

Croydon Permanence Strategy 2024-2027

**Creating loving and stable homes
for children and young people,
without disruption.**

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Context

This document defines permanency, our aims, principles, and a range of permanency options for children, as well as priority areas of action to help professionals and community partners to achieve permanent homes and stability for children as early in their lives as possible.

We will focus on helping families and connected people to care for children in their communities.

Working within the principles of this strategy we will promote children achieving stable, safe and sustainable homes that promote all aspects of their developmental needs, alongside our partners. Croydon's ambition is for the stability, consistency, and quality of all children's care to be supported through a robust multi-agency approach, ensuring children can thrive and achieve.

This document should be read in conjunction with Croydon's Early Help Strategy, SEND Strategy and Corporate Parenting Strategy.

Executive Summary

In Croydon we are passionate about achieving permanence for children and young people. We have prioritised permanence for all children and young people we support and care for. Permanence development is one of our four Corporate Parenting objectives. We will secure children's futures and where they cannot live with their parents, we will ensure the best plan of permanence is progressed for them as early as possible. We cannot do this alone. Permanence planning starts with parents and children, extended families and in communities. We know that the best place for children to live and grow up are with the people that know them, love them, and want the best for them. There are times when this is difficult, when those times occur, we want to ensure the best support at the right time will create opportunities to help children and families stay together.



Key Messages

1. We need a whole council and partnership approach to make a real difference to children and young people experiencing warm, loving, stable homes.
2. Children and young people must be listened to, respected and supported to co-produce solutions to permanence as part of their individual planning and strategic planning.
3. Permanence and stability start with helping children, young people and families live together in their communities and with their support networks. We will think about permanence planning for all children and young people and utilise family network meetings to create resilience and support within family arrangements.
4. We are co-parents and co-grandparents to the children and young people we care for. We recognise that wherever it is possible we will continue to work with birth, adoptive and connected families, and significant relationships to build stability and a sense of belonging that allows children and young people to flourish.
5. Permanence & Stability. When children cannot live with their parents, we will secure the best plan to meet their needs in their timescales. Wherever possible children and young people will experience their home and care in the borough of Croydon. When this is not possible it will be important to ensure that every effort is made to maintain and support links with family, significant others, and community.
6. We must measure our impact and delivery against the corporate parenting principles outlined in our strategy.
7. We will evaluate and update this strategy from the learning and experiences of delivering on the four priority areas.

Defining Permanence

Permanence can be defined in three main areas: -

1. Legal - where a child lives with his or her birth parent(s) who has sole parental responsibility (PR), or the carer of the child has a legal order which gives them whole or partial PR: for example, an Adoption Order; Care Order; Child Arrangement Order or Special Guardianship Order.

2. Psychological, Physical, Environmental – when a child feels emotionally attached and secure with an adult who provides a stable, loving, and secure relationship, a stable home environment in a familiar neighbourhood and community where the child’s identity and diversity needs are met and promoted.
3. Planning and securing a future - to ensure a child has a secure attachment in a stable and loving family and a future that supports them through childhood and beyond.

Emotional and physical security within a safe and nurturing environment provides for child’s identity and attachments to flourish and contribute to their sense of wellbeing and aspirations into early adulthood.

Our Aim

Secure children’s futures with their families wherever possible an at the earliest opportunity. When they cannot live with their parents, we will secure the best plan to meet their needs in their timescales. Parallel and contingency planning will underpin all permanence activity.



Croydon Council and our partners believe that all children need security, stability, love, a strong sense of identity and belonging to thrive and fulfil their potential.

Planning for permanence in all stages of our work increases the possibility that those children with the greatest need in our community have a secure, stable, and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond.

Based on our shared values and aims across the partnership, permanence planning and practice should not be an additional process; it is central to our practice. The question *'How are the child's permanence needs being met?'* must be at the core of everything we do. Therefore, we want to ensure that: Permanency, and the emotional stability and resilience it provides, is our goal for every child.

Every service, from universal services through to adoption contributes to achieving permanence. Permanency discussions at the first point of contact and subsequent planning identifies the needs of individual children and sibling groups and the permanency plans that reflect Croydon and our partners ethos.

We work together across all services, to achieve consistently high-quality practice in permanency planning and outcomes. We know that children want to remain at home with their parents and family. Working with children and families to achieve this aim, building on family resilience and potential will be our primary focus when it is safe for children to remain or return to their family. When children cannot remain with their families, we need to ensure that careful consideration is given to keeping siblings together wherever possible. When this is not in the best interests of individual children or the sibling group, we need to be clear with children and families why this might not be possible and how we will promote arrangements for children to stay close, in touch and have family time with each other. We will work with children to explain our plans in a way that they can understand, whilst listening and really hearing their voice, their worries, hopes and dreams.

