

Children's Social Care Early Permanence Planning Strategy



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Legal Framework

Refer to the Children Act 1989

**Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Review
2015**

1. Permanence Policy Statement

Together for Children defines “Permanency” as a framework of emotional, physical and legal conditions that give a child/young person a sense of commitment, security, and continuity of care throughout their childhood and beyond.

Permanence planning is based on the philosophy that every child has the right to a permanent, safe, stable and loving home, preferably with his or her own family.

Permanence does not necessarily mean a placement outside of the family and Together for Children are committed to ensuring that all family options have been fully explored before considering a placement outside of the immediate or extended family or network.

The question "**How is the child’s need for permanence being met?**" is at the core of all social work practice with families. This will ensure the child’s need for a loving, safe, stable home is always at the centre of all practitioners thinking and intervention.

The primary focus of permanency planning is to prevent children drifting within looked after arrangements-and provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children, young people and their families.

As corporate parents for children and young people who are looked after, Together for Children, will work to find permanent, safe homes for children in care that meet their specific needs, in a timely manner. The best possible care involves giving children security, stability and love through their childhood and beyond to ensure the best outcomes as they become adults.

2. Definition

Permanence is the long-term plan for the child’s upbringing and provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and their families from family support through to adoption. It ensures a framework of emotional, physical and legal conditions that gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging.

3. Principles

There are several principles that underpin permanency for a child or young person. The objective of planning for permanence is to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging. It is also important to remember that older children and young people also need to achieve permanence in their lives although they may not wish (for a variety of reasons) to be

in a foster home or to be adopted. For example, they may prefer to live in a children's home where they can also achieve a sense of security and belonging. Residential Care is a positive option for some young people and should not be viewed as a "last resort".

Together for Children will always provide high quality support and intervention to children and families to enable children to remain living with their family where it is safe to do so.

Where this is not possible for the child to remain with their birth parents, the following factors will be considered when planning for the child:

- **Family solutions:** If it is not possible for the child to be cared for by her/his birth parents then options within the extended network of family and friends will be considered as a priority. All families will be given the option of a Family Network and/or Family Group Conference
- **Security:** A feeling of security and being loved as a member of a permanent family or care setting
- **Stability:** The child expects the placement to continue and be stable
- **Voice:** The child's wishes and feelings along with her/his age and understanding must be considered in planning for permanence
- **Identity:** Where possible, be consistent with or fully able to support her/his ethnicity, language, religion and culture
- **Life story:** The child accepts her/his birth family and history and her/his parents are encouraged and supported to provide information about themselves and about the child's birth and early life
- **Family and friends:** The child is a member of an 'extended family' and part of a wider long term network of family and friends. The carers should nurture and promote the child's ability to build long term friendships and relationships with their peers and other adults;
- **Family Time:** The child has positive on-going contact with parent(s), family and friends where appropriate. The purpose of the contact should be clearly defined in the child's plan and meet the child's needs;
- **Siblings:** children will be placed together whenever possible unless the individual assessed needs of children indicate that children's needs will be better met placed separately;
- **Learning:** Stability in educational provision and training; and carers have high aspirations for what they wish the child to achieve;
- **Self-confidence:** Positive engagement in sports, hobbies and interests in order to promote their resilience and build self-confidence;

- **Independence:** The child is assisted and supported into independence when s/he chooses, and this is safe and appropriate;
- **Staying Put:** the child feels a sense of belonging to their carer's as (s)he moves into adolescence and adulthood; belonging does not end at the age of 18 years;
- **Timeliness:** Decision-making must be within the child's time scales to prevent drift and delay;
- **Twin track or parallel planning:** including Fostering to Adopt, may provide a means to securing permanence at an early stage for some children;
- **Early planning:** A child's permanence plan should be established at the four-month review and recorded in the LAR Decisions;
- **Review:** where a child remains looked after in care then care planning should be subject to continuous assessment and review with effective management oversight.

4. Delivering Permanence

The ability to secure permanence for any child will require robust planning and monitoring to ensure assessments are completed at the earliest opportunity to inform the final care plan. Assessments will commence pre-birth in line with the pre-birth procedure. The flow chart in Appendix 1 sets out how this is to be achieved.

The service will strive to deliver the commitments outlined in this policy by providing the following:

- High quality and timely assessments of a child's needs;
- Any assessment of the child/young person's experience will always refer to the factors outlined in the principles as outlined above. This will help to ensure appropriate planning and the focus of practice to best help the child/young person achieve as strong a sense of permanence as possible;
- Clear plans; with identifiable outcomes, service provision and actions to meet those needs;
- Multi-agency commitment and effective joint working processes to ensure that the services necessary to support children in permanent family placements and /or prevent their breakdown are prioritised and delivered;
- Where there are concerns that a child may not be able to remain with their birth parents without statutory intervention a family group conference will be held at the earliest opportunity to fully explore the options for the child to remain safely within the extended family and friends' network;
- Robust case reviewing arrangements for the early identification of the need for permanent arrangements and to prevent drift;

- The opportunity for the voice of the child to be heard and evidenced in the plan and to include their views and feelings; depending on the age of the child they will be given some choice re placement options as far as is possible particularly to ensure they can maintain school placements and their friendships.
- Effective communication pathways to ensure that family, carers and other individuals that the child considers to be an important part of their life can express their needs and feelings and are aware of the plans for the child and their role in these plans where appropriate;
- Policies and services that support all children placed within the range of permanence options;
- A Permanence Planning Meeting (See Appendix 2) will consider all plans for permanence prior to the four-month review to detail the final care plan. This meeting will be chaired by a Service Manager and attended by relevant staff. It will consider all assessments required to agree the formulation of the permanence care plan. This is particularly important where there are complex issues e.g. a sibling group and/or where children and young people have complex and challenging needs.

5. Permanence Planning must include the following:

- A timetable for introducing the child to the placement that ensures that both child and carers have a mutual understanding and commitment to the move;
- If the plan is for a residential placement, the desired aims, objectives and outcomes of the placements must be clarified;
- Plans for Life Story Work and more specific therapeutic work to take place during the planning for the placement before and after the child has moved into placement and throughout the child's childhood if they remain in a permanent or long term placement whether this is residential or a family placement; Life Story work is not a one off event and must be undertaken when it is an appropriate time for the child and information collated by social workers from the commencement of any alternative arrangement
- Arrangements for Family Time, if appropriate, that are based on the needs of the child and with the priority of achieving stability and permanence in their lives.

6. Permanence Options

There are various options to consider in care planning for permanence for a cared for child or young person as follows;

- 6.1 Reunification/Staying at Home
- 6.2 Placements with Family and Friends Carers
- 6.3 Early Permanence Placements / Fostering for Adoption
- 6.4 Special Guardianship (SGO)
- 6.5 Child Arrangements Orders (CAO)
- 6.6 Permanence in Foster Care & in Long Term Foster Care
- 6.7 Long Term Residential Care
- 6.8 Adoption

The permanence options are provided on the Permanence Options Table. (See Appendix 3.)

The following provides a summary of each permanence option and information about the relevant support, financial support and available legal orders regarding each option.

