

## Wiltshire Permanence Strategy 2023-25

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## 1. Introduction

Wiltshire Council is committed to support children and young people to be safe, independent, and ambitious and to live the best life they can. This strategy outlines our approach to achieving permanence for our children and young people to ensure they have a safe place to live and thrive and that they achieve the best outcomes possible. It should be read in conjunction with our [Permanence Planning Guidance \(proceduresonline.com\)](https://proceduresonline.com).

The Strategy has been revised with consideration to the government review: 'Children's social care: stable homes, built on love' (2023). We recognise both the need to strengthen the importance of families to look after children, as an alternative to fostering or residential care and the commitment to ensure the permanent homes are achieved for our children in care, whilst ensuring support is available to them.

We are committed to supporting our children in care to be happy and healthy, having the best start in life and being afforded every opportunity to reach their full potential. The Children Act 1989 regulations state that 'permanence is the long-term plan for the child's upbringing to ensure that children have a secure, stable and living family to support them through their childhood and beyond to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment identity and belonging'<sup>1</sup>

We are committed to ensuring that all children achieve permanence through a range of options including a return to birth parents or placement with extended family or friends. Where this is not appropriate or possible, we seek suitable permanent, family-based placements through foster to adopt, adoption, special guardianship, or long-term fostering. Where necessary, some young people will find permanence and security through good residential care. For all our children and young people, we seek permanent placements where they can achieve a sense of security, stability and belonging.

*Permanence is the long-term plan for a child or young person's upbringing.*

Permanence provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and their families. It aims to ensure that children and young people have a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging. There are three key parts to permanence as outlined in the Care Planning Guidance 2011:

- **Legal** - Defining who has Parental Responsibility.

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1000549/The\\_Children\\_Act\\_1989\\_guidance\\_and\\_regulations\\_Volume\\_2\\_care\\_planning](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1000549/The_Children_Act_1989_guidance_and_regulations_Volume_2_care_planning)

- **Emotional or Physiological** - The child feels attached to a care giver that provides a stable loving and secure relationship.
- **Physical and Environmental** - The child has a stable secure home environment.

## 2. Our Core Principles

Wiltshire Children's Services are committed to a strengths-based, trauma-informed restorative approach. Our aim is to ensure that all children, of all abilities, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity and class in Wiltshire achieve a stable home environment as soon as possible and within a robust and clear timeframe. Our commitment to Wiltshire's children is to hear and respect their views and work towards them achieving their ideal stable home life. When developing our permanence plans the following principles are followed to achieve the best possible outcomes for children in our care:

- **Family solutions:** If it is not possible for the child to be cared for by their birth parents then options within the extended network of family and friends will be considered as a priority.
- **Belonging:** develop a feeling of belonging to someone who is parenting a child on a daily basis.
- **Security:** A feeling of security and being loved as a member of a permanent family or care setting.
- **Stability:** The child expects the placement to continue and be stable
- **Voice:** The child's wishes and feelings along with their age and understanding must be considered in planning for permanence.
- **Identity:** To be consistent with or fully able to support their ethnicity, language, religion, and culture. Note that due consideration no longer must be given to a child's religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background when matching a child and prospective adopters.
- **Life story:** The child accepts their birth family and history, and their parents are encouraged and supported to provide information about themselves and about the child's birth and early life.
- **Family and friends:** The child is a member of an 'extended family' and part of a wider long-term network of family and friends. The carers should nurture and promote the child's ability to build long term friendships and relationships with their peers and other adults.
- **Family time:** The child has positive on-going family time with parent(s), family, and friends where appropriate. The purpose of it should be clearly defined in the child's plan and meet the child's needs.

