



Cheshire East

TOGETHER for Children and Young People

Together we will make Cheshire East a great place to be young

Permanency Planning Policy and Procedures

Children's Social Care

May 2023



Policy and Procedure Information Sheet

Service Area	Childrens Social Care
Date effective from	May 2023
Responsible Officer	Head of Service CIN/CP and Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers
Date for Review	May 2025
Status <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory (all staff name must adhere to guidance) • Optional (Procedures and practice can vary between teams) 	Mandatory
Target Audience	All practitioners and managers in Childrens Social Care
Related Document(s)	Cared for Children and Care Leavers Strategy 2022 – 2026 Local Offer for Care Leavers Children and Young People’s Plan 2022 – 2026 Care planning policies and procedures
Superseded Documents	Permanency Planning 2021 Early Planning and Permanency 2018
Equality Impact Assessment	Checklist completed – see over
Date of Approval	June 2023

Type of Document	Policy	x	Standard Operating Procedure	x	Guideline	x
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Document control

Version no	Type of change	Date	Description of change

If you have any comments or views on this document, please contact us at childrensdevelopmentandpartnerships@cheshireeast.gov.uk

Equality Impact Assessment

Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) must be completed whenever you plan, change, or remove a service, policy or function. They should be an **integral** part of continuous service planning and policy development. For further details and guidance on completing EIAs please see [here](#).

EIA Checklist

Equality Impact Assessment			
1	Does the policy/guidance affect one group less or more favourably than another on the basis of:	Yes/ No	Comments
	Race	x	
	Ethnic origins (including gypsies and travellers)	x	
	Nationality	x	
	Gender	x	
	Culture	x	
	Religion or belief	x	
	Sexual orientation including lesbian, gay and bisexual people	x	
	Age	x	
	Disability-learning disabilities, physical disability, sensory impairment and mental health problems	x	
2	Is there any evidence that some groups are affected differently?	x	
	If you have identified potential discrimination, are any exceptions valid, legal and/or justifiable?	x	
3	Is the impact of the policy/guidance likely to be negative?	x	
a	If yes can the impact be avoided?	n/a	
b	What alternatives are there to achieving the policy / guidance without the impact?	n/a	
c	Can we reduce the impact by taking different action	No	
4	Evidence considered – What data or other information have you used to evaluate if this policy is likely to have a positive or an adverse impact upon protected groups when implemented?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Audit activity including feedback from children and families - Discussion with frontline practitioners
5	Initial consultation – Have you consulted staff representatives and/or external representatives including those from protected groups? What were their views?	Yes	Discussions with frontline staff
6	Promoting equality - Does this policy have a positive impact on equality? What evidence is there to support this? Could it do more?	Yes	This ensures that there is consistency in practice.

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Signs of Safety

In Cheshire East, we use Signs of Safety as our way of working with families. This model of practice is based on therapeutic thinking that encourages working with children, young people and families to build on their strengths, empowering them to better manage the risks and challenges they may face now and in the future. The Signs of Safety approach underpins this policy and how we work in Cheshire East.

Executive Summary

Permanency planning is relevant to all children who could be on a path towards becoming cared for and all cared for children. The aim is:

- to provide more focus and drive for permanency planning throughout the services during supervision, multi-agency planning meetings, case recording, and audit activity to reduce delay and enable permanency to be achieved for more children
- for the social worker to have a clear understanding of the requirements for concurrent planning and the related activities required of them and others in the system
- to make the permanency planning activity very visible on the child's file
- to enhance the coordinated work required to progress these plans, across different parts of the service – such as, the social work team and their manager, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), fostering supervising social workers, placements, and Adoption Counts
- to provide a central tracking system to be used by managers in conjunction with supervision to progress plans in a timely way

1. Purpose, Scope, Aims and Vision

- 1.1. To promote good practice in ensuring that all children and young people have a safe, secure and loving family to grow up with, and to belong to, throughout their adult lives.
- 1.2. This policy explores the different routes to permanence and sets out how Cheshire East and its partner agencies work together to achieve permanence for all children and young people without delay.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. Permanency for all our children and young people is what we aspire to. This needs to be worked towards continuously until it is achieved. It is therefore relevant to all stages of the child's journey in social care. Permanency includes being safe to live at home without ongoing social work intervention. Decisions made in the short term will impact on how quickly children and young people can progress to a permanency plan.