We will ensure that all children's specific needs are clearly assessed, and plans created to ensure that permanence is delivered within their timescales.

We will ensure that that all permanence planning incorporates attention to children's diversity and how we will promote their identity by paying attention to the following which are not exclusive, age, disability, learning need, identified gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation.

Voice of the child and understanding their lived experience

We have invited our children and young people to tell us what permanence means to them and help us to understand what they need us to prioritise to make their experience of warm, caring, and stable homes, without disruption, a lived experience.

They told us:

“Permanence means that we are respected by you. You provide love and warmth, and are consistent, reliable, and loyal. You provide safe, stable homes where we can live forever or for a long period of time”

Children and young people’s consultation on Permanence 22-23.

Children and young people were very clear about the range and importance of relationships, individuals and organisations that create permanence for them. These include:

Their family, birth family, extended family, new family, carers. School friends, pets. Football team, independent reviewing officer, school nurse, CLA nurse, friends, Aunty, social worker, mentor, personal advisor. Manager, Chief Executive, King. Supervising social worker, Doctor, CAHMS, General Practitioner, Director, Manager, School Governors, Children in Care Council.

‘I love my sister looking after me, I want her to be my Special Guardian.’

‘We want our permanent homes to feel more homely.’

‘We want our carers to be able to make decisions without having to wait for social workers and managers to agree to plans.’

‘We can’t invest in new families and homes when they are temporary.’

Children and young people are clear and insightful about their needs and who can deliver on them. We will respect their views and incorporate them into individual and corporate planning.

Our approach to permanence and principles

Wherever possible we should support children and families to remain together, where there is stability and quality of care for the child. When it is deemed necessary for a child to be looked after away from his or her family, this should be for as short a time as needed with a focus on a child being able return home to a safe, secure and loving family home life. If a child cannot return home, plans must be made in a timely way to ensure a new permanent home can be identified and prepared for the child to move to. Family members and friends

should always be considered, with permanence secured through the appropriate legal order.



Our principles

Croydon Council and partners will ensure that children are supported to remain at home. Universal and specific interventions and services will support change where needed and ongoing support when this is in the best interests of the child.

- Where it is not in the child's best interest to live within their family network, we will assess and plan with children, young people, and their families the best primary and parallel permanence plans in order to secure stable and loving homes with permanent carers. Contingency planning will shorten the time and number of moves for a child, young person to achieve permanence and stability via adoption, long term foster care, a Child Arrangement Order or Special Guardianship Order.
- Residential care should only be agreed when living within a family setting cannot be achieved; and the long-term plan should be for a child to return to a family environment as soon as possible, wherever possible.
- Preparing children for their independent living will be discussed as part of their care and pathway planning, based on their age and level of understanding. We will clearly agree how to support with developing their independence skills and mental health and wellbeing development. Continuity of care, for example Staying Put and Shared Lives arrangements will be considered as positive options.

- Wherever possible, a child should live permanently within their own local community unless this has been identified as not appropriate.
- We meet with family networks to inform permanency plans in the first assessment that we complete.
- Staying in touch and meeting with the family and extended family should always be arranged in a way that benefits the child; and it should be facilitated and built on where it is in the child's best interests to do so.
- All partners will work together with children, parents/families to ensure the best possible permanence plan for the child.
- Any plan for a child must consider their wishes, feelings and lived experience; this must be clearly evidenced throughout the assessment and planning process with partners jointly deciding long term plans.
- All assessments and plans will explore and identify aspects of difference and power that impact upon a child experiencing their needs being met and being able to develop and thrive.
- Every child's links with his or her racial, cultural and religious heritage must be considered; wherever possible the child brought up within the same racial, cultural and religious environment as their birth family.

Croydon Council's priorities for permanence

Listen to our children and young people we support in their homes and communities, looked after children and care experienced young people.

Create a dynamic (sufficiency) strategy to ensure that there are a range of homes and locations to meet the diversity of need for our children and young people. We will review the strategy robustly and regularly to ensure that it meets current and projected need.

Enhance our approach to support children to live with extended family, significant others when it is not possible to live with their immediate birth family.

Continue to develop and improve our inhouse and partnership arrangements to ensure that permanency and stability is an experience that all children and care experienced young people can achieve. This partnership will include the views and needs of a range of families involved in a child's life.

To develop training and skill development for social workers, aligned professionals, council wide corporate parents and community partners, in assessing and planning for permanence for all children we support, in particular where home circumstances and care is fragile. Seeking and proposing positive solutions, incorporating children, young people, family, and carers wishes and feelings into plans and interventions.