- Siblings: children will be placed together whenever possible unless the individual needs of children indicate that children's needs will be better met placed separately.
- Learning: Stability in educational provision and training.
- Self-confidence: Positive engagement in sports, hobbies, and interests to promote their resilience and build self-confidence.
- Independence: The child is assisted and supported into independence when they choose, and this is safe and appropriate.
- Staying put: the child feels a sense of obligation from their carers as they move into adolescence and adulthood; belonging does not end at the age of 18 years.
- Timeliness: Decision-making must be within the child's time scales to prevent drift.
- Twin track or parallel planning: including concurrent planning, may provide a means to securing permanence at an early stage for some children.
- Early planning: A child's permanence plan should be established at the 4-month review and recorded in the IRO Review Report.
- Review: where a child remains looked after in care then planning should be subject to continuous assessment and review.

### 3. Our Objectives

The primary purpose of permanence planning is to provide a safe, stable, and secure home with a loving family, to support our children through childhood and to give them the best start in life and prepare them for adulthood. When a child comes into our care, we will focus on seven key objectives in our planning:

- Family members, friends and connected persons, will always be considered in the first instance.
- A child should only be in our care for as short a period necessary.
- If it is safe to do so, we will put plans in place to support the child's return to their family.
- Planning must always start early and be regularly reviewed.
- Planning will always consider including multiple options for permanence with the primary plan clearly identified, so that in the event of a child not being able to return home, there is no drift in achieving permanence.
- Permanence should always be secured through the appropriate legal order to meet the child's needs.

- Young people may want to live independently and where the service assesses this to be suitable and this is part of the young person's transition plan to independence, then this may be supported.

#### **4. Delivering Permanence; How We will Provide Support**

We believe in developing stable and trusting relationships with children, young people, and families. We are committed to working from a strengths-based, trauma-aware, restorative approach in achieving permanence for our children and young people.

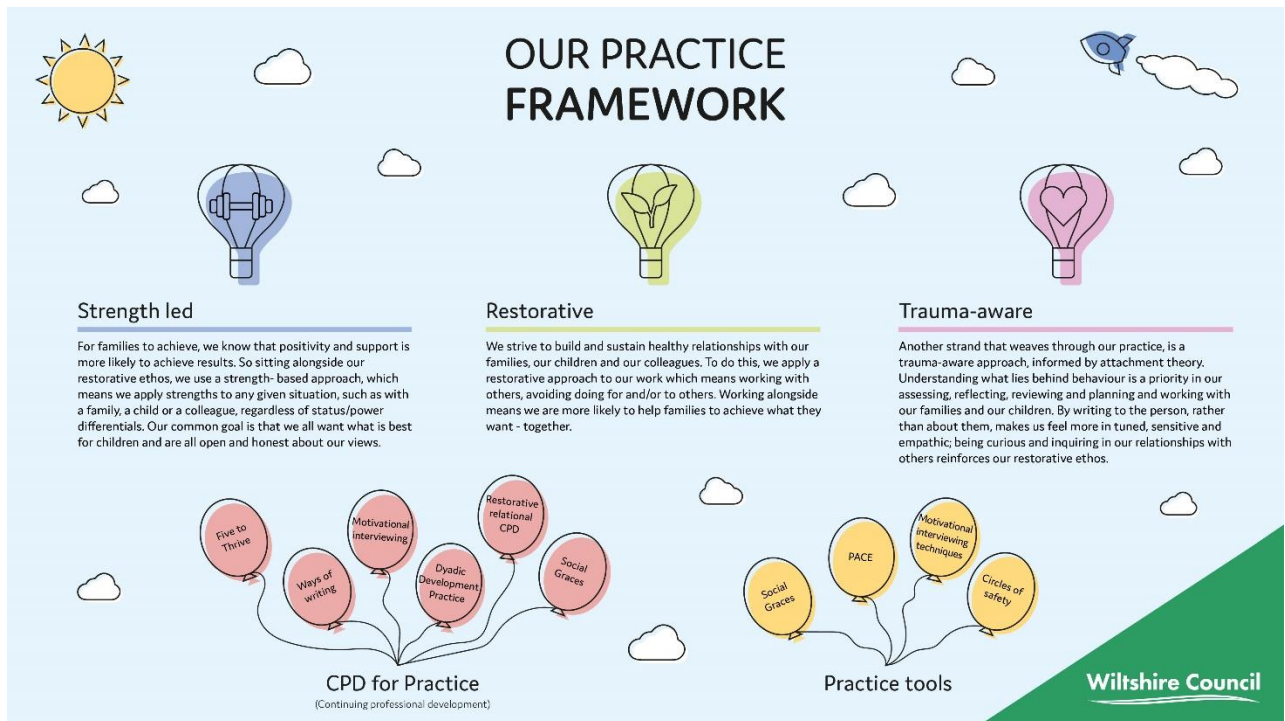
Here in Wiltshire, we are passionate about building positive relationships with families. Children are at the very heart of what we do, and our approach is underpinned by the following principles:

