

Children's Service

Permanency

Procedure and Practice Guidance

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1. Introduction

Permanency planning is based upon the philosophy that every child needs security, stability, love, a strong sense of identity and belonging in a permanent and stable home. Planning for permanence in all stages of work within Children's Services maximises the opportunity of achieving permanency for children in a timely way and that children have connections to support them through childhood, into adulthood and beyond.

It is recognised that a sense of belonging leads to improved confidence and resilience and mitigates against the impact of trauma and harm.

The Care Inquiry 2013 states that high quality relationships and their continuity are the key element in developing a sense of permanence for children, above legal status.

"...In order to develop normally, a child requires progressively more complex joint activity with one or more adults who have an irrational emotional relationship with the child. Somebody's got to be crazy about that kid. That's number one. First, last and always!.." (Bronfenbrenner 1979)

In Tameside we want all children to have security, stability and love from the person or people who *"are crazy about them!"*

Children have different needs and come from diverse and complex families and permanence can be achieved for them through several different routes. As well as Children's Social Care, Health, Education, Early Help, Youth Justice, Police, and the voluntary sector all play a role. The permanency planning process can identify which option best meets the needs of the individual child. Our intention is to work together across all services, alongside our partners, to achieve consistently high-quality practice in permanency planning.

2. Defining Permanence

Permanency is about creating a home where a child or young person's relational, physical and legal conditions allow them to feel secure; where they have commitment from their carers and their identity and development is supported, they feel safe to strive and thrive in their childhood. That is where children and young people feel secure, cared for and stable consistently throughout their childhood and into adult life. Permanence for children has three aspects:

2.1 Relational permanency - refers to emotional permanency and the experience of having positive, loving, trusting, and nurturing relationships with people important to the child. These relationships ensure a sense of belonging for the child. These relationships are usually provided by significant family attachments but also include friendships and community relationships. Where children are not able to live with their family of origin, the identification and strengthening of connections that a child has with their family and people of significance will be sought, supported and advocated wherever it is safe to do so.

2.2 Physical or environmental permanency - a stable home environment within a familiar neighbourhood and community. Children's living arrangements should meet the child's developmental, educational, emotional, health, intellectual and physical needs. Physical permanence supports continuity of relationships with family, friends and community and enhance safety, belonging and wellbeing. Tameside Children's Services has clear plans in place to maintain stability and continuity to reduce the risk of changes for children and young people. Support will be provided where there are risks to this stability in maintaining key relationships for children.

2.3 Legal permanency - refers to legal arrangements for a child that provides a sense of permanence and long-term stability. The first preference will always be for a child to be cared for by the child's family. This can be achieved by supporting the child's family where possible, or, if the child is to be removed from the family, support must be given to the child and their family to consider a return where this is in their best interests. The first preference for permanence for children and young people will be to remain in the care of their parents where this is safe and meets children's needs.

The second preference is for a child to be cared under an Order with a member of the child's family. This includes Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) and Child Arrangements Orders (CAO). The stability that a child and young person has from living in within a wider family and friends' group is very important to Tameside and every effort will be made to ensure that a child or young person has the opportunity to do so.

The third preference for the child is to be cared for by the local authority. For some children, adoption may also be considered as the appropriate option by considering where there is no one in the child's family or friends' network that can care for them and taking into account *Re B (A Child)* (2013) where a Court concludes "*nothing else will do*".

3. Key Practice Points

The objective of planning for permanence is to ensure that children have a secure attachment, with a stable and loving family throughout their childhood and into adulthood.

Achieving permanence for children starts following the first point of contact with services. Key to achieving permanence within the child's network is the early and ongoing use of cultural genograms and family network meetings. These will help us to understand more about the people within the child's network and what support they can offer to the family to increase the possibility that the child can secure permanence within their family.

Every child our services work with should have a permanency plan and a viable contingency plan, irrespective of the level of intervention with the question "*How are the child's permanence needs being met?*" being at the core of everything we do.

In Tameside, we recognise the importance of sibling relationships, and that they can often be a child's strongest enduring connection. Therefore, we are committed to ensuring that siblings can remain living together, wherever this is possible, and that permanence planning is informed through Together or Apart assessments being undertaken within early stages of permanency planning.

4. Voice of the Child

The voice of the child is central to everything we do, including their plans for permanence. We recognise the importance of:

- children and young people understanding why we are involved with their family and what that means for them
- children and young people not being separated from siblings where appropriate and as part of the child's plan
- children and young people having the opportunity to visit the place they will be living before moving in and
- children and young people's views about where they want to live being heard and considered.

Tameside has a range of mechanisms in place to listen to the views of children and young people in care including our Children in Care Councils.

It is best practice for all children who are to remain in long term care to have Life Story work undertaken with them. The Life Story work details the child's life history, people in their lives, personal information, stories, achievements etc. to promote their sense of identity and understanding of who they are, where they came from and why things have happened.

Fundamentally Life Story work aims to answer many questions; What happened? When? and Why? questions that children and young people may have about their lives and why.

