

# **Permanence Panel Protocol and Terms of Reference**

Children's Services

Updated: August 2025

Due for Review: August 2026

## **Table of Contents**

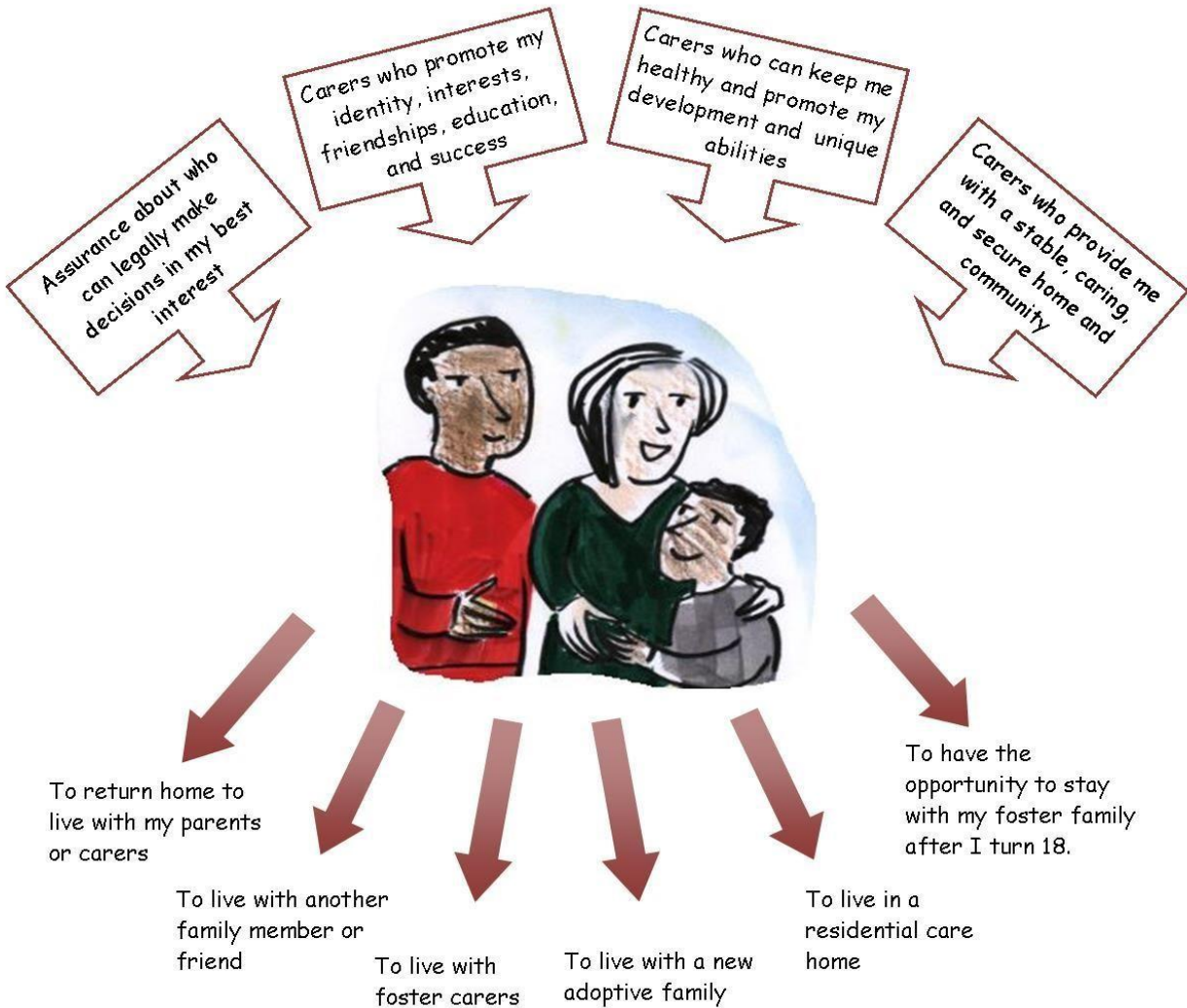
Achieving permanence for children .....	3
Permanence panel referral and decision making flowchart .....	4
Purpose of protocol .....	5
Purpose of permanence panel.....	6
Referral process for panel .....	8
Panel process and agenda .....	9
Outcomes and decision making .....	10
Permanence Planning Tracking Meetings .....	12

