



## **Children's Safeguarding and Family Help Legal Gateway Panel Terms of Reference**

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.

## **1 Description and purpose of Panel**

The Legal Gateway Panel is the designated forum for discussion and decision-making on cases where legal intervention is likely to be required in order to safeguard and promote a child's welfare. The forum combines a legal gateway meeting and oversight of decisions on legal intervention in line with the Camden policy. [Legal Gateway/Planning Meetings](#)

The purpose of the forum is to:

- Establish whether the threshold for court applications has been reached.
- Explore what work has been carried out with the family to date in order to avoid legal intervention and whether all options have been exhausted.
- Consider any other resources or interventions that could provide an alternative to legal intervention.

## **2 Cases to be presented at the forum**

- Where care proceedings are being considered in relation to a child; for further guidance on when to consider a legal gateway meeting please see the [policy](#)
- Where a child's care plan may involve a Deprivation of Liberty or an application for a Secure Order
- Where a legal order will be needed to secure permanence for a child or a child's permanence plan changes significantly
- Where a child is subject to a Supervision order that is due to expire in order to decide whether to return to court (see section 8)
- Where a DoLs or other order needs to be reviewed prior to the expiration date.

The Panel will also review and monitor the following cases in order to ensure timely decision making and to advise on case direction:

- All cases in the Public Law Outline (see section 7)
- Where a child has been accommodated under section 20 for more than 6 months (excluding UASC and homeless 16 and 17 year olds).

## **3 Panel principles**

- The welfare of the child is paramount.
- Children will remain living with their families or within their extended network where possible and consistent with the child's welfare.
- Decisions on children's present and future care are made in a timely manner avoiding drift and delay.

- Care proceedings are only pursued where pre-proceedings work has demonstrated that this is the best option for the child (save in cases where urgent protective measures are required and this is agreed by the relevant Head of Service or Director).

#### **4 Panel membership**

- Director of CSFH (Chair)
- Representative from Legal Services (advisor)
- CiN Head of Service
- FGC service manager
- Edge of Care Service manager
- Legal Proceedings Case Progression Manager

Membership may be increased to include professionals from other internal teams and external agencies where specialist knowledge is needed depending on the presenting issues of each case.

Where a Panel member is unable to attend, they should ensure another senior manager can attend in their place.

#### **5 Frequency and conduct of Panel meetings**

Panel meetings will be held every Monday morning and will be administered by the designated service co-ordinator. Cases will be presented to the Panel by the social worker supported by their manager. Each case will have a maximum 25 minute slot for discussion and decision-making.

Panel members will ensure that the referral form and supporting documentation is read prior to the Panel meeting and identify any questions they may have.

When making decisions on cases, the Panel will take into account the considerations set out in section 3 of the Legal Gateway meeting policy.

#### **6 Referral and documentation**

When deciding on referring a case, social workers, in consultation with their manager, should refer to section 2 of the Legal Gateway meeting policy for guidance on what matters to take into account. Social workers should complete the Panel Referral and Recommendations form available on MOSAIC and should provide a summary of the circumstances and primary evidence leading to the request. All referrals should be sent to the service manager for authorisation. Once authorised, the completed referral form should be sent to the Panel administrator along with the following documents in support:

- Most recent child and family assessment
- Chronology
- Genogram
- Current CP/CIN plan
- Outline initial care plan including timescales for work to be done (where care proceedings are sought)
- Other relevant assessments.

The Referral and Recommendations form and supporting documents **must reach the Panel administrator by 3pm on the Thursday prior to the Monday Panel meeting** to enable Panel members to read the contents. Referrals that are not received by that time will not be put forward to be heard.

## **7 Monitoring PLO cases**

The Panel will provide oversight and scrutiny for cases that have entered the PLO in order to monitor progress and provide support and direction to social workers so that these cases are planned and time-tabled and the quality of assessments assured.

The Panel will also re-consider the appropriateness of care proceedings as the plan for the child and decide if the case needs to exit the PLO at any point.

- Cases that have entered the PLO must return to the Panel for oversight at **4 weeks, 8 weeks and 12 weeks**. Return dates will be fixed at each Panel hearing.
- Where a case is likely to carry on past 16 weeks the social worker must make a referral to the Panel to get authorisation to extend the period of pre-proceedings work.

## **8 Monitoring and reviewing Supervision Orders**

Cases where a Supervision order is in place need to be referred to the Panel **at least 3 months prior to the expiration date** of the order for a decision on whether to apply to the Court to extend the duration of the order or to manage the case solely in the CP/CIN arena. The chairs of CP and CIN reviews are responsible for ensuring that referrals to the Panel are made in a timely manner.

## **9 Panel outcomes and decisions**

Panel may agree the following outcomes and decisions:

- The threshold has not been met and the case is to remain with the allocated team to carry out further work with the family.
- The threshold has been met and the case is to enter the PLO.
- The threshold has been met and the case is to enter proceedings.
- An application is to be made for a specific order (DoL order, FMPO/FGM injunction etc).
- Authorisation is given for a case in the PLO to extend beyond 16 weeks.

The outcome of the Panel meeting will be recorded on the Referral and Recommendations form, together with a short note of the discussion, by the Panel administrator and will be sent to the Panel Chair to authorise. The referral form with outcomes will be placed on the child's MOSAIC record to be actioned.

If the case is to return to the Panel for further consideration this date will be set at the Panel meeting and recorded in the Referral and Recommendations form.

## **10 Quality Assurance and Panel Governance**

- The Quality Assurance Board is responsible for the governance and oversight of Panel operations and will lead in developing best practice and responding to emerging themes and trends.
- The Legal Proceedings and Case Progression manager will provide a quarterly report based on data provided at Panel meetings to the Quality Assurance Board who will have an overview of cases presented to Panel.
- The terms of reference for the Panel will be reviewed annually by the CSFH Senior Management team in order to consider its continued effectiveness and to measure the impact of the Panel on positive outcomes for the children and young people referred.