



## **Children's Safeguarding and Family Help**

Corporate Parenting Service

Placements: practice guidance for social  
workers

## Placements practice guidance

### 1 Introduction

This document sets out the local practice and procedures for social workers when placing looked after children, from choosing their placement to when placements end. The document should be read together with the *Placement planning and disruption meetings* policy and the *Ceasing to look after a child* policy.

[Placement Planning and Disruption Meetings](#)

[Ceasing to Look After a Child](#)

### 2 Requests for placement

- When choosing placements, social workers should consult with the Resources service and the Family, Friends and Fostering Service and seek the views of the child, their parents and the IRO.
- All requests for placements should be sent to the Resources service using the *Request for initial placement and matching* or *Request for placement change* record which should be authorised by the team manager. The child and family assessment should be available on MOSAIC.
- For emergency placements, managers and seniors can make a request for a placement via the MOSAIC episode and an agreed assessment plan or other note in the case records explaining why the placement is needed at short notice can be used if the assessment has not been completed.
- Before beginning a placement search, the Resources service will check that the following options have been explored:
  - use of section 17 packages of care to allow the child to remain at home
  - where the child is subject to an interim or full care order, placement with parents
  - placement with a Kinship carer
  - Family Group Conference.
- If a child requires a fostering placement, the team will refer on to the Family, Friends and Fostering service duty worker who will check to see if a suitable Camden foster carer is available.
- If there is no suitable Camden foster carer available, the Resources service will approach private and voluntary fostering agencies to find a suitable carer for the child. The Family, Friends and Fostering service will then match the child with a suitable private and voluntary foster carer using the same criteria as above.

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- Where the child requires a residential or specialist residential placement the Resources team is responsible for selecting the most appropriate placement for the child.
- Wherever possible, children should be given an opportunity to visit any proposed placement and meet with the foster carer or key worker before the placement starts.
- There should be a discussion between the social worker, the Resources service and the virtual school head to ensure the choice of placement can support the child's education and that a suitable educational provision will be available for the child as soon as they are placed. For emergency placements, there must be an immediate discussion regarding the child's educational needs.

### 3 Notification of placements

- Any decision to place a child should be notified in writing in advance of the placement (where planned) or within 5 working days of the placement beginning and **Business Support Officers** are responsible for sending out notification letters in line with statutory requirements.
- In addition, **social workers** should prepare a letter for the child, the parents and the carer and IRO giving further details of the placement including:
  - duration of the placement
  - arrangements for the child's care and contact
  - arrangements for the child to return home to their parent's care
  - contingency plan should the placement break down.

### 4 Consent to placement

At the Placement Agreement meeting social workers should also ensure the following written consent has been obtained and recorded on the *CLA placement and health consent* record available on MOSAIC;

- parental consent to the child being accommodated
- parental consent for the child to receive medical treatment and/or assessment
- consent of a young person aged 16 years or over to be accommodated against their parents wishes
- consent of the foster carer, key worker or kinship carer to look after the child on behalf of Camden.

### 5 Moving a child to placement

- Children should be supported by either their social worker (or their foster carer) when they are first accommodated or move placement. It is the division's policy that children are able to take all their belongings with them and that they are provided with adequate luggage for this.
- To ensure that children do not lose their possessions during placement moves, social workers and foster carers should help the child to list all their belongings and ensure that this is checked when the child is preparing to move placement or return home.
- Children should be given as much information about the placement as far as possible in advance of the placement starting. Details of how the child will be brought to the placement and by whom should be agreed at the placement agreement meeting. Every effort should be made to arrange an informal meeting between the child and the carer prior to the placement beginning.
- Social workers should ensure that foster carers/key workers have copies of the placement plan, delegated authority checklist and care plan for the child and that all consents have been signed and carers have a copy of the consent form. Any important documents such as certificates, parent held health records or health appointment cards should be given to the carer/key worker.
- For emergency placements, the social worker must ensure that:
  - the foster carer/key worker has all the information available regarding the child and that they have an understanding of the child's needs and arrangements for their care
  - a date is set for the placement agreement meeting
  - all consent forms have been signed.

### 6 Cancelling child benefit payments

After a child has been looked after for 8 weeks, their parent will no longer be entitled to claim child benefit for them and the payment should be stopped. Social workers are responsible for notifying HM Customs and Revenue and this can be done on-line through the web-link below.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-benefit-local-authority-or-care-trust-notification-ch193>

### 7 Placement moves

#### 7.1 Managing placement moves

- Children may need to move placements as their needs change or in order to pursue their permanence plan. Sometimes their placement may end due to disruption. Camden aims to ensure:
  - All placement endings are planned and that children move on to their next placement or return home in a smooth manner with as little disruption to their lives as possible.
  - Placement terminations are agreed and planned for in advance within the statutory review process, so that the views of children, parents, carers and the professional network can be sought and an alternative placement identified.
- It is accepted that this is not always the case and that in some circumstances placements may end in an unplanned manner. In general terminating a placement should be discussed in advance at the CLA review
- Business Support Officers should send a notice of termination of a placement to all parties who were notified of the placement when it began and social workers should complete the *placement change request form* available on MOSAIC.

