

## LEGAL GATEWAY PANEL TERMS OF REFERENCE

### 1. Introduction

The Legal Gateway Panel is held on a weekly basis within Children's Social Care. It is the decision-making forum for pre-proceedings, care proceedings, to agree and review the status of cases where a child has been accommodated in an emergency or under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 and to consider any other court requests in Private Proceedings. This term of reference is effective from September 2024.

### 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 and care proceedings and the accommodation of children is considered or requested.

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

### 3. Criteria of the Legal Gateway Panel

- a) Request to initiate pre-proceedings (Public Law Outline)
- b) Request to initiate care proceedings
- c) Request to accommodate under section 20
- d) Review emergency admission to care retrospectively
- e) Review PLO cases at 16 weeks including if the LA should step down, step up or extend timescales
- f) Review of Section 20 is required
- h) Review recommendations within a Section 37 Report before filing

Where urgent legal decisions are required for children, this should first be discussed with the relevant 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 early 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 and funded.

4.4 Consider if a referral to FDAC (family Drug & Alcohol Court) is required.

## **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 that Panel.

5.2 The Social Worker will prepopulate the 'Legal Planning Meeting' form on Liquid Logic and reassign to the Legal Planning work tray by 12pm 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 if within 6 months of completion
- Chronology that is fully updated
- Case Summary that is fully updated
- Genogram
- Assessments completed through pre-proceedings (as appropriate)
- Letter for action for pre-proceedings

5.4 The Business Support Officer will circulate the documents to Panel member via 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 and stored.

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 the end of each Panel the LGP tracker is scrutinised regarding the timeliness of PLO being initiated, of cases within PLO and issuing of care proceedings. The agenda for the next LGP will be planned.

## **7. Membership**

Panel membership will comprise:

- Senior Head of Service
- Head of Service - Safeguarding Service
- Head of Service or Team Manager from IRO / CP Chairs Team
- A Social Care Solicitor
- Team Manager - Adoption Team
- Team Manager – Family and Friends Team
- The Team Manager / allocated Social Worker for presenting case
- Any other Senior Manager as required

## **8. Panel Administration and Information Governance**

8.1 A dashboard report is available which allows for cases that have attended Legal Gateway Panel to be tracked in regard to actions being completed within timescale.

Reviewed August 2024