Develop and deploy a range of support offers (people, programmes, approach) to increase stability where circumstances are fragile for children living with their birth/extended family and looked after children, care experienced young people. Creating equality of opportunity for all children and young people to experience a stable home and care.

How will we achieve delivering on these priorities

- **Strengthen and develop the roles** of Manager, Safeguarding Leads, Independent Reviewing Officer and Child Protection Chairs to understand and positively impact on permanence development.
- Ensure that the quality and frequency of **supervision and management oversight**, across the partnership, drives the quality of permanence practice which delivers good permanence outcomes for children.
- Develop a **common language** that is understandable for all (children, families and partners) to facilitate permanence practice as a thread running through our work
- Focus on **Direct work and Life Story work**. Creating coherence in children and young people's understanding of their history, life story in order to promote a sense of belonging and stability.
- Create **partnership learning opportunities** and develop the early stages of help offered to children and families, through our early help and family hubs offer. Ensuring all children are given the best opportunities of living with their families and in their communities.
- Ensure **quality assurance activity** continually drives permanency. This includes developing specific permanence data to track and drive performance, dip sampling, observation, practice reviews and a thematic spotlight on practice.

- Focus on **children in pre-proceedings and apply early permanence standards**. This means reviewing all children's plans, ensuring all activity and plans are good and drive good permanence outcomes within the child's timescales.
- Focus on **reviews**. This means ensuring more robust midway reviews that more frequently rag rate need, ensuring contingency and parallel plans are in place at the second review; and making sure the IRO 'footprint' evidence oversight and helps managers drive planning.
- Develop **simple, accessible guidance** for practitioners, managers and partners to easily understand permanence routes and quality practice approaches to ensuring that children have the best and most timely permanence outcomes.
- Ensure pace in **permanence tracking activity** to achieve permanence for children, particularly those under five and on care orders.

Permanency Outcomes

Remaining at home, returning home

The first stage within permanence planning is assessment and multi-agency/community support tailored with families and children in need to improve care at home. Staying at home offers the best chance of stability where it is safe, and risks can be managed. Where a child does become looked after, a return home or an arrangement to live with extended family members needs to be the primary permanence plan focus.

It is essential that we work with our partners to ensure that early help and interventions can offer the most effective services to families and children. Creating positive opportunities for children to remain at home. Croydon Council have an approach and core intervention services which include a commitment to Family Group Conferences (FGC), an Edge of Care Team, Clinical Team and social workers who facilitate Family Network meetings. The aim of these services is to strengthen family resilience and skills to enable children and young people to remain at home. These services work with and complement the multi-agency and community partners assessments and intervention.

These approaches consider extended family members or friends who could care and support the child and parents to remain at home or to provide extended family care. The aim of the FGC is to identify suitable family members or friends at the earliest stage so that there is no delay in identifying support and alternative care arrangements if children are unable to remain with birth parents. This can also inform the court or care planning process.

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When a child needs to come into care, a plan with clear interventions needs to be undertaken swiftly to address the reasons why this was needed. This will ensure that risk and resilience factors are critically analysed with partners to safely manage any remaining risk and ensure a return home with no delay. Research indicates that if a child is in care for over 20 weeks or longer, they are less likely to have a successful reunification with their birth parents. *Sinclair and colleagues (2007) Pursuit of Permanence*. Where the plan is for the child to return home during or following any legal proceedings and where the child is subject to a Care Order, an Assessment under Regulation 17 of The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulation 2010 must be undertaken before deciding to place the child with their parent. The decision to place the child with their parent must be approved by the Director Children's Social Care.

The Permanence Plan must consider the appropriateness of discharging the Care Order where a decision is made for the child. Care Orders at home should only be an option used in exceptional circumstances where the level of risk demands protection via a Care Order.

Where any plan includes the consideration of the child being placed with their parents, best practice guidance from the Final Report of the Public Law Working Group, indicates that best practice should be followed. 12 President of the Family Division (March 2021). This best practice guidance notes that regarding a Care Order with the child remaining at home: "The making of a care order should not be used as a vehicle to achieve the provision of support and services after the conclusion of proceedings" There may be good reason at the inception of care proceedings for a child to remain in the care of their parents/carers/family members and subject to an Interim Care Order, pending the completion of assessments.

The making of a care order based on a plan for the child to remain in the care of her parents/carers is a different matter. There should be exceptional reasons for a court to make a care order based on such a plan. A care order should not be used as a vehicle for the provision of support and services. A plan should be devised to provide necessary support and services without the need to make a care order. Consideration should be given to the making of a supervision order, which may be an appropriate order to support the reunification of the family. The risks of significant harm to the child are either judged to

be such that the child should be removed from the care of her parents/carers, or some lesser legal order and regime is required.