3. Permanency Options for Cared for Children

3.1. Permanency options for cared for children are options which mean the child or young person has a safe permanent family, where they belong and who will nurture them throughout their life. Therefore, they will not need to be cared for by the local authority for the remainder of their childhood.

3.2. This includes:

- Returning home safely to the care of the parent/s who were caring for them when they were previously at risk of or suffering significant harm with no Care Order in place
- Going to live with the other parent who lives separately with no Care Order in place
- They have Special Guardians, adopters, or other people who have Parental Responsibility for them:
 - these might be family or friends who apply to be their Special Guardians or adopters or who have a Child Arrangement Order (or an old Residence Order)
 - in-house or independent foster carers who have cared for them for some time and who apply to be their Special Guardians or adopters
 - prospective adopters including Fostering to Adopt (these families are sourced by the Regional Adoption Agency, Adoption Counts)

4. Early Permanence

4.1. This is the term we use when a baby or young child is placed with an approved Prospective Adopter under the fostering regulations, and it is hoped that this placement will be able to support the child through their assessments and later become their family if adoption is approved by the courts.

4.2. Fostering to adopt placements will be sought whenever a baby or young child is considered likely to require adoptive parents. This placement may begin when the child is born, or subsequently during care proceedings, at a point where the child is moving from their parent or family network to recruited foster care or from one foster carer to another.

4.3. This early permanence enables much earlier bonding for adoptive parents with their children and saves the child from repeated losses of primary carer.

4.4. Cheshire East are working closely with our Regional Adoption Agency – Adoption Counts – who recruit our adopters for us to improve the availability of prospective adopters who have been prepared for fostering to adopt placements.

5. Ambitious for Adoption

- 5.1. Where a child or young person cannot live within their birth family, the permanency option which provides the most legal and emotional security is when they are adopted by another family. This provides them with a level of commitment from their new parents to love and nurture them as their own children throughout their lives.
- 5.2. Cheshire East has a good record of successful adoption for children once they are on an adoption plan.
- 5.3. It has been noted that children over three have been unlikely to be presented to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for consideration for adoption. This policy and its procedures will address this, ensuring that any child who might benefit from an adoptive family of their own will be presented to the ADM for consideration.
- 5.4. We have had a number of older children who have been successfully placed with adopters having become older than three during proceedings and whilst waiting for their adoptive family to be found, and we remain committed to securing permanence for our children who are waiting.
- 5.5. We regularly review our children and young people who have been with their current foster carers for a long time to see whether they would like to provide these children with greater legal and emotional security by applying for an Adoption or Special Guardianship Order for the children in their care.
- 5.6. Where this is wanted by the foster carers and the children, and the local authority believes it is in the children's best interests, any barriers will be explored to see if these can be resolved.

6. Long-term Permanent Cared For Options

- 6.1. Long-term permanent cared for options are where none of the permanent alternatives to care options above are possible for the child or young person at this time. The young person will continue to be cared for by the local authority until one of the permanency options above becomes available, or until they reach 18 years old.
- 6.2. Options include:
 - Long-term fostering:
 - these might be friends or family who are formally approved by the local authority as permanent foster carers for the specific child
 - in-house or independent foster carers who have been formally matched by the ADM as the best match to be their long-term foster care family
 - Specialist residential home or school to meet specific identified needs

- Semi-independent living /supported lodgings for young people moving towards independence

Note – optimism for the possibility that a permanent alternative to care can become possible for a child in long-term care before a child or young person becomes 18 is really important. For example, a short or long-term foster carer may apply to be their Special Guardian or Adopter in the future. The parents' circumstances might also change so that it becomes safe for them to live at home with one of them with the Care Order discharged or the S20 ended.

7. Short-term Cared For Placement Arrangements

7.1. Types of short-term cared for placement arrangements include:

- Regulation 24 emergency placement in the care of a relative or friend while the relative or friend(s) are assessed for suitability to become their approved short term foster carer under the fostering regulations
- Short term foster care:
 - a foster carer who is a relative or friend and has been registered by Cheshire East to foster the child
 - a foster carer registered with Cheshire East
 - a foster carer registered with an independent fostering agency
 - an approved prospective adopter, who is approved to be a short-term foster carer for a baby or child who is very likely to need adoptive parents
- Parental care with a court order which makes the child cared for by the LA:
 - child is placed with a parent under the placement of children with parents' regulations under either an Interim Care Order or Care Order
 - child is placed in the care of a parent by the family court under a Section 38(6) Order together with an Interim Care Order
- Short-term residential
- Short-term supported accommodation

8. Transition to Independence

8.1. Where a permanent alternative to care option has not been achieved for a young person by the age of 15 and a half, or if they become cared for after this age, then Cheshire East will carry out an assessment of the young person's needs and work with the young person to put a pathway plan in place for them.

