

Placement stability Practice Guidance for children looked after and young people within Waltham Forest.

Concerns have been raised in the past around the impact that placement moves have on children and young people in achieving best outcomes and their general progression in life. It has been observed that possible moves could have been prevented if a more collaborative and planned process was followed to identify and support placements. In the absence of providing evidence of efforts/measures considered and processes followed to stabilise placements, placement moves will not be considered. Placement moves will be considered as a last resort.

1. Purpose

- That the London Borough of Waltham Forest ensures that we have stable placements for children and young people.
- This practice guidance provides information to ensure that placement stability is at the forefront of every care arrangement for children looked after and young people.
- This will provide a framework for joined up work with all partners to ensure that we achieve placement stability.
- It provides a framework to placement stability in identifying, managing and monitoring placement stability.

2. Definition and Scope

A simple working definition of placement stability for the purposes of this practice guidance is used as follows:

'Well planned placements that reduce the need for placement changes and emergency placements'.

This definition assumes that permanency is central to care planning. Ideally, children entering care would live in a single placement before returning home or becoming part of another family permanently.

Children should move only when their permanency goals require it and where all possible alternatives have been considered. The main objective is to reduce placement moves except those that are progressions toward permanency/ independence.

For the purpose of this guidance we consider placement stability in relations to all permanency plans for children and young people with reference to the following areas:

- Adoptive Placements
- Foster Placements

- Residential Placements
- Kinship placements (Family and Friends)
- Semi-Independent Placements

This practice guidance has been produced with reference to and should be read in conjunction with:

Waltham Forest Children Looked After and Care Leaver's Strategy (2014- 2017)

Permanency Policy (2014)

The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations volume 2: care planning, placement and case review

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) Sufficiency: statutory guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children

Waltham Forest Quality Improvement Plan (- which outlines particular actions in relation to the Children Looked After and Care Leaver's Strategy and includes placement stability)

The Fostering Service Statement of Purpose

Management Instructions, as follows:-

Practice Guidance relating to Pathway Plans, care planning and statutory visits to a child

3. Placement request and matching.

It is important that the placement request document is completed as soon as it is identified that a placement or alternative placement is needed for a child or young person.

The purpose of the placement request form is to ensure that the child and young person's specific needs are identified and they are matched with a provider who can adequately support the young person within his/ her placement. The document also highlights risks and encourages the allocated worker to identify previous support that has been implemented to minimise and/or prevent these risks from happening.

Identifying risk and issues that might have existed in the past is important, but also the measures that have previously been used to stabilise placements and manage risk. It is important to consider that moving a child or young person from one placement to another might not necessarily mean that the issues are managed or

addressed directly. A plan that the allocated worker and other professionals derives, must demonstrate the work undertaken around the issues existing within the placement. It is crucial that professionals consider the impact of the child or young person's lived experiences on how they view placements provided to them.

Further details of the child/young person's strengths and achievements, their personality, likes and dislikes, hobbies and interests and any other information needed for placement matching is required.

The document focuses on the legal status, educational needs of the young person, and the contact arrangements between them and their families and/or significant people in their lives. Another aspect is the importance of capturing the views of the child or young person in relation to their care plan/ pathway plan and the placement that is being explored for them.

It is important, as part of this request, that all restrictions and issue around placements are identified, to enable the placement teams to assess all possible resources available to identify the best possible provisions that will meet the needs of the child or young person. This is also relevant/important in terms of sibling groups. Where siblings cannot be placed together the preferred options should be clarified and discussed with the placement team. Transport requirements including school and other regular activities should be clarified.

Placement requirements is further explored in terms of the specific needs of the child or young person i.e. health, education, identity and social presentation Family and social relationship, emotional, behavioural, development and self-care skills.

The placement request document also focuses on the specific outcomes that we want to achieve with our children and young people in these specific placements. It also draws on joint working as a collaborative approach, to address the needs of children and young people in ensuring the best outcomes for them.