#### 7.2 Planned placement moves

- Placement moves should be planned in advance wherever possible via the CLA review with the child, their parents and their current carer/key worker fully consulted on any proposed move, and the child's views on the proposed move should be taken into account.
- Social workers and foster carers/key workers are responsible for preparing children to move on to new placements as soon as the move has been agreed, ensuring that the child understands the reason for the move and when and how it will take place. The child should be given an opportunity to visit the new placement and meet their new carer in advance and visit a new school where necessary.
- Social workers should convene a placement agreement meeting to be held at least 7 days before the date of the planned move, with the child's current carer attending in order to share information about the child with the new carer.

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- Social workers should complete a new placement plan and ensure that the new carer/key worker has a copy of this and the child's care plan. If there is any agreement for the child to remain in contact with the current carer, this should be recorded in the care and placement plans.
- It is good practice for the social worker and the current foster carer to be involved in the placement move as these can be an emotional experience for children, so it is important that key figures are present when it takes place to provide support.

### 7.3 Unplanned return home

- Some young people may leave their placement to return home and social workers may have difficulty persuading them to go back. In these cases, social workers should discuss the matter with the CLA team manager and the IRO to decide on the following:
  - whether it is in the young person's best interests to remain at home with support under a child in need plan
  - whether a legal planning meeting should be convened to look at taking legal action to secure the young person's safety and welfare
  - if the young person is subject to a care order, whether a placement with parents is the most suitable placement option.
- The social worker should convene a statutory CLA review/planning meeting to include the young person, their parents and the professional network in order to consider the care options for the young person and agree a plan for their future.

### 7.4 Removal from placement

- Children who are removed from placement by parents or other relatives contrary to their care plan are automatically deemed as missing from placement, and the social work missing children procedures should be followed: [missing-children-social-work-procedures.pdf](#)
- Social workers should immediately notify:
  - their team manager, CLA service manager and Head of Service
  - the Director of CSFH
  - the Family, Friends and Fostering service
  - the Quality Assurance Service.

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- The possibility of a child being removed or leaving their placement needs to be addressed at the placement agreement meeting, and contingency plans made for dealing with the eventuality, particularly if a return home would raise concerns about the child's safety and welfare. Parents should be made fully aware of the contingency plan and what action will be taken by CSFH to secure the child's safety and welfare.
- If a child is removed from placement, social workers must immediately visit or make contact with the parent and see the child to make sure that they are safe. Social workers should discuss the child's return to the placement with parents or where necessary, make arrangements for an alternative placement.
- Children who are **accommodated under section 20** can be removed from their placement by their parents at any time. However it should be made clear to parents that this is not in their child's interests and in the event of this happening, CSFH will convene a legal planning meeting to consider applying for a legal order.
- If there are high levels of concern about the child's removal, social workers should take advice from a CPO and consider convening a child protection case conference.
- Children who are **subject to a care order** may not be removed from the placement without permission from CSFH and this should be made clear to parents at the outset of the placement. If the child is removed from placement, foster carers must notify the police and CSFH immediately. Social workers and managers should consider convening a legal planning meeting to obtain advice on applying for a recovery order.

## 8 Placement breakdown

- Placement breakdown can be extremely disruptive and difficult for children and may indicate unresolved issues about whether the placement can meet the child's needs, levels of support for children and foster carers, and practice issues.
- It is essential that placements are closely monitored by children's social workers and fostering supervising social workers through statutory visits and reviews so that it is possible to identify those placements that are at risk of breaking down. This will enable early intervention to support the placement and avoid disruption.
- It is important that social workers discuss issues with the professional network and co-ordinate a multi-agency response to problems in order to ensure that carers receive specialist support from the network that can address issues promptly.

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- If the placement is at risk of breakdown, social workers should discuss the matter with the IRO, and consider convening a planning meeting to explore why the placement is at risk and discuss what extra support is needed by the foster carer and the child in order to strengthen the placement.
- The planning meeting should be chaired by the IRO and attended by the social worker, team manager, the foster carer or key worker, their supervising social worker, and the child where this is felt to be appropriate.
- The meeting should look at:
  - factors contributing to placement difficulties, ie: contact, school/education, health, child's behaviour and behaviour management issues
  - the child and the foster carers views on the placement
  - the views of other significant people regarding the placement, ie: parents, social worker, Fostering and Kinship service
  - the relationship between the child and the foster carer
  - details of current involvement of other agencies and support already provided
  - details of further support needed to support the placement.

