



Children's Safeguarding and Family Help

Permanence practice guidance for social workers

Camden's Children and Learning Directorate uses relational practice as the foundation for all our work. Our integrative relational practice framework is based on our values, and is designed to help achieve the Directorate's purpose: to work with children, families and communities to make a positive, lasting difference to their futures, so they have the best start in life.

We recognise the impact of structural inequalities on the lives of the children and families we work with and as a service we will embrace inclusive, anti-discriminatory and anti-racist practice based on our values and our mission to champion social justice.

Our practice framework centres on honest and compassionate relationships with those we serve and with each other. It is an expectation that all Directorate policies and procedures are implemented in line with our practice framework, and that any actions within policies and procedures reflect its ethics, values and practice expectations.

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1. Introduction

This document sets out the local practice and procedures for social workers with regards for permanence planning for children and should be read together with the *Permanence Planning Guidance*. [Permanence Planning Guidance](#)

2 Principles for achieving permanence

- The Children Act 1989 states that in general, children will achieve better outcomes where they are brought up within their birth family, and this will be the main objective when planning for permanence.
- It is acknowledged that all children will be different and will require different paths to permanence; therefore decisions on the best permanence option for each child will be based on the careful assessment of their individual needs.
- Decisions on permanence will be made and pursued in a timely manner as delay in achieving permanence can have negative consequences for children's development. However this will be balanced against the need to gather the relevant information in order to make informed judgements on the right plan for that child.
- Where a child cannot return home, all efforts will be made to place the child as close to their community as possible to ensure continuity as far as this is consistent with their best interests.
- As far as possible, permanence plans involving placing a looked after child with a permanent alternative carer will be legally secured through court orders such as adoption, special guardianship order or child arrangement order so that they are able to leave the care system.
- However, this may not be suitable for every child due to their individual needs and long term fostering either within their birth family or with mainstream foster carers may be the best permanence option for them.

3 Assessing permanence needs

- Assessment is key to identifying current and future needs and should inform decisions on the best permanence option for the child. When assessing children's needs, social workers should consider the long-term sustainability

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of care arrangements for the child in terms of meeting their current and future need for permanence.

- **For children with child in need and child protection plans** who are living at home, the assessment should focus on parents' ability to offer stability and a nurturing environment to their child on a long-term basis, with support offered to the family where needed to achieve this. For some children on the edge of care, assessments may need to consider whether intervention is needed in order to achieve permanence within a reasonable timeframe.
- **For looked after children**, the assessment should focus on the best permanence option for the child based on their present and future needs and how the chosen option can be supported to ensure its durability.
- The following should be taken into account when assessing all potential permanent care arrangements, including the child remaining or returning home.
 - Can the care arrangement offer the child a stable family environment where they can feel they “belong”?
 - Does the care arrangement provide the child with a secure and enduring relationship with their carer?
 - Can the care arrangement meet all the child's current and future developmental needs?
 - Can the care arrangement meet or support the child's ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity?
 - Is the care arrangement likely to endure throughout their childhood and provide support into adulthood post 18, for example under the *Staying Put* scheme?
 - Can the care arrangement provide the child with a link to their past, support contact with their birth family and maintain links with their extended family and friends network?

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4 Permanence planning clinic and permanence planning meetings

- The Family, Friends and Fostering Service, in collaboration with the CLA Service, hold weekly permanence planning clinics in order to provide advice and guidance to social workers and managers on available permanence options.
- All looked after children and children who are subject to the PLO pre-proceedings steps or care proceedings where there is a possibility that the child's permanence plan may involve placement outside of the birth family should be referred to the clinic as soon as it is known that alternative permanent care is being considered.
- For each referred case, permanence planning meetings will be held regularly at the Clinic in order to explore permanence options for the child and agree a plan for achieving permanence. It is an expectation that child's IRO or the conference chair in child protection cases, and the social worker/manager is present at this meeting.
- Members of the Family, Friends and Fostering Service and the Resources service will be available at the meeting if required to support progress in implementing the child's permanence plan and match the child with a suitable long term carer.

5 Tracking and monitoring permanence planning

- To ensure permanence plans for looked after children are implemented in a timely way, the following spreadsheets will be maintained in order to track progress on permanence planning:
 - cases in the Public Law Outline where the child may be removed from their parents care (maintained by the Legal Proceedings and Case Progression service manager);
 - cases in care proceedings, where responsibility for tracking is shared with Legal Services (maintained by the Legal Proceedings and Case Progression service manager);

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- permanence tracking for all cases including those involving kinship care and long term fostering (maintained by the Family, Friends and Fostering Service manager).
- Social workers and IROs are responsible for referring cases to the Family, Friends and Fostering Duty manager on MOSAIC.
- A permanence tracking meeting will be held every month attended by the IRO service manager, CLA service manager, CLA team managers, the CIN team managers, the Family, Friends and Fostering service manager, the Fostering Recruitment and Assessment service manager and Care Provision service manager to discuss permanence planning on individual cases and agree any action to be taken to progress plans.
- The child's IRO is responsible for ensuring that the permanence plan is incorporated into the child's care plan with objectives, tasks and timescales clearly set out. The CLA review should be used as an opportunity to review the progress of the plan and where necessary, consider any changes to the plan that are required.
- The review should look at progress made regarding identifying a permanent carer, timescales for the child to move to the placement and any support to be provided.

