**Dorset Council Children’s Services**

**Guidance for Family Finding for Long-Term Care**

# What is Permanence?

* 1. All children and young people need a loving family in which to live. For some children this can be a temporary arrangement, others a more permanent option. Regardless of the type of family setup, Dorset Council Children’s Social Care (DC) endeavours to discuss the needs of each child and young person from the outset of its involvement.
  2. Planning for both short and long-term care should be embedded in practice, discussed with families and recorded within reports and procedures.

Flowchart illustrating interrelationship between various policies relating to permanency

**Preventing Family Breakdown**

Child Safeguarding Policy and Child Protection Procedures

Public Law Outline

Looked After Children

Policy & Procedures

Family Group Conferencing Policy & Procedures

**Permanency Policy**

Adoption Policy

Policy & procedures in relation to

Re-unification to parental care

Fostering Policy

Child Arrangements Order Policy

Connected Persons Policy

Special Guardianship Policy

* 1. Permanence is defined in the statutory guidance that accompanies the Children Act 1989 as providing children with:

*‘a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity … a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond’* (DCSF, 2010).

* 1. Permanence is about having a ‘family for life’ (Sinclair et al, 2007) and a sense of belonging and connectedness (Schofield et al, 2012). At its heart is the quality and continuity of the relationships children build with their carers’, regardless of placement type (The Care Inquiry, 2013).
  2. Placement stability is an important element of permanence as it creates opportunities for children to develop these relationships, which may take time for children whose previous relationships have been characterised by adversity (Boddy, 2013).
  3. Continuing high-quality relationships are important for children in care because they:
* help children build security through developing secure attachments
* support their ability to form relationships in the future as adults
* help them develop a strong sense of belonging and identity, (The Care Inquiry, 2013).
  1. Permanence can be reached through different pathways:
* a return to birth parents;
* shared care arrangements;
* permanence within the looked after system: a residential placement, long-term unrelated foster care, or connected persons foster care;
* legal permanence, (adoption, special guardianship, child arrangement orders).
  1. Planning for permanence starts at the **outset of working with families and**

**should always be discussed prior to children being accommodated. It is**

**not a subject left until after a child is in care.**

* 1. It is a statutory requirement that all children who are unable to return home

have a permanency plan with a recommendation of how this will be achieved

by their second review. This can still be and can still be a parallel plan at this

point.

* 1. Prior to any ratification of a permanency plan at a child’s LAC review, a

discussion with the parents, child and carers should have taken place.

* 1. It is deemed ‘best practice’ if we follow the same processes for securing

permanence to offer children the best opportunities for having a secure home.

* 1. Professionals are confident in making a recommendation that it is in the child’s

best interest that a ‘Should be Placed for Long-Term Care’ decision is made.

* 1. If an application for a s31 is being made then the and care plan is for long-term

foster care (LTFC) the above recommendation should be completed within care

proceedings and it is advisable to seek legal guidance.

* 1. Where children are voluntarily accommodated under s20, further discussion

regarding the appropriateness of a LTFC decision, is needed before

proceeding.

1. **Dorset Foster Panel**
   1. From January 2018 DC’s Foster Panel will become a Fostering and Permanence Panel.
   2. It will continue with its remit to recommend new fostering approvals, hear annual foster home reviews and changes of approvals for foster carers. From January 2018, it will also complete the following functions:
      * Recommend a ‘**Should be Placed for Long-Term Care’** outcome for children required to remain in long-term care
      * Review and recommend proposed **‘matches’** for children with foster carers seeking to care long-term
2. **Routes to Permanence** 
   1. In order to ensure all current LAC are placed in appropriately matched long-term placements please follow the appropriate path outlined below and includes connected persons foster carers and residential care.
   2. It is critical that where **children are currently in a ‘long-term’ placement** the process to ensure the match is ratified, **does not** unsettle the children or **destabilise** the placement.
   3. This process will offer a quality assurance for children who have been in their care placements for some time, ensures foster carers are appropriately approved for long-term care and offers an outcome for children’s records.

