

Blackburn with Darwen Permanence Policy 2024



Trust
Respect
Ambition
Collaboration
Kindness



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1. Introduction

A key component in achieving our vision for children in Blackburn with Darwen is to ensure that our children and young people achieve permanence.

This document sets out Blackburn with Darwen's policy, procedures and processes to ensure our children and young people achieve permanence.

It considers findings from Stable Homes Built on Love and considers the enablers and outcomes of the National Framework.

2. Defining Permanence

Permanence can be defined as the long-term plan for the child. It provides an underpinning framework for all social work interventions with children and their families from family help through to adoption.

Permanence aims to ensure that a child has the emotional, physical and legal conditions that gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity.

This is echoed in national guidance, a fundamental part of Stable Homes Built in Love is that children and young people receive the right support at the right time and grow up in stable, loving homes.

3. Key Principles in Permanence Planning

When planning for permanence our aim is to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and into adulthood. All children should feel that they belong and live in families who promote their identity and provide them with a sense of security, continuity and commitment.

Permanence should be considered in everything we do. From our first intervention with children and families we need to be considering 'does our plan support the child's needs for permanence' and this must remain central to decision making.



Wherever possible children and young people should remain at home if safe to do so. Where it is necessary for a child to leave their family:

- ❖ This should be for a short a time as is required to support a safe return home.
- ❖ If a child cannot return home consideration should first be given to friends and family as alternative carers, and creative care planning should be considered to support this as an alternative to other care options. This should be supported through the appropriate legal order to meet a child's needs.
- ❖ Where a child is unable to remain within their family network, alternative permanent carers should be sought for the child without delay. Their home should be secured through a legal order that meets their needs for permanence, these options are set out further in this policy.
- ❖ Care should be provided locally unless clearly assessed as inappropriate.
- ❖ Family time should be facilitated and promoted, unless assessed as unsafe or unsuitable.
- ❖ Residential living should be considered when a need for this is identified within the child's plan and when no other placement options are available or assessed as suitable.
- ❖ Consideration should always be given to the child's GRACES – Gender, Race, Age, Culture, Ethnicity and Sexuality when planning for permanence.
- ❖ Information for the child's life story should be recorded as soon as interventions begin.
- ❖ All professional involved should work in partnership with parents and families to meet these principles.
- ❖ The voice of the child should be evident and influence permanence planning.



4. Options for Permanence

Permanence can be achieved in the following ways:

Staying with or returning to birth parent (s)

The first stage within permanence planning is to work with families to support them staying together. Staying at home offers a child the best chance of stability. Research shows us that early intervention and providing services at the right time can lead to less statutory intervention.

Kinship Care - Living with Relatives, Friends or other Connected Persons Arrangement Order or a Special Guardianship Order or a Care Order

If the assessment concludes that a child cannot safely remain at home, every effort must be made for the child to remain within their birth family or network. It is essential to establish at an early stage which relatives or friends may be able to care for a child to prevent delay. A family group conference should always be considered as early as possible. When considering the plan for permanence careful consideration needs to be given as to whether the child needs to remain looked after with continued social work intervention, the approach should be that this would be in exceptional circumstances only as it is better for children to develop a sense of stability, belonging and security with their kinship carers without continued statutory intervention.

Adoption

When all other alternatives have been considered and a plan of permanence is unable to be achieved for a child within their birth family or network, research strongly supports adoption as an option that provides stability for children, especially those under four years old. Consideration should be given to concurrent foster placements or foster to adopt placements for these children where it is clear at the pre-birth stage that the plan for permanence is one of separation.

Long term Fostering

For those children who remain looked after an important means of achieving permanence can be long-term foster care. There is further information within this policy around considering and approving long-term matches.



Long Term Residential Care

This option should be in exceptional circumstances, in line with the child's assessed needs and care plan and with Head of Service approval.

5. Early Permanence

How do we 'Think permanence' in Early Help?

The Early Help service is committed to supporting a child's right to family life and we are focused on providing services that:

- Support families to care for their own children, preventing the need for children to enter the care system
- Support extended families to help and support and care for children

We have built upon our well-established early help model to respond to the family first initiative this draws up the well-established relationships and delivery programmes that have supported our services to respond to the local needs of the children, young people and families within our borough. We have focused on ensuring that we concentrate on the following:

- Family Help – establishing locally based multi-disciplinary teams that work collaboratively with partners to provide intensive, non-stigmatising and effective support that is tailored to the needs of children and families.
- Family Networks – greater use of family care and support, with earlier use of family group decision making, with support to enable more children to live at home or to transition into kinship care.

