

LEGAL GATEWAY PANEL TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Introduction

The Legal Gateway Panel will replace the Legal Planning Meetings for all cases requesting pre-proceedings, care proceedings and to review the status of cases where a child has been accommodated in an emergency or under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

2. Intended outcomes

2.1 The purpose of the Legal Gateway Panel is to ensure consistency in the application of the threshold criteria of significant harm for children where pre-proceedings, care proceedings are entry to care is requested.

2.2 The Panel will ensure decision making is evidenced based and permanence is achieved within the child's timescale with no unnecessary delay underpinned by the principles in Bolton's Permanence Strategy.

3. Criteria of the Legal Gateway Panel

- a) request to initiate pre-proceedings
- b) request to initiate care proceedings
- c) agree or review following accommodation under section 20
- d) review emergency admission to care
- e) review cases in pre-proceedings that are particularly complex before final decision is made
- f) review final decision making in pre-proceedings.

Where urgent legal decisions are required for children, this should first be discussed with your Head of Service. For children who have been admitted into care urgently the case is expected to be presented to the next available Legal Gateway Panel.

4. Main Activity

The Panel will address the following key issues:

4.1 Ensure there is a recorded Panel decision for children where care proceedings or pre-proceedings have been requested.

4.2 Ensure permanence planning arrangements are considered at the earliest opportunity and put in place for children who become the subject of public law proceedings. This includes early identification of primary carers and identification and assessment of non-resident parents and connected persons.

4.3 Agree where expert evidence will be required.

4.4 Agree and review Section 20 entry to care.

5. Process of Legal Gateway Panel

5.1 Referrals of new cases to the Panel must first be agreed by the relevant Head of Service during a case management decision. Any emergency request for the emergency slot to be used must be agreed by the Chair of the Panel.

5.2 The Social Worker will prepopulate the 'Legal Planning Meeting' form on Liquid Logic and reassign to the Legal Planning work by 2pm on the Friday before the next scheduled Panel. The Social Worker MUST email the Legal Planning Meeting inbox and request a slot on the next Panel.

5.3 The documents that are necessary for Panel and must be completed when Panel date is confirmed are

- Children and Family Assessment
- Chronology
- Case Summary
- Genogram

5.4 The Business Support Officer will circulate the documents to Panel member by the way of email.

5.5 The notes of the decisions made will be recorded on the Legal Gateway Panel form.

5.6 A set of minutes of the meeting are recorded.

5.7 The case will be presented by the Social Worker and/or Team Manager.

6. Frequency of Legal Gateway Panel

6.1 Panel will occur weekly on a Thursday morning, starting at 09:30 – 12:30

6.2 At each Panel the LGP tracker is scrutinised regarding the timeliness of cases within PLO and issuing of care proceedings.

7. Membership

Panel membership will comprise:

- Senior Head of Service (co-chair)
- Head of Service – Safeguarding Service (co-chair)
- Principal Social Worker
- A Social Care Solicitor (on rotation)
- Team Manager – Adoption Team
- Team Manager – Family and Friends Team
- The Team Manager/allocated Social Worker for presenting case
- Any other HOS

8. Legal Business & Finance Meeting

8.1 This meeting will take place on a quarterly basis to review the impact of Legal Gateway Panel, consider any financial implications of Panel's decisions and receive updates regarding any issues from the local Courts/Judiciary.

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