

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Permanence Policy for Looked After Children and Young People

Introduction

Permanence is a framework of emotional, physical and legal conditions that gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity.

3 aspects of permanence are:

- Emotional – (when the child feels attached to an adult who provides a stable, loving and secure relationship)
- Physical or environmental – (involves a stable home environment within a familiar neighbourhood and community which meets the child's identity needs)
- Legal – (living with someone who has parental responsibility – able to make all the decisions a parent could)

A permanence policy is a framework that enables all options to be explored to enable children to develop secure attachments to committed carers, for the duration of childhood and into adulthood.

Policy

Overview

- The Council, through the Children's Directorate, aims to promote permanent care arrangements for all children, whether children in need or children, who become looked after. Permanence should enable children to live in families that offer continuity of relationships with nurturing parents or carers. This may mean sustaining permanence with birth families, or finding suitable alternative carers to offer permanent arrangements if it is not possible to sustain a child with, or restore a child to, their parent(s). Meeting a child's need for permanence will underpin all assessment and care planning activity for children in need.
- For looked after children, all our planning will be directed towards providing a permanent placement. Planning will be informed by the desirability of reducing the role of the local authority as a corporate parent, in so far as this is commensurate with the welfare of the child. Although, in the short term, local authorities can intervene very effectively by looking after children, in the longer term the corporate parenting role is much harder to fulfil and is normally best undertaken in family environments where parental responsibility is vested in the carers. However, this is not invariably the case and for some children in their adolescence stability may best be provided in a residential setting. The reasons for this choice of placement will be documented in the permanence plan.
- For a child who is still looked after by their second Looked after Children Review at 4 months from the date of becoming looked after, a permanence plan will be in place and reviewed. This may well involve pursuing several options at this early stage, and where this is so it is referred to variously as parallel planning or twin-tracking.
- We will utilise the legislative framework to provide a full range of permanence options and ensure that individual children are provided with arrangements most suited to their individual needs. The Children's Directorate will also deploy its financial provision to secure these outcomes. The most appropriate

permanence placement for a particular child will be determined by their particular needs and circumstances.

- We will operate a variety of decision-making processes to ensure that the permanence option provided for a child is well-thought through and appropriately identified.
- In a permanence placement it is important that the child has access to friends, family and the community in which they were brought up as these form part of their identity and may provide their long-term support network. Where possible, the child will be placed within the County Borough, and if outside, within a distance of 20 miles, unless the child's needs or circumstances indicate a more distant placement.

Children in need

- Wherever possible and appropriate, the Safeguarding and Family Support Service will support permanent arrangements being maintained for children with their birth parent(s). We will achieve this by making a range of support services available to children and their families through our Family Support Strategy and in conjunction with other agencies who provide services directly. Research shows that the best chance of achieving stability is when children are enabled to remain at home and that family preservation has a higher success rate than family reunification.
- However, where an assessment indicates that a child's needs cannot be met by their parent(s), temporarily or permanently, we will explore the feasibility and appropriateness of a child living with relatives or friends. Again research shows that living with family or friends is more successful than living with carers with no connection with the child. The Safeguarding and Family Service will continue to commission a Family Group Conference Service to assist families and friends to explore the best arrangement for children unable to live their parent(s), temporarily or permanently.
- Where an assessment indicates its appropriateness, we will employ a minimal intervention principle, guiding families or friends towards a private law arrangement, for instance through a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order application, or a private fostering arrangement.
- Where an assessment indicates that the Safeguarding and Family Support Service should assume greater responsibility for the arrangement for the children, we may still promote a private law arrangement. We may exercise our discretionary power to contribute towards the costs of accommodation and maintenance of a child who is subject to a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order obtained through private law proceedings. We can also contribute to the costs of those proceedings, as long as the child is unlikely to achieve a reasonable standard of health and development without the provision of this service and if it is a direct alternative to the child being looked after.

Looked after Children

Section 20

- Where an assessment indicates that children should be looked after by the local authority, we will still give priority to seeking a Family or Friend Foster Placement for the child.

- Where an assessment indicates that the plan for the children is rehabilitation to their parent(s), this will be pursued with diligence and executed as expeditiously as possible. Through the plan, all parties will be aware that this is the intention and be clear about the importance of avoiding drift and the risk to the child's experience of stability and best outcomes. The short-term foster carer (or residential provider) will play an active role in supporting contact with family and friends.
- By the second Looked after Children Review, four months after the child becomes looked after, there will be a plan for permanence for the child and this will be a major focus of the review. The plan may still be to return the child home but other options will be under consideration, in the event of this not being achievable.
- Where an assessment indicates that the child cannot be at home, a number of options will be appraised as a potential permanence plan and the choice will be determined by the child's individual needs and circumstances.
- Where the child has been provided with a Family or Friend foster placement, the intention will be to secure this as the permanence placement, if possible. This could either remain as a long-term foster placement or the foster carers could be supported to acquire parental responsibility for the child through an application for a Residence or Special Guardianship Order, or, in due course, through an Adoption application. The Council's policy will be to encourage carers to pursue permanence through one of these routes. In this circumstance, there will be an assessment to consider the necessity for continuing financial support through a lump sum payment or through regular payments to support the child's living costs. Support with legal fees will also be considered on request.
- Where a baby has been given up for adoption, this will be the permanence plan.
- For children where staying with the family is not possible, all children should have adoption considered, invariably for children under 5, but mindful that with increasing age adoption becomes harder to achieve. For young children, research strongly correlates adoption with stability.
- In the initial stages of a child becoming looked after, it may be unclear whether a return home is feasible or not, as assessments may not be completed. In this instance, a parallel planning approach will be adopted, so that at the same time as rehabilitation is being explored, work is also taking place to identify permanence arrangements. In this context, the child will be placed, where possible, with carers who will be able to work towards rehabilitation but become permanent carers if rehabilitation is unsuccessful.
- For children who are already in long-term foster placements, the policy will be to encourage and support carers, including financially if appropriate, to acquire parental responsibility through Residence, Special Guardianship or Adoption Orders.

Children in proceedings

- During care proceedings, the prospect of a return home will be explored through continuing assessments and the local authority will support this if the assessments demonstrate that this is appropriate for the child.
- However, to avoid delay for the child in the event that returning home does not become the plan then we will explore contingencies in parallel with this process, relative or friends as a first option or otherwise potential carers identified by the local authority.
- Where permanence options are under consideration, we will also explore and support legal arrangements that, where appropriate, maximise the parental responsibility that the permanent carers will hold, accompanied by financial arrangements to facilitate such placements according to assessed needs. (i.e through Residence, Special Guardianship or Adoption Orders.
- These arrangements will take account of the child's needs to retain contact in their permanent placements with relatives and friends.

Children 'placed with parents'

- Where the child is subject to the *Placement with Parents Regulations* and has been living at home for over 12 months, each subsequent LAC review will consider whether plans should be made to end the local authority's parental responsibility, by discharging the Care Order.

L Harper
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