6 Permanence planning procedures for children under 16

- Looked after children under 16 requiring a long-term placement should be referred to the Family, Friends and Fostering service for family finding and matching. A permanence planning meeting must be held as soon after the second review as possible but can be held earlier where it is clear a permanent placement will be needed.
- The child's care plan should be presented to the CLA statutory review unless the plan is for adoption where it should be presented to Director of CSFH or Head of Service for Corporate Parenting as Agency Decision Maker for a decision on whether adoption as the permanence plan should be pursued. This decision must be secured prior to the filing of any final evidence in care proceedings.

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- ***If the plan is adoption*** the child's social worker should complete the Child's Permanence Report and refer the child to the Regional Adoption Agency for family finding. For further information see the *Adoption processes for social workers* procedures: [adoption-processes-for-children-s-social-workers.pdf](#)
- ***If the plan is long term fostering*** the social worker should complete the child's Form E and refer the case to the Family, Friends and Fostering service. For further guidance, please refer to the *Long term fostering* procedures: [long-term-fostering-policy.pdf](#)

7 Permanence planning procedures for young people entering the care system at 16 and 17

- Young people may become looked after at 16 or 17 as part of care proceedings or because they are unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) or because they have been assessed as being homeless and in need of accommodation.
- The key planning process for these young people will be the pathway planning process and the focus of planning should be supporting the young person towards independence and helping them develop the skills they need. For further guidance please refer to the *Leaving care and transitions* policy available at: [Leaving Care and Transition](#)
- It is essential that stability for young people entering care at this age is provided to support them to move on to semi-independence and develop the skills they need to eventually become independent. This should be on the agenda for all meetings and the care plan should indicate the permanence plan. Social workers should refer to the *Long term fostering* procedures for further details.

8 Sibling groups

- It is Camden's policy to try to keep sibling groups together where this is in their best interests, and this should continue to be the case when considering permanent substitute care.

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- However, it is recognised that for some siblings, being placed separately is in their best interests, particularly if they have different needs or where there are concerns about the nature of the relationship between siblings. For large sibling groups, it may not be practically possible to place them all together.
- It will require careful assessment of each individual child's needs and an understanding of their relationships, functioning and history to be able to make informed decisions about placing siblings separately.
- An assessment of the sibling relationship will need to be completed by the social worker using the BAAF sibling checklist in order to determine each child's placement requirements. When completing this, social workers will need to take into account the context of where the children are currently living, the quality of care they are receiving and the impact of this on the relationship between the siblings. The assessment template and checklist are available at: [BAAF sibling assessment documents](#)

9 Contact following permanent placement

- Where a looked after child goes to live with a permanent alternative carer it is likely that contact arrangements will need to be changed to reflect the status of the new care arrangements. Contact should be considered at the CLA review and details of contact arrangements included in the child's care plan.
- For general guidance on the purpose of contact, types of contact and making contact arrangements, please refer to the *contact with parents/adults and siblings* policy available at: [Contact with Parents/Adults and Siblings](#)
- The type of contact arrangement and the frequency and duration of contact should not interfere with the child settling into their placement or developing their relationship with their permanent carer.
- It is likely that at 18, the child may wish to be reunited with their birth family or extended family. This will particularly be the case where the child has been placed in a long-term fostering placement with an unrelated carer or in residential care until independence. This may be important to them in terms of their identity and understanding their history and sense of belonging. Their family may also provide vital support for the young person during their transition to adulthood. Contact arrangements for these children and young

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people should therefore focus on maintaining these relationships and Lifelong links used as a mechanism to achieve this.

- Sibling relationships are the most enduring and it is therefore vital that, where siblings are placed separately, contact arrangements can support them to maintain their relationship throughout childhood and into adulthood.
- Kinship carers may require a high level of support from CSFH around managing contact with birth parents.
- As children get older their views on contact and their needs with regards to contact may change; for this reason contact arrangements must be continually reviewed within the CLA review and changed where necessary so that it continues to be of value to the child.
- **Life long links** should be pursued for any child who is placed long term with a carer to whom they are not related, ie: long-term foster carers or in residential placements, so that they have an opportunity to retain links with people in their life who are important to them.

10 Supporting permanent placements

- Where a child remains or returns home as part of their permanence plan, services and support should continue to be provided to support the care arrangement via a child in need plan and then through an Early Help action plan as required.
- Parents and carers should be advised and supported to take up all benefits to which they are entitled and to access universal services for the child.
- Children who leave the care system through adoption or special guardianship order are owed a continuing duty by schools and local authorities to promote their education. Camden's Virtual School will remain involved with these children and continue to provide advice to carers and schools on meeting their specific education needs. For further details please see the Supporting the education and *promoting the achievement of LAC and previous LAC* policy available at: [Supporting the Education and Promoting the Achievement of...](#)
- Adopters and Special Guardians may be eligible for specific support.

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- The Regional Adoption Agency will assess the adoptive family for **Adoption support** as part of the Family Finding process and the adoption support plan will be put forward to the RAA Panel.
- The Family, Friends and Fostering service will assess Kinship carers for **Special Guardianship support** when carrying out the court assessment for the Special Guardianship Order application and this will be presented to the court in support of the application.
- Advice should be obtained from the Family, Friends and Fostering service on any aspect of adoption or special guardianship support or other support available to adopters and special guardians.

Permanency planning flowchart