**See the flowchart in appendices:**

* + Children requiring new long-term care placements – **follow section 4 onwards**
  + Children placed with connected person foster carers – **follow section 4 onwards** with specific sections identified
  + Children placed in long-term placements after September 2015 - **A PP meeting held and then follow section 5, steps 3, & 8 onwards**
  + Children placed in long-term placements prior to September 2015- **A PP meeting and ratified at a LAC review**

1. **Planning for Permanence**
   1. All children either requiring a long-term placement or currently placed in what is deemed to be a permanent placement **must have** a Permanency Planning Meeting.
   2. If there have been care proceedings any plan for permanency will be in the court agreed care plan.
   3. Children placed with **connected persons’** foster carers, or where other people are being assessed to care under Special Guardianship the court care plan needs to clearly reflect the outcome and whether care long-term is being offered.
   4. After the Permanency Planning Meeting (PPM) has taken place and the recommendation is for permanency (either within the birth family, for long term fostering or residential care), a referral will be made by the child’s Social Worker (CSW) to the Placements Team who will ‘record’ and send to Fostering Services Manager (FSM).
   5. A Family Finder (FF) will be allocated within the Fostering Service and recorded on Mosaic.
   6. The CSW completes the Child Permanence Plan on Mosaic, which will initiate the next step -. Long-Term Fostering Report (used for residential care).
   7. The decision is ratified at the next Looked After Children Review and the care plan updated by the CSW.
2. **Process Steps to Achieving Permanency**

**Step 1:** **Fostering Team Allocate Family Finder:**

* The FF will notify the Placements Team to inform them they are the FF, ensure the placement request is recorded and to check vacancies.
* The FF will have responsibility for finding the long-term family that meet the child’s needs.
* This could involve seeking permanent/long-term alternative foster carers, existing foster carers who may come forward, or the identification of a suitable alternative placement for the young person.
* The needs of the child can be helpful to the social worker assessing family members, as well as informing the matching process if looking for foster carers.
* **Connected persons (CP) foster carers:**
  + Theassessing social worker will contribute to the family finding process where the carers have been assessed to care long-term.
  + The assessment should reflect permanence has been assessed within the Form C or sch. 21 report and whether this will be LTFC or a Special Guardianship application.
  + Where CP carers are only seeking short-term care then a FF will need to be allocated separately.

**Step 2**: **The Manager will ensure:**

* The FF coordinates an initial ‘needs’ meeting. This will involve both the CSW, FF and the fostering social worker (FSW) for the carer of the child placed. This will be chaired initially by the Fostering Services Manager (FSM) or a Fostering Team Manager (TM) or if residential care the Residential Services Manager (RSM).
* If the child is of an age where they can make their views known they should also be included in determining the attributes of a placement you are searching for.
* **Child’s needs** - The purpose of the meeting is to identity the needs of the child and to draw up a list of criteria for future carers to meet these specific assessed needs.
* It will also ensure all those with parental responsibility (PR) are aware of the plan and have their views recorded.
* Any sibling assessment should have been completed prior to proceedings.
* Siblings should be assessed separately and whether they are placed together or apart form part of the needs document.
* A ‘Together or Apart’ assessment will need to be completed for all permanency planning.
* **Long-term Fostering Report’** (the child’s Permanencereport) - Establish a timeline for the completion of the child’s Long-term Fostering Report by the child’s SW required for seeking a permanent carer.
* **Contact** - consideration needs to be given to the current plan and proposals for reducing the level of contact for any child moving into a permanent foster placement.
* If a reduction in contact is deemed in a child’s best interests and differs from the court agreed contact plan then it is advisable to seek legal advice.
* **Child’s Profile –** The FF will use the needs to create a profile of the child and establish a timeline for the completion– **see** **step 4 below.**
* Timelines established and Foster Panel booked.
* **Current Foster Carers** - The FSW for the current carers should before this meeting establish if the current carers are seeking to become permanent carers and the potential impact on the other members of the household.
* If so this should be declared at the initial meeting and will be considered as part of the future matching.
* If current carers deemed to be at this stage a good match, then an updated Form F (or additional Coram BAFF section on Permanence completed), foster carer review, health assessment and (if appropriate) a request for change of approval completed by the FSW with feedback sought from all parties.
* **IFA Foster carers** - Where a child is in an IFA, a discussion will be held by the CSW with the IFA supervising SW to explore interest at this stage - **see later steps as approval at Care and Support Panel (CASP) is required first**
* **Residential Care –** where a child is in residential care a discussion with the home explored by the CSW - **see later steps as approval at Care and Support Panel (CASP) is required first**
* The FF must coordinate these discussions and liaise with all parties.
* Minutes written by the FF and recorded on Mosaic.

**Step 3: The Social Worker will:**

* Ensure permanency plans are completed on Mosaic and signed off by the manager.
* The CSW will specify the type of placement required, and the matching considerations.
* The Long-term Fostering Report will be completed stating the full history and information required to secure a good match.
* The CSW will be required to ensure there will be a health assessment for the child that is less than 6 months old, latest school report ready for panel.
* Updates child’s care plan.

