

## Document Control

### Sign off and ownership details

<b>Document Name</b>	LONDON BOROUGH OF HAVERING PERMANENCY STATEMENT
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### Revision history

<b>Version</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Dissemination</b>
<b>V0.1</b>	First Draft	October 2014	
<b>V0.2</b>	Comments and Final version	April 2023	Senior Management Team sign off

1	Title of activity	LONDON BOROUGH OF HAVERING PERMANENCY STATEMENT		
2	Type of activity	Update of Statement		
3	Scope of activity	To equip our social worker, practitioners, carers, Independent Reviewing Officers, supervising social workers, placements team and other professionals to work together to find stable, safe and sustainable permanent home for Havering's children in a timely manner.		
4a	Are you changing, introducing a new, or removing a service, policy, strategy or function?	Yes / No	If the answer to <u>any</u> of these questions is 'YES', please continue to question 5.	If the answer to <u>all</u> of the questions (4a, 4b & 4c) is 'NO', please go to question 6.
4b	Does this activity have the potential to impact (either positively or negatively) upon people (9 protected characteristics)?	Yes / No		
4c	Does the activity have the potential to impact (either positively or negatively) upon any factors which determine people's health and wellbeing?	Yes /No		
5	If you answered YES:	<b>Please complete the EqHIA in Section 2 of this document.</b> Please see Appendix 1 for Guidance.		
6	If you answered NO: <i>(Please provide a clear and robust explanation on why your activity does not require an EqHIA. This is essential in case the activity is challenged under the Equality Act 2010.)</i>  <i>Please keep this checklist for your audit trail.</i>			

In Havering we are committed to ensuring our children and young people are able to live in safe good quality homes that meet their needs. This Permanency Strategy sets out our strategic aims for developing and delivering a plan of action for children to achieve permanent homes as early in their lives as possible. This includes permanent placements; reducing placement breakdowns; and achieving stable, safe and sustainable placements that promote all aspects of the child or young person's developmental needs. The plan reflects Havering's high ambition for the standard of care, which is to ensure young people are able to thrive and achieve and lead happy healthy lives.

Our plan is designed to equip our social worker, practitioners, carers, Independent Reviewing Officers, supervising social workers, placements team and other professionals to work together to find stable, safe and sustainable permanent home for Havering's children in a timely manner.

### **Definition of permanence**

Permanence is a framework of emotional, physical or environmental and legal conditions that gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity. Where it is not possible for children to remain with birth parents, the London Borough of Havering (LBH) aims to ensure that children are securely attached to carers for the duration of their childhood.

Planning for permanence ensures that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond. Children have different needs and come from diverse and complex families. Permanency can be achieved through different routes. The permanency planning process identifies which option best meets the needs of the individual child.

### **Legal Framework**

The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations sets out the clear expectation that Local Authorities should (where necessary) secure permanent care arrangements for the children in its care. This has been strengthened in the revised regulations where achieving Permanence for every child must be a key consideration from the day a child becomes Looked After (Care Planning Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010).

### **Our Principles for Permanence**

- Not all children we work with will need to be in the care of Havering Children's Services. However, all children will need to have their permanence needs considered, planned and addressed. This may be in staying with or returning to their family; living with extended family, friends or connected persons through a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or Child Arrangement Order; long term foster care; Adoption; or residential care if this is necessary to meet the child's needs.
- Our aim is to ensure that all children, of all abilities, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity and class in Havering achieve a stable home environment as soon as possible and within a maximum timeframe of 14 months from them needing our intervention. Our pledge to Havering children is to hear and respect their views and work towards them achieving their ideal stable home life.