6.1 Reunification/Staying at Home: The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning and Placement & Care Review (2015)

- a. Staying at home offers the best chance of stability for children and efforts in working with the parent(s) and family about care arrangements for the child is the first line of approach if there is no risk of significant harm to the child(ren);
- b. Where a child(ren) cannot remain safely at home and intervention is necessary which means that the child(ren) is received into care then the focus of family work should be on reunification where this is safe to do so;
- c. Any plan to rehabilitate the child to the birth parents or other family members will be pursued with some urgency to minimise the length of the separation of child and parents / carers but only where it is safe to do so. For reunification to be successful several factors are relevant to achieve a safe and appropriate return of children home
 - Thorough multi-agency assessments;

- Good support identified from extended network of family and/or friends including the use of a Family Network Meeting or Group Conference; see **FGC**
 - Clear written expectations have been set for the parent(s) to meet before the child could return home and within what timescales;
 - The views of the child/young person are central and social workers must ensure they are involved and spoken to throughout any period of change
 - Problems which led to the admission to care have been addressed;
 - Return to other parent or parent has a new partner who makes a difference;
 - Appropriate support/safety plan is in place and any specialist support has been provided and parents engage with this;
 - There is good preparation of parent(s) and child(ren), including life story work;
 - Good monitoring of the child(ren) before and after return.
 - Appropriate Senior Manager approval to any reunification or placement with parents and family or friends
- d. If a child is subject to care proceedings and the assessment work indicates that reunification should be attempted, then:
- Wherever possible, time within the care proceedings should be used for this;
 - Placement with Parent Regulations (see **Placement with Parent Policy**) should be used to support placement at home with parent(s) if the child is subject to interim or final Care Orders. Senior Management approval is required.
 - If, at the final hearing in the care proceedings, it is proposed that the plan for permanency should be for the child(ren) to live with a parent or parents then proportionate use of the court orders available should be used, including use of a Supervision Order or no order where safe and appropriate to do so;
 - Arrangements are in place to provide multi-agency support to the parent(s) and child(ren) through a clear and appropriate support plan;
 - As part of a step-down approach the plan and support should be reviewed and chaired by the Team Manager for at least a 3-month period;
 - The CAFCASS officer and the Independent Reviewing Officer should be kept informed at all key points about planning for the child or any changes / significant events.
- e. It will be necessary to ensure that there is Twin Track or Parallel Planning alongside efforts in reunification so that alternatives for care, e.g. possible solutions provided through the Family Group Conference or alternative placement options are also considered and clear contingency plans are in place.

Support available to enable this permanence option:

- A clearly written support plan including support from within the family - this is multi-agency support identified through a Child in Need plan;
- Together for Children has the discretion to provide support on a one-off or regular basis under section 17 Children Act 1989 - Children in Need of support.

Available legal orders to support this permanence option:

- Supervision Order;
- Family Assistance Order
- Section 8 Order Children Act 1989.

6.2 Placements with Family and Friends Carers (see **Connected Carers Policy**)

When a child cannot safely return to their birth parents then every effort must be made to seek a placement with relatives or friends. It is very important to establish at the earliest possible stage of a child coming into care which relatives or friends might be available to care for the child to prevent delay. The use of genograms and ecomaps to assist the family identify possible carers must be used as part of any assessment.

A Family Network Meeting or Family Group Conference should always prior to a child entering care unless there is an immediate risk of harm to the child/young person.

Good quality assessments of family and friend's carers need to be completed to assess the quality of the care to be provided as this leads to better outcomes for children.

Placements need to be well supported as family and friend's carers may be older, have poorer health and must manage difficult relationships within the family because of caring for the child/young person.

Ideally placements within the extended family or with friends should be supported by a Child Arrangements Order or a Special Guardianship Order or through adoption rather than a Care Order.

A Supervision Order may assist family and friends carers in feeling supported during the first year of a placement in more complex circumstances, rather than the child remaining on a Care Order.

Support available to enable this permanence option:

- A clear support plan including support from within the extended family network;

A range of multi-agency support as outlined in the **Connected Carers Policy**

- Connected Carers Policy and Procedure;
- Together for Children has the discretion to provide support on a one-off or regular basis under section 17 Children Act 1989 - Children in Need of support.
- Special Guardianship Order payments
- Child Arrangement Order payments

Available legal orders to support this permanence option:

- Child Arrangements Order
- Special Guardianship Order
- Supervision Order
- Adoption Order

6.3 Early Permanence Placements / Fostering to Adoption

The Children and Families Act 2014 imposes a duty to consider placements with carers who are approved as both adopters and foster carers if the plan for a child is adoption- see Fostering to Adopt Procedure.

Fostering to Adopt placements enable the child to remain in one placement where they can develop strong attachments with primary carers whilst care proceedings are progressing. It is anticipated to reduce placement moves for the child in adoption processes.

Foster to Adopt carers will be specifically recruited assessed and approved for this role. They will require a level of resilience and will be supported throughout this process by the dedicated Fostering/Adoption Social Worker.

Social Workers have a duty to consider a Foster to Adopt placement where consideration is being made for an unborn child or infant to be separated from birth parents, where all assessments have ruled out a return to family members and where Together for Children believes there will be a high likelihood of a plan of adoption being the final determination.

However, it is not appropriate for all cases therefore discussion should take place at the Care and Legal Panel and legal advice sought. Birth parents must be informed and IRO and CAFCASS consulted.

6.4 Special Guardianship (SGO)

Special Guardianship provides an alternative legal status for children, and provides greater security than long term fostering, but without the absolute legal severance from the birth family that an Adoption Order provides. It is a legal route to permanence for children for whom adoption is not appropriate and in general are remaining within the extended family network of family and friends.

The Special Guardian will have parental responsibility for the child and may exercise this to the exclusion of all others with parental responsibility, apart from another Special Guardian. There are exceptions to the decisions a Special Guardian can make, for instance they cannot change the child's surname or take them out of the country without the permission of the court for more than 28 days or the agreement of all people with parental responsibility. The birth parents also retain the right to consent or not to adoption by the Special Guardian.

Special Guardians may be supported, including financially, by Together for Children and will have the right to request an assessment for support services. It is Together for Children's responsibility to assess this for 3 years following the making of the Order, if the child or young person lives outside of Sunderland because of the decisions made by the Court. After this time the Local Authority where the child or young person lives, should be approached for them to consider any support needed. The level and extent of support needed should be established by undertaking a formal assessment at the point of the completion of the court report -see **SGO Policy**

Support available to enable this permanence option:

- A clear multi-agency support plan
- See Special Guardianship Orders Procedure for the range of support available, including financial support

Available legal orders to support this permanence option:

- Special Guardianship Order
- Supervision Order may be made by the court if there are concerns regarding ongoing support and services. A robust and clear support plan for an SGO will negate the need for this
- Section 8 Orders

6.5 Child Arrangements Orders

Child Arrangements Orders were introduced in April 2014 by the Children and Families Act 2014. They replace Contact Orders and Residence Orders.