A 'family first' culture engages family networks throughout decision making, so that we empower families by prioritising family-led solutions, working collaboratively with family networks and give family-led plans a central position in practitioners' plans wherever possible.

When the needs of a child and family can no longer be met within early help services there is a strong step-up policy that enables collaborative working between early help and children's social care to prevent the need for families to repeat their stories.



How do we 'Think permanence' at our Front Door?

Permanence should be considered for all children that are referred into CADS:

- During our screening we always consider what support a family needs to ensure that any child can firstly remain within their birth family.
- We seek to identify who is in the extended family
- We seek to identify who is important to the family.
- We seek to identify who is in their support networks.
- Start to complete the genogram from the information shared.

This will ensure that if a child progresses to a Child and family Assessment, we have an understanding of the extended family and friends and can start to consider how permanence can be reached for a child within their own family with the support that is available. A systemic genogram will be completed alongside, and family group conference offered should a child become a Child in Need.

6. Key Stages of Permanence Planning and Decision Making

Becoming LookedAfter

If it is assessed that a child/young person is unable to remain in the care of their parents, the social worker requests a case discussion with their line manager and provides an updated case summary.

The manager records the details of the case discussion on the child's file and ensures all preventative services (including a Family Group Conference) have been considered prior to requesting a Care Planning Meeting with the relevant Service Lead.

If the Service Lead agrees that the child is unable to remain in the care of their parents, the Care Planning Meeting will record that the child's circumstances will be presented to Legal Gateway Panel and a proposed date recorded on the child's file.



Where a child is deemed to be at risk of immediate significant harm, urgent discussions will be arranged with the appropriate Service Lead and an urgent Legal Gateway Panel convened.

The decision for a child to enter the care of the Local Authority must be made by a Head of Service or above.

Legal Gateway Meetings

Legal Gateway Panel (LGP) is held weekly (urgent panels can be convened where required) and Chaired by a Head of Service.

Reason for presenting children to LGP include decisions to enter or step-down from pre-proceedings, decisions to enter care proceedings, consideration of Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards, ratification of recommendations made within s37 reports, agreement for child to enter the care of the local authority.

Requests for children to be added to the weekly agenda for LGP will be made to Business Support, following discussion and agreement with the relevant Service Lead. Relevant documentation for the panel to consider (see Terms of Reference for LGP) must be uploaded to the appropriate Teams folder by the end of the day on Thursday prior to the LGP.

Minutes of LGP are taken by Business Support and recorded on the child's file. The minutes are checked and authorised by the Head of Service Chairing the panel.

Pre-Proceedings meetings

Pre-proceedings will be tracked at the Public Law Outline (PLO) Impact Board every 4 weeks (Chaired by Head of Service) and formally reviewed at Legal Gateway Panel 14 weeks after the decision to enter pre-proceedings.

Once pre-proceedings has been agreed, parents/carers will be provided with the pre-proceedings letter within 5 working days of LGP and the first PLO meeting should take place within 10 working days of the LGP decision.

The first pre-proceedings meeting will be Chaired by a Team Manager and the pre-proceedings plan is finalised and signed by all. A copy should be provided to parents.

It is important to be clear on roles and expectations at the initial Pre-Proceedings meeting, for progressing the pre proceedings plan. Please refer to the BwD PLO Toolkit for details of the pre-proceedings process and relevant templates for pre-proceedings letters and plans.



Final Evidence Care Planning

A Final Care Planning Meeting must take place in all cases where a child is subject to care proceedings and reaching final hearing. This meeting will be scheduled two weeks prior to filing of final evidence.

This meeting must be chaired by the relevant Head of Service and include the social worker, team manager, service lead, solicitor with conduct of the case, Independent Reviewing Officer, and any other relevant professionals, including where appropriate kinship team, fostering, Children in Our Care Team, Adoption. The meeting will be minuted and recorded by Business Support.

The Final Care Planning Meeting will agree the final care plan for the child.

Matching Meetings

It is vital careful matching of a child or young person to their new home takes place as we know this contributes to immediate and long-term the stability. The matching process should consider the child or young person's needs especially regarding the following key areas:

- The child's education;
- The expectations around contact with relatives and friends;
- The child's identity/race/culture;
- The child's history;
- The child's developmental needs;
- The child's health;

The matching process should also consider the following in relation to the type of home:

- Their experience;
- Their strengths;
- The distance from the home to the child's school;
- Other children in the placement and the appropriateness of the match;

Where possible the matching process should include a multi-agency matching meeting, with the proposed new carers/ care provider.



The child's social worker should visit the potential new home and meet with the proposed new carers directly prior to a decision being made about the new home.