**Step 4:** **Family Finder will:**

* **Child’s Profile -** A profile of the child will be created by the FF following a meeting the young person and their foster carer (where appropriate)
* The profile will be used to seek a foster carer within DC resources. A suitable photo must be obtained for the publication.
* If deemed appropriate a DVD and current photos need to be arranged to show to prospective foster carers. The DVD footage can also be used on specific sites to ‘advertise’
* Coram BAAF and Fostering Network may be able to offer some advice in searching for placements for children who have disabilities.
* The profile is shared with the CSW and monthly FF meetings.
* It is then the job of the FF to seek carers and note expressions of interest from approved short or long-term foster carers and reasons why they are not suitable.
* The FF must if necessary, initiate a search for suitably approved long-term foster carers, advertising if deemed appropriate.
* Regular liaison with the Placements Team is essential to establish vacancies.

**CASP Panel Approval:**

* If no suitable carers are identified, (or may be vacant soon) within 3 months then permission is sought from the CASP panel, to seek an independent fostering agency (IFA) foster carer, with commissioning colleagues notified to secure a reduction once identified.
* A full chronology of searches should be shared with the panel with a clear request as to what is being sought.
* Agreement from CASP panel should be shared with the Placements Team by the FF to seek IFA carers and to report to the monthly FF meetings.
* When enquiries come in, the Ofsted reports of the agency will need to be checked by the Placements Team to ensure ‘Good or Outstanding’
* All family finding activity is recorded on Mosaic by the FF as a chronology.

**Step 5: Family Finder is then responsible to:**

* Collate from interested and potential carers the Form F, latest annual reviews to read, discuss with the relevant FSW/ Supervising SW (if an IFA) to establish skills and experience and whether these can meet the child’s needs.
* The Long-term Fostering Report for the child should also be shared with the interested carers / FSW’s to read.
* Carers’ deemed a good ‘match’ – reports shared with the CSW to read and comment on.
* Any prospective families who are deemed a ‘good match’ by the CSW and FF will be shortlisted and the FF should convene or bring forward the next FF meeting.
* The process is the same for residential care.
* This Family Finding chronology must be kept for each child and updated regularly by the FF on Mosaic.
* This will form part of the paperwork required when seeking IFA permissions and when the child is matched.
* Each chronology should include a running record of enquires main points of actions from searches and meetings.

**Step 6: Family Finding Meetings** **held monthly:**

* The FF meeting is chaired by the FSM/TM fostering (or RSM) if residential care the option), with the, FF, CSW and if a DC foster carer the FSW /residential representative.
* These will be held monthly.
* If the case is in protracted legal proceedings any decision to ‘ratify’ a **Connected Persons** family for LTFC will need to wait until these are concluded, therefore you may decide to schedule the meetings six weekly during this time.
* The FF will update re progress and the CSW if there are any changes to the child’s placement, status etc.
* If prospective foster carers /units have been identified then these are discussed as a paper exercise and agreed which families /units are to be visited.
* Where possible, shortlisting to no more than two potential foster carers or residential homes who best meet the child’s needs.
* Joint home visits completed by the FF and CSW to discuss with the carers and their FSW or unit manager the needs of the child and how they will meet these.
* Where a long-term placement is not found within six months then a review permanency planning meeting is recommended.
* The Long-term Fostering Report should be continuously updated with new information as required.

**Step 7: Visiting Prospective Carers /Res. Units:**

* Visits are made by the CSW and Family Finder.
* It is good practice for the FSW to be present with their foster carers.
* Questions to be asked about the carers /unit and their ability to meet the needs of the child are to be agreed between the CSW and FF prior to visiting.
* All medical information should be shared.
* Confidential information and photographs are not to be left.
* Medical Information along with the Long-term Fostering Report can be left with the FSW /unit, but needs to be retrieved if that match does not go ahead.
* A second visit can be arranged to ask further questions and show the child’s DVD if it wasn’t shared at the first meeting.

**Step 8**: **The Matching Meeting is held**:

Considerations of the meeting -

* The meeting is chaired by the FSM or RSM /TM (unless child placed prior to September 2015 then the Operational Manager for the LAC team will chair) with the FF, CSW and FSW.
* The meeting reviews the proposed options for long-term care, and recommends which best meets the long-term needs of the child.
* Current approval, experience, training and support needs of the carers are identified.
* Any gaps in identified need and proposals how to offer this.
* Where a change of approval to long-term fostering is required for the DC foster carers that the relevant reports have been prepared.
* The Fostering Social Worker must then submit the report for their carer(s) to the Fostering Panel for recommendation of them as long-term carers and await the agreement by the Agency Decision Maker.
* **Proposed IFA placement** - If this is a proposed placement with an IFA, funding should have been agreed by CASP prior to this meeting.
* Consultation by the Placements Team to secure a possible fee reduction (given this is a long-term placement) should also have been established at this point.