Any placement with parents under an interim or final order should be evidenced to comply with the statutory regulations for placement at home. It should be rare in the extreme that the risks of significant harm to the child are judged to be sufficient to merit the making of a care order but, nevertheless, the risks can be managed with a care order being made in favour of the local authority with the child remaining in the care of the parents/carers. A care order represents a serious intervention by the state in the life of the child and in the lives of the parents in terms of their respective European Convention on Human Rights, article 8 rights. This can only be justified if it is necessary and proportionate to the risks of harm of the child.

A home with family and friends' carers

If the assessment concludes that the child cannot safely remain at home, every effort must be made to secure a placement with relatives or friends. 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 to ensure the child retains links with their family and community. It is important to establish at an early stage which relatives or friends might be available to care for the child to avoid delay.

The legal status of the placement with a relative, friend or other connected person is important. It is essential that the social worker can clarify the legal status of the placement and whether the placement is a private family arrangement or is subject to Regulation 24 of the 2010 Care Planning Regulations. This sets out arrangements for the temporary approval of a connected person as a foster carer; in exceptional circumstances by the Head of Service for up to **16 weeks**, to allow an immediate placement and sufficient time for a foster carer approval process to be undertaken.

In these circumstances, permanence options must be considered, for example:

- Special Guardianship Order
- Child Arrangement Orders
- Adoption

Where possible, the child's plan should not be to remain in care for the remainder of their childhood.

Every effort should be made to secure permanence via the above routes. This means considering what the family needs regarding support to progress the plan.

A home with a carer under a child arrangement order

A Child Arrangements Order sets out who a child should live, spend time, or otherwise have contact with. It can offer physical and psychological permanence as well as a degree of legal permanence. Parental responsibility is equally shared between the carers and the birth parents. A Child Arrangement Order is in force until the child reaches 18 years of age. However, it can be revoked in certain circumstances.

Child Arrangements Orders were introduced in April 2014 by the Children and Families Act 2014 (which amended section 8 Children Act 1989). They replace Contact Orders and Residence Orders. A home with a carer under a child arrangement order with whom a child is to live, spend time or otherwise have contact; and when a child is to live, spend time or otherwise have contact with any person. This legislation applies to England and Wales.

A Child Arrangements Order means a court order regulating arrangements relating to any of the following: The 'residence' aspects of a Child Arrangements Order (i.e. with whom a child is to live/when a child is to live with any person) can last until the child reaches 18 years unless discharged earlier by the Court or by the making of a Care Order. The 'contact' aspects of a Child Arrangements Order (with whom and when a child is to spend time with or otherwise have contact with) cease to have effect when the child reaches 16 years, unless the court is satisfied that the circumstances of the case are exceptional. A person named in the order as a person with whom the child is to live, will have parental responsibility for the child while the order remains in force. Where a person is named in the order as a person with whom the child is to spend time or otherwise have contact but is not named in the order as a person with whom the child is to live, the court may provide in the order for that person to have Parental Responsibility for the child while the order remains in force.

Child Arrangements Orders are private law orders and cannot be made in favour of a local authority. Where a child is the subject of a Care Order, there is a general duty on the local authority to promote contact between the child and the parents. A Contact Order can be made under section 34 of the Children Act 1989 requiring the local authority to comply with any arrangements for the child to have contact with a named person. Child Arrangements Orders are private law orders and cannot be made in favour of a local authority. Where a child is the subject of a Care Order, there is a general duty on the local authority to promote contact between the child and the parents. A Contact Order can be made under section 34 of the Children Act 1989 requiring the local authority to comply with any arrangements for the child to have contact with a named person.

A home with a special guardian carer - special guardianship

A Special Guardianship Order, (SGO) offers a high degree of legal permanence, as well as psychological and physical permanence. Although parental responsibility (PR) is shared between the Special Guardians and the birth parents, the Special Guardians have the “exclusive exercise” of parental responsibility. The child is not in care and therefore the trust does not share any parental responsibility. It remains in place until the child reaches 18 years. Special guardianship addresses the needs of children who need a sense of stability and security within a placement away from their parents but does not sever the legal relationship with birth parents associated with adoption. This provides a permanent legal relationship between a child and a member of their family or significant other.

The following persons may apply:

- Any guardian of the child
- A foster carer with whom the child has lived for one year immediately preceding the application.
- Anyone who holds a Child Arrangements Order with respect to the child or who has the consent of all those in whose favour a Child Arrangements Order is in force.
- Anyone with whom the child has lived for three out of the last five years.
- Where the child is subject of a Care Order, any person with consent of Croydon
- Anyone who has the consent of all those with parental responsibility for the child e.g. anyone, including the child, who has the leave of the court to apply.