Consultation with the child or young person should take place at the most appropriate time, to seek their views where it is believed there is a strong possibility of a suitable match. Introducing a possible new home to a child or young person must take place sensitively and at the right time, where possible a child or young person should be given the opportunity to visit the proposed new home and meet the proposed new carers prior to a move taking place.

Placement Planning Meetings

Placement Planning meetings should be convened as part of the process of identifying and placing a child and should take place before the child is placed, if it is not possible the meeting should be held within 5 working days of the start of the placement.

Further Placement Planning Meetings should be held at intervals agreed with the child's social worker, residential workers or the foster/kinship carers and their supervising social worker - or as required for example where there are issues to be resolved in relation to the day-to-day arrangements for the placement.

The social worker and the residential worker/foster/kinship carers supervising social worker will agree the best format and venue for the meeting and who will chair the meeting.

The people listed below should contribute to the meetings:

1. The child's social worker and/or other professional associated with the child e.g. personal adviser or advocate.
2. The child.
3. The child's parents.
4. For children in residential care, the child's link worker/keyworker and, where appropriate the home manager.
5. For children in foster/kinship care, the foster/kinship carers and their supervising social worker
6. Health professional (where appropriate)
7. Education professional (where appropriate).

Before any meeting, the chairperson should obtain or be updated on the following, if available:



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- The child's Placement Plan (recorded on the Placement Information Record on ICS).
- Any work which has been undertaken in supporting the child's placement
- If relevant: the child's care plan, personal education plan and pathway plan.

It is important that the placement plan including delegated authority is discussed and agreed with all parties as part of the placement planning meeting to ensure that parents, children and foster/kinship carers are aware of their roles and expectations within the placement.

Children Looked After Review

The Children Looked After Review is the child's meeting and is chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer (see IRO handbook).

The child must be consulted and encouraged and supported to participate with their review process age appropriately.

This will include offering each child the option to use the Mind Of My Own App.

The child's placement plan and Care Plan must be available for the first Children Looked After Review.

At the second Children Looked After Review the care plan should clearly consider the plan for permanence to allow the Independent Reviewing Officer to ratify the child's care plan.

Where a child has been living in a long-term foster home for over one year which has been ratified as permanent via 'long-term matching panel', a decision can be made to reduce the frequency of reviews and visits. This decision must be led by the child's wishes and feelings, supported via multi-agency care planning, and supported by the team manager, prior to confirming agreement via the Children Looked After Review process.

Multi-Agency Care Planning Meetings

Multi agency Care Planning Meeting for children and young people in our care should be held at a frequency of at least every 6 weeks. The only exception to this, is when the home has been ratified as a permanent lasting home and there is an approved management position, agreed via the CLA review process, that frequency can be reduced. The meeting should include, as a minimum, the child/young person (unless they choose not to attend), parents (if appropriate), social worker, personal advisor (if



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applicable) carers, health, education (if applicable), and any services/professionals (as appropriate) working with the child and contributing to their care/permanence plan.

Each multi agency Care Planning Meeting should consider, as a minimum:

- The assessment of the child's current needs, and whether this requires updating
- Child's lived experience, voice, and views of care/permanence plan
- Identity and Life Story work
- Permanence options
- Progress of the care/permanence plan
- The child's education and health needs
- Family time arrangements

The meeting should be chaired and recorded by the social worker and a copy of the meeting record provided to the child, parents (if appropriate), and professionals.

Reviewing, and monitoring

When it has been decided a child/ young person's primary plan of permanence is one which would see them remain in the care of the Local Authority they will transfer to and be supported Children in Our Care (CIOC) Service.

This plan should have been ratified by the child/ young person's IRO, through their Child Looked After review.

It is however essential for the CIOC Service to continue to assess the on-going suitability of this plan. Where a child or young person's plan can progress to achieve greater, and a more secure level of permanence this should happen without delay.

For example, where a child or young person is living with a relative, subject to a Care Order and it is suitable to progress to a Special Guardianship Order, or where a child or young person is living with a foster carer, and it is suitable to ratify this as their long-term home.



It is the responsibility of the allocated Social Worker, with oversight of the Team Manager, in the first instance to ensure each child or young person's care plan is reviewed, through assessment and through supervision.

As a minimum, a Child & Family assessment should be completed when a child has lived in their current home for twelve months to consider their most suitable long-term plan and if any changes to their status within their home should be sought.

Each supervision, completed by the Team Manager should be explicit in stating the timescales for progressing and reviewing each child or young person's plan of permanence.