The main purpose of life story work is:

- To give details and understanding of the child/young person's history
- To build their sense of identity, including religious, cultural and ethnic identity
- To enable the child/ young person to share their past with others
- To give a realistic account of early events and to dispel fantasies or fears about their birth family
- To link the past to the present and to help both the child/young person and the carer or parent to understand how earlier life events continue to impact on behaviour
- To acknowledge issues of separation and loss
- To enable carers/parents to understand and develop empathy for the child/young person
- To enhance the child/young person's self-esteem and self-worth

Significant people in the child's life should assist in completion of Life Story work. Foster carers, key workers, parents, teachers can all make significant contributions to providing such a picture even if at times the information may seem contradictory. Photographs and videos may help to "bring the child to life". This information should start to be gathered as soon as possible by the child's social worker, FSW and carers to ensure that no relevant information is lost or forgotten.

Our **Participation Principles** requires all staff to:

1. We will always empower you to share your views, let you know how much impact you will have, show you how your views have influenced the outcome and celebrate your achievements.
2. We will be inclusive and make things accessible. We will think about your identity, needs, age and abilities when communicating with you and recording your views.
3. When talking to you, we will consider the setting, your state of mind and how to build a good relationship with you.
4. You are our equal partners, so we will work with you. We will always involve you in decisions that affect your life.
5. We will be open-minded, respectful and considerate of your views even if we disagree with them.
6. We will be clear, open and honest. We will you know what is possible and make commitments and stick to them.
7. We won't make assumptions. We will be patient, imaginative, and work together to find a solution, rather than imposing our own.
8. We will respect your privacy and will not share your information without your permission unless we legally have to. If there are times when information has to be passed on, we will make sure you are told.

5. Our Commitment

We believe that every child has the right to live with their birth family, so long as this is safe, and our practice will be through the lens of how we can support families to make this happen.

We will support and work with children, young people and their families, endeavouring to achieve permanence for children within their family home. This work will include understanding the child's network and supporting families so that they can support each other to enable permanence within the family home.

Where it is identified that a child's needs cannot be safely met within their family home, we will ensure that we know who, within the child's network, can safely care for them, so that they can remain living within their wider network. This means that our practice will involve the child's network at the earliest stage of assessment.

Where it is necessary for a child to live away from their family, this will be for as short a time as needed to secure a safe, supported return to family care.

We recognise that the sibling relationship is often the most enduring relationship and will assess whether siblings should be cared for together or apart, ensuring a robust analysis of decisions made.

If a child cannot return home or live safely within their network, we are committed to exploring all options for permanence whilst regularly reviewing and exploring whether the child could safely return to family care.

Residential care is provided only when a need for this is identified within the Care Plan and when living within a family setting cannot be achieved.

Assessment and planning at all stages must be qualitative with a clear risk analysis and completed in a timely way. Assessments should demonstrate appropriate permanence options for the child or young person and identify how any proposed plan will meet the child or young person's need for security, stability, love, connection and support throughout childhood and into adulthood.

Wherever possible, the child should live permanently within their own local community unless this has been identified as not appropriate.

When children enter our care, we will ensure we promote their links with their network, where this is in their best interests. Family time will be arranged in a way that benefits the child.

We value the contribution of parents and significant others within the child's life and will actively seek to work in partnership with them for the benefit of the child, including for reunification if it is safe to do so.

Most importantly, any plan for a child must take into account the wishes and feelings of the child; and we will clearly evidence this throughout the assessment and planning process.

Permanence planning will promote the child's links with their racial, cultural and religious heritage and their assessed needs and how they will be met will be evidenced within the child's permanence plan.

We commit to ensure that children we care for have access to advocacy.

We will undertake life story work with children we care for so that they understand their life experiences and the journey that brought them into our care.

We will produce high quality case file recordings which demonstrate the permanence options explored for the child and an analysis of the options chosen and discounted.

6. Knowing Children and their Families

So that we can meet our commitment that children will live within their family or network whenever this is safe, we need to know our children and families well. We need to know who is important to the children we work with, and we need to understand, through collaboration and assessment, what level of support the child's network is willing and able to offer. There are two fundamental interventions that must be undertaken with families through our involvement and starting at the point of allocation into our Duty and Assessment teams.

6.1 Cultural Genogram

Cultural Genograms are family trees that include information about the strength of familial relationships; family/cultural norms; family values; significant events and stories that are part of the child's family journey and heritage. Discussions with children, young people and their families when completing cultural genograms will also give us valuable information about potential risks associated to people in the child's network.

Undertaking a cultural genogram at the outset of our involvement with a family will help us to understand who, within the network, can support the family in times of need or in a crisis. We will better understand the child in the context of their family and discussions when completing a cultural genogram can aid practitioners understanding about the family norms and values that have influenced parenting style, enabling intervention to focus upon achieving second order change which will be sustained.

Should it be determined that a child cannot remain living at home, the cultural genogram will enable us to ensure we support the child to remain living within their network where possible and in maintaining a connection with the people that are important to them.

6.2 Family Group Conference/Family Network Meetings

When we know who is in the child's network, we can generate, in collaboration with parents, conversations with those people. The family can be brought together for a facilitated discussion focused on the child, the identified worries and in what way those in the child's network can support to minimise or alleviate the identified concerns, keeping the child safe. Strengths within families can be identified and recognised and built upon to help families to resolve their difficulties themselves, albeit with professional support when required. Family meetings can also be used to identify who could care for the child, should they be unable to remain at home.

Family meetings should be initiated at the earliest stages of involvement and be held as and when required to ensure the continued support of the network and to review the family plan made.