## **Appendices**

Appendix A Referral form for permanence panel .....	15
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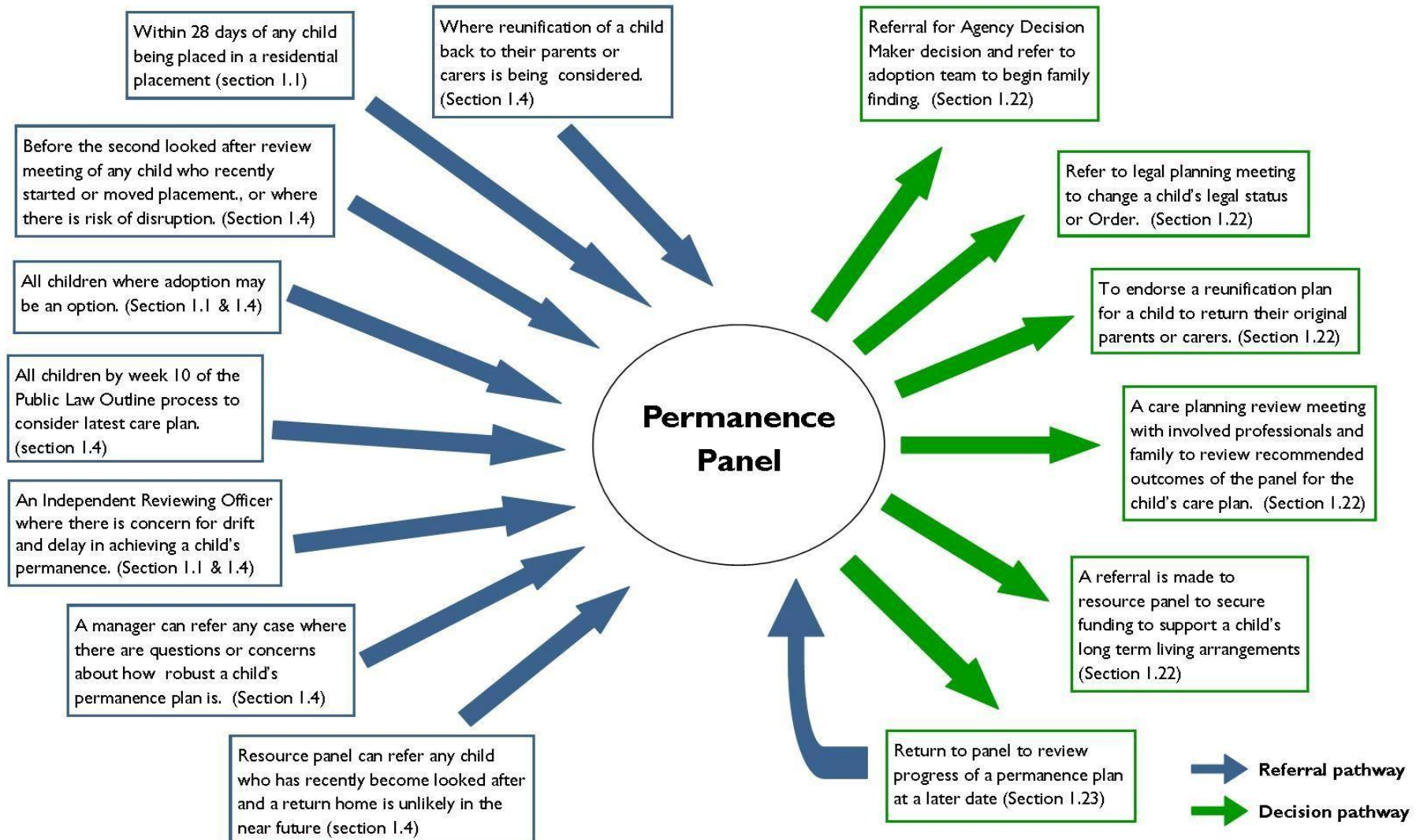
# Achieving Permanence for Children

## What do I need?



## What's the right plan for me?

## Permanence Panel Referral and Decision Making Flowchart



## Purpose of Protocol

Bexley Children's Services believes that all our children and young people should live with carers who love, support, care for and respect them and who will do so through their childhood into adolescence and adulthood.