Where the preferred permanence plan cannot be achieved, the Team Manager will request an internal Care Planning meeting. This meeting will be chaired by the Service Lead and will consider the barriers to achieving the preferred plan of permanence. Clear timescales will also be set for actions aimed at supporting the preferred plan of permanence to progress and to prevent drift and delay for the child or young person.

Approving our children and young people's home as their long-term home.

Long-term Fostering

For those children who remain Looked After an important means of achieving permanence can be long-term foster care. Where the permanence plan for the child is long-term foster care this may be where the current short-term foster placement is assessed to meet the long-term needs of the child for permanence.

This option has proved to be particularly useful for older children who retain strong links to their birth families and do not want or need the formality of adoption and where the carers wish for the continued involvement of the local authority.

The above plans of permanence should be approved via Head of Service through a 'long-term matching panel'.

For a home to be long-term matched the following will need to have taken place:

- ❖ Child & Family assessment completed, which considers how each child or young person's home is meeting their needs and supporting positive outcomes.
- ❖ Child or young person's views have been sought and captured through high-quality direct work.



- ❖ Carers' views, including an understanding of their long-term commitment to caring for a child or young person.
- ❖ Parents' views.
- ❖ The views of multi-agency professionals, with consideration to how the child or young person's carers are meeting their needs.
- ❖ The views of the IRO, and for the proposed plan to be ratified via the child or young person's looked after review.

See Appendix 1 for Lasting Homes Panel Protocol Process

Kinship Care

Although it is our preferred permanence option for those children living with kinship carers to be cared for via a Special Guardianship Order, there may be specific circumstances, particularly for young people with complex needs to remain in their home with their Kinship Carers via a Care Order.

Children placed with Kinship Carers are assessed to care long term as a plan of permanence, through the combined assessment for both long term care as kinship foster carers and as Special Guardians. The assessment also considers the matching of the carers capacity to meet the identified needs of the child/ren in their care long term.

The combined assessment with the plan of permanence is ratified through either the Fostering Panel at the point of approval, or the SGO Panel as a plan of legal permanence.

The Combined Assessment and ratification process considers,

- ❖ Statutory compliance in relation to Fostering and SGO Regulations.
- ❖ How each child or young person's home is meeting their needs and supporting positive outcomes both in the short and long term.
- ❖ The strength of the relationship between the carer and the child
- ❖ Child or young person's views are sought and captured through high-quality direct work.
- ❖ Household members views, including carers own children
- ❖ Carers' views, including an understanding of their long-term commitment to caring for a child or young person.



- ❖ Parents' views.
- ❖ The views of multi-agency professionals, including health and education, with consideration to how the child or young person's carers are meeting their needs.
- ❖ The support needed to ensure the carers can meet the needs of the child both in the short and long term whether through fostering or SGO.
- ❖ The views of the IRO, and for the proposed plan to be ratified via the child or young persons looked after review.

Residential Care

In specific circumstances, particularly for those children or young people with complex needs and/ or disabilities it may be the preferred permanence option to be cared for in a residential home.

8. Promoting Permanence and Long-Term Stability

Life storywork

The importance of a child understanding their life story, particularly when they become looked after or care experienced is vital to support their identity, self-esteem and relationships with themselves and others. We understand that the impact of relational trauma does not stop once the trauma has stopped, that the child has created meanings of that trauma that are often rooted in shame and mistrust, seeing themselves as unworthy and others as unsafe. This can increase the child's vulnerability in relationships, impacting on their ability to feel safe, secure and cared for as well as how they communicate with and trust others. The latter all impact on how a child experiences and responds to carers, which we know can significantly influence placement stability.

Given the importance of life story work on a child's psychological and social functioning, BwD see it as an ongoing process contributed to by all teams within children's services. This starts from collating information at Duty and Assessment through to developing eco maps with a child leaving care. Quality assurance is provided by BwD's Independent Reviewing Officers who monitor progress and ensure standards are being met.



Psychological Permanence

How a child develops is affected in very significant ways by the nature of their relationships. Children in care and/or who experienced adverse childhood experiences have often developed insecure ways of relating to others, lacking trust in the connection, support and care offered to them. At times care offered can then 'mirror' this lack of trust meaning that carers and the child are both not experiencing safety and the child is not having the opportunities needed to thrive.

In BwD helping children to develop secure attachments to an adult/adults who provide a stable and loving relationship is recognised as central to their well-being. Children and carers/parents in BwD have access to Revive, an inhouse therapeutic service for children in our care and care leavers. Revive offer specific trauma and attachment focused interventions such as Theraplay and Developmental Dyadic Psychotherapy as well as assessment, consultation and oversight into care planning and meeting these relational needs. All social workers can refer formally to the team, in addition to having opportunities to attend drop ins and chat with the team informally.