- To meet our aim every child will have an agreed written permanence plan in place by the second Looked after Review in accordance with the Care Planning Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and the Adoption and Children Act 2002.
- Havering will ensure that systems for assessment, planning intervention and review, are robust, legally compliant and informed by best practice, and research.
- Permanency planning will be child focused and where conflict arises between the wishes of the parent and the needs of the child, the child's needs will be paramount.
- Decisions about the permanent placement of children will respect the child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language.
- The needs of children with additional needs and disabilities will be taken into account as part of the planning and matching process.
- Children will be sensitively and age appropriately consulted in the care planning process but will be assured that the burden of decision making does not fall upon them.
- We will ensure children understand their life journey and develop positive narratives about themselves through quality, inclusive life story work.
- Children will be prepared for their permanency journey in an age appropriate manner, ensuring they have the information and support required to help them on that journey.
- Parents and Carers will be worked with in partnership to ensure they are clear and involved (where appropriate) in decisions about the best interests of their children. They will be offered appropriate information and support.
- Where siblings become Looked After, careful consideration to be given to their individual needs and their need to be placed together. Where it is not viable to do so, consideration of significant, good quality contact will be promoted by their care givers.
- Every young person must have support services available to meet their assessed needs and have readily available assistance in the event of difficulties or placement breakdown
- Every young person must have information about how to make complaints or representations if required and how to access advocacy services.

### **Planning for permanence and stability (Looked After Children)**

- For all children in care, it is a legal requirement to have an up-to-date Care Plan. The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 set down minimum requirements for the review of care planning for Looked After Children.
- The first review should take place within 20 working days of the child coming into care.. The second review should take place no later than three months after the first and then at intervals of no more than six months thereafter. (section 4 Care Planning, Placement, Review)
- In addition, the Care Planning Regulations and the Adoption Act 2002 requires there to be a written Permanence plan presented to the second statutory review (i.e. within 4 months of becoming Looked After).

- The Permanence plan will identify the appropriate option (or options depending upon the stage reached in any care proceedings) for the child and will be formally endorsed at this second statutory review. Responsibilities for implementing the plan and actions contained within it will be clearly attributed with timescales for outcomes. The plan will include evidence of contingency arrangements.
- The plan will be made available, and updated, at each subsequent review. The Independent Reviewing Officer will be informed by the social worker of any changes to the Care Plan and any significant events in the child's life between reviews.
- Our strategic plan helps to equip professionals to work together to find stable, safe and sustainable permanent home for Havering's children in a timely manner. We will continue to review children's records and seeks the views of and with children and young people who have care experience, to gain their understanding of permanency.

### **Key Objectives in Permanence Planning**

The objective of planning for permanence is to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond. The question "how are the child's permanence needs being met?" must be at the core of everything we do. Where it is necessary for a child to leave his or her family, this should be for as short a time as needed to secure a safe, supported return home. If a child cannot return home, plans must be made for alternative permanent care. Family members and friends should always be considered in the first instance with the permanence secured through the appropriate legal order to meet the child's needs. Where it is not in the child's best interests to live within the family network, it will usually be in the interests of the child for alternative permanent carers to be identified and the placement secured through Adoption, Long Term Foster Care, Child arrangement orders or Special Guardianship Orders. Residential group living is provided only when a need for this is identified within the Care Plan and when substitute family care is not appropriate.

For older children arranging for their independent living must be considered. Where it is clear that families and children are unable to live together, planning must be swift and clear to identify permanent alternative settings. Wherever possible, care should be provided locally unless clearly identified as inappropriate. Family time with parents, siblings and extended family should be facilitated and built on (unless clearly identified as inappropriate). The professionals involved will work in partnership with parents/families to meet the above objectives. The wishes and feelings of the child will be taken into account.

When undertaking permanence planning, all workers have a duty to promote the child's links with his or her racial, cultural and religious heritage. Wherever possible promoting placements enabling the child to be brought up within the same racial, cultural and religious environment as his birth family.

However, the overriding permanency principle must be to avoid delay. Therefore, identifying a placement which can promote links to the child's race, culture, disability and religion must be considered if the above is not possible.

### **Placement of sibling groups**

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.

Permanency Planning in Havering will address the sibling relationships at the onset of the Permanency Planning process to consider if assessments are required to inform the Family Finding work and prevent unnecessary delays for children.

Issues from research:

- 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;
- 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 family 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 sibling time within the permanence plan wherever possible, if they cannot be placed together.

## **Permanency Options**

### **Reunification/Staying at Home**

We are focused on supporting children to live with their birth family whenever it is safe to do so and enabling families to be ambitious in achieving this. We understand that good relationships are crucial and promote this through our Practice Model. Delivering the right service at the right time for sustainable change and offering support at the first instance means children are more likely to remain in their families. If this is not possible we look to the family and extended network for alternative care.