4. Introduction Planning Meetings

Introduction Planning Meetings should be convened as part of the process of identifying and placing a child - as set out in the **Placement in Foster Care**

Procedure and the Placements in Residential Care Procedure. This should also be considered for young people who are moving into semi – independent placements. This will ensure that the unit is aware of any specific needs and issues, and the young person gets an opportunity to meet the relevant staff.

The first Introduction Planning Meeting in relation to a placement should be held before the placement or, where this is not possible because of the urgency of the situation, within 72 hours of the placement.

Further Introduction Planning Meetings should be held at intervals agreed with the manager of the residential home or foster/connected carers or adopters as part of a transition plan. This also needs to include the social worker for the carers and other relevant/interested parties. Introduction Planning Meetings may also be called where there are issues to be resolved in relation to the day to day arrangements for the placement.

The social worker and home manager/carers' social worker will agree the best format and venue for the meeting and who will chair the meeting.

5. Placement Agreement meetings (Placement Plan)

Before a placement is made, (or soon afterwards, in the case of an emergency), a Placement agreement meeting must be held. Where arranged after the placement is made, this must take place within 5 working days. The purpose of this meeting is to ensure that the child/ young person, as well as the Foster carers and/or service providers are clear as to the arrangements for the child or young person whilst they are living in the accommodation.

Foster Carers and their supervising social worker, staff from the accommodation providers, the young person, the allocated worker and any other professionals involved in the normal day to day arrangements for children and young people should be present. The placement agreement meeting is arranged and chaired by the allocated social worker/ leaving care coaches. In the case of a LBWF foster placement, the supervising social worker will assist in arranging this.

It is important to note that Placement Agreement Meetings form part of the mechanism that is used on an ongoing basis to support placements of children and young people and should be used to review placements on an ongoing basis.

A Placement agreement meeting should produce a Placement Plan. This also needs to be completed within 5 working days of placement. The Purpose of this Placement Plan is to set out in detail how the placement will contribute to meeting the child or young person's needs as set out in the care plan. The Placement Plan will set out how the child or young person will be cared for on a day to day basis and how the child or young person's welfare will be safeguarded and promoted by the Foster carer/s or providers.

The placement plan provides the framework for ensuring that there is clarity for the child / young person and foster carer's / providers roles and responsibilities in carrying out the day to day tasks and for the child's upbringing and financial arrangements. The carers will receive relevant information to enable them to support and care for the child or young person. Help and support that carers will need is identified and confirmed during the meeting. If there are additional resources required with costs implications, this will be presented to the Children In Care panel. This will ensure that the placement is unlikely to break down due to lack of clarity regarding everyone's roles and responsibilities.

During this meeting the long term plans for the child or young person will be discussed, as well as the time frames for this, with specific reference to the objectives of the placement and how this will fit within the context of the care plan or pathway planning. Within this framework, where a placement is identified as long term, the plan should reflect greater levels of delegated authority to the carers, and in the case of semi-independent providers, greater autonomy for the young person to conduct their business as part of independent skill development.

Information that will be shared with the care providers, and the reason for this, should be shared with the parents, previous carers and young people (having regard to their age and understanding). Where there is reason for withholding significant information about the child or young person's history, this should be documented.

Where placements are made immediately or as a result of an emergency, it is important that foster carers are provided with sufficient information, including health information, to keep the child/ young person and other people in the household safe. However, it is important that if carers are to work in partnership with both parents and practitioners, they feel that they are sufficiently trusted with sensitive information.

6. Placement stability meetings

When issues exist around placements of children and young people, a review of the placement agreement needs to take place, considering alternative ways to support the young person and/or foster carer in placement. If this does not resolve the issues then a Placement Stability Meeting needs to be arranged.

A Placement Stability Meeting will be held when a more intensive approach is required. This meeting will consider the factors that could result in the disruption of the placement and how this might be averted, if in the best interests of the child.

The focus of the meeting will be to gain an understanding of the quality of the child/carer relationship and identify other areas of difficulty impacting on the stability of the placement.