SGOs offer greater stability and security to a placement than Child Arrangements Orders in that whilst they are revocable, there are restrictions on those who may apply to discharge the order. Leave of the Court is required and will only be granted where circumstances have changed since the Special Guardianship Order was made.

- Special Guardians will have parental responsibility although this will be shared with the child’s parents,
- the special guardian will have the legal right to make all day-to-day arrangements.
- parents must be consulted, and their consent is required to change their child’s name,
- agreement for their child to be adopted and any placement abroad for more than 3 months.

These areas are not exclusive but represent indicative issues which need to be considered when sharing parental responsibility with parents. An SGO made in relation to a child who is the subject of a Care Order will automatically discharge the Care Order and the Local Authority will no longer have parental responsibility.

Special guardians may be supported financially or otherwise by the Local Authority and, as with adoptive parents, will have the right to request an assessment for support services at any time after the order is made.

A home with a permanent foster carer

Long term fostering does not provide legal permanence as the foster carers do not hold parental responsibility. The child is either looked after on a Care Order, which the birth parents can seek to revoke, or voluntarily with birth parents' agreement. If a child is on a Care Order, parental responsibility is shared between the Local Authority and the birth parents and if they are accommodated voluntarily (Section 20 Children Act 1989) the birth parents retain sole parental responsibility.

However, long term fostering can offer psychological and physical permanence for the child. A long-term fostering arrangement ceases when a child attains adulthood at age 18, although Staying Put arrangements enable a previously fostered child to remain with the foster carers up until the age of 21 as an adult in their home parental responsibility.

This option can be a positive plan for older children who retain strong links to their birth families and do not want or need the formality of adoption.