Guidance published by the DfE (2014) defines permanence as:

“The framework of emotional permanence (attachment), physical permanence (stability) and legal permanence (the carer has parental responsibility for the child) which gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity. The objective of permanence is to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond. Permanence provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and their families; from family support through to adoption. This can include situations where the Local authority and birth parents share parental responsibility (PR) but where the carer has made a long-term commitment to the child”.

Similarly, the Care Inquiry In 2013 found that permanence for children means:

“Security, stability, love and a strong sense of identity and belonging” They found that this was not necessarily connected to legal status and that no one route to permanence was better than another.

The Council supports permanence through a range of options including a return to birth parents or placement with extended family or friends. Where this is not appropriate or possible we seek suitable permanent, family-based placements through adoption, special guardianship or long-term fostering. Where necessary some children might need security through good residential care to thrive, achieve and make a positive transition to their family, foster care or semi-independence in preparation for adulthood.

Using the Signs of Safety framework we always try to secure a permanent future with either the birth family or the wider family network. To do so we are committed to using Family Network Meetings or Family Group Conferencing with families when children become looked after and supporting families to utilise their own strengths and resources to develop effective safety plans so that children can return home as soon as it is practicable for them to do so. We recognise that this is not always possible or may not be achievable within the child's timeframe and as such we will seek suitable alternatives wherever necessary, working with the family and young person to effect permanence in a child centred, fair and transparent manner.

We know that every child is different and so each must have their own permanence plan agreed by the time of their second looked after review, including those young people for whom residential care is the most appropriate option.

Whatever the plan that is agreed the seven **Corporate Parenting principles of the Children and Social Work Act 2017** as set out in the **Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2018** will apply. These are:

1. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of children and young people,
2. To encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes, and feelings,
3. To consider the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people,
4. To help children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners,
5. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people,
6. For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships, and education or work,
7. To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

This protocol clarifies how we will support permanence for all the children we work with, where this is being sought away from birth family or friends. It further specifies the decision-making process where required.

This protocol must be read in conjunction with the following policy areas on Tri-x:

1. Section 4 – [Children in our Care](#)
2. Section 5 – [Fostering and Adoption](#)

## **Purpose of Permanence Panel**

1.1 The purpose of the permanence panel is to:

- a) Help Bexley carry out its corporate parenting responsibilities to children in its care within the spirit and meaning of the seven principles outlined in the Children and Social Work Act (2017)
- b) Support the implementation of timely and positive long term, stable care plans and placements for all children in care based on their individual assessed needs
- c) Ensure the application of consistent practice across all teams in decisions regarding children
- d) Considering each child within 6 weeks of entry into care or after care proceedings have been issued if children remain at home with parents, to ensure that parallel planning takes place effectively
- e) Ensure that permanence plans for children on full care orders are progressed in a timely way