8.2. The pathway plan will detail all of the arrangements for their continued care plan and will also identify how the young person would like to be supported in respect of gaining more independence. It will also detail how the young person would like

to be supported once they leave care, such as moving to independent living with support, or asking their foster carers to provide a 'Staying Put' arrangement for them after 18 years old.

- 8.3. For some young people, they will choose to have increased contact with their family members and may choose to live with a family member once they are 18 years old, or sooner if Cheshire East feel it is safe for them to do so.
- 8.4. As Corporate Parents we will ensure that there are sufficient and qualitative arrangements in place that support this journey and recognise the care that our children require at this important time. Cheshire East have produced a [local offer](#) with our care leavers which describes the ways in which we will support and care for our young people during this transition and beyond.
- 8.5. At any time after a young person reaches 16 years of age, we offer access to our Ignition Panel which is a panel consisting of different accommodation and support providers. This enables our cared for children and care leavers to own their pathway to adulthood and are made aware of the options available to them.
- 8.6. Our cared for children, whatever their experience of type of home, will begin to hear about and learn about transition from 14 years old. The structure that we use to embed this is through the undertaking of bronze, silver, gold and platinum transition packs, which empower the children and young people to track their own development and also inform us as a service of how we may need to support them in the future.

9. Direct work / communications with the child or young person

- 9.1. We work directly with children and young people to build positive relationships. The time spent with children and young people will include time to explore their views in respect of their current and past experiences and aspirations for their future. Proposed plans and the assessments taking place will be fully explained to them.
- 9.2. They will be offered support to assist them in healing from adverse experiences so that they can form more rewarding relationships going forward.
- 9.3. The child or young person's voice will help inform and steer decision making in respect of their permanency plan as each avenue is explored.
- 9.4. Since direct communications with the child or young person can be recorded in a lot of different places and ways on the child's file, it can be very difficult to find these and see who is listening to the child. A consistent heading is therefore to be used in all recordings to record direct communications with the child or young person – this will enable the option of searching case work records to see all direct communication the child has had with social care staff. Direct communication includes in person, online, telephone and text.

10. Family Time (Contact)

- 10.1. We recognise the importance of understanding the relationship between children and young people with each parent, their paternal and maternal extended family members, and their significant adults and friends. We will ensure that time with them is emotionally, physically and sexually safe, promotes their social and emotional development, and improves their self-esteem and sense of identity. As far as is in the child's interests to do so, we will promote continued relationships, which are positive for them.
- 10.2. This will be arranged at a frequency which supports the child or young person to maximum benefit within their stage in permanency planning. For example, an increase in frequency of contact with a parent or family member will benefit them prior to going to live with them.
- 10.3. Where a child cannot live with either of their parents, their contact with each of them will be balanced with the child or young person's need for the emotional space and time to bond with their new permanent family members, new extended family and making new friendships.

11. Procedures for Permanency Planning

11.1. Purpose of these Procedures

- Permanency planning is relevant to all children who could be on a path towards becoming cared for and for all cared for children. The aim is to:
 - provide more focus and drive for permanency planning during supervision
 - for the social worker to have a clear understanding of the requirements for concurrent planning and the related activities required of them and others in the system
 - to make the permanency planning activity very visible on the child's file
 - to enhance the coordinated work required to progress these plans
 - to provide a central tracking system to be used by managers in conjunction with supervision to progress plans in a timely way

11.2. Practice

- Where birth parents are struggling to provide adequate and safe care, every effort will be made to support one or both birth parents to improve their capacity to provide this for their children and young people.
- Children's social care will also engage any safe extended family members in a Family Network Meeting to encourage them to offer support to the parent(s) in the care of their children both now and in the long-term
- Safe family members and other significant adults in the child or young person's network, will be encouraged to offer the child or young person

ongoing support which might be both practical and/or emotional as part of their permanency plan at home.