## 9 Disruption meeting

- Social workers should refer to the *Placement planning and disruption meetings* policy. [Placement Planning and Disruption Meetings](#)
- Disruption meetings should be held no earlier than 20 days and no later than 30 days following the placement breakdown. This is to give all parties involved time to reflect on what occurred and to prepare for the meeting.
- The meeting should be:
  - convened by the child's social worker
  - chaired by the manager of the IRO service
  - minuted by a designated minute taker from Business Support Services.
- The social worker and carer should complete a disruption report which should be available at least 5 working days before the meeting is held, available at:  
[carers-report-for-disruption-meeting.docx](#)  
[social-worker-report-for-disruption-meeting.docx](#)



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- The meeting should follow the agenda available at: [placement-disruption-meeting-agenda.docx](#)
- Minutes of the meeting should be sent to everyone who attended the meeting and placed on the child's and the carers MOSAIC record.
- A copy of the minutes should also be sent to the Fostering and Permanence panel administrator to be made available to the panel in their advisory role on policy and practice.

## 10 Moving on from care

### Discharge from care

- It is Camden's policy that children should only be looked after for as long as necessary for their care and permanence plan to be implemented. A decision to discharge a child from care may only be taken at a statutory CLA review and for all children leaving the care system, it must be demonstrated there is a continued plan of support for the child and their parent or carer or a pathway plan for any young person moving to independence.
- Children will leave the care system for one of the following reasons;
  - ***They have reached the age of 18 and are discharged from care.*** These children will be former relevant children under the Leaving Care Act 2000 and will be supported by the Care Experienced service under the *Leaving Care and transition* policy. [Leaving Care and Transition](#)
  - ***They are living with a permanent alternative carer in a placement that has been legally secured.*** This will be following the making of an adoption order, child arrangement order or special guardianship order and the child ceases to be looked after. Camden's Family, Friends and Fostering service will provide support.
  - It is assessed to be safe and appropriate for the child to ***return home.*** Children who are returning home will be children in need and should have a CIN plan in place detailing services that will be provided to support reunification. Further details of this step-down provision can be found in the division's *Child in need procedures*. [cin-procedures.pdf](#)

### Returning home

- For most looked after children, their permanence plan will be a return home (reunification). However, research shows that without careful planning and support, outcomes for children returning home are not always good and a high percentage return to further neglect and abuse. For some children, this leads to further care episodes.
- Deciding to allow a looked after child to return home will be one of the most difficult decisions social workers will need to make, and the decision can be strongly influenced by a variety of opinions from the professional network as well as pressure from courts, children and birth parents.
- Some older children may force the issue of returning home by consistently leaving their placement to return to the care of their birth family. This can lead to concerns about their well-being but it may be hard to implement a care plan that a young person does not agree with.
- Camden aims to ensure that children only return home when this is the right move for them. Decisions on returning home need to balance the duty to safeguard and promote the child's welfare against the need to reunite them with their family and achieve stability outside the care system. Above all, decisions must be in the child's best interest.
- Decisions to allow a child to return home must be based on a thorough risk assessment, and a return home should only be considered if assessment shows that the risks that led to the child being accommodated are no longer present or greatly reduced and that the household the child is returning to is able to provide a good standard of care that safeguards and promotes their welfare.
- Social workers should refer to the Reunification practice guidance for details of the framework for assessment and decision-making.  
[reunification-policy-and-practice-guidance.pdf](#)
- It is an expectation that all children leaving the care system will be considered a child in need for at least 3 months after the care episode ends and that the final CLA review is used to develop a child in need plan that supports the birth family to meet the child's needs.
- Where a young person returns home in an unplanned manner and in contradiction to the care plan, this must be reported to the CLA Service Manager and the young person's IRO. The statutory CLA review should be brought forward to discuss the matter and decide on what action to take to ensure the young person's safety and welfare is promoted and to plan for their future care.

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- Where a child who is subject to a care plan is to be placed at home with parents, social workers should refer to the *Placement with parents* policy. [Placements with Parents](#)
- If a child is to return home having been looked after for more than 20 working days (after the first CLA review) the care episode cannot end until the decision has been approved by the Corporate Parenting Head of Service. Decisions for a young person aged 16 or 17 (eligible children) this decision must be approved by the CSFH Director.
- When deciding on whether to approve the decision, the Head of Service or Director should consider whether:
  - the child's wishes and feelings have been ascertained
  - the decision will safeguard and promote the child's welfare
  - the IRO has been informed
  - for eligible children that a pathway needs assessment has identified their needs in relation to their transition to adulthood.