>

**12. Panel decision**

In most cases, the decision will be made within a day, and recorded by the panel administrator.

The decision will be placed on the child’s electronic record on a case note by the panel administrator.

**13. Review of decisions**

Any individuals wishing to request a review of a decision can do so within 28 days of the date of decision. Written representation should be made with reasons and sent to the case holding social worker who will then re-refer to the Access to Resources panel for review.

Any decision reviews will be dealt with within 14 days of the request and outcomes will be communicated directly to the carer by letter.

**14. Links with other panels**

The Panel may suggest that a case is referred to:

 Joint Resources Access Panel - JRAP (for funding from Education or Health)

**15. Emergency arrangements**

Requests for emergency placements or support packages, which cannot wait until the next panel, must be discussed with the Integrated Service Manager and agreed by the area Assistant Director.

An electronic panel referral form should be completed and the case will be heard retrospectively at the next available panel meeting.

Urgent requests for placement moves that cannot wait until the next CIC Placement Panel, in exceptional circumstances can be presented to the weekly Access to Resources Panel.