A Child Arrangements Order is a court order regulating arrangements relating to any of the following:

- a. With whom a child is to live, spend time or otherwise have contact; and
- b. When a child is to live, spend time or otherwise have contact with any person

The 'residence' aspects of a Child Arrangements Order can last until the child reaches 18 years unless discharged earlier by the Court or by the making of a Care Order.

The 'contact' aspects of a Child Arrangements Order cease to have effect when the child reaches 16 years, unless the court is satisfied that the circumstances of the case are exceptional.

A person named in the order as a person with whom the child is to live, will have Parental Responsibility for the child while the order remains in force.

Child Arrangements Orders are private law orders and cannot be made in favour of Together for Children or Local Authorities

Interim Child Arrangements Orders can be made where a child would otherwise have to be placed with strangers, a placement with family or friends/Connected Persons may be identified as a preferred option and the carers may be encouraged and supported to apply for a Child Arrangements Orders where this will be in the best interests of the child.

Whilst support may continue for as long as the Child Arrangements Order remains in force, the aim will be to decide which are self-sustaining in the long run.

The following can apply for a Child Arrangements Order without needing the leave of the court. In addition, any person who is not automatically entitled to apply for a Child Arrangements Order may seek leave of the court to do so:

- Any parent (whether or not they have Parental Responsibility for the child), guardian or special guardian of the child
- Any person named, in a Child Arrangements Order that is in force with respect to the child, as a person with whom the child is to live
- Any party to a marriage (whether or not subsisting) in relation to whom the child is a child of the family - this allows step-parents (including those in a civil partnership) and former step-parents who fulfil this criterion to apply as of right

- Any person with whom the child has lived for a period of at least three years - this period need not be continuous but must not have begun more than five years before, or ended more than three months before, the making of the application; or
- Any person:
 - Who has the consent of each of the persons is named in a Child Arrangements Order as a person with whom the child is to live;
 - In any case where there is an existing order for care in force, has the consent of each person in who's favour the order was made;
 - In any case where the child is in the care of a Local Authority, who has the consent of that Authority;
 - In whose favour a Child Arrangements Order has been made in relation to the 'contact' aspects and who has been awarded Parental Responsibility by the court (i.e. they would be able to apply for a Child Arrangements Order in relation to the 'residence' aspects);
 - In any other case, has the consent of everyone with parental responsibility for the child.
- A Together for Children foster parent is entitled to apply for a Child Arrangements Order relating to whom the child is to live, and/or when the child is to live with any person, if the child has lived with him/her for a period of at least one year immediately preceding the application;
- A relative of a child is entitled to apply for a Child Arrangements Order relating to whom the child is to live, and/or when the child is to live with any person, if the child has lived with the relative for a period of at least one year immediately preceding the application. (A relative is a child's grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (by full or half-blood), or by marriage or civil partnership).

A Child Arrangements Order specifying with whom the child is to live has the following advantages:

- a. It gives Parental Responsibility to the carer whilst maintaining the parents' Parental Responsibility
- b. The child will no longer be Looked After and there need be no social work involvement, therefore, unless this is identified as necessary
- c. There is no review process
- d. The child will not be Looked After and so less stigma is attached to the placement

A Child Arrangements Order has the following disadvantages:

- a. It is less secure than Adoption or Special Guardianship in that an application can be made to revoke the Order. However, the Court making the order can be asked to attach a condition refusing a parent's right to seek revocation without leave of the court
- b. There is no professional reviewing of the arrangements after the Order is made, unless a new application to court is made, for example by the parents for contact or revocation

6.6 Permanence in Foster Care & Long-Term Foster Care

For those children and young people who remain looked after an important route to permanence is long term foster care or permanent foster care. This will mainly be for children and young people under the age of 13 who require a family to claim them and bring them up as a member of their own family.

For older children, a long-term foster placement will be where a placement is deemed suitable to meet their needs until they reach 18 or beyond or until they may return to their birth family. This is particularly appropriate for those children who have strong links to their birth family and network and where “permanence” outside of the family is not required in the strongest sense.

Permanence and Long-Term foster care have the following advantages as a Permanence Plan:

- Together for Children retains a role in negotiating issues between the birth family and the child.
- The child / young person and the foster carers are provided with continued support in a family placement that is continually reviewed to ensure that the child's needs are met.
- It maintains legal links to the birth family who can still play a part in the child's life and any decision making around a child / young person's care.

Permanence in foster care has the following disadvantages of a Permanence Plan:

- The foster carers do not have Parental Responsibility for the child.
- Continued social work involvement
- Regular looked after reviews which may be intrusive to the placement in some instances.
- The child / young person remains a looked after child, which may be a stigma in some situations.
- The child / young person is not a legal member of the family. If difficulties arise there may be less willingness to persevere or resolve issues.

Support available to enable this permanence option:

- A clear plan of support should be outlined in the child / young person's care plan. This should be reviewed regularly at Looked after Reviews and Care Team Meetings

- The foster carer has an allocated supervising social worker from the Fostering Service and will have access to a range of training and support
- Weekly financial support to meet the costs of caring for the child / young person, including a Professional Fee in accordance with Fostering Skills level.
- For those children and young people placed with external Independent Foster Care Placements (IFA) the costs and support to the child / young person's placement are agreed between the external IFA and Together for Children

Available legal orders to support this permanence option:

- Care Order
- Section 20 with parental agreement to a Care Plan of Long-Term Foster Care

6.7 Long Term Residential Care

For some children and young people living with a foster family does not work and some children's needs cannot be effectively met within a family.

Their behaviour may be too challenging or complex and they may have experienced several family arrangements including foster placement breakdowns before they are placed within a residential setting.

The focus of residential provision should be to aim to return the child / young person to a family environment but if this is not likely to be successful residential care can be a positive and successful option for a small number of young people.

6.8 Adoption.

See **Adoption Policies and Procedure** for more detailed procedures.

In many cases where a child cannot safely be cared for by their birth parents the permanence plan is that of adoption. Together for Children is committed to adoption as a legal and emotional permanence option which can be considered for all children. Research strongly supports adoption as a primary consideration and as a main factor contributing to the stability of children and which promotes good outcomes.

Adoption transfers Parental Responsibility for the child from the birth parents and others who had Parental Responsibility, including Together for Children, permanently and solely to the adopter(s). The child is deemed to be the child of the adopter(s) as if he or she had been born to them and the child takes on the surname of the adoptive parent.

The child's birth certificate is changed following the making of an adoption order to an adoption certificate showing the adopter(s) to be the child's parent(s). A child who

is not already a citizen of the UK acquires British citizenship if adopted in the UK by a citizen of the UK.

This legal status applies into adulthood and is therefore a lifelong legal commitment, unlike any other legal permanence options.

Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and a comprehensive adoption support service will be provided in partnership with other agencies. Adopters may be supported, including financially, by Together for Children and will have the right to request an assessment for support services, up to 3 years after the Order is made. See Adoption Support Procedures for detailed procedures.

The expectation is that family time is maintained with siblings placed separately and some form of family time will be maintained with the birth family throughout the child's life depending on the circumstances. Research indicates that openness in adoption is key in adoptive placements and offers continuity when family time with the birth family is not possible.