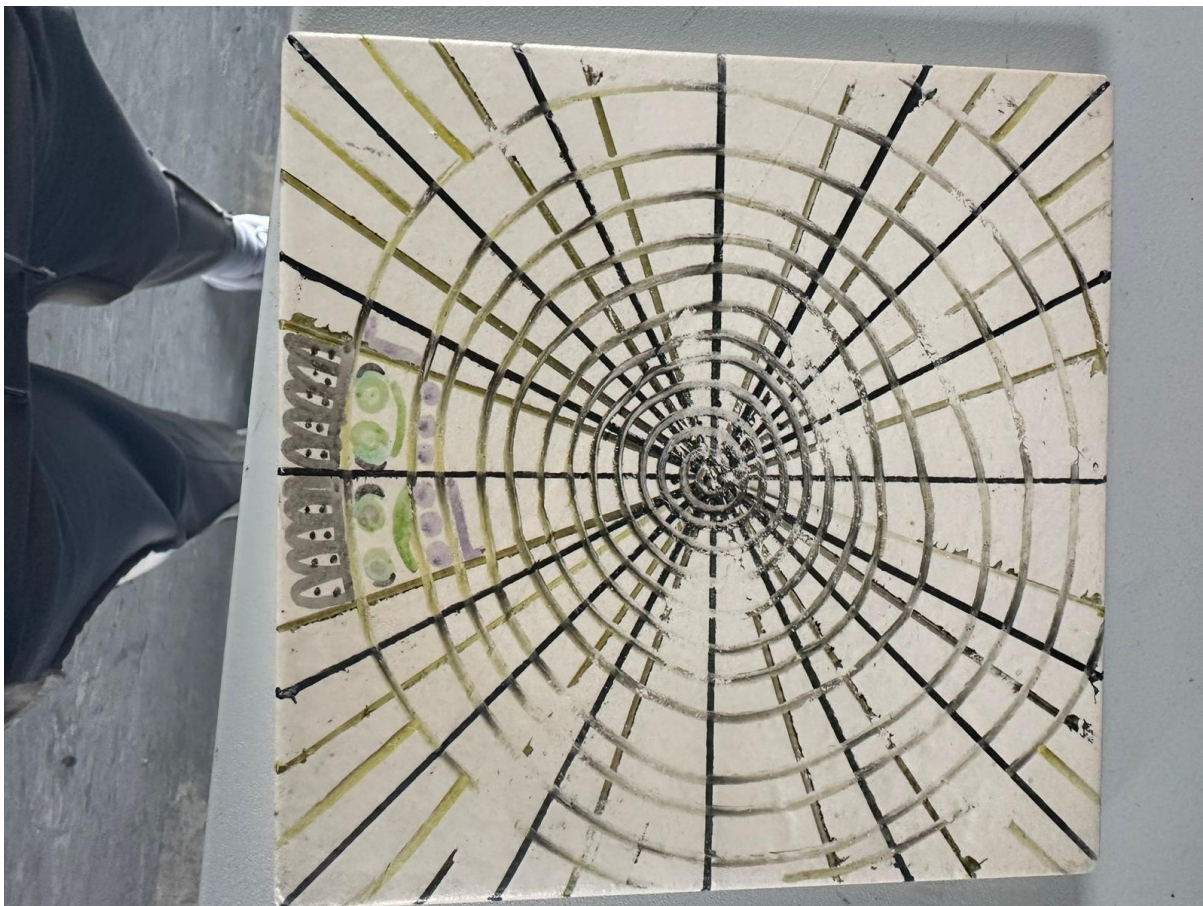
A home with adoptive parent/s

We recognise that some of our children will not be able to remain in the care of their parents or family. For those children, where appropriate, adoption will be their permanence plan. This will be identified at the earliest opportunity as part of the child's permanence plan.

Adoption legally transfers parental responsibility for the child permanently to the adopter. The child is then deemed to be the child of the adopter(s) as if the child had been born to them and the child's birth certificate is changed to an adoption certificate showing the adopter(s) to be the birth parent(s). The child will also acquire UK citizenship if they are not already a UK citizen, assuming they are adopted by a UK citizen. The adopter(s) 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.

The government have in recent years provided significant financial support to address the therapeutic needs of adopted children and their families. We recognise that for those children where it is decided that adoption is the appropriate route to permanence growing up in an adoptive family is a positive opportunity for them. Adoption ensures that children's needs are prioritised and that they can get the support they need from professionals who understand the long-term impact of being adopted.

Despite the legal break from the birth family that adoption creates we are committed to enabling children to grow up with every opportunity to retain links with the birth family. We know that children are most likely to have more positive outcomes when they maintain their relationships with their siblings. Sibling relationships are important and will be carefully considered how siblings will keep in touch as part of their individual permanence plans. Our children when not placed with their siblings, will be supported in an age appropriate way to understand the reasons for this and keeping in touch arrangements between siblings will be a priority in our permanence planning when sibling keeping in touch is assessed as appropriate. 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.



Birth Families and Siblings

Keeping in Touch

It is important to assess the extent and quality of relationships in a sibling group and for this work to be undertaken early to inform the Permanence Plan for the children. Usually and especially where there is a pre-existing and meaningful relationship, it will be important to seek to maintain sibling relationships within any Permanence Plan, including those where an alternative family placement is sought. A 'Together and Apart' Assessment can be useful to determine the needs and views of individual children within sibling groups.

The impact on separated siblings of losing vital support, a shared history and continuity affects stability in the placement. Permanence decision making needs to ensure that brothers and sisters have good arrangements to promote staying in touch and meeting each other where it is necessary for them to live in different homes with different carers.

The importance of identifying strengths and difficulties in sibling relationships to make appropriate permanent placement decisions is crucial. It is important to ascertain the perceptions and wishes of the child, their family, significant others, and foster carers, 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, religion, or beliefs. It is critical to explore issues related to children seeing and staying in touch with their brothers and sisters from the earliest point.

Family time or contact with families when children are separated can be difficult to navigate, however research suggests that when families are engaged from the point of a Family Group Conference and onwards, they are far more likely to make contact and become a positive experience for their children whatever the final permanence outcome. Early permanence planning is essential.

Sibling relationships are important and will be carefully considered how siblings will keep in touch as part of their individual permanence plans. We know that children are most likely to have more positive outcomes when they maintain their relationships with their siblings. Our children when not placed with their siblings will be supported in an age-appropriate way to understand the reasons for this and keeping in touch arrangements between siblings will be a priority in our permanence planning when sibling keeping in touch is assessed as appropriate. 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.

When it is in their best interests, it is important that the child remains in contact with their birth 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. We support the need for adopted children to keep in touch with any members of their birth family where this is in their best interests. Adoptive parents increasingly support direct approaches to support children in keeping in touch with their birth families. Wherever possible birth family members are included in reviews, updated plans, and significant life events for their children.

Early Permanence

Where possible we are committed to achieving permanence and stability at the earliest opportunity for children. Where children, particularly infants cannot remain with their birth family or extended family members, we will ensure that those whose plan is adoption are prepared and identified a family within their timescales.

Close partnership working between the early permanence team, courts and 'Adopt London South' enables the identification of children who require an immediate and a potential adoptive placement. Early permanence is used to provide a foster placement which can become an adoptive placement if required. 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 legal proceedings. This is called 'foster to adopt'.