- f) Ensure that the use of s20 is monitored effectively and permanence for children and young people is achieved at the earliest opportunity
  - g) Ensure that Bexley is ambitious in seeking legal permanence for all children and that adoption is pursued for all children, regardless of their age, unless there is clear evidence to suggest that this is not in the child's best interest
  - h) Avoid drift and delay when securing long term permanent placements for children with the most suitable carer. This can include adoption, Connected Persons, Special Guardians, foster carers, and residential placements
  - i) Agree residential placements as short-term living arrangements where there is an up-to-date assessment and care plan indicating this is in a young person's best interests and will allow them to flourish whilst the long-term plan is for family connection/living. Young people should be encouraged to let panel know their views about the placement. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) must agree with the plan.) These cases must be placed before permanence panel within 28 days of the placement commencing for review and monitoring. Such a change of plan will be formally recorded on Liquid Logic. In some exceptional circumstances long term residential care can be agreed due to complex needs of a child who will need ongoing support into adulthood where a capacity assessment will be undertaken by the preparing for adulthood team before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday as they transition into support from adult social care.
  - j) Review any child referred to it by the allocated IRO or any other interested professional if they are concerned that suitable permanence options are not being robustly explored for a child.
  - k) Refer children and set timescales of when permanence plan review meetings should take place for them
  - l) Consider those care plans where the plan is a change away from adoption and make recommendations before the change is considered at adoption panel
  - m) Consider sibling together/apart assessments and agree plans for separation of siblings following a review of all the relevant assessments and care plans
  - n) Ensure that the presenting practitioner and team have always explored how we can work in partnership with the family network to secure permanence for children within their family and their wider network. This will include reviewing whether family network meetings have been utilised and whether any of the other reunification processes available have been sourced. This will include but is not limited to joint work with the Staying Together team, a referral to the Multi Systemic Therapist or Family Systemic programme and work with the children in care service.
- 1.2 Quorate for the panel will be the chair and at least two additional panel members. Panel members should not exceed eight for any given meeting.
- 1.3 Panel members must declare any involvement or pre-existing knowledge of a case being presented in the meeting.

#### **1.4 The Permanence panel will review children in the following circumstances:**

- i. Legal planning meetings (LPM) or legal gateway panel (LGP) will refer all cases where care proceedings have been initiated, and adoption may be an outcome
- ii. Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) can refer children where they believe there has been drift in the decision making and permanency planning processes for a child or young person. Where this happens, the IRO is expected to complete the referral to panel in conjunction with the allocated social worker, detailing why they have referred the child and where they believe there has been drift and delay
- iii. Before the second looked after child review meeting of any child who has recently begun or changed living arrangements
- iv. Where there is a likelihood of a placement breakdown or disruption
- v. Regularly review (6-weekly) the children's permanence plans where proceedings have been issued to ensure that plans progress in a timely manner and to ensure that parallel plans are in place to avoid drift
- vi. Regularly review (6-weekly) the children's permanence plans where placement orders have been granted to ensure that plans progress in a timely manner and adoption orders is secured at the earliest opportunity
- vii. Regularly review (6-weekly) cases where full care orders have been granted to ensure that plans are progressed without delay and permanence is agreed at the earliest opportunity
- viii. A senior manager can request that the panel undertake a review of a child's permanence planning to assure themselves that this planning is robust, timely and in the child's best interest
- ix. Resource and Care panel can refer to Permanence Panel any child or young person where they have recently become looked after and a return home is not believed to be possible or viable soon.
- x. When considering the reunification of a child back to their parents or carers
- xi. Any Social Care team manager can refer a child or young person for review if it is believed that permanence planning has been poor and that there is a risk a child may suffer drift and delay in finding a long term, loving and stable care environment

#### **Referral Process for Panel**

- 1.5 Any child who meets the criteria under Section 1.4 can be referred to permanence panel. Referrals will be made using the form contained in Appendix A and can be accessed under forms on Liquid Logic (not yet available so hard copy to be completed and uploaded into documents).

- 1.6 All referrals must be completed and submitted to the panel administrator at least three working days before the panel date. Any late submissions or those submitted incorrectly may be deferred to another panel date to be properly submitted and considered.
- 1.7 Panel members are expected to read all referrals and come to panel prepared with questions and comments.
- 1.8 Referrals should be succinct and contain just enough information for the panel to understand the significant events in a child or young person's life and to inform discussions and key recommendations. It should not unnecessarily cut and paste complete reports or previous information on file. Additional reports should not be submitted along with a referral form unless the chair gives agreement.
- 1.9 Referrals must equally justify the recommendations or decisions being sought by the panel and set out why this is believed to be in the child or young person's best interest. It must also justify the anticipated cost implications, both short and long term.
- 1.10 The chair will decide which cases are properly prepared or are given priority to be heard at any given panel.