**Step 9: Matching Document:**

* A ‘matching’ document should be completed by the FF and FSW for the foster carers in preparation for foster panel, read and signed by the TM,FSM and LAC Team Manager.
* Foster panel booked by the Family Finder
* All paperwork for the child should be checked ready for panel- **see step 11.**
* It is deemed good practice to hold a pre-panel meeting with all parties including current and proposed carers held to ensure all information has been shared. This is especially important when using an external agency- **as in** **step 10 below.**

**Step 10:**  **The Pre-Approval Meeting is held:**

Considerations of the meeting –

* The meeting is chaired by the FSM/TM, with all parties present, including current foster carers, proposed foster carers, IRO and if deemed helpful, health and education
* The meeting discusses the proposed match, any support plan, proposed delegation of authority, the contact plan, timescales for placement, introduction plan if appropriate, and the proposed meeting with the birth family.
* A Life Book should be completed all children in LTFC; agreement as to who will complete and the timescale.
* It checks that full information in respect of the child’s Long-Term Fostering Report, health and education has been provided, and allows for questions.
* It is crucial to the success of placements that informed decisions are made at this stage.
* It is also important to specify that any match will be recommended to the Fostering Panel and it is the Agency Decision Maker who will agree if thought to be a suitable match.
* The Pre-Placement Meeting is to be held within one month of the carers being identified, and should be prior to Fostering Panel.

**Step 11:** **Fostering Panel Paperwork:**

All paperwork must be received by the Panel Administrator at least 10 days before the panel in order that it can be distributed.

**Child:** Recommendation for ‘**Should be Placed for Long-Term Care’** The following documents are required by the Panel in respect of the child:

* A Long-Term Fostering Report, Child Permanence Report (CPR), (if plan was adoption previously) or the report under S21 if these have been completed for Special Guardian Order (SGO) applications ahead of court.
* Matching Report and decisions (if considered at the same time as the match\0
* Current care plan/pathway plan
* LAC review
* Latest school report
* Latest health assessment (for panel health rep. and Chair only).

**Match:** The following documents are required by the Panel in respect of the match:

* Matching report and minutes of a matching meeting
* Where applicable with SGO’s the support plan completed with and signed by all parties and, where appropriate, the child
* Foster carer profile and latest foster carer review / Form F–as below
* Panel minutes in relation to their approval as long-term foster carers from DC or an IFA
* Child’s Profile
* Delegation of authority.
* Updated Safe-Care plan

**Foster Carer (DC)**: The following documents are required by the Panel in respect of the change of approval to long-term of DC foster carers if approval not already sought:

* The original Form F assessment of the foster carers with an update and assessment of them as long-term foster carers with details of the household; the same applies whether the carers are DC carers or from an independent provider
* Latest foster carer review and where applicable panel minutes
* Chronology of fostering history including previous placements and outcomes
* Panel minutes in relation to their approval as long-term foster carers
* Updated health reports on the carers (required for permanence)
* Updated Safe-care
* Training and Development Record
* Consultation feedback from:
* Foster Carers
* Independent reviewing officer
* Childcare Social Worker
* Any looked after child/ren
* Carers own children

**IFA Foster Carer/s**: The following documents are required by the Panel in respect of the IFA carers:

* The original Form F assessment of the foster carers with an update and assessment of them as long-term foster carers.
* Latest foster carer review and where applicable panel minutes
* Chronology of fostering history including previous placements and outcomes
* Panel minutes in relation to their approval as long-term foster carers
* Updated health reports on the carers (required for permanence).
* Training and Development Record
* Consultation feedback from:
* Foster Carers
* Independent reviewing officer
* Childcare Social Worker
* Any looked after child/ren
* Carers own children

**Step 12: The Fostering Panel meets and all parties attend including the foster carers from DCC/IFA:**

* To consider the permanence plan for children in care where long-term fostering is the plan.
* To consider the match with the long-term foster carers.
* To consider the support needs of the child and the carers in order to ensure the stability of the placement.
* To make recommendations in respect of other legal options in respect of the children.

**The Fostering Panel may also:**

* Oversee the processes by which the permanence plans have been made and provide quality assurance feedback.
* Advice on the support plans and of contact with birth family.
* Ensure that the long-term identity needs of children have been considered, life story work is in progress and of an appropriate quality.
* Give advice and make recommendation on such other matters or cases as may be referred to it.