- The support from children's services will be offered through a co-ordinated multi-agency support plan; this will be either an Early Help, Child in Need, Child Protection, Cared For or Pathway Plan, depending on the threshold of need.
- Every effort is made to help young people and their family members resolve relationship issues which might lead to them becoming cared for and for young people who have become cared for. We aim to help to make it possible for them to return home safely as soon as possible after a crisis. This is in line with research which says that the sooner they return home once the crisis has passed, the more likely it is to be successful.
- The @CT team is set up specifically to provide extra input with these young people and their families as part of their multi-agency plan.
- When neither parent is able to provide adequate care and safety for one or more of their children in the long term, we will do everything possible to secure an alternative safe, secure and loving permanent family home for these children and young people.
- We work closely with the parents, paternal and maternal extended families and any other safe significant adults (legally known as connected people) to explore whether any of them might be able to raise the child as their own. This may include holding additional Family Network Meetings.
- More than one connected person may offer to care for the child. During the viability assessments we will consider their suitability for short term care and whether or not they have the potential to care for the child permanently. This is to prevent children and young people having to cope with unnecessary moves between connected people.
- Where none of a child's connected person/s or parent/s can provide a safe, nurturing and life-long family home, we will do everything possible to provide this through recruited families.

11.3. System – robust systems and expectations for permanency planning

- We ensure that permanency planning is central to planning for children at risk of becoming cared for and for those who are already cared for. We do this by having clear procedural expectations about practice and recording on file.
- To reduce delay in achieving permanence for children, concurrent avenues of assessment will take place simultaneously.
- The Permanency Planning Progress form (PPP Form) is to standardise the recording of progress with permanency assessments and plans. Cared for children and young people's permanency planning progress will be tracked by managers through this form on individual children's records.

- A business intelligence report has been written and is available on the reporting suite to enable overall case planning tracking for cared for children. This report is used regularly in supervision sessions and also to identify individual children and cohorts of children who require a targeted piece of work to progress their plans more effectively.
- The Cared For Action Planning Tracker is complimented by the Legal Tracker which tracks children prior to their becoming cared for through Legal Advice Meetings (LAM) and Public Law Outline (PLO) and continues during Care Proceedings.

11.4. Individual permanency planning

- Discussions and permanency decision making takes place at a number of key meetings which already exist i.e., Supervisions, Case Conferences, Legal Advice Meetings, Family Network Meetings, Care Planning Meetings, Pre-filing Meetings, Statutory Cared For Children's Reviews.
- This procedure is intended to standardise the recording of key information on the child's file about the progress of the permanency options being assessed and the outcome of these as the child's journey evolves. This will be done through the Permanency Planning Progress Form and will be tracked via a central case tracking system.

11.5. The Permanency Planning Progress (Recording) Form (PPP Form)

- The form provides the opportunity to record all avenues being assessed for permanence and their outcomes. It is available for use on the children's record system. The form is designed to have a high degree of reportability from the system to inform the central tracker.
- A form will be started on all children's records from the first LAM and will be updated at subsequent LAMs, Care Planning meetings and when Pre-filing meetings take place.
- It will be particularly important for it to provide focus for concurrent planning prior to the child becoming cared for and leading up to the first and second reviews after a child or young person becomes cared for. It is also essential to continue the vigilance around progressing permanency planning both during proceedings and after they have ended until permanency is achieved.
- The form must be referenced in LAM recording and in the child's Care Plan to ensure that all key information is available to any reader of the file. The form will remain open and continue to be updated until we achieve permanence for the child or young person.

11.6. The Cared For Children Action Planning Tracking System

- A management information report is now available on the Power BI reporting suite which is available to all members of children's social care

who have access to the cared for children reports. The tracker is called the CfC Action Planning Tracker.

- The tracker report currently includes a range of information extracted from the children's database to help provide a case overview and promote case discussion and permanency planning decisions. This includes key written information from the Care Plan, last case consultation/supervision, and last managers decision.
- The report suite enables the report to be run for all the cared for children, the caseload of one or more teams, or for an individual worker's caseload. Managers will run the tracker report to gain an overview of progress in respect of children and young people's plans and to help monitor progress. They will also have this report to use during supervisions where progress discussions on permanency plans takes place.
- Managers should check the following while reviewing their cases:
 - Have all the assessments of each parent and connected persons been completed?
 - Is the child or young person already living with the people who are assessed as being their long-term parent or carer?
 - If so what, if anything, needs to happen to secure them legally?
 - If not, then what needs to happen before they can live with their permanent parent or carer?
 - Is the child being seen regularly (and whether seen alone)?
 - Are all the entries showing a consistent and accurate picture of the child's current circumstances?

Note: managers will still need to ensure that they and the allocated social worker are fully aware of the child's full history from reading the file in detail on allocation. This is because the tracker is live and therefore looks at the present position only.