7. Partnership Working

In Tameside we have a partnership approach to achieving permanence for children and young people. We work with all internal and external partners to ensure the most appropriate help and support in securing permanence.

Our partners include Independent Reviewing Officers, Virtual School, Early Help and Prevention, Police, Health, Youth Justice Services, Foster Carers and Adoption Support. All partners agree that communicating with each other in a timely manner and strong working relationships are key to preventing reaching crisis point with families.

The **Independent Reviewing Officer** (IRO) has an important role, when a child becomes cared for, in achieving permanence for children within an appropriate timescale. The IRO has a statutory responsibility to oversee the child's care planning which includes ensuring there is no drift in achieving permanency and that the child is being supported to maintain existing connections. The IRO chairs the Child Cared For reviews to ensure their care plan is progressing and that the child's holistic needs are being met. The IRO will make sure that they speak to the child and that the child understands any process they are part of and their rights within that process.

The **Looked After Children Nursing Team** play a key role in ensuring that children and young people are registered with local health services (e.g. Paediatricians, CAMHS, Dentist and Speech Therapist) when moving to a new placement. They have an ongoing role in a child's health assessment, monitoring and ensuring that the child's health needs are met, and they contribute to additional assessments and care planning for the child.

The **Virtual School** contribute to the matching process for a new placement by matching a child's needs in their current school or securing a place in a new school where this is necessary. They work with looked after children in Tameside forging links and maintain a sense of continuity for the young person, tracking the progress they make and supporting them to achieve educationally and in line with their peers. Wider education professionals and teams (e.g. teachers, Designated Teachers, Educational Psychologists, SENCO, SEND Team and Young People Services) also play a pivotal role in supporting children cared for with educational attainment.

The **Clinical Psychologist for Looked After Children** is a commissioned service and part of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) which supports the emotional wellbeing of children cared for and Foster Carers and contribute to the wrap round support provided to fragile placements.

In line with legislation, any young person in custody becomes a child in care and local protocols between our Youth Justice Services and Greater Manchester Police recognises this. However, wherever possible, the emphasis should be on preventing a young person entering the criminal justice system. In accordance with national guidelines, Greater Manchester Police, Youth Justice Service, Children's Services and Health Services must always ask the question "*Would this be good enough for my child?*" Restorative and diversionary approaches should underpin responses, whether the behaviour occurs in a child's home or the wider community. Youth Justice Services advocate for the lowest possible intervention to prevent to criminalisation of children cared for.

Local health partners have identified that the emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people entering care needs to involve robust assessment processes and that pathways for access into emotional health and wellbeing services need to be more clearly defined and supportive of prevention and early intervention strategies. This is to help the wider partnership achieve permanence for children through an Integrated Health Pathway for Looked After Children.

Where a child returns home, monitoring this arrangement and rehabilitation is the responsibility of professionals who know the child. Together, everyone is committed to a timely and child centred approach to achieving permanence.

8. Options for Permanence

The options for permanence are:

- 8.1 Staying at home** – this is always Tameside's aim and all initial intervention with a child and family should be focused on supporting them to remain together, providing this is safe for the child. Research tells us that children who remain at home have the greatest likelihood of experiencing stability so working with families to equip them with the knowledge and skills to effectively parent their children is in the best interests of

the child. Intervention such as Family Group Conference; Family Network Meetings; the use of Cultural Genograms; Edge of Care Services and Family Support Services must be utilised.

8.2 Reunification home – there will be times when it is identified that the risk is too high for a child to remain at home, and they may need to be cared for outside of the home. In these circumstances, our aim will be for the child to safely return home, and we know that this is more likely to be successful if it happens sooner rather than later. (see also [Placement with Parents](#) Policy) Intervention with the family to equip them with the knowledge and skills they need to effectively parent their child is therefore crucial and should be provided without delay.

If it has been identified in a child's care plan that they are able to return to their family home, it is important to:

- Clearly communicate with the family: what needs to happen to enable the child to return home, and the timescales.
- Understand family ties and long-term relationships with family, school, and the wider community; and use Family Group Conferencing (where appropriate) to help facilitate the above.
- Working restoratively, drawing on relationship-based approaches, drawing upon strengths, identifying worries and planning what needs to happen and who is around this child and their support using genograms and ecomaps.

8.3 Placement with Relatives or Friends – where assessment work and intervention determine that a child cannot remain safely living at home, every effort must be made for the child to remain cared for within their wider family and network, i.e. with a connected person (see [Placement with Connected Carers](#) policy). A return home should remain the goal and where this is assessed as not being in the child's best interests, placement with a connected person should be the preferred permanence plan. Achieving this will be more likely using early family network meetings or Family Group Conferences and viability assessments, a vital part of contingency planning. Family meetings will enable identification of those within the child's network who would be willing to care for the child should they be unable to remain at home. Early assessment of family members supports the child remaining within their family should they need to be cared for outside of their home. Our ethos in Tameside is that no child should be placed outside of their family, where there is someone within the family who can safely care for them.

8.4 Child Arrangements Order – a Child Arrangements Order determines legally who a child should live with and who they can spend time with. It provides carers named in the Order with parental responsibility for the child, and this will continue until the Order ceases, which is usually at age 16. Child Arrangements Orders should be considered when seeking to secure the care of the child with a connected person as the child will achieve stability and will no longer be cared for, so Local Authority intervention may end. The child's parent(s) continue to share parental responsibility with the person(s) named in the Child Arrangements Order so this arrangement is most successful when parents support the permanence plan and can work with the carers in the best interests of the child.