### **Panel Process and Agenda**

- 1.11 The panel will be chaired by a Service Manager for Children in our Care. The Chair is responsible for facilitating discussions in a timely, respectful and focused manner using the agenda set out in Section 1.13 below. Given the importance of securing permanence for children, only a Service Manager can chair the panel. The Service Manager for Children in our Care is the substantive chair and the Service Manager for the Independent Review & Conference Team is vice chair. In the event neither is available, the Service Manager for Permanence, Placements and Specialist Services should chair to avoid any delay in decision being made for children and young people.
- 1.12 The panel will meet weekly, and its membership will include:
  - a) Chair – as detailed above
  - b) Service Manager for Children in our Care
  - c) Service manager for the Independent Reviewing & Conference Service
  - d) Service Manager for Permanence, Placements and Specialist Services
  - e) Other relevant professionals by invitation of the chair
- 1.13 The agenda for the panel will be as follows:
  - 1. Purpose of panel
  - 2. Statement of conduct and confidentiality
  - 3. Introductions
  - 4. Review of previous recommendations and decisions

5. Case presentations
6. Review of panel recommendations and decisions
7. Next date and adjournment

I.14 The agenda for new case presentations will be as follows:

1. Social worker or team manager gives brief case summary and what they are seeking from panel (5 mins max)
2. Chair opens discussion from panel members (10-15 mins max)
3. Chair summarises discussion and recommendations or decisions made (5 mins max)

I.15 In order for the panel to proceed in a timely and focused manner it requires panel members to come prepared having read all referrals prior. It also requires social workers and team managers to complete referrals properly, in time, and presented in a succinct and focused way.

I.16 **The statement of conduct and confidentiality reads:**

***The panel will proceed in a respectful manner. This means language or actions that are offensive or discriminatory are not tolerated. Please turn your phones to silent and excuse yourself if you need to take an urgent call. The panel and its chair aim for the meeting to provide constructive feedback and considered recommendations.***

***Information shared is confidential and is not to be discussed outside this meeting without proper consent or purpose to do so. Panel reports must be confidentially shredded and minutes from the meeting securely stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act.***

I.17 Panel members are expected to support the chair in ensuring the meeting takes place in accordance with the agenda and statement of conduct and confidentiality.

I.18 The meeting will be coordinated and minuted by a business support administrator and recorded on LCS case notes. All referrals to panel are to be emailed no later than three working days before to the meeting administrator.

I.19 Due to time constraints the chair may have to bring an end to discussions, prioritise which cases are heard at panel, and designate cases to be tabled for another panel meeting.

## **Outcomes and Decision Making**

I.20 When reaching recommendations and decisions the chair should solicit the views of all panel members. Any panel member can request their view be recorded in the minutes.

- 1.21 The chair will normally concur with the majority view of the panel members in reaching panel recommendations and decisions. Where the chair makes recommendations or decisions against the view of the panel, the dissenting views will be recorded.
- 1.22 The panel can make the following recommendations and decisions:**
- a) That a multi-agency care planning review meeting with the family takes place within 10 working days to review and revise the child's current care plan to consider or act upon recommendations or decisions made by the panel
  - b) That a child is referred to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for a decision on adoption
  - c) That a referral be made to the adoption team to begin family finding
  - d) That the case proceeds to a legal planning meeting to consider changes to a child's legal and/or care status
  - e) That a referral is made to the Resource and Care panel to secure funding in support of a child's long term placement plan
  - f) That a full sibling "together/apart" assessment is completed and thereafter the children referred to panel
  - g) That more work is undertaken to try and work with the family and their network to enable the child/young person to return home
- 1.24 The panel may decide and specify a date when a case must return to panel to consider changes and progress made on previous recommendations and decisions made. This can be in line with the 6/12 weekly review rules or sooner if required.
- 1.25 The panel should reserve itself to making recommendations only, leaving responsibility for the detailed child's planning for the involved family and professional network. Certain decisions may have to be taken where the chair believes the safeguarding of a child from significant harm or concerns of drift and delay warrants.
- 1.26 Where there is disagreement between panel members about the decisions made at panel or the case holding team have concerns about the decision made the Head of Service for Corporate Parenting should be asked to review the decisions made and where the point of concern is. The chair of panel must facilitate the discussion with the Head of service, ensuring that there is documentary evidence and relevant attendance at a meeting to review the area of disagreement. This meeting must be organised within 5 working days of the Permanence Panel wherein the permanence plan was heard. The Head of Service for Corporate Parenting will review the information presented and will agree the appropriate action to be taken on the permanence plan. This meeting will be minuted and the decision circulated to panel within 48 hours. A copy will be uploaded to the liquid logic file as usual.