Family finding should begin as soon as adoption is under consideration as part of twin tracking for a child, subject to the required legal permissions and following the making of a Placement Order. For children who may be more difficult to place the Adoption Service will commence looking at all available possibilities to reduce unnecessary delay for the child.

Support available to enable this permanence option:

- A clear adoption support plan
- See Adoption Support Procedure for the range of support available, including financial support

Available legal orders to support this permanence option:

- Care and Placement Order
- Adoption Order

7. Permanence Outcomes and Twin Track or Parallel Planning

The emphasis on early consideration of permanency plans and avoidance of drift has led to the development of twin track or parallel planning for children, where efforts are made to rehabilitate but the necessary information is gathered ready to put in place an alternative plan e.g. adoption, if this fails. Social Workers are expected to work to this model; working towards a child's return home where appropriate, whilst at the same time developing an alternative Permanence Plan, within strictly limited timescales.

Where children's cases are before the court in Care Proceedings, the Court require twin track or parallel planning to be reflected in the Care Plan.

See also Fostering to Adoption Procedure.

8. Good Practice Guidance

The following practice guidance is not exhaustive.

8.1 Supporting reunification with birth or extended family

- The importance of clearly communicating to the family what needs to happen to enable the child to return home, and within what timescales
- The importance of exploring family ties and long-term relationships with family, school and community
- The use of Family Network Meetings and Family Group Conferences as an effective way of facilitating both of the above

8.2 Identifying the best permanence option

The permanency planning process, informed by multi-agency contributions, will identify which permanence option is most likely to meet the needs of the individual child, taking account of his/her wishes and feelings.

Issues to consider:

- The assessment process must ask how stability for this child will be achieved
- Long term stability means the sense of a permanent home with the same family or group of people, as part of the same community and culture, and with long-term continuity of relationships and identity
- Short- or medium-term stability or continuity will be important for children who are going to stay in care for a brief period before going home and for children who are going to need new permanent arrangements. The quality of a child's attachments and life will be detrimentally affected by uncertainties, separations from what /who is known and changes of school and placement
- Educational experiences, links with extended family, hobbies and friendships and support to carers, contribute to guarding against disruption and placement breakdown;
- The importance of carefully listening to what children want from the placement, helping the relationship between carer and child to build, making thorough plans around family time with their birth family, providing vigorous

support during crisis times and taking a sufficiently flexible attitude to adoption by carers

- The older a child is, the less likely it is that the child will secure a permanent family through adoption or permanence in foster care
- The larger the family group of children, the harder it is to secure a single placement that will meet all the needs of all the children
- Where a child has had several placements, within the family or within any looked after arrangements
- These detailed considerations in relation to permanency options must be the subject of discussion within the Permanence Planning Meeting Chaired by the Service Manager, prior to the final care plan being ratified
- It is important that the needs of each child are specifically considered and assessed

8.3 Placement/Family Time with Siblings - Issues to Consider

Wherever it is in the best interests of each individual child, siblings should be placed together. Being able to live with brothers and sisters where they are also Looked After is an important protective factor for many children. Positive sibling relationships provide support both in childhood and adulthood and can be particularly valuable during changes in a young person's life, such as leaving care.

A number of factors however, can mitigate against achieving the positive placement of brothers and sisters together – they may have entered care at different times and/or they may have very different needs related to past experiences, current emotional and behavioural development and age, especially where there are significant age differences. There may be practical difficulties in accommodating large sibling groups together. In some circumstances a child may have been abused by a brother or sister. An understanding of family functioning and family history, providing appropriate support to all parties, as well as listening to the wishes and feelings of children, are therefore key to informing these judgements.

There are often some practical steps that can be taken to overcome some of the more logistical reasons for being unable to place sibling groups together. Where siblings placed together in foster care may be separated when one turns 18, consideration should be given to whether Staying Put arrangements may be beneficial for all the children involved.

There will, however, always be circumstances in which it is not possible to place siblings together and children should be supported to understand why they cannot live with their siblings. A sibling assessment must be undertaken to inform appropriate decision making which can be explained to children and young people. In these circumstances where it is in the best interests of each individual child, sibling family time should be promoted and maintained.

Where the plan is for adoption, to reduce delay, an early decision should be taken as to whether it is in the best interests of each child to be placed together or separately, and the impact on each child of that decision. The decision should be based on a balanced assessment of the individual needs of each child in the group, and the likely or possible consequences of each option on each child. Factors that may need to be considered will include: the nature of the sibling group (do the siblings know each other/ how they are related); whether the children have formed an attachment; the health needs of each child; and each child's view (noting that a child's views and perceptions will change over time).

8.4 Family Time with birth family members and others

Family Time must always be for the benefit of the child, not the parents or other relatives.

This may be direct or indirect and is more likely to succeed where parents and the child accept the care plan.

The purpose of contact is:

- To maintain a child's identity and relationship with the parents/family - Consolidating the new with the old
- To provide reassurance for the child
- To provide an ongoing source of information for the child
- To give the child continuing permission to live with the adoptive/foster family
- To minimise the sense of loss

Time for the child(ren) with their birth family must be negotiated as part of the Permanence Plan, a formal agreement setting out how this will take place, who with, where and how frequently must be negotiated before placement, and reviewed regularly throughout the child's life.

8.5 Clearly communicating the Permanence Plan

- The social worker must ensure that the child's care plan is discussed with parents throughout the time that their child is looked after particularly prior to and after each looked after review.
- All children should know their plan and have these shared with them. Social Workers should develop appropriate ways to communicate the plan to the child which includes words and pictures, photos, video, profiles of foster carers, adopters and family books;

Appendix 1 - Care planning in pre-birth cases and following any child becoming looked after

Pre -15 weeks gestation

Referral received and sent to appropriate team.

Contact with midwife to ensure pregnancy is viable before contacting parents.

10 day C&F assessment to be completed, CIN plan created and CIN procedures followed if referral is pre- 16 weeks.

Immediate support on identified issues and engagement with parents to commence.

First Mapping of case, draft danger statement, safety goals, scaling questions

Harm Matrix to be started

Family Network meeting to be arranged

16- 20 weeks gestation

Commence Pre-birth assessment (45 days) and implement support plan.

Open CIN plan if referral was received post 16 weeks.

Complete Family Safety Circles,

Complete Family Network meeting.

Initial planning meeting chaired by TM.

Consider PLO depending on history.

21- 24 weeks gestation

Ongoing Pre -birth assessment and support plan.

Family network meeting to identify support/ alternative care.

CIN procedures ongoing

Consider PLO if required

24- 28 weeks gestation

Pre -birth C & F assessment completed (day 43, week 27 gestation)

Share assessment with family by week 28.

Assessment information gathering is ongoing and will be included in the Post- birth assessment from this point.

If health indicate baby has any issues that may result in a premature birth strategy to be completed pre -28 weeks gestation

Request viability assessment from Connected Carers team.