- All children have an excellent quality assessment and plan which they have been involved in, that reflects their experiences, wishes, feelings and needs are known and understood. This will be written to the child.
- All children will have an assessment and a plan which reflects the wishes, feelings and needs of parents and carers; enabling them to fulfil their responsibilities.
- All children will have a SMART plan which explains what needs to happen; by when; who by; what outcomes we are seeking together; how risk is being managed; and what the contingency plan is. Plans should be simple and easy to understand by families and children.
- As far as age and understanding allows, children will be spoken to alone and worked with by professionals who have the tools to directly engage them.

All children's case records will be analytical, professionally written, and timely, so that everyone can understand significant events that have happened; what the plan is; the purpose of actions and interactions; and what difference has been made so far for the child and family.

- Every child will be supported by management oversight of the professionals' working with them. This includes reflective supervision; checking that work has been done to agreed standards (monitoring and quality assurance); seeing what difference it is making; how the agreed outcomes are progressing, and what needs to happen next.

Our Practice Framework (see below) harnesses our relationship-based approach; is trauma aware, strengths led and restorative. The core of our practice is a shared value base of effective and meaningful relationships with our children and families; and that we ensure all decisions we make are for the betterment of them.



## 5. What to consider when a child cannot remain at home

When deciding on a permanency option we will take account of children's wishes and feelings and work with multiagency partners to identify which option best meets the needs of the individual child or young person. The assessment process must ask how stability for this child will be achieved and consider the following factors:

- 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, and changes of school and placement.
- Educational experiences, links with extended family, hobbies and friendships and support from carers, contribute to reducing the risk of disruption and placement breakdown.

- Listening to what children want from the home they live in, helping the relationship between carer and child to build, making thorough plans around family time, 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.

## 5.1 Family Group Conferencing (FGC)

We see the family as part of the solution and engage with families at the earliest opportunity. FGCs provide a child centred, and family focused approach to build relationships and support networks. The FGC brings together members of the family to find their own solutions and formulate a family plan.

In Wiltshire, Daybreak is commissioned to provide FGCs. An Independent coordinator helps the family prepare for the family group conference and children may be supported by an advocate. It is a voluntary process, and we support a FGC occurring before a child comes into our care. This supports families by providing a setting and framework to talking through concerns and to co-produce a solution.

## 5.2 Family finding process.

We seek to build or maintain a child's family support network by identifying relatives and other supportive adults who could provide permanence, sustainable relationships, and support through the transition to adulthood and beyond. In developing lifelong links children are connected to people who are important to them.

With a focus on children's safety and supporting families to create sustainable plans to meet their children long term permanence needs, we will always first consider whether a child could return home or remain with extended family members. The process operates on the principle that relatives are located and consulted regardless of where they live.

This could include:

- Finding a family member or friend who will care for the child if the child is unable to remain at home.
- Improving placement stability and the child's support network.
- Increases the child's sense of self and belonging.

