

LONDON BOROUGH OF BARNET PERMANENCY POLICY

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Principles and Policy
3. Options for Permanency
4. Procedure

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The London Borough of Barnet is committed to ensuring that all children in its care are given the opportunity to live safely and securely in a family. In circumstances where children cannot remain with their birth parents, every effort will be made to ensure that alternative families are found to meet the needs of each child as speedily as possible through effective child care planning and monitoring.
- 1.2. Early permanency planning is essential for all looked after children to avoid drift and ensure that they have the opportunity of reaching their full potential from a safe and secure base.
- 1.3. In this context, the use of the term 'permanence' can mean various things which and acknowledges that permanence can be achieved through different routes - with existing or reconstituted birth families, with friends or relatives, through adoption or long term fostering with new or existing carers via residence and special guardianship orders and, for a minority of children through permanent residential care.

2. Principles and Policy

- 2.1. Barnet's permanency policy is based on the principles set out in this section (S2). It incorporates the National Adoption Standards and Regulations for England, the principles and values contained in the Children Acts 1989 and 2004, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- 2.2. Barnet believes that all children have a right to family life. In the first instance, this should be with their parent/s, or where this is not possible, within their wider family or kinship network, or other significant person connected with them if this is considered to be in the child's best interests. Where this is inconsistent with the child's welfare, or not realistically a viable plan then Barnet will seek to place children in an alternative family environment, in an appropriate permanent

placement that offers a legally secure arrangement with adults who are able to meet their identified needs.

- 2.3. It is widely accepted that all children need to experience a sense of stability, security, continuity and belonging, to promote their identity and positive sense of themselves throughout their childhood **and beyond. Barnet will strive to ensure this sense of permanence and belonging for all children who become looked after is achieved.**

What matters most to children who are looked after is the quality of relationships with both the adults who care for them and ongoing relationships with their parents, siblings and other birth family members providing that this is in their best interests. The ethos of our permanency policy is to provide stability, security and continuity for individual children, and we understand that in order to achieve this for most children this means that we need to support routes to legal permanence

- 2.4 Barnet aims to achieve permanence for looked after children by;

- providing high-quality and stable care;
- supporting children's sense of identity and belonging; and
- connecting children's past, present and future throughout childhood and transitions out of care, and into adult life.

- 2.5 Whichever route to permanence is appropriate for a child we are clear it is essential that planning takes account of children's wishes and feelings to ensure that they understand the plan for them and why an alternative permanent placement is necessary.

Principles

It is the fundamental right of every child to belong to a family and:

- Every child must have his or her wishes and feelings listened to, recorded and taken into account in decision making and planning for their future;
- Every effort must be made to recruit enough permanent families to meet children's needs;
- Every effort must be made to find families that reflect the ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language of the children concerned;
- Every effort must be made to allow children to place sibling children together unless this is not assessed to be in their best interest;
- Every effort must be made to ensure that, where possible and appropriate, links between the children and their birth families are maintained.

Policy

- Where children cannot live with their birth parent/parents, there is a duty to provide an alternative permanent home. This must be within a family environment unless there are significant needs that cannot be met within a family placement;
- Parallel planning must be considered for children where an assessment has identified that their parents may be unlikely to achieve or sustain the necessary changes in their parenting on their children's behalf;

- All children must have a permanency plan where a decision has been made that they cannot live with their birth parent/s;
- Every child is a unique individual and their individuality must be taken into account when planning all aspects of their needs, identity and wishes;
- Sibling groups must be placed together unless there are clear indications that this is not in the interest of the individual child and / or a placement could not be achieved within a reasonable time-scale;
- When a child is placed in a permanent alternative home through adoption, long term fostering, by means of a special guardianship order or a child arrangement order, an assessment must be made of their needs for continued support, to ensure the future stability of the placement. This will always be facilitated by the post order permanency service.
- Placements with family or friends' carers should be considered as a preferred option if there is someone with in the child's network who is willing, able and suitable to give them a permanent home unless there are strong reasons to the contrary;
- Adoption or special guardianship should be considered as the preferred option for all looked after children under 10 years needing permanent homes;
- Work must be undertaken in partnership wherever possible with the child's birth and extended family, to ensure the long term wellbeing of the child in their permanent placement.

3. Options for Permanency

3.1. Staying at Home

The first stage within permanence planning is work with families and children in need to support them staying together. Staying at home or reunification usually offers the best chance of stability. This has to be balanced against the risks to the child of remaining in a family that is failing to meet the child's needs.

3.2 Placement with Family or Friend Carers

If the assessment concludes that the child cannot safely remain at home, every effort must be made to secure a placement with a suitable family or friend carer/s. This will be either as part of the plan to work towards a return home or - if a return home is clearly not in the child's best interests - as the preferred permanence option. It is very important to establish at an early stage which relatives or friends might be available to care for the child, to avoid delays which can happen during court proceedings where this work has not been carried out. Upon a child coming into care a permanency planning meeting (PPM) will be held within 4 weeks to establish the likely outcome for permanence.

3.3 Adoption

Research strongly supports adoption as the best way of achieving long term stability and security for children, especially for those under four years of age who cannot be reunified with their birth or extended family. Adoption transfers parental responsibility for the child from the birth parents

(and others who had parental responsibility, including the local authority, which means that the child ceases to be looked after) permanently and solely to the adopter(s).

The child is deemed to be the child of the adopter(s). The child's birth certificate is changed to an adoption certificate showing the adopter(s) to be the child's parent(s). A child who is not already a citizen of the UK acquires British citizenship if adopted in the UK by a citizen of the UK.

3.4 Long-term Fostering

This option is particularly useful for older children who retain strong links to their birth families and do not want or need the finality of adoption and where the carers wish for the continued involvement of the local authority. It is also a formal option for those children and young people who are considered harder to place.

3.5 Special Guardianship Orders

Special guardianship addresses the needs of a significant group of children, who need a sense of stability and security within a placement away from their parents but not the absolute legal break with their birth family which is associated with adoption. It will also provide an alternative for achieving permanence in families where adoption, for cultural or religious reasons, is not an option.

Special guardians have parental responsibility for the child and although this is shared with the child's parents, the special guardian has the legal right to make all day to day arrangements for the child. The birth parent seldom exercises PR in this situation.

3.6 Child Arrangement Orders (CAO)

A child arrangement order may be used to increase the degree of legal permanence in a placement with family or friend carer/s or a long-term fostering placement, where this would be in the child's best interests.

A child arrangement order confers parental responsibility, to be shared more equally with the parents than with special guardianship, which in some cases may be a more appropriate arrangement.

3.7 Residential Care

For a small number of looked after children settled residential care can be an option of choice. These children may have additional needs or special needs which cannot be met in a family setting, older children who have had a significant number of family placements and disruptions or children whose behaviour means it can be difficult to care for them in a family setting.

4. Procedure

Planning underpins all child care decisions. This includes an assessment of the child's permanency needs which must be considered at the second looked after review (held within 4 months of the child becoming looked after).

Timescales - Clear timescales must be set for the implementation of the plan, whether it is for the child's return home, preparation for independence or for permanency through adoption, fostering, a CAO or a Special Guardianship Order.

Post Order and Post Permanence Support – For all children placed permanently access to support services will be through the adoption and post order permanence team to ensure that all families are supported.

Mediation in relation to matters relating to Special Guardianship Orders: Should any of the parties wish to consider mediation in relation to matters relating to the Special Guardianship Order, this will be facilitated by Barnet's Adoption and Post Permanence Team within the first three years of the Special Guardianship Order being granted. Following the three year period mediation may be provided by the Local Authority in which the child is resident.