28- 32 weeks gestation

Strategy meeting to take place (if required)

ICPC by 32 weeks (if required)

PLO meeting (if required)

Complete birth response plan and share with relevant professionals- parents, midwife, safeguarding midwife and EDT

Early Permanence Planning meeting chaired by TM to discuss all possible options for baby

If foster to adopt a possibility meet with Adoption team, start Foster to Adopt report and book ADM.

33- 36 weeks gestation

Family Network Meeting to ensure support in place for parents.

If plan is foster placement, - parents to be introduced to carers if appropriate

If connected carer identified ensure viability is signed and carers are prepared.

If Foster to Adopt is considered complete Foster to Adopt report and seek decision from ADM. Identify and prepare carers alongside Adoption team

Plan family time schedule and assess supervisors if required.

37- 40+ weeks gestation

Ensure Family Network is prepared to offer support if baby to remain in parents care.

Ensure viability signed off and carers prepared if baby to live with connected carer.

Prepare SWET if plan is to place baby with alternative carers

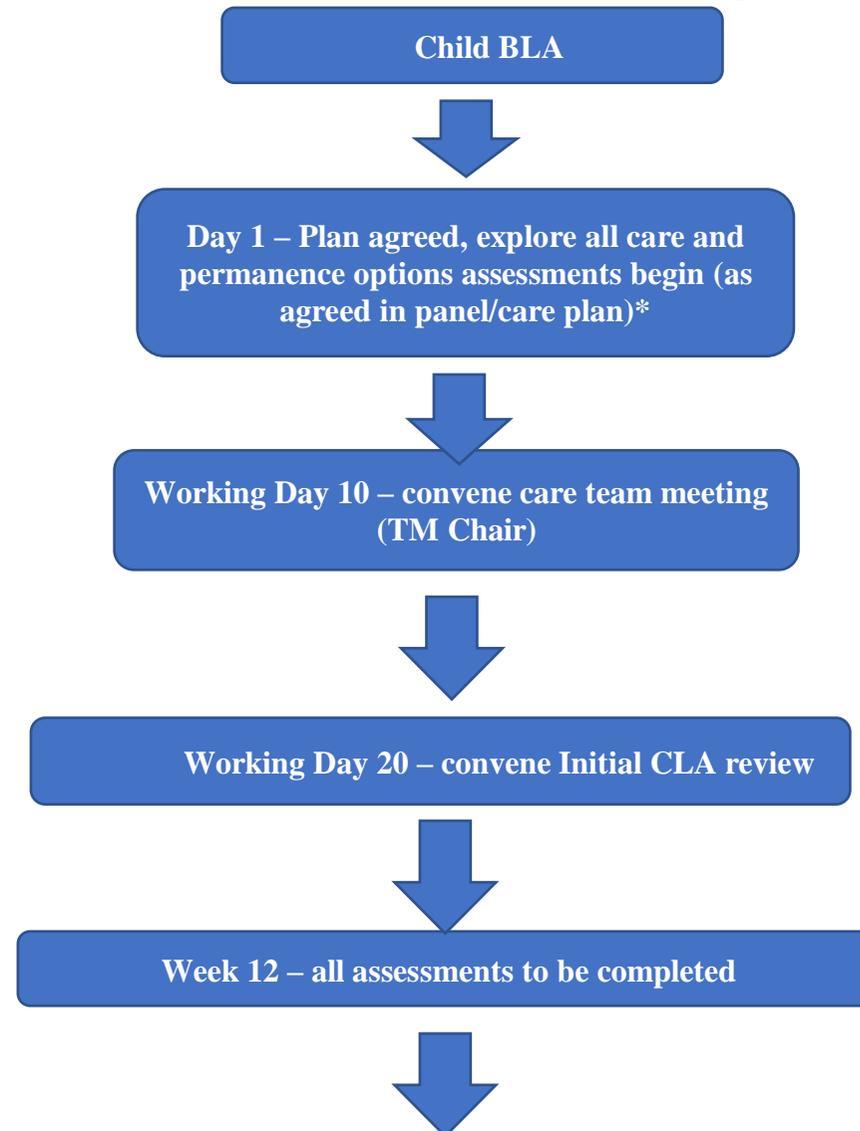
Ensure birth response plan is up to date and accurate

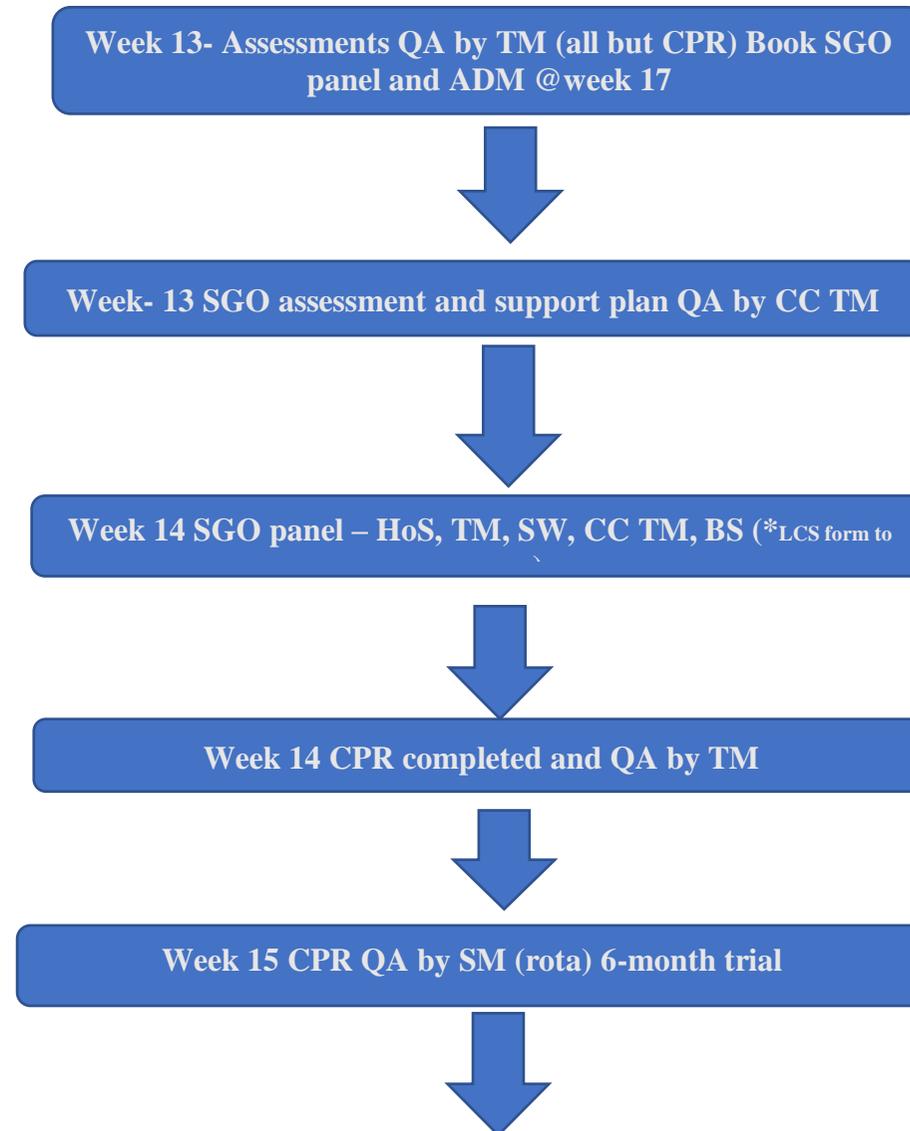
Ensure family time arrangements are in place