### **Placement with Family or Friends/Connected Persons**

If children are unable to live with their immediate family our priority is to identify a member of their extended family or network to care for them. Genograms and ecomaps are used as direct tools to help families and practitioners to better understand their strengths and systemic functioning. Family group conferences or family network meetings are used at the earliest stage to identify what supports each member could offer to strengthen the family's functioning. These meetings will also work to identify who could provide either short, or long-term care depending on the need of the child and their family. Our Fostering Recruitment

and Permanency team undertake connected persons and SGO assessments with an aim of completion in 14-weeks.

### **Special Guardianship (SGO)**

Special Guardianship provides an alternative legal status for children and provides the child with permanency without taking away all of their parent's rights. A special guardian is usually a family member or family friend. SGO's can be granted as an outcome of court proceedings initiated by Merton or through private law applications. SGO's are also an option for foster carers who have children settled in their care and who can meet their needs without state intervention.

### **Long term Fostering**

Long term foster care means that a child or young person lives with a committed foster carer until they reach adulthood. Being brought up by a consistent carer over time provides a greater sense of belonging within a family. If a child does need to move to other carers, their family network will always be considered to see if it is safe and appropriate to achieve. This option has proved to be particularly useful for older children who retain strong links to their birth families and do not want or need the formality of adoption and where the carers wish for the continued involvement of the local authority.

### **Staying Put Arrangements**

Staying Put arrangements are positive outcomes for our care experienced young people who are approaching 18 years-old. Changes to the Leaving Care Act have enabled young people to remain with carers longer, this means a young person has a stable placement with their permanent foster carers who are their forever family. Merton aims to have sustainable placement agreements for all of our children before the age of 18 years. The increase in Staying Put arrangements has highlighted the need for more foster carers to be recruited who can meet the needs of older children entering care for the first time.

### **Adoption**

Adoption is a way of providing the security, permanency and love of a new family when it is not possible for a child to be raised by their birth parents or within the birth family. Adoption is a legal process and transfers Parental Responsibility for the child from the birth parents and others who had Parental Responsibility, including the local authority, permanently and solely to the adopter(s).

### **Concurrent Planning Placements**

Concurrent Planning is where a child moves from their birth parent(s) to their prospective permanent family while reunification is still being pursued. These arrangements can be made for a child of any age.

### **Fostering to Adoption/ Early permanence placement**

Foster-to-adopt describes assessed and approved prospective adopters who are also approved as foster carers so they can care immediately for children they would like to adopt. This would be before the Agency Decision Maker and Courts have formally decided a child can be placed for adoption.

Foster-to-adopt carers most often care for babies where there have been previous children adopted and the family history and identified risks are such that adoption is more likely than not. Some prospective adopters become foster-to-adopt carers so the brother or sister of a child they have already adopted can join them. Foster-to-adopt arrangements can also be used for older children and brother and sister groups.

### **Identifying the Best Permanence Option**

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

### **Parallel Planning**

Parallel Planning is the key principle which underpins this permanency strategy and is essential for our work with all children in our care in Havering. Parallel planning refers to a situation where two or more plans run in parallel. In such cases the main focus will be upon rehabilitation home but, at the same time, a parallel plan or plans (e.g. placement with family/friends and/or adoption) will be established in order to achieve an alternative permanent placement if rehabilitation is unsuccessful.

Where care proceedings have been initiated, and there are concerns regarding the viability of the child being able to return to his/her birth family, parallel plans will be put in place to avoid delay and to provide the Court with a clear plan. Parallel Planning needs to begin at point a child enters into care.

Family Group Conferences should be held as early as possible to agree what needs to happen to help the child to return home and within what timescales. Schools and community professionals should be consulted to identify alternative family members where the parents are not open to the involvement of their extended family network. Birth parents must be

informed from the outset that two or more options are under consideration within a strictly controlled timescale and that the primacy of the rehabilitation plan must also be stressed.

Parallel planning does not pre-empt the Court decision but does prevent delay when reunification is not feasible.

