

Adoption

B.1 Securing and Promoting Children's Welfare

B.1.1 Commitment

The Swansea Adoption Service is committed to:

- recruiting sufficient adopters to meet the needs of the range of children waiting for adoption locally;
- having efficient arrangements to secure placements in other areas where it is unable to meet children's needs from its own pool of adopters;
- matching children with adopters who best meet their assessed needs, wherever possible with a family that:
 - reflects their ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language;
 - allows them to live with brothers and sisters where this meets their needs;
- making every effort to find a suitable adoptive family in a realistic timescale to ensure that children are not left waiting indefinitely in the care system;
- taking account of the views and feelings of the child when making a placement, as far as these can be ascertained based on the child's age and understanding

B.1.2 Planning

Where a child is "looked after" by the local authority an appropriate permanence plan will be made at the second statutory review (i.e. no more than four months from the date on which the child begins to be looked after) or possibly earlier. This review will consider all the options for best meeting the child's needs for permanence, including:

- returning the child to the family, with support where necessary;
- long term placement with the child's wider family;
- long term placement with foster carers;
- residential placement until independence;
- special guardianship;
- adoption.

Whenever plans for permanence are being considered, they will be made on the basis of the needs of each looked after child, and within the following timescales:

- The child's need for a permanent home will be addressed at the four month review (or, possibly, at the first review) and a plan for permanence made;
- Clear timescales will be set for achieving the plan, which will be appropriately monitored and considered at every subsequent review.
- Where adoption has been identified as the plan for the child at a review, the adoption panel will make its recommendation within 2 months of the second LAC Review

The timescales below will be followed, taking account of the individual child's needs:

- A match with suitable adoptive parents will be identified and approved by panel within 6 months of the agency agreeing that adoption is in the child's best interest;
- In care proceedings, where the plan is adoption, a match with suitable adoptive parents will be identified and approved by panel within 6 months of the court's decision;
- Where a parent has requested that a child aged under 6 months be placed for adoption, a match with suitable adoptive parents will be identified and approved by panel within 3 months of the agency agreeing that adoption is in the child's best interest.

B.2 Providing Permanency

B.2.1 Background

Permanency is a term that describes the way a child needs to feel about where she or he lives and with whom. For a child to thrive; physically, emotionally and intellectually, he or she needs the security of belonging and of receiving consistent, reliable care from one or more particular adults.

A permanent placement describes a particular family or particular adults with whom the child is expected to live for a long time, probably for the duration of his or her childhood, into adulthood.

A plan to find a permanent home could involve the child returning to their birth parent/s, being cared for by a member of the wider family or friends, living long term in foster care or adoption into a new family. The key factor is to ensure a clear plan is in place, based on the best interests of the child, with clear timescales.

For most children, the best prospect for a permanent family that meets their emotional, physical and legal needs will be with their own birth parents. Under the Children Act 1989, where children cannot live with their birth parents, the preferred option is to seek a home for them within their extended family, where this is consistent with the child's welfare.

For some children, neither of these options is possible. Adoption can offer children who are unable to return to their birth families a legally permanent new family, which they will belong to all their lives. Long term fostering also has a role as part of the spectrum of options available for permanency planning, and has proved particularly useful for older children with strong links to their birth families who do not want or need the formality of adoption.

Placement with carers under a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order are alternative permanency options.

Achieving permanence for a child should be a key consideration from the day they become looked after. The National Adoption Standards require that the child's need for a permanent home is addressed at the 4 month LAC Review and a plan for permanence made.

B.2.2 Contingency Planning

Where an assessment identifies that parents may be unlikely to make and sustain the necessary changes in their parenting, contingency plans should be made to avoid delay in securing a permanent family for a child.

There are a number of contingency planning models including that of parallel or twin tracking, where the child remains with birth parents or foster carers whilst a rehabilitation plan with clear time scales is in place and/or extended family members are considered as potential carers. At the same time, the elements of an alternative permanence plan, such as adoption, are put in place if this is unsuccessful.

It should be made clear to parents that the twin tracking is being undertaken to meet the child's needs and prevent unnecessary delay.

Concurrent Planning - The Concurrent Planning model places the child with foster carers, who may be specifically recruited or be relative carers who, as well as providing temporary care for the child, act as a support to the birth parents in meeting the objectives of any rehabilitation plan. These carers must be additionally trained and assessed specifically as prospective adopter(s) within the scheme so that should the plan for rehabilitation be unsuccessful, the child will stay with them in an adoption placement. They will first be approved as foster carers but their assessment can be updated and presented to the adoption panel for them to be approved as adoptive parents.

Parallel or Twin Track Planning - In this model the child remains with the parents or is placed with foster carers. A rehabilitation plan with time-scales is put in place. At the same time the agency establishes elements of a plan for an alternative permanence placement, if the rehabilitation plan is unsuccessful.

Once all other permanency options have been ruled out and a decision for permanence through adoption is taken at a LAC Review, the matter must be referred to the Adoption Panel for consideration at the earliest possible opportunity. Where adoption has been identified as the plan for the child at a Review, the Adoption Panel must make its recommendation within 2 months.

The Adoption Panel makes recommendations to the adoption agency as to whether the child should be placed for adoption and whether an application for a Placement Order should be made. Decision making rests with the adoption agency, specifically with the agency decision maker.

Adoption should not be written into any care plan presented to the court prior to the matter being considered by the Adoption Panel, their recommendation made and the subsequent decision made by the Head of Child & Family Services Agency Decision Maker.

A Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order should be considered if a permanency plan includes a long term foster placement.

If the proposed permanence plan is not to return the child to the birth family, the plan would be presented to the Panel within their CARA. (Child's Assessment Report for Adoption). The proposed permanence plan should include recognition of the child's:

- birth parents and child's need for contact;
- right to participate in decision-making about where they live and the level of contact. Such contribution should be moderated by the age and understanding of the child; and
- racial, religious, linguistic and cultural background in promoting their sense of identity and belonging