## 5.3 Identifying the Best Permanency Option

Every permanency plan must focus on an assessment of the child's needs with a focus on outcomes and stability, while the child's wishes, and feelings should be sought and considered along with the views of the child's carers. When deciding on a child's primary and contingency permanence plan, we will collaborate with other multiagency

professionals, children, and their families to understand the child's needs. As part of this process, we will consider the factors below:

- The age of the child and their wishes and feelings
- Short-term stability – the quality of the child's attachments and the impact of uncertainty
- Long term stability- a permanent home with a sense of family, community, culture and continuity of relationships and identity.
- How do children develop and maintain relationships with key family members and other appropriate adults (lifelong links)?
- Educational experiences, hobbies, and friendships.
- Understanding what a child wants and supporting the development of a relationship between the child and their carer to create a family environment.
- Possibility of finding permanence through adoption
- How the young person will be supported to transition to adulthood.

#### **5.4 Supporting reunification (returning home) with birth or extended family.**

Wiltshire Council has a reunification (returning home) policy for children and young people who are in care and in conjunction with this a guidance note on reunification; providing information to social workers and managers that needs to be considered of at all stages of working with children where reunification should be considered.

Please see [Reunification \(Returning Home\) Policy for Children and Young People who are Accommodated \(proceduresonline.com\)](#) and [reunification.pdf \(proceduresonline.com\)](#)

If reunification has been identified in a child's permanence plan and that they may be able to return to their family, it is important to:

- Clearly communicate to the family what needs to happen to enable the child to return home and the timescales.
- Understand family ties and long-term relationships with the family, school, and the community.
- Use of Family Group Conferencing to help facilitate the above



- Support from our Stronger Families Team as part of a rehabilitation plan

## 5.5 Siblings

Sibling relationships are important, and we will always carefully consider how siblings will stay connected as part of their individual permanence plans. It is known that

children are most likely to have more positive outcomes when they maintain their relationships with their siblings. However, in some instances it may not be possible to place siblings together such as:

- Large sibling group
- Differing care entry times
- Differing needs relating to past experiences of trauma.
- Significant age differences

When children are not placed with their siblings, they will be supported in an age-appropriate way to understand the reasons for this. Staying connected arrangements will be assessed to ensure safe and suitable family time arrangements are in place. This will be a priority in our permanence planning.

If there is a plan for adoption, decisions about siblings being placed together or apart must be made at an early stage and based on a balanced assessment of the children's needs. All sibling groups will have a Together or Apart Assessment undertaken which considers their individual and siblings attachments and provides a narrative for decision making.

## 5.6 Staying Connected

When it is in their best interests, it is important that the child has face to face (direct) time with their family. This maintains their identity, gives reassurance, provides an on-going source of information, gives the child permission to live with alternative carers, minimises the sense of loss and assists adopters if the child is placed for adoption.

Direct family time works best when all parties agree to the following:

- The plan for permanence
- The parental role of the permanent carers
- The benefit of family time and all involve agree to the plan for staying connected.

Direct family time is less likely to be effective if a parent:

- Disagrees with the plan for permanence.
- Does not accept the parental roles of the permanent carer.

- Does not accept their own minimal role with the child.
- Is unreliable in their commitment to family time.
- Has no significant attachment to the family

## 5.7 Indirect family time

We recognise the development of technology has made indirect staying connected more accessible and reliable. This does not replace the need for direct family time when assessed as appropriate. Indirect staying connected, as with direct keeping in touch, must be agreed by all parties with a clear plan to prevent confusion.

## 5.8 Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

IROs are independent champions of our children in care and will look to ensure timely appropriate permanence is achieved for all children in care. The IRO ensures the child is at the centre to decision making and the child's voice is heard. They will support the services to ensure timely actioning of process to ensure the right permanence is achieved for children in care based on their individual needs. Ensuring children and young people are provided with permanent homes that are nurturing, loving and stable whether from parents, foster carers, special guardians, or adopters.