The following people may apply for a Child Arrangements Order:

- A parent or guardian
- A party to a marriage (whether the marriage is subsisting or not) where the child was brought up as a child of the family
- A person with whom the child has lived for 3 years. (This need not be continuous but must not have started more than 5 years before or ended more than 3 months before the making of the application)
- A local authority foster carer with whom the child has lived for 1 year
- Where a Child Arrangements Order is already in force, a person who has the consent of those in whose favour the Child Arrangements Order was made
- Where the child is cared for, a person with the consent of the relevant Local Authority
- In any other case, a person who has the consent of all those with Parental Responsibility.

Anyone else who wishes to apply must seek leave of the Court for permission to do so.

An application can be made to revoke the Child Arrangements 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.

8.5 Special Guardianship Order – offers a high degree of legal permanence, as well as the psychological and physical permanence that a child needs (see policy on [Applications for Special Guardianship Orders](#)). The carer acquires parental responsibility for the child. Whilst the child's parent(s) retain parental responsibility, this is restricted, and the Special Guardian(s) is/are able to make major decisions on behalf of the child. This Order provides permanence for a child; however, like a Child Arrangements Order, does not sever ties with the child's birth family. Special Guardians are entitled (means tested) to financial support and other associated support from the Local Authority however the child is no longer cared for by the Local Authority.

The following persons may apply for a Special Guardianship Order:

- Any guardian of the child
- A local authority foster carer with whom the child has lived for one year immediately preceding the application
- Anyone who holds a Child Arrangements Order with respect to the child or who has the consent of all those in whose favour a Child Arrangements Order is in force
- Anyone with whom the child has lived for three out of the last five years
- Where the child is subject of a Care Order, any person who has the consent of the local authority.
- Anyone who has the consent of all those with Parental Responsibility for the child.

An application can be made to revoke a Special Guardianship Order; however, the leave of the Court is required and will only be granted where circumstances have changed since the Special Guardianship Order was made.

8.6 Long-Term Foster Care - is typically an appropriate option for older children and young people who are unable to live within their network (see [Long Term Foster Placement](#) procedures). It enables children and young people to retain connections with family and wider networks whilst providing stability within a long-term foster care

placement. This should be balanced against the potential for placement moves throughout childhood. The child will remain supported by the Local Authority and there will be the option of the child “Staying Put” with the foster care when they reach 18, providing ongoing stability. Long-term foster care arrangements should be considered in terms of suitability for an application for a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangements Order which provides the child or young person with legal permanency and an increased sense of belonging.

8.7 Adoption – should be considered for a child only when “nothing else will do.” An Adoption Order transfers parental responsibility from the child’s parent(s) (and anyone else holding parental responsibility, including the Local Authority) to the adoptive parent(s) and is irrevocable with no future legal challenge being permissible (see [Placement for Adoption](#) procedure). The child becomes a permanent member of their adoptive family, as if they had been born to the family. Where it is clear that a child cannot be returned to family care, adoption will offer the highest level of stability and permanence to a child. Adoption may sever links between the child and their birth family, although there are increasing expectations of adoptive parents to consider promoting ongoing familial relationships where this is considered to be in the child’s best interests.

[Adoption Now](#) is our Regional Adoption Agency that delivers all adoption work on behalf of Tameside.

Adopters may be supported, including financially, by the local authority and will have the right to request an assessment for support services at any time after the Order is made.

Where it is assessed that an unborn child is unable to be cared for within their family, [fostering for adoption](#) should be considered. This is where the baby is placed with approved foster carers who are also approved as prospective adopters on a fostering basis during the court proceedings and then the placement will change to one of adoption once a Placement Order is made. The baby does not experience transition to different carers, which enables them the opportunity to form secure attachments from birth.

A FFA placement must be carefully planned, and the agreement of the Agency Decision Maker sought before it goes ahead. The adopters need to be approved as foster carers (as under the Fostering Regulations), but the ADM can decide that they are suitable for Foster to Adopt where it is for a specifically named child.

8.8 Staying Put Under the Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010, Planning Transition into Adulthood for Care Leavers Guidance and Government Staying Put Guidance (2013), the Authority must provide information about extending placements beyond the age of 18. These are known as Staying Put arrangements. The Authority has an up to date Staying Put policy and actively encourages and supports young people to remain with their carers beyond the age of 18 (see [Staying Put](#) procedure).

Discussion should start with the young person and his/her foster carer(s) regarding the option of staying put as early as possible, ideally before the young person reaches the age of 16. Where a child/young person is formally matched with his/her foster carer(s) on a long term/permanent fostering basis, the potential for a Staying Put arrangement

should be discussed as part of the matching and Panel process regardless of the age of the child/young person on placement.

If this has not already been done, the first CLA review following the child's 16th birthday must consider whether a Staying Put arrangement should be an option. This will entail assessing the implications for both the young person and the foster carer(s).

9. Permanence and Local Placement

Where a child is placed with long term foster carers, it is important that the child has access to the friends and family and the community within which they were brought up and which form part of their identity and their long-term support network. For these reasons children should be placed in their local community wherever possible.