The wider training offer to foster carers in addition to specific training courses ran by Revive aim to give carers the knowledge and skills required to provide the therapeutic parenting to help many of our children recover from their experiences of relational trauma and disrupted attachments. Supervising social workers are also trained in the same principles to ensure a consistency of approach and offer the best chance of creating and strengthening stable, loving homes and relationships.

Stability and Unplanned Ending Meetings

Where a child's or young person's home is at risk of disrupting or ending, a stability meeting must take place in the first instance to prevent a breakdown of placement.

This meeting should be chaired by a Team Manager and must include the carer/residential staff, the child (where appropriate), IRO, Social worker, supervising social worker, health, education and any other relevant services working with the child/young person.

The stability meeting should develop a plan to offer support to everyone within the home unless it is determined that the placement has irretrievably broken down.

In the event of a placement ending unplanned or disrupting, an Unplanned Ending and Disruption Meeting should take place. One of the main purposes of these meetings is to consider learning that can be applied to future planning.



Unplanned Endings and Disruption meetings will be facilitated and chaired by Independent Reviewing Officers to maintain independent oversight. There will be quarterly meetings taking place between the IROs, Service Manager for IROs and the Service Lead, Placements to discuss the outcome of disruption meetings. An analysis and recommendations will be collated to put into an annual report to support ongoing learning and development.

Staying Put

Remaining with foster carers after the age of eighteen should be considered for all our children living in a foster care home, and preliminary discussions about this option should be held with the foster carers before ratifying a foster care home as permanent, regardless of the age of the child. Staying Put arrangements ensure that young people can remain with their former foster carers until they are prepared for adulthood, can experience a transition akin to their peers, avoid social exclusion and be more likely to avert a subsequent housing and tenancy breakdown.

Prior to when a child is matched with their carers, long term, preliminary discussions should have been held regarding staying put arrangements, regardless of the age of the child.

https://blackburndarwenchildcare.proceduresonline.com/p_stay_put.html

Family Time

Decisions about family time are crucially important for children and families when children are placed for adoption, removed from home through care proceedings, or voluntarily looked after by local authorities.

For most children, the aim from the outset of their placement will be to reunite them with their family provided that it is safe and practical to do so. Developing and maintaining close links between children and their family is essential in trying to meet this objective.

The Local Authority has a duty to promote children in care spending time with their parents and families under Schedule 2 Children Act 1989, unless to do so, is not practicable or it is not in line with the child's best interests.

It is essential that all arrangements for children to spend time with their parents and/or family are dynamic and flexible in response to changing plans for a child's future.



Planning meetings and review meetings are the vehicle to ensure that appropriate plans are in place for children to enjoy safe family time, and that these are kept under regular review.

Children, young people and their family should be involved in all decisions relating to family time and their wishes and feelings taken into account.

Family time is an integral part of care planning and must be considered at every stage of the process.

Family time should be compatible with the child's needs taking into account their age, ethnicity, culture, religion and disability.

The planning of family time relates to the care planning for a child and there should be assessment and analysis of:

- ❖ What is the purpose of family time and why is it important for this child and family?
- ❖ Who should the child have family time with?
- ❖ What level of supervision is required to promote the family time?
- ❖ What frequency of family time is required to maintain the child's links with their family?

It is important to recognise that whatever the circumstances, the local authority must always balance the need for family time with the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.

The child's welfare is paramount in relation to contact and the court is required to have regard to welfare considerations such as, the child's ascertainable wishes and feelings (in light of his or her age and understanding), his or her needs, the likely effect of any changes in circumstances, any harm suffered and how capable parents and other family members are of meeting the child's needs. This should be carefully considered if the Local Authority is applying for a s34 (4) order.

9. Plans of Reunification

For some of our looked after children, a care plan of reunification may be in their best interests, particularly when their birth parents have demonstrated changes and the risks that led to them becoming looked after have been addressed.



For any care plan of reunification an up to date assessment is required. As a minimum this should consider the situation that led to them becoming looked after, their current needs, the capacity of their parents to meet their needs and an updated position in respect of parenting capacity.

Prior to any care plan of reunification being implemented a care planning meeting will be held and chaired by the Head of Service for Corporate Parenting and Permanence to agree the plan and identify the wrap around support for the child or young person to prevent a breakdown. This care plan will need to be formally ratified at a CLA review by the IRO prior to the child or young person returning home.

10. Appendices

Appendix A: [Child in Our Care - Lasting Homes Panel Template](#)

Appendix B: [Lasting Homes Panel Protocol](#)

Appendix C: [Reunification Process 2025 - A guide for Practitioners](#)