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 placements moves for the child and disruption. We are committed to achieving permanence at the earliest opportunity for our babies and young children.

All children where adoption is the best plan to meet their needs will have activity to drive the realisation of this plan within their timescales.

Adopt London South

Adopt London South is the regional adoption agency to which Croydon belongs, there are ten local authorities in this partnership.

The service recruits and supports adoptive parents to one single pool of adopters for the local authorities and undertakes family finding for all children with a permanence plan of adoption.

Approaches and routes to achieve permanence

The plan for permanence can take different routes and the outcome should always be that the child/young person feels loved, safe, supported, and secure and they are encouraged to achieve their full potential. This includes planning and support into leaving care. The aim is to support children and young people by minimising the number of moves before they achieve their permanent home.

Younger children can experience early permanence through robust planning, this is often referred to as parallel, contingency planning. The approach is to ensure that children can move to a new home and care, where this is necessary, swiftly, if it is not possible to follow through on the primary plan. Achieving permanence must be in the child's timescales.

Parallel and contingency planning

All efforts should be made to safely keep or return a child to their parent or carer. However, where this may not be possible alternative plans will be made in parallel to support them to live with their birth family.

Parallel, contingency planning is essential especially when assessments of parents, family and friends are being completed and the outcome is not known. The child must not experience delay in achieving permanence and, if the child is unable to be cared for by their guardian or parent, other family and friends, adoption or permanent fostering should be considered.

Family network meetings and 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.

It is important that the Independent Reviewing Officer, continues to hear what children and young people want from a permanent home, which will help the matching processes, support bonding between the permanent carer and child and ensure connections with birth family are assessed and planned for to ensure the child can retain and continue a relationship with birth parents and family, wherever possible.

Permanence tracking

Permanency planning and tracking for children is crucial to drive the focus and quality of a permanent home and care for children. Permanence planning and tracking needs to have a strong focus on the child's journey, from first point of contact through to adoption/special guardianship support.

Permanence planning and tracking must improve the timeliness and quality of assessments and plans developed with children, families, and partners. The focus will be to enable children to stay with their families and communities wherever possible. When this is not possible, we must create more opportunities to drive the plans for exploring possible connected carers and non-connected care options. We need to make sure that our practitioners, managers and partners are knowledgeable and have the requisite skills to identify the salient factors that will impact upon the quality of care and stability of a child's lived experience in a new home. We also need to make sure that our Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Chairs help to drive permanence quality and timeliness through their scrutiny and oversight.

We must identify the factors that are important for individual children in alternative care arrangements, this includes attention to a child's equality and diversity needs. Undertaking direct work to understand what these elements mean for individual children in different families and what support needs carers will have, clearly identified to ensure that children have the greatest opportunity to live in a new home without further disruptions.

Working with birth parents and families in planning permanence

Continued work with birth parents and families is crucial for the stability and quality of ongoing care children need to improve and explore all opportunities for children to remain with their families and in their communities. Consistent engagement with families can also increase opportunities for children to return to live with their birth families after a period of being looked after by Croydon Council.

Family Group Conferencing and Family Network meetings are effective approaches in working with families at the earliest opportunity but also further along the child's permanence journey where it can assist with lifelong links with family and significant relationships that will support children into adulthood.

When it is not possible for children to remain with their birth family, alternative care and homes are needed for children, work must continue with birth parents to understand and engage in supporting their children to live with another family. Careful planning of contact arrangements with birth families which are regularly reviewed increases greater stability for children looked after. Children's identity and sense of belonging can become more established and flourish with good life story input with birth parent, carer and social work practitioner input with the child. Helping birth parents and carers to explore the differences and commonalities between them are important to build upon and create a new foundation and stories for children, as they develop.

Carer support to work with birth parents is crucial to help them protect the children they care for but also to develop empathy and respect for birth parents.

Where it is safe and in the best interests of the child, current research reflects the benefits of an open adoption arrangement with birth parents and families. This requires continual post adoption support to review, negotiate and support.



Life story work

It is best practice for all children who are to remain in long term care to have life story work undertaken with them. Life story work details the child's life history, people in their lives, personal information, stories, achievements etc. to promote their sense of identity and understanding of who they are, where they came from and why things have happened.

The main purpose of life story work is:

- to give details and understanding of the child/young person's history
- build their sense of identity, including religious, cultural and ethnic identity
- enable the child/ young person to share their past with others
- give a realistic account of early events and to dispel fantasies/ fears about their birth family
- link the past to the present and to help both the child/young person and the carer or parent to understand how earlier life events continue to impact on behaviour
- acknowledge issues of separation and loss
- enable carers/parents to understand and develop empathy for the child/young person
- enhance the child/young person's self-esteem and self-worth and enable them to develop a coherent sense of self that will contribute to positive health and wellbeing.