When a child is placed for adoption, they are often placed in a different geographical area from their birth family because they become a full member of their new adoptive family.

Any decision to place a child away from his or her community should be based on the particular needs of the child and considered within the context of a permanence plan.

Where a child is to be placed in a different local authority area, the likely availability and cost of suitable local resources to support the placement must be explored. In the case of an adoptive placement, this will be required as part of the assessment of need for adoption support services (see Adoption Support Services Procedure) but should be carried out in relation to any permanent placement. With Adoption and Special Guardianship, the responsibility for support transfers to the Local Authority where the child is living after three years of the Order being made, except where ongoing financial support was agreed. This will remain the responsibility of the placing authority.

9.1 Assessing and Planning for Permanence

Assessment of a child's needs in relation to their permanence plan must:

- Be undertaken in a timely manner
- Identify intervention which will support the child safely remaining in the care of their family
- Focus on outcomes
- Encompass and analyse information known from the cultural genogram and family network meeting
- Consider what support the child's network can provide to enable the child to remain cared for by their family; this will be best understood using family network meetings
- Analyse all available information, including the history of the family, risks, protective factors, adults' relationships with the child, capacity for change, information from involved professionals and support that may be required to provide care for the child. The child's identity, the impact of them potentially joining a new family/return home, their readiness for this and their associated needs
- Consider the child's needs in relation to family time, including with people in their network who they identify as important, in the event that they will require care outside of the family

Social workers must ensure the child's permanence plan is clearly linked to previous assessments of the child's needs. [Appendix 1](#) presents a brief, research-based checklist

of considerations about Adoption, Child Arrangements Orders, Special Guardianship Orders and Long-term Fostering. This includes the duration of the arrangements, the support offered ([Appendix 2](#)) and the financial implications ([Appendix 3](#))

In considering the child's needs, full consultation with the child (age appropriately), family and community networks should be undertaken to establish the child's attachments and supports.

A permanency Planning Meeting will be chaired by the Team Manager (see [Appendix 4](#) – Permanency Practice Standard and [Appendix 5](#) – Permanency Planning Meeting Template)

For children who become cared for, their permanence plan should be presented for ratification to be considered at their second Child Cared For Review. In the event of care proceedings and it not being possible to ratify a permanence plan, potential permanence options being explored must be identified and presented to the review.

For children not cared for, their permanence plan and contingency plan should be identified within their child in need or child protection plan and discussed at each child in need review or core group meeting.

10. Tools to Support Permanence

The following practice guidance is not exhaustive. It is drawn from research and consultation with young people, parents, carers and practitioners.

10.1 Supporting Reunification with Birth or Extended Family

The [NSPCC reunification framework](#) points to:

- The importance of clearly communicating to the family what needs to happen to enable the child to return home, and within what timescales, these timescales must always be based on the needs of the child
- The importance of exploring family ties and long-term relationships with family, school and community
- The use of Family Group Conferences as an effective way of facilitating both the above. (N.B – In Tameside, the use of Family Network Meetings is also supported)

10.2 Identifying the Most Appropriate Permanence Option

Issues to consider:

- The assessment process must ask how permanence for this child will be achieved. Every child should have a permanence plan identified and a contingency plan from the early stages of intervention, i.e. Duty and Assessment. Assessments must be timely and encompass what we know from the completion of cultural genograms and family network meetings
- Long term stability means 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
- Life Story Work is key in assisting children to understand their past, present and future. Every child should have Words and Pictures to support their understanding of their current circumstances

- 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 for life will be detrimentally affected by uncertainties, separations from what/who is known and changes of school and home
- 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, helping the relationship between carer and child to build, making thorough plans around family time, providing vigorous support during crisis times and taking a sufficiently flexible approach by carers
- Should a child's care arrangements become fragile, swift intervention should be provided to stabilise the arrangement and ensure stability, unless this is not considered to be in the child's best interests
- Children should have permanence within their family, providing this is safe. When a child requires care outside of their family, their care plan must include ongoing consideration of future assessment of family to determine whether the child could safely return to family care, recognising that there will be changes in both the child's needs as they develop and in their family's capacity to meet their needs
- Together or Apart Assessments should be undertaken for sibling groups at an early stage of involvement and should inform individual permanence plans; where it is assessed that it is in the best interests of siblings to remain together, every effort should be made to ensure this happens. See section 10.4

10.3 Twin Tracking or Parallel Planning

To avoid delay in achieving permanence for children, their care plan must always support the use of twin or triple track planning. Work must be undertaken to progress all potential permanence options until such point as permanence is achieved.

Alongside the use of twin and triple track planning, when identifying a permanence plan, a contingency plan must also be identified, in the event that the permanence plan is unsuccessful or breaks down. Work must be undertaken to ensure that identified contingency plans are viable. This means that the child will always be able to live in an arrangement that has been assessed as most suitable for them.

10.4 Sibling Relationship

It is important to assess the extent and quality of relationships in a sibling group. Usually and especially where there is a pre-existing and meaningful relationship, it will be important to actively seek to maintain sibling relationships within any Permanence Plan, including those where an alternative family placement is sought.

Issues to consider:

- The most enduring relationships people have are likely to be with their siblings.
- The impact on separated siblings of losing vital support, a shared history and continuity affect stability in the placement.

