



Somerset County Council Children's Social Care

Permanence Policy Statement

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Owners | |
| Authors: | Strategic Managers & Operations Managers – Child Placements and Resources |
| Compiled by: | Becky Hopkins |
| Version: | 1.2 |
| Date: | December 2016 |

Version Control

| Version number | Status | Date amended | Name | Comments – amendments made |
|----------------|--------|--------------|---------------|---|
| 1.0 | Draft | 03.11.15 | Laurie Isaacs | First Draft document prior to Permanence Framework meeting |
| 1.1 | Draft | 11.11.15 | Laurie Isaacs | General review and updated to include Parallel Planning, Siblings |
| 1.2 | Final | 04.01.16 | Laurie Isaacs | General review and updating of sections |

Contents:

| Section Number | Title | Page Number |
|----------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Overarching Statement | 3 |
| 2 | Parallel Planning | 5 |
| 3 | Reunification | 5 |
| 4 | Siblings | 5 |
| 5 | Family and Friends Care | 5 |
| 6 | Long Term Foster Care | 6 |
| 7 | Special Guardianship | 6 |
| 8 | Adoption | 7 |

1. Overarching Statement

This Permanence Policy Statement relates specifically to children who are looked after by Somerset County Council.

- We recognise and are committed to upholding the rights and freedoms of the European Convention on Human Rights which are given effect in UK law by the Human Rights Act 1998 and the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The following policy statement is set in the context of those principles and provisions.
- We are committed to acting as a good 'Corporate Parent' to enable all children looked after by the Authority to achieve their full potential in life.
- We recognise that all children have the right to family life which offers them permanence and that where consistent with their welfare this should be within their birth family or with a 'connected person' as defined by the Care Planning Regulations 2010.¹
- We define permanence as the framework of legal, physical and emotional permanence which gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity throughout childhood and into adulthood and believe this is achieved by the provision of consistent care, stable relationships and a secure family base in life.
- We recognise that delay in planning and implementing plans for permanence is detrimental to good outcomes for children.
- We recognise placement moves prior to permanence are detrimental to good outcomes and any unnecessary moves should be avoided.
- We believe every child should reach their full potential and are best supported to grow and achieve within their own families.
- Where children are separated from their birth families every effort will be made to re-unite them where it is safe and consistent with their welfare.
- Where this cannot be achieved within timescales which meet the child's needs and a decision is taken that a child cannot return to the care of their birth family, we will consider all other options which will promote permanence.
- Family Group Conferences are recognised as an important tool in identifying support and placement resources within the extended family, and these will be used wherever possible.

- Decisions about achieving permanence must take into account the wishes and feelings of children and young people, their birth parents and families.
- We recognise that parents experience trauma and loss and we will encourage birth parents and family members to access available support.
- Where the wishes of a child are not followed the reasons will be clearly recorded and explained to the child in a way they can understand where appropriate.
- The importance of children maintaining links with their birth family is acknowledged. Contact plans which enable such links to be sustained and are appropriate to support permanence for the child will be developed and supported.
- We recognise the legal duty to give preference to a permanent placement with family or friends unless that would not be the most appropriate placement for a child.²
- We are committed to offering a range of support services to support the assessed needs of children in permanent placements and their carers, whatever the legal status of the placement.
- All placements will be made following a clear plan which will include a programme of introduction to the placement.
- Somerset County Council considers that the routes to permanence are:
 - Going Home (Reunification)
 - Family and friends care
 - Permanent foster carer
 - Special Guardianship / Child Arrangement Orders³
 - Adoption⁴
- The decision about the most appropriate route to permanence will be based on a thorough assessment of the child, the parenting capacity of any prospective carers and will take account of relevant research findings.

¹Care Planning Placement & Case Review Regulations & Statutory Guidance 2010

²Children Act 1989 section 22C (7)

³Child Arrangement Orders are not specifically addressed in this policy. We have included them here as it is recognised that in some cases Child Arrangement Orders may be the preferred legal option to Special Guardianship and are still used in private proceedings.

⁴For the purposes of this policy statement residential care is not included as a permanent placement option as it does not provide a secure family base into adult life. It is recognised that for a small number of children and young people their needs can only be met at and/or for a specific time within a residential unit.

2. Parallel Planning

- We are committed to ensuring children find their permanent family as quickly as possible. In order to do so we actively explore and pursue all appropriate permanence options concurrently.
- These options are considered at each CLA review as part of the child's plan.
- All permanence options must be shared with parents from the outset.

3. Reunification

- We are committed to reunification as a permanence option.
- Decisions will be made in line with the conclusions of an evidence based, multi-agency assessment.
- There is an expectation that the original risks which led to the child coming into care will have been re-assessed. Evidence in that assessment needs to show how the risks have been removed or reduced and/or strengths and resilience factors.

4. Siblings

- Somerset County Council is committed to:
 - Keeping siblings together whenever possible and appropriate;
 - Promoting positive relationships e.g. contact arrangements.

5. Family and Friends Care

- Family and Friends can provide a permanence option for children looked after.
- Assessments must evidence that Family and Friends can provide care for a child into adulthood and the carers have the capacity to meet the child's changing needs.
- Supporting children to live with their extended family or friends can provide good outcomes and is consistent with our legal duties but must always be consistent with the child's needs.

- We define Family and Friends Care for a child looked after as placement of the child with family members or other significant adults (connected persons) who have an established relationship with the child.
- Family and Friends care can be provided in a variety of ways. It would be expected that the carer would make an application for a Special Guardianship Order, Child Arrangement Order or an Adoption Order. On occasion, the care could be provided within a long term fostering framework.
- Immediate placement under Regulation 24 (temporary approval as a foster carer) will be used only exceptionally.

6. Permanent Foster Care

- We believe that long term fostering can provide a secure family base for children and young people and meet their needs in childhood and into adulthood through use of Staying Put.
- The decision that long term fostering is the preferred option for the child will be taken initially through a Permanence Planning Meeting and agreed at a subsequent CLA Review.
- Assessments must evidence the ability of a foster carer to provide long term care. This will be assessed by the Fostering Service.
- Children in long term fostering placements remain in care, subject to statutory visits and reviews, health assessments and personal education plans. Authority to take decisions about their day to day lives will be delegated as appropriate to their foster carers (see Delegation of Authority Policy).
- There is a formal process of ratification for the recognition of a permanent fostering placement. The long term matching will be considered and agreed by the Permanence Panel.

7. Special Guardianship

- We are committed to special guardianship as a permanence option for children placed with either family and friends carers or foster carers. We see special guardianship as offering legal permanence to the children involved and a family for life.
- When we consider that a child in an existing fostering arrangement may benefit from their carers becoming their special guardians, information and advice will be made available to those carers to allow

them to make an informed choice about whether this is an option they wish to pursue.

- In accordance with statutory guidance we undertake special guardianship support assessments and provide services to meet need.

8. Adoption

- We are committed to adoption as a permanence option which should be considered for all children. Adoption offers a child legal permanence and a family for life.
- The process of placing a child for adoption is clearly set out in legislation. Delays in adoption planning and implementation have a severe impact on the emotional health and development of children and the likelihood of a successful adoption.
- We actively consider Foster to Adopt placements when it is in the best interests of a child to achieve early permanence.
- We are committed to the provision of high quality adoption support services. Every child has an adoption support plan at the time of matching.
- In accordance with statutory guidance we undertake post adoption support assessments and provide and commission support services and training to meet need.

Julian Wooster
Director of Children's Services