To facilitate this the IRO must be satisfied by the child's second statutory care review that the child and their parents have been consulted and have been part of the creation of the permanence plan and any subsequent updates. The IRO should also have had the opportunity to comment on the plan.

Where a single permanence plan cannot be agreed, a twin or multi-track plan will be identified with clear timescales. The IRO has a statutory responsibility to monitor the child's journey and ensure there is no drift or delay in implementing the plan and achieving permanence. The IRO will also look to gain the child's views as to their permanence plan.

## 5.8 Life Story Work

Life Story Work is the narrative of the child's journey, which includes the child's experience within their birth family and encompasses the child's history, identity, and ecosystem. Life Story work should include a descriptive narrative as well as pictures and other forms of information to help the child understand why they came into care and any subsequent changes. It needs to explicitly consider the child's identity and diversity needs. The work should include the child, their birth parents and extended family where appropriate. It should include information gathered with parents (where possible), carers, social workers and other key people. Life Story Work in Wiltshire should start from the beginning of our interventions with the child

and be updated alongside the child as they grow up to help them make sense and form an accurate narrative of their life journey. Life story work will be recorded sensitively on the child's individual record 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.

## 6. Planning for Permanence

Every child in care will have a care plan, and by the second statutory review (the four-month review), this will outline plans for permanence.

Legislation and guidance are clear that if a child cannot return home, family members and friends should be considered as the first option for permanence. Where this is not possible or not in the child's best interests, alternative permanent carers should be identified. Where alternative family living is not appropriate, long-term residential care can be considered, and for older children, options for independent living should also be investigated.

A permanence options meeting must be held before the child's second statutory care review and thereafter on a minimum of twelve weekly until permanence is achieved.

The permanence planning process will:

- Plan for permanence based on a comprehensive assessment.
- All assessments will consider what is the best permanence option and how stability can be achieved for the children in our care.

Stability can be considered in the following way:

- Ensuring continuity of care for a child who is entering our care for a brief period before returning home (short medium term) and
- A sense of a permanent home (long term stability)

An assessment of a child's need in relation to permanence must include:

- Focus on outcomes and consider stability issues based on the needs for the child and family in the long term.
- Consider family time with parents, siblings, and wider family.

The Assessment will include:

- Outcomes for the child
- Their wishes and feelings

- The child and family's support needs
- Staying connected with siblings, parents, friends, family (lifelong links)
- Evidence that the plan is linked to an assessment and the needs of the child.
- Recommendations for the child's care plan

The possibility of returning home will be considered as part of the assessment. We will always parallel and contingency plan to prevent drift or delay in achieving permanence for our children. If this is through court, this will be subject to the Public Law Outline process which has a 26-week timescale. When not in proceedings, our approach will remain the same, to ensure assessments and our support and intervention inform permanence plans that result in excellent quality plans and timely permanence being achieved.

We will begin planning for the child's long-term outcomes when it is known they will become looked after. We will ensure that children are given the opportunity to express their wishes, feelings, dreams, and ambitions, and that their voice is heard. We will ensure their care plans are effective in meeting their needs and build a foundation that will see their transition into adulthood. To support the success of children in care, trusting relationships and strong networks are critical to their resilience and achieving their full potential.

## **7. Permanence and local placements**

Where a placement is with long term carers, it is important that the child have access to their friends, family, and local community with whom they are brought up. Keeping children in touch with their birth family and lifelong links will remain a priority and focus of our work with our children.

Any decision to access an out of area placement away from the child's local community will be based on the needs of the child. When this is in another Local Authority, the availability and cost of a suitable local resource to support the placement must be explored. In a prospective adoptive placement, this will form part of the assessment of need for adoptive support services but will be conducted as part of the permanence planning.

