

Long Term (Permanence) Foster Placements – A lighter touch to reviews and visiting

Updated Guidance November 2019

The Children Act 1989 Guidance & Regulations - Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review, created for the first time the statutory concept of permanence through long term fostering and set out the conditions that must be complied with when considering this permanence option.

Permanence is the long term plan for the child's upbringing and provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and their families from family support through to adoption. The objective of planning for permanence is therefore to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging. One of the key functions of the care plan is to ensure that each child has a plan for permanence by the time of the second review. The permanence planning process will identify which permanence option is most likely to meet the needs of the individual child, taking account of his/her wishes and feelings.

A range of options for permanence exist, all of which can deliver good outcomes for individual children:

- Successful return to their birth family
- Permanence outside the care system may include
- Permanent family and friends care supported by a legal order (CAO, SGO, Adoption)
- Adoption
- Permanent non family and friends care supported by a legal order (CAO, SGO, Adoption)
- Long term foster care

Where long term foster care is the chosen permanence option, the **2010 Regulations** set out the arrangements for making such a placement **regulation2(1)**. These include

- That foster care is the "plan for permanence" and is recorded in the child's care plan **regulation 5(a)**
- That the foster carer has agreed to act as the child's foster carer until the child ceases to be looked after and
- That the responsible authority has confirmed the arrangement with the foster carer(s), the birth parents and the child.
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This policy only applies to children who are in long-term matched foster placements. In all cases the match will have been subject to recommendation by foster panel and approved by the agency decision maker. Children accommodated under Section 20 are not automatically excluded from this process. In these cases, evidence must be presented in the matching report to Foster Panel to demonstrate that the legal status is no bar to achieving long-term permanence.

Long term Light LAC Reviews

Where a child over the age of 12 is placed in a long term foster placement and has been in this placement for more than a year, consideration should be given to whether it is necessary to hold a meeting as part of each review.

In these circumstances a recommendation should be made by the Independent Reviewing Officer (at the next available review) that the formal LAC review meeting should take place every 12 months rather than the current requirement of 6 monthly. This recommendation can only be made with the agreement of the child/young person, carer/s and social worker (and parents/carers where appropriate) and must be ratified by the relevant team manager when endorsing the IRO recommendations and then recorded in the child's care plan. If the child is under 12 then the Service Manager must ratify this arrangement.

The consultation, information gathering, and review process will continue on a six monthly cycle, however for these children a formal review meeting will only be held every 12 months. The IRO will write a report following the 'light-touch' review and where necessary make recommendations to the care plan.

Subsequent reviews should then only be attended by a small core group of essential attendees.

Long term Light Statutory visits

Visiting requirements differ according to the type of placement **regulation 28**.

For children placed in foster care the schedule is

- The child should be visited within one week of the start of the placement and within one week of the start of any subsequent placement **regulation 28(2)(a)**
- Thereafter the child should be visited at intervals of not more than six weeks for the first year of placement **regulation 28(2)(b)**.
- Visits during subsequent years must also take place at intervals of not more than six weeks **regulation 28 (2)(c)(ii)** unless the placement has been formally agreed as a permanent placement which is intended to last until the child is 18; in those circumstances, the intervals between visits in the second and subsequent years of placement must not be longer than 3 months **regulation 28(2)(c)(i)**.

At the same time as considering the reduction in the number of formal meetings the Independent Reviewing Officer and LAC review should also consider amendments to the statutory visiting requirements which can (where the child, being of sufficient age and understanding, has agreed) be reduced to 6 monthly **regulation 28(3A)** .

Should the circumstances of the child/young person **change significantly** at any time during the 12 month period then the Independent Reviewing Officer will consider calling a LAC review meeting to revisit the appropriateness of the review arrangement and current care plan. The IRO must be notified of any issues that jeopardise the child/young person's placement stability, e.g. missing episodes, school exclusion or missing out of education, family bereavement or other change in the foster care family etc.

Should the "Light Review Schedule" be agreed then the following will take place

- Key professionals will be identified at the LAC review and notified formally of the light review decision by the IRO
- Foster Carers and SSW will become key in monitoring the continuing appropriateness of the decision and this question should become a routine part of the FC/SSW supervision session whether in house or IFA – Both will have the responsibility to alert SW and IRO if circumstances change and therefore call into question the continuing appropriateness of light reviews
- SW will have an obligation to inform IROs of significant events
- Single Assessments will continue to be updated annually by SW
- The decision to update the single assessment in the light of a significant event should be taken in consultation with the TM and IRO if there is a view that the event might challenge this light review arrangements.
- The annual review will continue to follow current format. The six month review will be completed as a “mid-point” review. As such SWs should aim to conduct their stat visit before so that their stat visit record can be used as an update to the IRO
- IROs will visit SW team meetings every quarter to ensure SWs are clear what constitutes a significant event
- CiCT TM will continue to review cases on a 3 monthly basis in supervision with SWs
- The Service Manager for CRS will also review light touch cases with IRO's in supervision every 3 months

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