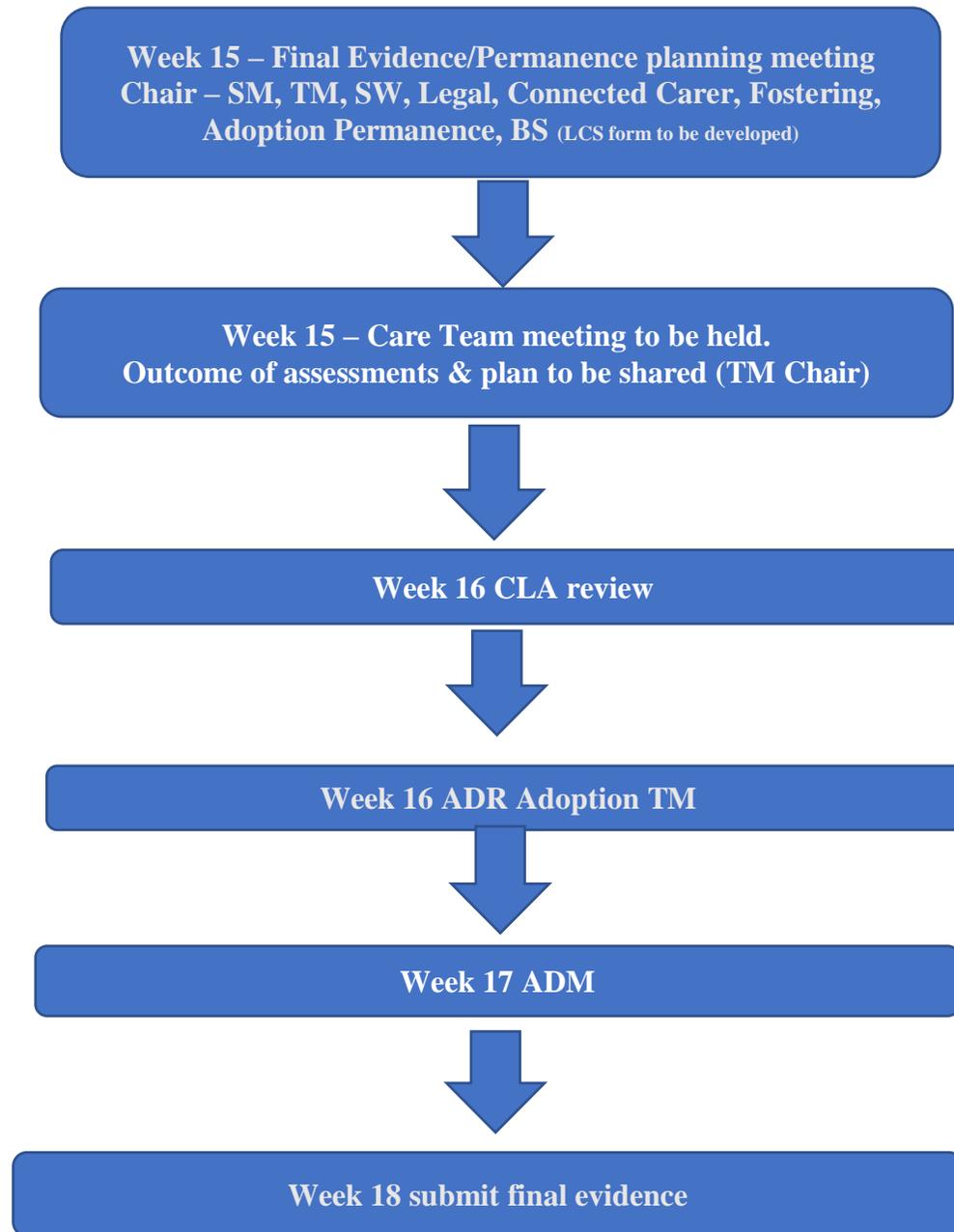
Plan post- birth assessment and support plan.

Pre- discharge meeting following birth prior to discharge from hospital

Permanence Planning







Appendix 2

Early Permanence Strategy Permanence Planning Meeting Guidance Notes

The purpose of the Permanence Planning Meeting (PPM) is to ensure a clear work plan is agreed for any child where a plan of permanence outside of the family is being considered.

The meeting is to ensure that children's needs are fully explored, and appropriate decisions reached to optimise their placement options. Where any specialist assessments have been commissioned, in relation to children or their parents as part of any care proceedings this will be considered as part of the meeting to inform the Care Plan.

The meeting will be chaired by the Service Manager. Minutes will be taken and shared with parties as outlined in the agenda. Any decisions must be recorded on the child's electronic case record.

The notes will become part of the submission to the ADM where a Care Plan of Adoption is to be considered.

These minutes may be required as part of the evidence bundle in Care Proceedings.

It is particularly important for those children who may be deemed more difficult to place that these meetings are properly arranged and where evidence of decision making in formulating the final plan. These will be:

- Sibling groups
- Children with more complex needs
- Children who have experienced significant abuse and neglect and who may have additional needs, developmental delay and attachment issues
- Children who have experienced several placements both within the family network and in foster care
- Children who have a disability

Permanence Planning Meeting - Guidance on what should be considered

<p>1. <u>Attendance</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Manager • Team Manager • Social Worker • Legal Adviser • Permanence Team /Fostering/ Connected Carers/Adoption Team Manager • Business Support
<p>2. <u>Review of Genogram</u> – <i>who is in the family network? Who is important to the child? Any family members or connected persons to be added?</i></p>
<p>3. <u>Information Sharing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short background history, including the outcome of the Child & Assessment and any other assessments completed • Legal context • Are there any additional assessments required – (e.g. sibling assessment/PAMS assessment/Drug or Alcohol testing/DNA testing) • Family Group Conference and the outcome. • Risk Factors
<p>4. <u>The child's needs</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health • Education • Heritage/Identity • Family/Social Relationships including contact • Emotional/behavioural development

5. Views

To Include:

- The child's wishes, views and feelings
- The wishes and feelings of any siblings?
- Sibling matching and assessment of the social worker regarding placement together or separately
- The parent's wishes and feelings
- The wishes and feelings of significant others
- The views of the current carers
- The views of the supervising social worker
- The views of the child's social worker/manager
- The views of the IRO
- The views of the Guardian (if relevant)

6. Consider options for Early Permanence (using Signs of Safety Model)

What are we worried about? (Past harm, future danger or risk and complicating factors)

What's working well? (Existing strengths, safety)

What needs to happen? (Future safety and stability)

Where are we on a scale of 0 to 10

(where 10 means that there is confidence that this option for early permanence can be achieved in the child's timeframe and succeed, and 0 means this option for early permanence will not succeed and the child is likely to be moved again)

