

# Permanence Planning Strategy 2024-2027



## Version Control

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## About this document

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| <b>Title</b>                | Permanency Planning Strategy 2024-27     |
| <b>Purpose</b>              | To set out strategic aims for Permanency |
| <b>Updated by</b>           | Katherine Peddie / Paul Coke             |
| <b>Approved by</b>          | CSMT                                     |
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### Intended Audience

This document has been issued to the following people for Review (R) Information (I) and Review and Sign off (S). The Practice Standards are mandatory and must be shared with all managers, and practitioners in Children's Social Care

| <b>Name</b>                  | <b>Position</b>  | <b>S/R/I</b> |
|------------------------------|--|--------------|
| CSC                          | All staff supervisors, managers and senior managers, IROs, CP Chairs, ADs, Directors in CSC<br>Practice Development Leads<br>Principal Social Worker<br>Practice Evaluation/Audit officers | I            |
| Performance                  |  | I            |
| MOSAIC Team                  |  | I            |
| Children's Brokerage Service |  |              |

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## 1. Introduction

Our Permanency Strategy sets out our direction for developing a consistent approach for children to achieve safe, stable, and permanent homes where they come into contact with our social workers or come into care.

We undertake Permanence Planning, so that children who we support can thrive. We do this through sustainable placements, that promote all aspects of the child or young person's developmental needs.

Permanence is the long-term plan for the child's upbringing and provides an underpinning framework for all our social work. This Strategy focuses on supporting children and their families, from family support through to adoption. It aims to ensure a consistent approach to give a child a sense of security and stability.

## 2. Our objectives for Permanence Planning

Our core objective of permanence planning is to ensure that children have a stable and loving environment. In Lambeth this means, a home which will support them through childhood and beyond. We want to give all children who come into our care a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging.

In Lambeth, we want all children to be in a family environment wherever possible. We aim to identify a plan of permanency as early as possible. We are committed to ensuring in the majority of cases we will have done this by the time of a child's second review. In Lambeth, we believe all children should be living in a permanent care arrangement within a maximum of 14 months of the need being identified.

Where families and children are unable to live together, our planning arrangements will identify permanent alternative settings. Wherever possible, care should be provided in Lambeth. This will be through the range of provisions identified in other core strategies, that sit alongside this document. These include our overarching Sufficiency Strategy and our Foster Care Recruitment Strategy. This work also relates to our connecting Strategies for Housing and Adoption recruitment with the local Regional Adoption Agency (RAA).

Contact with a child's family, connected person and extended family should be facilitated and built on as the basis of our work (unless clearly identified as inappropriate). Our social workers will work in partnership with parents, families and other professionals, in supporting developing a plan of permanence for a child. We also will take the wishes and feelings of the child into account where possible, in defining a plan of permanence for a child.

We will consider all our children's backgrounds and support a child's links with their cultural, and religious heritage where possible in defining a plan of permanency. We will use this information to help secure the right forever home for each child.

## 3. Permanency Planning Meetings and Oversight

Permanency Planning Meetings (PPM) are a process that take place in Lambeth, to allow professionals to develop appropriate plans for our young people. These meetings take a holistic view to ensure the child's views, identity and needs are central to the development of their permanence plans.

These meetings are a multidisciplinary partnership, who consider several key areas. These can include considering the sibling groups a child may have, alongside their specific health needs. The partnership also considers a young person's emotional and psychological needs and their

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needs for attachment. Professionals also consider each young person's identity, alongside their care plan and the time spent by young people in their residual familial conditions and placements.

The record of the meeting and all agreed decisions are shared and placed on the child's record, with an agreed plan of permanency. Permanence planning meetings (PPMs) will be chaired by the Early Permanency Team managed by the Agency Adviser from 1 October 2024. This approach ensures all young people's plans of permanency are reviewed in a timely manner.

Managers will use the Permanence Power BI dashboard to inform their reviews of the arrangements of all children, to ensure they obtain an appropriate plan of permanency within the expected timeframes. A monthly permanence board is chaired by the Corporate Director of Children, Families and Education, to oversee permanency in its entirety and to minimise drift and delay.

## 4. Securing Permanence for Children and Young People

Finding a plan of permanence for a young person can take differing routes. In Lambeth, we are focused on ensuring that all our children and young people are safe. We also prioritise secure and stable placements for all our children, based on their individual needs.

The aim is to support children and young people by minimising the number of moves they experience before they achieve their permanent home. We aim for young children in Lambeth to experience early permanence, through Concurrent Planning Placements and Foster for Adoption placements where possible.

### Parallel Planning

All efforts should be made to safely keep or return a child to their parent or carer. However, where this may not be possible, alternative plans will be made in parallel to support them to live with their birth family.

Parallel planning is essential, especially when assessments of parents are being completed and the outcome is not known. The child must not experience drift in achieving permanence. Where a child is unable to be cared for by their guardian or parent, other family and friends, adoption or permanent fostering should be considered.

Family network meetings and Family Group Conferences should be held as early as possible, to agree what needs to happen to help the child to return home and within what timescales. Schools and community professionals and those who know the family well will be consulted to identify alternative family members, where the parents are not open to the involvement of their extended family network.