- Where siblings do not have a pre-existing relationship consideration must still be given to placement them together in order to promote and develop a lifelong relationship
- More successful outcomes occur for children placed together with their siblings. Children should therefore be placed with their siblings unless there are exceptional circumstances, such as dysfunctional interaction that cannot be remedied, incompatible needs or where the lack of appropriate placement would lead to unacceptable drift. The immediate non-availability of a suitable placement should not prevent rigorous home-finding efforts within an agreed time frame, based on balancing the potential for success against the risk of undue delay.
- The importance of identifying strengths and difficulties in sibling relationships in order to make appropriate permanent placement decisions. It is important to ascertain the perceptions and wishes of the child and their family, to assess the shared experience of siblings and the children's individual permanence needs. This involves thorough consideration of issues of gender, race, disability, identity and attachment; The importance of including regular contact between siblings within the Permanence Plan wherever possible if they cannot be placed together.

10.5 Direct Family Time with the Child's Network

Family life includes the right to have and maintain family relationships. It includes the right for children who are separated from their family to maintain family time. It is the closeness of the relationship that is important rather than the legal status and the importance of relationships should be determined by the child through direct work.

Family time must always be for the benefit of the child, not the parents or other party.

It may serve one or all of the following functions:

- To maintain a child's identity. 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 their new family
- To maintain positive relationships for the child with people who are important to them
- To minimise the sense of loss
- To assist with the process of tracing

Direct family time will be most effective when all parties accept/agree to:

- The plan for permanence
- The parental role of the permanent carers
- The benefit of family time.

Direct family time is not likely to be successful in situations where a parent:

- Disagrees with the plan for permanence
- Does not accept the parental role of the permanent carer and their own minimal role with the child
- Has proved to be unreliable in their commitment
- Has not got a significant attachment with the child or the attachment has been assessed as damaging or unhealthy for the child.

The wishes of the child to join a new family without direct family time must be considered and given considerable weight at any age.

If direct family time is a part of the permanence plan, a written formal agreement setting out how it will take place, who with, where and how frequently must be negotiated before placement and reviewed regularly throughout the child's life.

10.6 Indirect Family Time with the Child's Network

We do not all share the same sense of family; it means different things to different people. It helps when children are helped to understand to whom they are related, especially if they have complicated family trees including brothers or sisters living in different places. Identity is built on solid information.

Wherever possible, indirect family time between the child and their new family with people from the past should be facilitated in order to:

- leave open channels of communication in case increased family time is in the child's interests in the future
- provide information (preferably two-way) to help the child to maintain and enhance their identity and to provide the birth relative with some comfort in knowing of the child's progress.

Indirect family time must be negotiated prior to placement, and all parties should be asked to enter an agreement with one another about the form and frequency that the family time will take. Renegotiations of the family time should only take place if the child's needs warrant it.

All parties to the agreement will need to accept that as the child becomes older and is informed more fully about the arrangements for indirect family time, the child will have a view regarding its continuation. No arrangements can be promised to remain unaltered during the child's childhood. Those involved need to accept that family time may stop if it is no longer in the child's interests. Alternatively, an older child may need to change to direct family time.

10.7 Clearly communicating the Permanence Plan

- Communicating a permanence plan effectively involves setting it out clearly and concisely as part of the care plan, in a way that acts as a useful reference to all involved during the review process. This applies also to contingency planning.
- Good quality care plans set out clear, concise statements about intended outcomes and are clear about timescales to prevent drift or delay.

It is important that the *reasons* for the care plan and which route to permanence is chosen are clearly recorded in the child's record. As a social worker, you need to reflect whether, when the child becomes an adult and accesses his or her care record, there is full reasoning as to why a certain permanence plan was chosen, including the contact plan with family members, e.g. siblings. Adoption records have to be held for 100 years; the paper record is stored in the salt mines.

Research in Practice "[Care Planning for children in proceedings](#)" suggests that children want to know:

- People making decisions have considered and weighed different sorts of information
- Their views and feelings have been considered

- People are sure that the child would suffer harm if they returned home
- Pros and cons of different options have been considered and this is the best one for them
- Everyone has considered how their sense of belonging and identity will be supported
- Their mum and dad will be given help with this decision
- What role that everyone who is important to them will play in their life and how they will all stay in touch
- Why their home was chosen for them.

10.8 Legal routes to permanence

For younger children unable to be returned home where adoption is the plan, a Care Order and Placement Order are necessary unless parents are clearly relinquishing the child and agree with the plan and the placement choice.

For children for whom adoption is not appropriate, each case will need to be considered on an individual basis. The decision between Special Guardianship Order, Child Arrangements Order and Long-Term Fostering under a Care Order will depend on the individual needs of the child set alongside the advantages and disadvantages of each legal route.

Where a child is remaining at, or returning home, and ongoing Children's Services intervention is required beyond the support which can be provided via child in need or child protection planning, a Supervision Order should be considered, with a robust Supervision Order Support Plan stipulating the support which will be provided to the family. It should be necessary only in exceptional circumstances for a child to be placed with their parent/s under the remit of a Care Order.