## **8. Options for permanence**

We recognise that different children and young people have diverse needs and to enable us to make the best plans for them we have several options available for permanency:

- Reunification/returning home.
- Placement with family or friends /connected persons.
- Long term fostering
- Residential care

- Special guardianship order
- Child arrangements order
- Adoption/early permanence

The primary permanence option will be chosen considering the wishes and feelings of the child or young person and the outcome of assessments completed.

Initial permanence plan before the second child's care review multi-track plans and becomes the agreed permanence plan once assessments are completed. Permanence plan options will be reviewed a minimum of every 12 weeks until permanence is achieved.

## **8.1 Return home (reunification)**

We strive to keep children and young people in the care of their family who are best placed to provide care, unless it is unsafe to do so. We have clear and detailed reunification guidance which ensures any reunification decision is evidence based and actioned in a timely manner. Our reunification guidance ensures we work with our children their family, local communities the child's lifelong links and multi-agency professionals to ensure a safe sustainable transition back into the family home. Where this is not possible the reunification process allows for clear evidenced based decision making. [reunification.pdf \(proceduresonline.com\)](#)

We have flexibility in our planning and placements to facilitate the above including use of a bridging placement where appropriate to support reunification arrangement.

## **8.2 Kinship care (family, friends, connected persons)**

When a child cannot safely return to their birth parents then every effort must be made to seek a placement with relatives, friends or connected persons. It is particularly important to establish at the earliest possible stage of a child coming into care which relatives or friends might be available to care for the child, to avoid delays in planning for permanence a family group conference should always take place prior to a child entering care.

Research indicates that children can have increased commitment from kinship carers in providing stability and have an enhanced opportunity to develop their identity. However, research also states that good assessments of kinship carers need to be completed to assess the quality of the care to be provided as this leads to better outcomes for children. Placements need to be well supported as kinship carers are often older, have poorer health and have less support than foster carers.

Routes to permanence for children placed with kinship carers need to be considered at an early stage. If children are not able to return to their birth families, ideally their placement within the extended family or with friends would be supported by a child

arrangement order, a special guardianship order or through adoption. It would be unusual for children to remain on care orders when placed safely with relatives and for the carers to remain therefore as formal kinship foster carers.

Family time in kinship arrangements can often be more complex and this needs to be addressed in the care plan. A supervision order may assist kinship carers in fee supported during the first year of a kinship placement, rather than the child remaining on a care order.

Support available to enable this permanence option:

- A clear support plan including support from within the family.
- A range of multi-agency support as outlined in the kinship care (family and friends policy: [Family and Friends Care \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com))
- Available legal orders to support this permanence option:

Child Arrangement Order.

Special Guardianship Order.

Supervision Order.

Adoption Order.

### 8.3 Long term fostering

For those children who remain in long-term local authority care, an important route to permanence is long-term foster care. Where the permanence plan for the child is longer-term foster care, this may be where the current short-term foster placement is assessed to meet the long-term needs of the child for permanence or where a new placement is identified for a child because of an assessment and matching process.

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.

Long-term fostering has the following advantages as a permanence plan:

- The local authority retains a role in negotiating between the foster carers and the birth family over issues such as family time.
- There is continuing social work support to the child and foster family in a placement that is regularly reviewed to ensure that the child's needs are met.
- It maintains legal links to the birth family who can still play a part in the decision making for the child.

Long-term fostering has the following disadvantages as a permanence plan:

- The foster carers do not hold parental responsibility, and this may delay or complicate decision making.

- Continuing social work involvement can be an intrusion into the child experiencing a 'normal family life'.
- Regular statutory care reviews can sometimes be regarded as an intrusion in a long standing and stable placement.
- Stigma attached to the child due to being in care.
- The child is not a legal member of the family. If difficulties arise there may be less willingness to persevere and seek resolution
- Post care and/or post eighteen the carers have no legal responsibility towards the young person.