It is important that Havering, through the Independent Reviewing Officer, continues to hear what children and young people want from a permanent alternative home, which will help the matching processes and support bonding between the permanent carer and child or young person.

### **Permanency Tracking Meetings**

Permanency Tracking Meetings are Havering's process to reflect on, and progress the permanence for children. The meetings are an opportunity to share all aspects of the child/young person's story through relationships with, and knowledge about them and to better inform the care planning to achieve permanency.

#### **Permanency tracking for children under the age of 10 years' old**

Children under the age of 10 that enter into care proceedings will be presented to this panel to review the parallel plan. Cases will be referred to the panel by the Care Proceedings Group Manager after the LPM agreement to initiate proceedings.

The panel will review cases until the final care plan has been agreed and evidence has been filed.

Children with a final care plan for adoption will continue to be tracked by this panel until placed with a family and the Adoption Order granted.

Children with a final care plan for long term fostering will be transferred to the long term permanency panel when the court authorises the care plan.

Tracking and monitoring of this panel will be the responsibility of the Adoption Team. The meeting will be chaired by the Head of Service for Adopt London East. Agreed decisions will be placed on the child's record.

#### **Permanency tracking for children over the age of 10 years' old**

Cases for children aged over 10 in care proceedings will be tracked by the legal tracking meeting which help ensure cases are progressed in a timely manner through court. Once care proceedings have concluded child will be transferred to the long term permanency tracking panel.

The meeting will be chaired by the Care Proceedings Group Manager. Agreed decisions will be placed on the child's record.

#### **Long term permanency tracking**

Cases will be transferred to this panel when:

- The court has authorised the care plan for long term fostering
- Children placed under S20

Cases will be transferred to this panel from the permanency tracking for under 10's and S20's by the relevant Team Manager at the point the care episode commences.

Tracking and monitoring of this panel will be the responsibility of ISS/SSSU. The meeting will be chaired by the Head of Service for QA/ Safeguarding Service. Agreed decisions will be placed on the child's file.

### **Life Story Work**

Life Story Work is the story of the child's journey, which includes the child's experience within their birth family and encompasses the child's history and ecosystem. Life Story work should include a narrative as well as pictures and other forms of information to help the child understand why they came into care and any subsequent changes. The work should include the child; their birth parents and extended family where appropriate. It should include information collated by parents (where possible), carers, social workers and other key people. Life Story Work should start from the beginning of our interventions with the child and be updated alongside the child as they grow up to help them process and form an accurate narrative of their life journey. Life story work will be recorded sensitively on the child's file using language which empathises with children's birth families and recognises the impact trauma can have on the challenges and decisions adults might face. In exceptional circumstances, where it is not appropriate to include the child there must be a plan for sharing the child's life story with them.

### **The best options for children**

This strategy defines and clarifies expectations around the permanency options for the children of Havering. It outlines options for those who may need additional help and support when their families are having difficulties which require them to have support in their home environment or live away from their birth parents.

All those working with children and families play a part in offering and supporting these permanency options. It is the translation of best practice for children by all involved in the journey of the child which will ensure best outcomes for Havering's children.

### **Havering Permanency Priorities**

- To ensure children have regular Permanency Planning Meetings (PPM's) to review and progress their plan of permanence until permanence is achieved.
- Provision of robust oversight of children requiring permanence to ensure timeliness and quality of care, through the use of performance indicators, management tracking systems, and the Independent Reviewing Service.
- Providing timely, well matched permanent placements through increasing our capacity of in-house foster carers, and having good quality permanence reports for children.
- To include birth families in the child's life wherever safe and appropriate for children in care.
- To support birth parents to make changes and mend relationships with children in care in the event reunification may be achieved, either pre or post adulthood if it is in the child's best interest to do so.
- To ensure that children understand their life journey and develop positive narratives about themselves through quality, inclusive life story work.

- Improving staff knowledge of permanency through training and supporting social workers to have systemic conversations with families in practice. This should lead to improved outcomes for children and families.
- Continuing a cycle of learning to ensure our practice is developing and evolving to meet the needs of our children. This includes feedback from children and families, audits, learning reviews, learning from others and national guidance and research.