11. Appendix 1 – Identifying Permanence Options: Differences

	Private Fostering	Family care (informal)	Family and friends foster care	Unrelated foster care	Child Arrangements Order	Special guardianship order (SGO)	Adoption
Route into the caring arrangement	<p>This is a private arrangement whereby the child is being cared 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>Relative means grandparent, brother, sister, uncle, or aunt (by full blood, half blood or by marriage or civil partnership)</p> <p>The child is not a looked after child.</p>	<p>The relative has chosen to take on the care of the child but 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>Relatives 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 a 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.</p>	<p>The child is a looked after child being accommodated by the local authority under Section 20 Children 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 best meet the child's needs).</p>	<p>The child may be at risk of becoming 'looked after' and a friend or relative applies for an order, or</p> <p>The child may have been 'looked after' and their foster carer or other relative/friend applies for an order.</p> <p>In either circumstance, 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.</p> <p>Or there can be benign reasons, e.g., after parent's death and in line with a prior agreement between 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 under a placement order made by a court.</p> <p>An approved foster carer can apply for an adoption order after a 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.</p>
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	Remains with birth parents if child accommodated under Section 20 CA, or If the child is subject to a care order or emergency protection order the local authority will have parental responsibility and determines the extent to which it may be exercised by others.		Shared by parents and holder of CA order.	PR shared with parents and anyone else with parental responsibility for the child. The special guardian may exercise parental responsibility to the exclusion of all others with PR, apart from another special guardian.	Transfers to adopters and relationship with birth parents is severed.

Approval basis	The arrangement is assessed by LA, but the carer is not 'approved' as a local authority carer is. The arrangement may be prohibited if assessed by the local authority as unsuitable.	None	Approved as local authority foster carers in accordance with Fostering Service Regulations. (if child is looked after, carers must be approved as foster carers even if close relative.)	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.	The adoption agency assesses and approves prospective adopters, and the court makes order regarding specific child. If the child is not looked after, then notice of intention to adopt must be given to the LA who then conduct an assessment/report for the court.
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12. Appendix 2 – Permanence Options: Duration, Support and Review

	Private Fostering	Family care (informal)	Family and friends foster care	Unrelated foster care	Child Arrangement Order	Special guardianship order (SGO)	Adoption
Duration	Subject to discretion of person with PR and readiness of private foster carers.	Subject to discretion of person with PR.	So long as placement remains in line with child's care plan, as determined by LA.		Age 16.	Age 18 unless varied or discharged but the court before the child reaches 18 years.	Permanent lifelong relationship.
Placement Supervision	It is not a placement, but there are statutory visits to child by social worker (minimum 6 weekly in first year, then 12 weekly)	None	Statutory: visits to child by social worker and supervision of foster carers by supervising social worker.			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.
Review of Placement	It is not a placement, but the LA may do formal reviews in addition to ongoing assessment during visits	None	Statutory reviews of child's care plan (minimum 6 monthly) and annual reviews of local authority foster carers' approval		None	None	See above
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 of the 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 of the Children Act 1989	Support to meet child's needs including health plan and personal education plan. Training and practical support to foster carers in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations, NMS and CWDC standards. Young person may be entitled to leaving care support services.		No entitlement (But LA has discretion to provide services/support for child/family under section 17 of the CA)	If a child was looked after prior to making the SGO, LA must assess the need for special guardianship support services. LA has discretion whether to provide support. Young person may be entitled to leaving care support services if was a looked after child prior to making an SGO.	Entitlement to assessment for adoption support services, which may be provided at discretion of LA in accordance with Regulations and NMS.

13. Appendix 3 – Permanence Options: Finances

	Private Fostering	Family care (informal)	Family and friends foster care	Unrelated foster care	CA Order	Special guardianship order (SGO)	Adoption
Financial support – entitlement	<p>Can claim child benefit and child tax credit if not being paid to parent.</p> <p>Financial responsibility to maintain the child remains with holders of PR.</p>	<p>Can claim child benefit and child tax credit if not being paid to parent.</p> <p>Financial responsibility to maintain the child remains with holders of PR.</p> <p>Guardians 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 and child tax credit not payable.</p> <p>Weekly allowance to meet the costs of caring for the child. This should meet at least the minimum rate set by DCSF.</p> <p>The Manchester City Council judgement ruled that allowances must be the same for all foster carers, whether or not family and friends.</p>		<p>Can claim child benefit and child tax credit if not being paid to parent.</p>	<p>Can claim child benefit and child tax credit if not being paid to parent.</p>	<p>Can claim child benefit and child tax credit if not being paid to parent.</p> <p>Entitlement to assessment for financial support (part of adoption support) if child looked after prior to order.</p>
Financial support – discretionary	<p>LA has discretion to make one-off or regular payments under section 17 Children Act.</p>	<p>LA has discretion to make one-off or regular payments under section 17 Children Act.</p>	<p>Some fostering providers pay their foster carers a fee to recognise the carers' skill, experience, and commitment.</p> <p>The Manchester City Council judgement (which requires allowances to be paid on the same basis regardless of the relationship of the carer to the child) did not consider fees. However, Statutory Guidance for Fostering Services requires that any policy in relation to the payment must be applied to all foster carers who meet the criteria in the same way and must not discriminate on the grounds of a pre-existing relationship with the child.</p>		<p>LA has discretion to pay residence order allowance – usually if a child was previously fostered by the carers, or exceptionally if making residence order prevents child becoming looked after. Any allowance reviewed</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 above and for former foster carers can include an element of remuneration.</p> <p>Regular or one-off payments.</p> <p>Any allowances reviewed annually.</p>	<p>Subject to assessment, one-off payments or regular adoption allowance may be paid.</p>

14. Appendix 4 – Permanency Planning Practice Standard

The Children Act 1989 regulations state that planning for permanence ensures 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.