Support available to enable this permanence option:

- A clear plan of support as outlined in the care plan and the placement and support plan. This should be reviewed regularly at the child's care review.
- The foster carer will have an allocated supervising social worker from the fostering service and will have access to a range of support and training.
- Weekly allowance is paid to meet the costs of caring for the child.
- For those children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) the costs for the child's placement are agreed between the IFA and Wiltshire Council and confirmed on the Individual Placement Agreement (IPA).

Available legal orders to support this permanence option:

- Care Order.

Please see the chapter on placements in foster care on our on-line procedures regarding the appropriate making of long-term foster placements: [Placements in Foster Care \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com)

In Wiltshire children who are in settled, long-term matched foster care may be subject to a lighter touch review and visiting arrangements: [long\\_term\\_foster.pdf \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com)

To improve outcomes for children leaving foster care and in line with the Children and Young People's Act 2008 and Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers 2010 (Regulations and Guidance), Wiltshire have a Staying Put policy that sets out the arrangements which enable young people to remain in with their foster carers beyond their eighteenth birthday: [staying\\_put\\_pol.pdf \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com)

## 8.4 Residential care

For most children, a placement in residential care should be identified in their care plan as a short-term transition with the aim of preparing, enabling, and supporting the child to return to live in a family setting. Long term residential care may better meet the

needs of small numbers of children and young people and lead to better outcomes if it is a clear decision is made on assessed needs.

The needs of older children and young people must be considered in relation to achieving permanence in their lives. Some young people may not be able to live with birth parents, nor wish to be in a foster home but prefer to live in a residential children's home. However, the care planning process must identify adults such as wider family and friends or other connected people who can provide a long-term trusting relationship and emotional support and which will provide continuing support, particularly during periods of transition.

It is essential to support young people to make the transition towards independence with the provision of high-quality leaving care support. We are currently developing the 'Staying Close' model to provide an enhanced support package for young people leaving care and is designed to be a comparable offer to the option of Staying Put.

Please see the chapter on Placements in Residential Care on our on-line procedures for further information [Placements in Residential Care \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com)

## 8.5 Special Guardianship Order

Special guardianship provides an alternative legal status for children, and provides greater security than long term fostering, but without the absolute legal severance from the birth family that stems from an adoption order. It is a legal route to permanence for children for whom adoption is not appropriate.

The special guardian will have parental responsibility for the child and may exercise this to the exclusion of all others with parental responsibility, apart from another special guardian. There are exceptions to the decisions a special guardian can make, for instance they cannot change the child's surname or take them out of the country without the permission of the court or the agreement of all the people with parental responsibility. The birth parents also retain the right to consent or not to adoption.

Special guardians may be supported, including financially, by the local authority and will have the right to request an assessment for support services at any time after the order is made.

Support available to enable this permanence option:

- Please click on the link to our procedures [Applications for Special Guardianship Orders \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com) for the range of support available, including financial support.

Available legal orders to support this permanence option:

- Special Guardianship Order
- Supervision Order.
- Section 8 Orders.



## 8.6 Child Arrangements Order

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

Where a child would otherwise have to be placed with strangers, a placement with family or friends/connected persons may be identified as a preferred option and the carers may be encouraged and supported to apply for child arrangements order where this will be in the best interests of the child.

A child arrangements 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. The holder of a child arrangements order does not have the right to consent to the child's adoption nor to appoint a guardian; in addition, they may not change the child's name nor arrange for the child's emigration without the consent of all those with parental responsibility or the leave of the court.

Whilst support may continue for as long as the child arrangements order remains in force, the aim will be to make arrangements which are self-sustaining overall. The making of a child arrangements order can now be made until the child is eighteen and will have the effect of discharging a care order.

The following people may apply for a child arrangements order.