### Concurrent Planning Placements

Concurrent Planning is where a child moves from their birth parent(s) to their prospective permanent family while reunification is still being pursued. These arrangements can be made for a child of any age.

### Fostering to Adoption

Foster-to-adopt describes assessed and approved prospective adopters who are also approved as foster carers so they can care immediately for children they would like to adopt. This would be before the Agency Decision Maker and Courts have formally decided a child can be placed for adoption.

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## 5. Options for Permanence for children in Lambeth

### Family Support and Supporting a child to return home

The first stage within our permanence planning, is to support families and help them stay together with targeted support and appropriate interventions.

Staying at home offers the best chance of stability for a child. Research shows that family preservation has a higher success rate than reunification. As part of our practice model for social work, we will balance the opportunity to preserve families whilst always prioritising the minimising of risk of harm to a child.

### Placement with Family or Friends/Connected Persons

If the assessment concludes that the child cannot safely remain at home, we will support planning to secure a placement with a family member/ friend or Connected Person as their carer. This will may be as part of the plan to work towards a return to the child's home. Where a return home is clearly not in the child's best interests, we will quickly establish an alternative permanence option.

We will establish at an early stage, which relatives or friends might be available to care for a child. We will explore in all cases parallel plans, to avoid the kind of delays that can happen during court proceedings where this work has not been done. Where placement is proposed with family, friends or connected carers joint viability assessments will be undertaken in line with Reg 24.

### Special Guardianship Orders (SGO)

A Special Guardianship Order (often known as an SGO) is a legal order, where the court appoints a carer usually a relative as the 'Special Guardian' of a child until they turn 18. The Special Guardian then shares parental responsibility for the child with the parents. SGOs can be granted as an outcome of court proceedings initiated by Lambeth Social Care, or through private applications that are made that are in the child's best interests.

SGOs are also an option for foster carers who have children settled in their care and who can meet their needs without state intervention. In Lambeth, we support the use of Special Guardianship Orders where it is in the young person's best interests.

### Adoption

Lambeth is part of the South London Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). They help young people who have a plan of permanence of adoption, find forever homes. Adoption is a way of providing the security, permanency, and love of a new family when it is not possible for a child to be raised by their birth parents or within the birth family.

Adoption is a legal process which transfers parental responsibility from the child's birth parents to their adoptive parents.

Lambeth joined the local RAA in September 2019. Children's Social Care have been working to support the development and embedding of new practices, to improve outcomes for young people where it is in their best interest to be adopted.

### Foster Care Placements / Long Term Fostering

Foster care means that a child or young person lives with a committed foster carer for a set period or until they reach adulthood. Being brought up by a carer, provides many young people a greater sense of belonging within a family. If a child does need to move to other carers, their family network will always be considered to see if it is safe and appropriate to achieve permanence with them.

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We continue to recruit foster carers for Lambeth, this is a clear element of the Sufficiency Strategy.

### Staying Put Arrangements

Staying Put arrangements are placements with foster carers for our young people who are approaching 18 years old. Changes to the Leaving Care Act have enabled young people to stay in these types of placement until they are 25 years of age.

### Residential Placement

In Lambeth, we do not promote residential homes as a plan of permanence in the longer term for any of our young people. Where these plans indicate that this is the best option for a young person, we will actively review their plan, and seek to step them down into one of the other forms of permanence as a priority.

## 6. Supporting children through Life Story Work

Life Story Work is the story of the child's journey through care, which includes the child's experience within their birth family. Life Story work is critical to all young people who come into care to help them understand their past and who they are.

In Lambeth, we undertake Life Story Work for all young people who have a permanence plan.

Life Story work includes pictures, stories, notes, and other forms of information about our children. These memories can resemble books, or other documents that help a child understand how and why they came into care.

The work includes information from a young person, their birth parents and extended family where appropriate. It should include information collated by parents (where possible), carers, social workers and other key people.

Life Story Work should start from the beginning of our interventions with the child and be updated alongside as they grow up. This helps a child process and form an accurate narrative of their life journey to when they leave care through adoption or through other plans of permanency.

Life story work will be recorded sensitively on the child's file using language which empathises with children's birth families and recognises the impact trauma can have on the challenges and decisions adults might face. In exceptional circumstances, where it is not appropriate to include the child there must be a plan for sharing the child's life story with them at a future stage.

In Lambeth, we aim to ensure that we provide a young person with their life story work and any later life letters (where a child has been adopted) within statutory timeframes.

## 7. Conclusions and next steps for our Strategy

In Lambeth we are ambitious for all our children. We aim to ensure that we continue to ensure that we provide plans of permanence for all children consistently. We will also consider each young person's circumstances and journey through care, where we make decisions on their future.

All young people will benefit from the systems and processes that have been rolled out, to ensure that children do not experience unnecessary drift and delay in achieving a plan of permanence. We will continue to explore concurrent opportunities for each young person and will work across

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professional partnerships to capture all relevant information that may affect finding a young person's most appropriate forever home.

We will continue to review cases regularly and prioritise family environment for young people using a variety of services and placement options. We will in addition undertake Life Story work that captures a young person's journey through care to help them understand their past to allow them to move forward positively as they leave care.

We will continue to monitor the approaches and outcomes set out in this Strategy. This will be regularly reviewed by the Permanence Board and appropriate changes or updates will be added as they are deemed necessary.