In Tameside, we have committed to our Permanency Values, which are:

Family First: We will always consider the wider family network when planning for children

- We will prioritise keeping children with their family and their networks when safe to do so
- We will utilise genograms to map the child's network, updating as relationships change
- We will provide life story work to help children understand their identity
- We will support children in maintaining important relationships with family and their wider networks

Needs First: We will aim to ensure our children are in a family-based home that meets their needs, provides stability and keeps them safe

- We will take calculated risks to ensure permanence, with effective risk management strategies in place
- We will ensure children's needs are met in family-based homes or settings
- We will collaborate with partners to ensure children's permanence plans are achieved
- We will empower children to voice their needs and feel supported
- We will ensure we are accountable for child safety and well-being

Future First: We will help build aspirations for children and ensure that we are continuously preparing them for their future

- We will advocate for each child, tailoring our approach to their strengths and aspirations
- We will support children in building long-lasting relationships to aid their future
- We will ensure our carers/partners provide inspire and prepare children for their future
- We will talk about children in a strength-based way, focusing on needs rather than behaviours

In our practice, we will:

- ensure that all children cared for have a care plan, which includes a long-term plan for permanence, and that this is achieved in a timely way.
- use cultural genograms at an early stage so that we have a robust understanding of who is in the child's network and who can safely support the child.
- use Family Group Conferences and Family Network Meetings to support children being cared for within their family and to maintain familial relationships that will support them into adulthood.
- undertake viability assessments of adults identified in the network who may be able to offer care to the child.
- assess the relationships between brothers and sisters through completion of sibling assessments at an early stage to help us understand the child's needs in the context of permanence planning.
- ensure we have a clear permanence plan for our cared for children before their second cared for child review and through the regular use of Permanency Planning Meetings.
- update Child and Family Assessments at least every 12 months and consider within the assessment, any changes within the family that mean a reunification to family care is possible and can be assessed.
- we will try to make sure that our children cared for live within Tameside or as close to Tameside as possible.
- accurately reflect the child's needs on placement referral forms, making sure that we include all the positive aspects of a child including their strengths, aspirations and achievements.

The Team Manager will chair a permanency planning meeting:

- At any juncture where it is considered necessary to review a child's permanence plan.
- Prior to attendance at Legal Gateway where possible and immediately after Legal Gateway where it has not been possible to convene in advance.
- Within 20 days of a child becoming looked after.
- Between each statutory Looked After Child review (every 6 weeks) until permanency has been achieved.
- Prior to attending Permanence Panel.
- Where assessment at a pre-birth stage indicates the likelihood of the newborn baby becoming cared for.
- During care proceedings and at least 6 weeks prior to the filing of the final Care Plan.

15. Appendix 5 – Permanency Planning Template

Date of Meeting:
Attendees
Child's name, age and LCS number:
Review of actions set at last meeting
Why is this Permanency Planning Meeting being held? (Include short background history, legal context and any risk factors. Please include intended outcomes for the child/young person)
Who are the people who are important to the child? (Include how they have been considered to care for and or support the child and what arrangements are in place to promote the relationship between the child and those important to them)
What are the current strengths? (Include the outcome of assessments; family time; child/adult relationships)
What are the barriers to achieving permanency? (Include the outcome of assessments; family time; child/adult relationships)
What are the views of the child/young person?

What options for permanency are being considered/ruled out?

(outline the strengths and risks of each option and what this will mean for the child)

NB: Remember if more than one child the permanency plan may not be the same for all the sibling group

Return to/remain in family care

(if this cannot be supported through child in need or child protection planning, consideration of a Supervision Order with a robust Supervision Order Support Plan should be given and children should only be placed with their parent/s under the remit of a Care Order in exceptional circumstances)

Special Guardianship Order**Child Arrangements Order****Long Term Foster Care****Residential Care****Adoption****What does the sibling assessment tell us?****What is the contingency permanency plan and how do we know it is viable?****What is the anticipated timescale for achieving permanency?****Actions agreed including timescales**

(include dates of Adoption Panel, Fostering Panel, ADM. Include any support to carers required so they can care for the child long-term)

How will any decision made be shared with the child and by whom?**Date of next meeting:**

16. Appendix 4 – Useful reading

Comparing placement options to meet children and young people's current and future needs: Strategic Briefing (2017) available at [Comparing placement options to meet children and young people's current and future needs: Strategic Briefing \(2017\) | Research in Practice](#)

Assessing and supporting family and friends care: Practice Tool (2020) available at [Assessing and supporting family and friends care | Research in Practice](#)

Care Planning for children in proceedings: Frontline Briefing (2022) available at [Care planning for children in proceedings: Frontline Briefing \(2022\) | Research in Practice](#)

The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2 Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (DfE 2021) available at [The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Using Genograms in Practice; Practice Tool (2021) available at [Using genograms in practice | Research in Practice](#)

Brothers and sisters in public law proceedings – assessment, placement, permanence and contact: Frontline Briefing (2020) available at [Assessment of brothers and sisters in public law | Research in Practice](#)