- Reunification with parents
- Placement with extended family or connected carer network.
(Consider Viability Assessments/Regulation 24/SGO/CAO)
- Long term/Permanent fostering
- Fostering 2 Adopt
- Adoption

<p>7. <u>Contact arrangements</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who with? • When • Venue • Frequency • Supervision arrangements • Has a contact agreement been drawn up? If not, by when? • Reduction plan/final contact (if applicable)
<p>8. <u>Primary Permanence Plan (To be discussed and agreed in meeting)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which option for permanence best meets the child's needs? • What legal order is required to secure this option? • Are all parties in agreement? • Is the plan likely to be contested? • Does the plan require further legal action and what is the timescales for this? • What needs to happen to achieve this plan? • Referral for CPR?
<p>9. <u>Contingency Plan</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the primary plan realistically achievable within the child's time scale? • Does a twin track plan have to be put in place to ensure that there is no delay in achieving permanency by another route if the primary plan cannot be achieved? • If so, what should the twin track plan be? • Is a contingency plan necessary should the current care arrangement/placement breakdown? • If so, what should the contingency plan be?
<p>10. <u>Preparation for Permanence</u></p>

Child/Children

- Who will do preparation work with the child/ren?
- What will it consist of?
- Life Story work
- What is the timescale for this work?
- Are there plans for further assessments of health, educational needs, therapeutic needs etc.?
- What are the timescales for this? Who will be making the referral?
-

Birth parents/family

- What work needs to be undertaken to prepare them for the child's permanent placement?
- Has information about the process of adoption including Foster 2 Adopt been given? If necessary, who will undertake this work? Time scales?
- Have contact expectations and arrangements been discussed with the birth family (e.g. a one-off meeting between prospective adopters and birth family, letter box, long term arrangements, face to face)

11. Family Finding if placement outside of birth family

- Name of family finder
- In-house placement (Foster 2 Adopt/Fostering/Adoption)
- External Placement (Foster 2 Adopt/Fostering/Adoption)
- Family finding action plan??

12. Summary, decisions and actions on Permanence Plan[s] to be recommended to the Child's Looked After Review

- Is Legal advice required?
- Reasons for decision

13. Distribution list

All professionals in attendance
LA Solicitor
Strategic Service Manager

Appendix 3
PERMANENCE OPTIONS FOR CHILDREN OF DIFFERENT AGES

The table below may be of use to understand permanence planning for different ages of children and young people when relatives are and are not available.

This should be used as a **GUIDE ONLY** to support your judgement, decision and gathering.

AGE UNDER 7 YEARS		AGE 7 – 10 YEARS		AGE 11 YEARS+	
No kinship care arrangements available	Connected carer arrangements are available	No Connected carer arrangements available	Connected carer arrangements are available	No Connected carer arrangements available	Connected carer arrangements are available
	Family Group Conference must be arranged in these situations		Family Group Conference must be arranged in these situations		Family Group Conference must be arranged in these situations
Permanency Plan includes Twin Track or Parallel Planning until return to birth family is not possible					
Adoption Long Term Fostering (needs Head of Service approval if child is under five)	Formal Approved Connected Carer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Guardianship Order • Child Arrangements Order • Care Order – possibility of move to SGO/RO <p>Where the child is 0 – 3 years, if at the end of the legal process if carer is not able to consider SGO/RO then the adoption route must be followed.</p>	Adoption Long Term Fostering Special Guardianship (with existing foster carer)	Formal Approved Connected Carer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care Order – possibility of move to: • Special Guardianship Order • Child Arrangements Order 	Long Term Fostering Special Guardianship (with existing foster carer)	Formal Approved Connected Carer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Guardianship Order • Child Arrangements Order • Care Order – possibility of mover to SGO/RO

Appendix 3

	PRIVATE FOSTERING	CONNECTED CARER (informal)	CONNECTED CARER (formal foster care)	UNRELATED FOSTER CARE (and residential care)	CHILD ARRANGEMENTS ORDER	SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDER (SGO)	ADOPTION	
Route into the caring arrangements	<p>This is a private arrangement whereby the child is being cared for, for 28 days or more (or the intention is that the arrangement will last for 28 days or more), by anyone who does not have parental responsibility, and who is not a close relative.</p> <p>Close relative means grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (by full blood, half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or a step parent.</p> <p>This child is not a looked after child.</p>	<p>The relative has chosen to take on the care of the child and this is an arrangement between the parent(s) and the extended family or friend. The Family member or friend does not have parental responsibility, and the arrangement was not made by the Local Authority.</p> <p>The child is not a looked after child</p> <p>Relative may perceive the parents to be unable to care for the child</p> <p>Or the parents may be dead or otherwise not available (e.g. in prison)</p> <p>Or there may be an agreement between relatives due to difficult family circumstances.</p>	<p>The child has been placed with the relative or friend by the Local Authority, because the person who had been caring for the child was deemed not to be providing suitable care.</p> <p>The child is a looked after child and so the Local Authority must approve the relative or friend as a Local Authority foster carer.</p> <p>The child may be accommodated voluntarily with the agreement of the parents or may be subject to a Care Order, Interim Care Order or Emergency Protection Order</p>	<p>The child is a looked after child being accommodated by the Local Authority under Section 20 Children's Act 1989 or because the child is subject to a care order; but has been placed with a foster carer by the Local Authority.</p> <p>Alternatively, the Local Authority may choose to place a child into residential care where this is considered to meet the child's assessed needs.</p>	<p>(a) The child may be at risk of becoming 'looked after' and a friend or relative applies for an order, or</p> <p>(b) The child may have been 'looked after' and their foster carer or other relative/friend applies for an order</p> <p>(c) In some circumstances, application can be made without the support of the parents or the Local Authority. Relatives may apply for an order after the child has lived with them for one year or given leave of the court to apply for SGO.</p> <p>Or there can be benign reasons, e.g. after parent' death and in line with a prior agreement with the birth parents and the carer.</p>			<p>Looked after children; the LA may decide that the child should be placed for adoption. They can only do so with the consent of the birth parent or by making an application for a placement order made by a court.</p> <p>A foster carer can apply for an adoption order after one year of caring for the child.</p> <p>Other informal carers could apply for an adoption order if the child has lived with them for a period of 3 years or with leave of the court.</p>
Contact	Private arrangement with birth parent or person with PR	Private arrangement with birth parents or person with PR	As set out in the care plan with details of frequency and supervision clarified. We have a duty to promote contact with the child's family.		Private agreement Or as defined by the court or discretion of the person with PR.	Agreed as part of SGO or at discretion of the SG with PR. May be subject to a Section 8 Contact Order	As agreed, as part of the adoption order. Legally at the discretion of the adopter.	