The focus of this meeting will be to create opportunity for the foster carer/s, child/ren or young person/s to discuss the issues or concerns that exist within the placement. Contribution from other professionals who are involved with the child, young person and foster carer/s will also be sought at the meeting.

A Placement Stability Meeting will be called when the placement of a Looked After Child is considered to be at risk of disrupting.

This could be if:

1. Concern is raised through the child's or foster carer's review process;
2. Where an allegation or complaint has been made;
3. The child or young person is absconding or is absent from placement on a regular basis;
4. Where there is relationship fragility in the placement because:
 - The relationship between the child and carer gives cause for concern that the placement may break down;
 - The child or young person has made it known that they want the placement to end.

- The carers have expressed concerns that they are experiencing difficulties or that they feel they can no longer care for the child or young person;
- The child or young person's social worker or other professionals raise cause for concern that the placement does not meet the needs of the child or young person.

Where it appears that the placement is unstable, every effort will be made to resolve the presenting difficulties. This will be in the form of considering ways to support the carers to manage issues in relation to the young person, thinking about his / her placement and strategies that could be implemented to stabilise the placement. This could also include considering additional support to address the issues of concern.

Where a resolution to avoid placement breakdown can be achieved, a plan will be formulated. This will highlight the issues and difficulties in the placement to date and set specific actions to maintain placement stability. This will clearly cite by whom and when the actions are to be completed.

Where necessary, a second Placement Stability, or a follow up Network meeting will be arranged where continuing recommendations will be made about the placement.

Where it is not possible to prevent the breakdown of a placement, a Placement Disruption Meeting will be held. See Placement **Disruption Meetings Procedure**.

7. Placement disruption meeting

Consideration should always be given to convening a Disruption Meeting in relation to children whose placement has ended abruptly or on an unplanned basis. This guidance should be read in conjunction with Waltham Forest Policy for **Introduction Planning and Disruption Meetings**

For children whose adoptive placement disrupts, a Disruption Meeting must take place - see **Disruption of Adoptive Placement Procedure**.

A Team Manager will usually chair the meeting. In complex cases, however, consideration will be given to appointing an independent person as chair.

The purpose of this meeting is to get an understanding as to the reasons why the placement has disrupted, whether learning can be taken from this and applied to future placements to avoid further disruption. During this meeting the history of the young person, carers and the placement will be explored to get a sense of what the specific reasons were that the placement resulted in breaking down, and that no alternatives could be considered to secure it.

One of the aims of this meeting will be to ensure the child / young person (depending on his or her age and level of understanding) is given the opportunity to understand the reasons for the placement disruption and be supported with managing the feelings around this and the transition from one placement to another.

The chairperson should keep minutes, which must be circulated to all concerned. The disruption meeting should focus on the strength and potential of the child / young person and carers, as well as the areas of challenges and difficulties, resulting in the placement breakdown. The outcome of this meeting should enable all professionals to learn from this experience, trying to minimise and / or prevent this from happening in future.

In relation to the disruption of an external residential placement, consideration needs to be given to explore if this provision will continue to be used in future as a resource by the Local Authority.

In relation to the disruption of a permanent foster placement, where the foster carers are in-house approved carers, consideration should be given to holding an early Foster Carer Review to consider the foster carer's approval, if relevant to the approval of the carers- see **Review and Termination of Approval of Foster Carers Procedure**

8. Conclusion

To ensure that placement stability is created for all children and young people it is important that all professionals work consciously to continue to focus on the needs of our young people in a proactive way, as well as exploring ways that foster carers and providers can be supported. Placements should be identified as part of a planned process, ensuring that considerable thought and assessment has gone into identifying and understanding the specific identified abilities and skills of carers, which can be matched with the needs of the child or young person.

It is important that placements are reviewed on a regular basis, even when progressing well, to ensure that we continue to be mindful of what is happening within placements and how we can continue to sustain and support these stable placements. In cases where challenges exist around placements, we need to ensure we are exploring issues in such a way that we start making sense of the child's lived experiences and the impact of these on the foster carer's ability to care for the child in a safe and supportive way.

Flow Chart