## **2. Permanence Planning Tracking Meetings**

### **2.1 Purpose and Intended Outcomes**

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- Monitoring cases going through proceedings to ensure plans for children are progressed in a timely way and parallel plans are in place so there is no delay for children
- Monitoring cases on full care orders to ensure children's plan are progressed and permanence is achieved at the earliest opportunity
- Analysing patterns and trends to ensure best practice; inform commissioning intentions and trigger responses from relevant service areas and partner agencies regarding identified practice concerns;
- Reducing delays in planning for children and helping to promote early permanence decisions for children.
- Monitoring all cases to ensure stability and early notification and action where there might be disruption or pressure building that could cause disruption to permanence.

### **2.2 Main Activity**

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The Permanence Planning Tracking Meetings will address the following key issues:

- Regularly review cases where proceedings have been issued to ensure that plans progress in a timely manner and to ensure that parallel plans are in place to avoid drift
- Regularly review cases where full care orders have been granted to ensure that plans are progressed without delay and permanence is agreed at the earliest opportunity

### **2.3 Protocol and Function of Permanence Planning Tracking Meetings**

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- The Business Support Administrator will support the Team managers in arranging the Permanence Planning Tracking Meetings to ensure good coordination and all relevant professionals (Independent Reviewing Officer, adoption Social Worker, Supervising social worker) invited.
- The permanence planning tracker will be sent to all team managers a week in advance to ensure they note and update any actions agreed at the last panel.
- The meeting will focus on the assessed needs of the child in relation to their emotional, physical, social, cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious needs as well as proposed contact plans.
- Formulate a profile of the child's needs and match these against the proposed placements.
- Develop a suitable Support Plan to contribute to the success and sustainability of the placement.
- Ensure the child's wishes are duly considered within the meeting.
- Review the possible permanency options, with a view to agreeing one plan or several plans to be progressed concurrently.
- Identify what needs to be done to achieve the chosen plan/s and agree who will do what and by when.

- Track, monitor and advise upon direct work with child, including Life Story work /preparation and transition work.
- Where there are differences of opinion between involved professionals the meeting should clarify these and identify a process for resolution. Where it is necessary for a senior management decision to be sought the meeting should identify the available options and the strengths and risks of each option considered.
- At the Permanence Planning Tracking Meetings Team Managers will be asked the following: Assessment Analysis, including the impact of any harm the child has experienced; Assessments to be undertaken; Contact arrangements; Legal timetable; Current Care Plan Parallel Plan Considerations for family finding.
- The Team Manager will be responsible (directly or by identifying the relevant person to do so) for taking forward identified patterns and trends and practice concerns to the relevant service areas and partner agencies;
- Following discussion, the Business Support Administrator will update the Liquid Logic records within 5 working days, will book the next agreed Permanence Planning Tracking meeting and will invite all relevant professionals.

## **2.4 Frequency of Permanence Planning Tracking Meetings**

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- Where care proceedings are in place, Permanence Planning Tracking Meetings will occur **monthly** on a specific day of the week agreed by the team manager.
- Where the children are subject to Placement orders, Permanence Planning Tracking Meetings will occur every **monthly** to ensure drift and delay in family finding and achieving permanence is avoided.
- Where the children are subject to Care orders and have been in placement for less than 12 months, Permanence Planning Tracking Meetings will occur **monthly**.
- Robust tracking of issues will assist with mitigating any risk of drift and delay to securing permanency for children.

