**Permanence Planning Guidance**

**1. Purpose & Vision**

Wiltshire’s approach to permanence planning is rooted in the belief that every child deserves a stable, loving, and enduring home. This guidance is designed to ensure that children who cannot live with their birth families are provided with long-term, secure arrangements that support their emotional, social, and developmental needs. The aim is to create stability, enable recovery, and promote lifelong relationships.

**2. Definition of Permanence**

Permanence is not just about where a child lives; it’s about security, identity, and belonging. It includes:

* **Legal permanence**: Achieved through legal orders such as Adoption, Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs), or Child Arrangements Orders (CAOs), which provide a stable legal framework.
* **Emotional permanence**: Ensuring children form lasting, secure attachments with caregivers who offer consistent love and support.
* **Physical/environmental permanence**: Providing a stable home environment in a familiar community, preserving cultural and social connections.

The guidance emphasises that removal from family should be temporary unless absolutely necessary, and that family and friends should be the first consideration for alternative care. Reunification will remain an active consideration, if this is considered in the best interests of the child.

**3. Core Principles**

**3.1 Child-Centred and Relational**

Children’s voices are central. Planning must be led by their experiences, wishes, and feelings, with a strong emphasis on building and maintaining trusting relationships between children, carers, and professionals.

**3.2 Strengths-Based and Restorative**

We focus on what’s working well in a child’s life. Rather than focusing solely on problems, our approach builds on resilience, strengths, and potential, both in children and their support networks.

**3.3 Systemic and Collaborative**

We recognise that children’s lives are influenced by multiple systems (family, education, health, and community). Effective permanence planning requires multi-agency collaboration to ensure holistic support.

**3.4 Inclusive and Accessible**

We work to ensure that all children, including those with disabilities or protected characteristics, receive equitable support. The process must be transparent, fair, and accessible to all involved.

**4. Objectives of Permanence Planning**

The guidance outlines four key objectives:

* **Stability** - Providing a consistent, loving home throughout childhood and beyond.
* **Timeliness** - Avoiding drift and delay by making early, decisive plans.
* **Identity and Belonging** - Supporting children to develop a strong sense of self and connection to their heritage and community.
* **Participation** - ensuring children and families are actively involved in planning, with their views respected and considered.

**5. Permanence Options**

The guidance outlines a range of permanence options, each with its own legal, emotional, and practical implications:

**5.1 Return to Birth Family (refer to Reunification Policy)**

* Always the preferred option if safe and achievable.
* Requires evidence-based assessments and support plans.
* Family Group Conferences are encouraged to explore support networks.

**5.2 Family or Friends/Connected Persons**

* Prioritises kinship care to maintain family ties.
* Legal options include SGOs, CAOs, or Adoption.
* Regulation 24 placements (temporary fostering by relatives) are used only in exceptional cases.

**5.3 Adoption**

* Offers complete legal transfer of parental responsibility.
* Best suited for younger children where reunification is not possible.
* Provides permanence and legal security but severs ties with birth family.

**5.4 Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs)**

* Grants shared parental responsibility to a guardian (usually a relative).
* Offers legal stability while maintaining some birth family links.
* Less intrusive than adoption, but not as permanent.

**5.5 Child Arrangements Orders (CAOs)**

* Determines who the child lives with and contact arrangements.
* Maintains legal ties with birth parents.
* Offers less legal security than SGOs or adoption.

**5.6 Long-Term Foster Care**

* Suitable for older children who may not want adoption.
* Maintains local authority involvement and birth family links.
* Can lack the legal permanence and emotional security of other options.
	1. **Residential Care**
* Used only when specialist support is needed for children with complex needs.

**6. Local Placement Emphasis**

Children should be placed locally whenever possible to maintain continuity in:

* Education
* Friendships
* Cultural and community ties

Out-of-area placements must be justified and carefully considered for their impact on the child’s identity and well-being.

**7. Assessment & Planning**

**7.1 Timely Assessments**

* Assessments should be completed by the second Looked After Review.
* Must be outcome-focused and consider long-term needs and support.

**7.2 Multi-Agency Collaboration**

* Involves social workers, health professionals, education colleagues, and legal teams.
* Ensures a holistic and coordinated approach.

**7.3 Parallel Planning**

* Develops multiple plans simultaneously to avoid delays if the primary plan becomes unviable.

**7.4 Court Considerations**

* Courts must consider the permanence provisions of the Care Plan, including:
	+ Impact of past harm
	+ Current and future needs
	+ How the plan meets those needs

**8. Good Practice Principles**

* Child-Centred practice that engages children in planning in age-appropriate ways. We respect their voice and lived experience.
* Cultural Sensitivity in our approach ensuring we Incorporate the child’s cultural, religious, and linguistic background into planning.
* Support for caregivers by providing training and ongoing tailored support to foster carers, adopters, and guardians.
* Permanence plans must be regularly reviewed and adapted as needed.
* Actively supporting reunification through clear communication with families about what needs to change for reunification.
* Stability includes emotional, relational, and environmental continuity and avoids unnecessary changes in placement, school, or relationships.
* Siblings should be placed together wherever it is in their best interests. We recognise that sibling relationships are protective and enduring.
* Family Time Contact must be child-focused, not for the benefit of adults. It should support the child’s identity, reassurance, and sense of continuity.
* Permanence Plans must be clear, concise, and outcome focused. They should be easily understood by all involved and regularly referenced in reviews.

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