	PRIVATE FOSTERING	CONNECTED CARER (informal)	CONNECTED CARER (formal foster care)	UNRELATED FOSTER CARE (and residential care)	CHILD ARRANGEMENTS ORDER	SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDER (SGO)	ADOPTION
Parental Responsibility (PR)	Remains with birth parents	Remains with birth parents but the person who cares for the child may do what is reasonable to safeguard or promote the child's welfare and has delegated responsibility unless alternative legal orders are in place e.g. Special Guardianship, Adoption or Child Arrangement Orders.	Remains with birth parents if the child is accommodated under Section 20 CA, or if the child is subject to a care order or emergency protection order, the Local Authority shares parental responsibility and determines the extent to which it make to delegated to others.		Shared by parents and holder of Child Arrangements Order.	PR shared with parents and anyone else with parental responsibility for the child. The special guardian may exercise parental responsibility to the exclusions of all others with PR, apart from another special guardian. Limitations include taking child out of the country or changing the child's name.	Transfer to adopters and legal relationship with birth parents and siblings is severed.
Approved Basis	The arrangement is assessed by LA, but the carer is not 'approved' as a Local Authority foster carer. The arrangement may be prohibited if assessed by the Local Authority as unsuitable.	None	Approved as Local Authority foster carers in accordance with Fostering Services Regulations. (If the child is looked after, carers must be approved as foster carers even if close relative). This includes temporary approval if the child needs to be placed in an immediate or urgent circumstance		Appointed by court following application	Appointed by court following application from the applicant. LA must investigate the matter and prepare a report for the court dealing with the suitability of the applicant to be a special guardian.	Adoption agency assesses and approves prospective adopters, court makes placement order regarding specific child following ADM approval If the child is not a Child Looked After, then notice of intention to adopt must be given to the LA who then carry out an assessment
Duration	Subject to discretion of person with PR and readiness of private foster carer	Subject to discretion of person with PR	So long as placement remains in line with the child's care plan as determined by LA or the making of an alternative order (unless Section 20 when parents have the right to move the child from care).		Age 18	Age 18 unless varied or discharged by the court before the child reaches 18 years	Permanent lifelong relationship which severs any legal ties with the birth parents and family

	PRIVATE FOSTERING	CONNECTED CARER (informal)	CONNECTED CARER (formal foster care)	UNRELATED FOSTER CARE (and residential care)	CHILD ARRANGEMENTS ORDER	SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDER (SGO)	ADOPTION
Placement Supervision	It is not a placement, but there are statutory visits to the child by social worker (minimum 6 weekly in first year then 12 weekly)	None	Statutory visits to the child by social worker and supervision of foster carers by supervising social worker.		None	None	When a child is placed for adoption by the LA, the placement is supervised and there are statutory reviews. Once the adoption order is made, none Post adoption support will be provided if necessary but after 3 years will become the responsibility of the place of residence which may not be the LA who placed the child.
Support Services	Provision of advice and support as determined necessary by the LA, which may assess the child as a child in need, with a child in need plan, and provide services/support for child/family under Section 17 Children Act 1989	No entitlement but the LA may assess the child as a child in need, with a child in need plan, and provide services/support for child/family under Section 17 Children Act 1989.	Support to meet the child's needs including health plan and personal education plan (PEP); Training and practical support to foster carers in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations. National Minimum Standards and Children's Workforce Development Council standards. Young persons may be entitled to leaving care support services, Statutory social work. Placement support to meet the child's identified need.		No entitlement (But LA has discretion to provide services/support for child/family under Section 17 Children Act 1989)	If child was looked after prior to making the SGO. LA must assess for need with special guardianship support service. Young person may be entitled to leaving care support services if was a looked after child prior to making of the SGO.	Entitlement to assessment for adoption support services, which may be provided at discretion of LA in accordance with Regulations and National Minimum Standards. Three-year rule applies where for first three years, it is the placing Authority who is applicable and after first three years it is the Local Authority in which the child resides.

Review of Placement	It is not a placement, but the LA may do formal reviews in addition to on-going assessment during visits.	None	Statutory reviews of the child's care plan (minimum 6 monthly) and annual reviews of Local Authority foster carers' approval.		None	None	See above
	PRIVATE FOSTERING	CONNECTED CARER (informal)	CONNECTED CARER (formal foster care)	UNRELATED FOSTER CARE (and residential care)	CHILD ARRANGEMENTS ORDER	SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDER (SGO)	ADOPTION
Financial support - entitlement	<p>Can claim child benefit and any other universally available benefits for children if not being paid to the parent.</p> <p>Financial responsibility to maintain the child remains with holders of PR</p>	<p>Can claim child benefit and any other universally available benefits for children if not being paid to the parent.</p> <p>Financial responsibility to maintain the child remains with holders of PR.</p> <p>Guardian's Allowance payable if both parents have died, or the only surviving parent cannot be found or serving 2 years or more prison sentence</p>	<p>Child benefit or other universally available for children is not payable.</p> <p>Weekly allowance to meet the costs of caring for the child. This should meet at least the national minimum rate set by the Department for Education.</p>		<p>Can claim child benefit and any other universally available benefits for children if not being paid to the parent.</p>	<p>Can claim child benefit and any other universally available benefits for children if not being paid to the parent.</p>	<p>Can claim child benefit and any other universally available benefits for children if not being paid to the parent.</p> <p>Entitlement to assessment for financial support (part of adoption support) if child looked after prior to order.</p> <p>Some children will be eligible for an adoption allowance which is means tested and subject to approval by the ADM. Any allowances are reviewed after a 2 year period</p>
Financial Support - discretionary	<p>LA discretion to make one-off or regular payments under Section 17 Children Action 1989</p>	<p>LA discretion to make one-off or regular payments under Section 17 Children Action 1989</p>	<p>Fees are payable under the payment for skills model.</p>		<p>LA has discretion to pay child arrangements order allowance – usually if child was previously fostered by the carers, or exceptionally if making Child Arrangements Order prevents child becoming looked after. Any allowance reviewed annually at a minimum</p>	<p>Entitled to an assessment for financial support under the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 if child looked after prior to order and meets the criteria in the regulations. Subject to assessment as above and for former foster carers can include</p>	<p>Subject to assessment, one off payments or regular adoption allowance may be paid.</p>

						an element of remuneration, Discretionary regular or one-off payments. Any allowances reviewed annually at a minimum.	
	PRIVATE FOSTERING	CONNECTED CARER (informal)	CONNECTED CARER (formal foster care)	UNRELATED FOSTER CARE (and residential care)	CHILD ARRANGEMENTS ORDER	SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDER (SGO)	ADOPTION
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Financial Support - discretionary	<p>LA discretion to make one-off or regular payments under Section 17 Children Action 1989</p>	<p>LA discretion to make one-off or regular payments under Section 17 Children Action 1989</p>	<p>Fees are payable under the payment for skills model.</p>		<p>LA has discretion to pay child arrangements order allowance – usually if child was previously fostered by the carers, or exceptionally if making Child Arrangements Order prevents child</p>	<p>Entitled to an assessment for financial support under the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 if child looked after prior to order and meets the criteria in the regulations.</p> <p>Subject to assessment as</p>	<p>Subject to assessment, one off payments or regular adoption allowance may be paid.</p>

				<p>becoming looked after. Any allowance reviewed annually at a minimum</p>	<p>above and for former foster carers can include an element of remuneration, Discretionary regular or one-off payments. Any allowances reviewed annually at a minimum.</p>	
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