## **2.5 Membership**

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Permanence Planning Tracking Meetings will be attended by:

- Chair – Head of Service for Corporate Parenting & Children with Disabilities
- Team Manager of Children in Care Teams
- Connected Carer Social Worker where applicable
- Family finder, where applicable
- Supervising Social worker
- Other involved professionals where appropriate.
- IRO (The IRO's views are to be sought prior to the meeting if unable to attend)
- Business Support Administrator.

## **2.6 Permanence Planning Tracking Meetings Administration and Information Governance**

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Permanence Planning Tracking Meetings attendees will read all documentation in advance of the meeting.

Permanence Planning Tracking Meetings attendees should be prepared to briefly present the case and be able to provide all relevant information regarding any proposed plan for the child.

Minutes of the discussion and decisions will be recorded on the child's social care file within 5 working days of the meeting.

## **3. Review Arrangements**

The Permanence Panel and Permanence Planning Tracking Meetings will be reviewed on an annual basis.

**Appendix A**

**Permanence Panel Referral**

**Part A – To be completed by worker**

Name of Worker	Team	Date

**Relevant Family Members (starting with the children):**

Name	Date of Birth	Ethnicity	Relation to child (or self)

**Who else is part of the family's support network? (friends, professionals, community members)**

Name	Role

**Has a family network meeting already taken place?  Yes  No**

**Is there a safety plan already in place for the child(ren)?  Yes  No**

**If you answered no to any of the above questions, please explain why:**

**What recommendations or decisions are you seeking from the panel?**

(Think about what the panel can do to help create a better and safer outcome for the child/ren)

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**Views of the parents/carers**

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**Child/ren's wishes and feelings**

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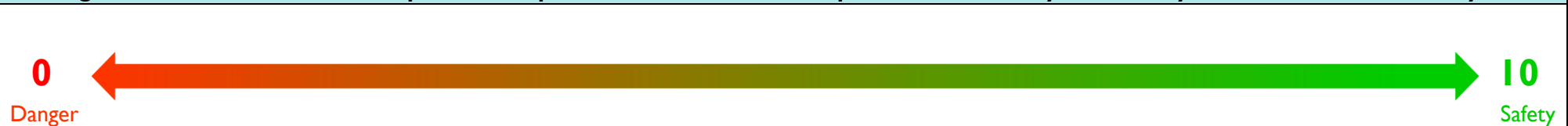
### Signs of Safety Case Summary

Child/ren's Name	Date of Birth	Ethnicity	Disability/Special Need	Legal Status

What are we worried about?	What is working well?	What needs to happen?
Past Harm	Existing Strengths	Next Steps
Future Danger	Existing Safety	
Complicating Factors		

Danger Statement	Safety Goals

On a scale of 0–10 where 10 means that things are safe enough for the child(ren) to return home to their parents/carers and 0 means things are so dangerous for them that we must place or keep them in another home or place for their safety, where do you rate this situation today?



Name	Role or Relation to Child	Scaling	Reasons

**Referral Completed and Authorised by:**

<b>Name of Worker</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Name of Team Manager</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Name of Service Manager</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>

*Please note that referrals that are submitted late, incomplete, or unsigned may be rejected and deferred by the panel.*

**Part B – To be completed by panel chair**

Name of Child/ren	Name of Worker	Team

**Permanence Panel Recommendations and Decisions**

The panel agreed that:

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. \_\_\_\_\_

- Care plan review meeting  Refer to ADM and adoption  Refer to LPM  Amend care plan
- Refer to Resource Panel  Continue current care plan  Endorse reunification plan home;  Permanence planning tracking meeting review to be booked;
- Return to panel by: \_\_\_\_\_

**What is the rationale for the recommendations and decisions made:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Appendix B**

### **Permanence Planning Tracking meeting form**

- This is an excel spreadsheet tracking form containing all cases, kept up to date by the business support and sent to each team manager a week before the tracking panel.

All notes/actions will be recorded on the spreadsheet and on Liquid Logic on case notes for Team Managers to discuss in supervision with practitioners.