

Meeting: Children, Education and Skills Sub-committee

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Title: Permanency Planning

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Looked After Children's Resources

Service: Health, Education, Care and Safeguarding

Wards affected: All

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide assurance to the committee that the processes and policies in place to support permanency planning for children who require this are in place.

2. Recommendations

The sub-committee is recommended to note the information in the report and make any comments and/or recommendations as appropriate.

3. Information

- 3.1 Permanence Planning is a social work term used to describe the care planning activities that ensure children and young people who become Looked After by the Local Authority are supported to live in a place they can stay in.

Permanence is defined in the statutory guidance that accompanies the Children Act 1989 as providing children with:

'a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity ... a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond' (DCSF, 2010).

- 3.2 Permanence is about having a 'family for life' and a sense of belonging and connectedness. At its heart is the quality and continuity of the relationships children build with their carers, regardless of placement type. Placement stability is an important element of permanence as it creates opportunities for children to develop these relationships, which may take time for children whose previous relationships have been characterised by adversity.
- 3.3 Continuing high-quality relationships are important for children in care because they help children build security through developing secure

attachments while supporting their ability to form relationships in the future as adults and helping them develop a strong sense of belonging and identity.

3.4 Permanence can be reached through different pathways:

- a return to birth parents
- shared care arrangements
- permanence within the looked after system: a residential placement, long-term unrelated foster care, or family and friends care
- Legal permanence (Adoption, Special Guardianship Order, Child Arrangement Order).

4. Signs of Safety

4.1 Within North Tyneside Council children's services the introduction of Signs of Safety as a model of practice includes at the outset of any work with a family, a meeting described as a 'network meeting'. This is a meeting of all of the adults involved in a child's life that are able to offer support to the child and/or their parents. Increasingly these meetings are successful in identifying the concerns that have led to social work involvement and establishing a 'bottom line' with parents. This provides clarity and a focus for intervention to support improvements in a child's situation and care in the home. These meetings also identify contingency arrangements in the event changes are not made or sustained within a timescale required by the child. Working in this way supports children to live safely within their families supported by this wider network.

5. Looked After Children

- 5.1 The definition of looked-after children is found in the Children Act 1989. A child is looked after by a local authority if a court has granted a care order to place a child in care, or a council's children's services department has cared for the child for more than 24 hours.
- 5.2 This includes children who the Local Authority has placed a restriction on a parents contact or ability to undertake care without the supervision of another person. Often children are 'placed' with extended family members, and are therefore 'Looked After', within their own families while further work is undertaken.
- 5.3 Children who need to become Looked After by the Local Authority are identified as requiring a permanent alternative place to live with adults who can provide the stability and certainty that supports good trusting relationships, upon which foundations can be built to thrive into adulthood.
- 5.4 Whenever a child becomes 'Looked After' by the Local Authority an Independent Reviewing officer is appointed to oversee the Care Planning for the child. This role includes ensuring that there are no delays in establishing for the child a care plan that provides them with 'permanence'. Formal meetings (Looked After Child Reviews) are held at statutory intervals and at these meetings the social worker is required to present the permanent Care Plan for the child. These meetings are held and the child is included, and all other adults involved in the child's life,

subject to the child's agreement (where they are old enough to express an informed view).

6. Foster Care

- 6.1 Foster care is identified for many children and young people as a permanent alternative care arrangement. This involves a child living in the family home of an assessed and approved foster carer and being supported by that foster carer with all of the tasks that a parent may reasonably be expected to undertake. Foster care placements are made by the social work foster care team, and when making a placement the child's needs are considered. This includes the child's education and health needs as well as the child's need to maintain existing networks and relationships with important people in their lives.
- 6.2 When a child is placed in foster care every effort is made to ensure that the child is matched to the fostering household. This supports the stability of this arrangement and increases the likelihood of the arrangement enduring. Once the child and foster carer are confident the arrangement is one that they agree is likely to endure, consideration is given by the child's care team to requesting the arrangement be formalised at fostering panel as a permanent arrangement. This requires both the child's and the foster carer social worker to agree that this is the best outcome. In these circumstances this would be presented with a range of supporting written material to the fostering panel who would then make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker that the child and foster carer should be 'long term matched'. This then provides each with the certainty that the arrangement is accepted by all involved as permanent.
- 6.3 Within North Tyneside Council, as with many Local Authorities it has not been previous practice to support this process for children over 12. This is an area for change within North Tyneside as we strongly believe that a child's age should not be a determining factor in achieving permanence and we are introducing long term matching regardless of age where it is identified as the correct course of action for the child.

7. Special Guardianship and Child Arrangement Orders

- 7.1 Where safe and appropriate to do so children are supported to remain living within their own families or wider networks. As explained above this may result in them being considered a 'Looked After Child'. Where it is clear a child cannot safely return to their parents care, but alternative care within their family is identified as meeting their needs and being able to do so on a permanent alternative basis, connected person's carers often seek legal orders to secure the child within their care. Doing so supports the child to be clear that the arrangement is permanent and can remove the long term daily involvement of children's social care from the family life.
- 7.2 In these circumstances the court is requested to make a legal order to support the arrangement. Typically this is endorsed by the Local Authority Children's Services with assessment and supporting evidence.

- 7.3 Where legal orders are made providing permanent alternative care for children under a Special Guardianship Order the Local Authority have a duty to undertake an assessment of the support that arrangement may require. This includes, but is not exclusively, financial support.
- 7.4 North Tyneside Council fostering service has social workers dedicated to the provision of this support. We operate support groups, and provide individual support to carers, as well as making payments to support the arrangements.
- 7.5 Where a Child Arrangement Order is made there is not the same statutory requirement to provide on-going support or assessment of support needs. Within North Tyneside Children's services support needs are assessed regardless and provided as required. The financial support to carers who have a Child Arrangement Order is discretionary.

8. Adoption

- 8.1 Where a child is identified as being unable to live safely with their parents, and for whom no safe alternative network is identified a plan of adoption may be presented to the court for consideration. This is only ever undertaken when the child's social worker is able to demonstrate that there is no safe alternative and where the court agrees that is the case.
- 8.2 North Tyneside Council adoption service works to identify adults who are suitable to adopt children in anticipation of these circumstances. Adults who wish to adopt come from a wide demographic range and careful assessment and training of them is undertaken prior to any consideration of the placement of a child with them. This process takes a period of months and tests the adult's resilience and commitment to adoption. During this period of time the prospective adopters will be supported to consider their ability to meet the needs of children with different characteristics and experiences, to allow them to be best matched with a child in the future. If this is successful the adult's circumstances are presented to the adoption panel that make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker that the adult(s) is suitable to adopt. The Agency Decision Maker then either approves this or not.
- 8.3 The same process is involved in 'matching' a child with prospective adopters. In order to avoid delay in this process it is usual for concurrent planning to take place. This means the possibility of the child requiring different types of placement are considered at the same time and planning for each potential outcome takes place at the same time. This means that for the child when a final plan is agreed that this can progress without delay.

9. Background documents

[Children Act 1989](#)