- A parent or guardian
- A party to a marriage (whether the marriage is subsisting or not) where the child was brought up as a child of the family.
- A person with whom the child has lived for 3 years. (This need not be continuous but must not have started more than 5 years before or ended more than 3 months before the making of the application).
- A local authority foster carer with whom the child has lived for 1 year.
- Where a child arrangements order is already in force, a person who has the consent of those in whose favour the child arrangements order was made.
- Where the child is looked after, a person with the consent of the relevant local authority.
- In any other case, a person who has the consent of all those with parental responsibility.

Anyone else who wishes to apply, including the child, must apply to the court for leave to make the application for a child arrangements order.

A child arrangements order has the following advantages:

- The child will no longer be looked after and there need be no social work involvement, therefore, unless this is identified as necessary.

- It gives parental responsibility to the carer whilst maintaining the parents' parental responsibility.
- There is no review process.
- The stigma of being in care is removed.
- A child subject to a child arrangements order will be entitled to additional education support throughout their school career.

A Child Arrangements Order has the following disadvantages:

- It is less secure than Adoption or Special Guardianship in that an application can be made to revoke the Child Arrangements Order. However, the Court making the Order can be asked to attach a condition refusing a parent's right to seek revocation without leave of the court.
- There is no formal continuing support to the family after the Order is made although in some instances, a Child Arrangements Order may be payable by the local authority.
- There is no professional reviewing of the arrangements after the Order unless a new application to court is made, for example by the parents for family time or revocation. **(N.B.** New applications to court may be expensive to defend, and the carers would have to bear the cost if not entitled to assistance with legal costs). For further guidance on child arrangements orders please refer to our [Permanence Planning Guidance \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com)

## 8.7 Early permanence/ fostering for adoption.

The Children and Families Act 2014 imposes a duty to consider placements with carers who are approved as both adopters and foster carers and, where a child is placed in an early permanence/fostering for adoption placement, the relationship which the child has with the person who is a prospective adopter must be considered by the court or adoption agency alongside other relevant relationships the child has with their relatives or other persons.

We are committed to achieving permanence at the earliest opportunity for our babies and young children. An Early Permanence Placement provides the mechanism for our children to be placed, where appropriate, with approved adopters in a foster placement whilst we remain in proceedings. If the plan for adoption is agreed and a placement order is granted, they will be matched and adopt the child. This process reduces the number of moves in placement and reduces disruption to our children.

[Fostering for Adoption, Concurrent Planning and Temporary Approval as Foster Carers of Approved Prospective Adopters \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com)

## 8.8 Adoption

In many cases where a child cannot safely be cared for by their birth parents the permanence plan is that of adoption. We are committed to adoption as a legal and emotional permanence option which can be considered for all children.

Adoption 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). The child is deemed to be the child of the adopter(s) as if they had been born to them and the child takes on the surname of the adoptive parent.

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.

This legal status applies into adulthood and is therefore a lifelong legal commitment, unlike any other legal permanence options.

Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and a comprehensive support service will be provided in partnership with other agencies. Adopters may be supported, including financially, by the local authority and will have the right to request an assessment for support services at any time after the Order is made. Wiltshire Council is a partner in the Regional Adoption Agency, Adoption West who provide adoption support on behalf of the local authority: <https://adoptionwest.co.uk/>

The service is committed to preventing delay for children and supports fostering for adoption where appropriate to prevent delay for the child. Family finding should begin as soon as adoption is under consideration, and before the agency decision maker decides that the child should be placed for adoption, or a placement order made.

Support available to enable this permanence option:

- A clear multi-agency support plan

Available legal orders to support this permanence option:

- Placement order
- Adoption order.

[Court Reports in Placement Order Applications and Adoption/Special Guardianship Guidance \(proceduresonline.com\)](https://www.proceduresonline.com/court-reports-in-placement-order-applications-and-adoption/special-guardianship-guidance)

## 9. Conclusion

This strategy aims to ensure our children in care achieve their permanence option in an appropriate time frame, supported by professionals and their families collaborating with one another in an open and transparent way. In doing so, this builds our children's resilience and provides them with the best opportunities and start in life.