**The Foster Panel recommendations**: are made the same day and minutes when checked passed to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who will provide a decision within **seven days** of receipt of these.

**Step 13**: **The Agency Decision Maker** **(ADM)** **must**:

* Ratify the match and thus authorise certification.
* Verbal confirmation to the foster carers should be provided by the FSW within **2 days** of the ADM decision.
* Written confirmation of these must be sent to the relevant parties within **5 working days** of the ADM decision or the decision being ratified whichever is sooner
* The Fostering Panel must be held within two months of the carers being identified, unless it is felt appropriate to place the child first. In this case the Fostering Panel should be held within six months of the placement, following the second review.

**Step 14**: **Fostering Business Support will:**

* Issue (if not approved at a previous panel) the new Foster Carer Agreement and minute extract of the panel.
* Letter to the young person if applicable from the ADM.
* Update Mosaic re carers’ status as long-term and child’s placement is permanent.

**Step 15:** **The Placement Planning Meeting is held prior to the child moving:**

Considerations of the meeting –

* The Placement Planning Meeting is to be held within two weeks of the decision by the ADM and should be prior to the child moving.
* The meeting is chaired by the FSM/TM and all parties including where applicable, the birth parents should be present.
* The meeting reviews the support, contact plan, and an **introduction plan** is agreed.
* The child should be moved in a planned way and have the opportunity to have a positive ending with current carers’.
* The Placement Plan and Delegation of Authority is finalised with copies including the child’s Care Plan provided to all parties.
* Birth certificate, passport and health information provided to the carers in respect of the child and frequency of future visits and reviews are agreed.
* Agree how this will be monitored and reviewed.

**Step 16: A Looked After Child’s Review** s**hould follow the placement of the**

**child with the new foster carers**

In the longer term-

* The child’s review and foster carers annual home review should both identify continued placement and approval are suitable as long-term.
* The existing delegation of authority may be reviewed at subsequent Looked After Children, reviews.
* Once a child has been in the placement for 12 months, consideration can be given to having the statutory visits occurring every six months.
* The alternate LAC reviews may be a paper review (not meeting, nor visiting).
* It is anticipated that children in long-term foster care, will remain with their foster carers into adulthood, and the arrangement will become a Staying Put arrangement.

The procedure is complete.

**Appendix 1 Useful Information**

**1. Writing the child’s profile**

**(It will need to be anonymised if seeking to advertise externally)**

Information to include:

* Brief physical description of child (e.g. to include their age, ethnicity) and main characteristics, could include words used by current carer to describe the child/young person.
* The child’s interests/Skills, are they age appropriate?
* Details of current placement, how long placed there, family set up e.g. 1 or 2 carers.
* Reason for placement with current carers –rather than apportioning blame, to be worded such as “Family unable to provide safe care and meet X’s needs. Mother has severe depression and experienced domestic abuse.”
* Relevant health/education information.
* For very young child can be useful to include information on sleeping and eating routines.
* What are the future contact plans, what is legal status, what/will post-placement support be offered?
* What carers are you looking for e.g. 1 or 2 carers, other child(ren) in household?, qualities/characteristics sought
* Contact details for Family Finder

**Consider how much can the child contribute to their own profile**

* Profiles will need regular updating. (Photos/names to be added after Placement order)
* Try and keep prolife 1-2 sides of A4. Colour copies can be emailed, consider will colour copies be printed –costs to be agreed.
* If profile going to Be My Parent there are word limits -see www.bemyparent.org.uk/info-for-agencies/agency-faqs

1. **Filming for profiling**

Be My Parent website has useful tips, a copy has been put inside team video camera case.

Basic pointers:

* Have all lights on even if it looks too much it won't be when you watch it back!
* Noisy toys, TV's phones, washing machines, chatting in background are all very distracting, you will need absolute quiet!
* With very young child you may find you chase them round quite a lot to make sure you get camera on their face rather than their back. Suggest different types of activities/toys etc, ask carers what child enjoys, film indoors/outside
* Make sure no identifying features e.g. references to local area by name, school names/uniforms, local newspaper on the table etc.
* Think about how you will introduce them - will carer say child's name and age?
* If carer is holding child make sure carer’s face is not in full view.
* May need to take at least 20 minutes footage to get 5 minutes that is useable.
* Consider a transcript to show what footage demonstrates e.g. child showing particular motor skills, being comforted, imaginative play etc.
* You can edit on camera.
* To get it onto DVD give IT memory card and a writable disk.

**Appendix 2 Process Flowcharts -see separate document**