Fundamentally life story work aims to answer many questions – what happened, when and why. Questions about a child and young person's life that will need continually revisiting.

Transitions, approving and celebrating children and young people moving to a new home

It is important that careful planning for children to move to any new home is prioritised. Sometimes this is referred to as matching for looked after children and may take less formal descriptions for children living with extended family members under a court order. Good direct work to explore anxieties, wishes and hopes will inform the pace and format for introductions. Careful preparation of carers is important to be undertaken in tandem to ensure that they are also prepared to receive and be prepared for different responses and needs of individual children. Croydon Council and our partners can provide additional

support during this period to support and promote consistency and stability for children and carers at a crucial time. Working closely with family members and short-term carers to prepare and plan is important. The following website can be used for useful and practical guidance to support with transitions not just with adoptions, but across the whole care system: www.movingtoadoption.co.uk.

A celebration to acknowledge the transition for the child or young person to navigate the transition between families and securing a stable home in early adulthood exploring what this means for their identity and sense of belonging.

References

Children Act 1989

Adoption and Children Act 2002, 2004

The Care Planning Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011

The Special Guardianship Regulations 2005

Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)

Court orders and pre-proceedings For Local Authorities (2014)

Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Review (2015)

Legal Framework Guiding Practice:

Achieving Permanence Practice Guidance 2020

CoramBAAF, 'Siblings Together or Apart' 2009

Public Law Outline (2014)

UEA Moving to Adoption Model. 2020

Policy and Procedures Guiding Practice:

Permanence Planning Guidance

Thresholds guidance

CIC Review and permanence guidance

Child's entry into care guidance

Recommendations to achieve best practice in the child protection and family justice systems

Placement of children with parents

Together and Apart Assessment guidance

Research

Post Adoption Contact. Modernising an approach.

https://www.nuffieldfjo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/nfjo_report_adoption_connections_20210913v2.pdf

Key Action Plan and Delivery 2024-2027

Priority	Approach
<p>Listen to all children that we support in the community, looked after children and care experienced young people.</p>	<p>Develop a common language that is understandable for all (children, families, and partners) to facilitate permanence practice as a thread running through our work.</p> <p>Children and young people are represented and advise as ambassadors in the development of this action plan.</p>
<p>Create a dynamic (sufficiency) strategy to ensure that there are a range of homes and locations to meet the diversity of need for all of our children and young people. We will review the strategy robustly and regularly to ensure that it meets current and projected need.</p>	<p>Interdependence with sufficiency and placements that focusses on the how of permanence planning informing positive and stable loving homes.</p> <p>Strengthen and develop the roles of Manager, Safeguarding Leads, Independent Reviewing Officer, and Child Protection Chairs to understand and positively impact on permanence planning and review.</p> <p>Focus on reviews. This means ensuring more robust midway reviews that more frequently rag rate need, ensuring contingency and parallel plans are in place at the second review; and making sure the IRO ‘footprint’ evidence oversight and helps Managers drive planning.</p>
<p>Continue to develop and improve our inhouse and partnership arrangements to ensure that permanency and stability is an experience that all children and care experienced young people can achieve. This partnership will include the views and needs of a range of families involved in a child’s life.</p>	<p>Ensure that the quality and frequency of supervision and Management oversight, across the partnership, drives the quality of permanence practice which delivers good permanence outcomes for children.</p> <p>Ensure quality assurance activity continually and explicitly drives permanency. This includes developing specific permanence data to track and drive performance, dip sampling, observation, practice reviews and a thematic spotlight on practice.</p> <p>Focus on children in pre-proceedings and apply early permanence standards. This means reviewing all children’s plans, ensuring all activity and plans are good and drive good permanence outcomes within the child’s timescales.</p>

	<p>Ensure pace in permanence tracking activity to achieve permanence for children, particularly those under five and on care orders.</p>
<p>To further develop training and skill development for social workers, aligned professionals, council wide corporate parents and community partners, in assessing and planning where home circumstances and care is fragile. Seeking and proposing positive solutions, incorporating children, young people, family, and carers wishes and feelings into plans and interventions.</p>	<p>Create partnership learning opportunities and develop the early stages of help offered to children and families, through our early help and family hubs offer. Ensuring all children are given the best opportunities of living with their families.</p> <p>Develop simple, accessible guidance for practitioners, managers and partners to easily understand permanence routes and quality practice approaches to ensuring that children have the best and most timely permanence outcomes.</p> <p>Action learning opportunities for social workers to develop their permanence knowledge and practice.</p> <p>Focus on direct work and life story work. Creating coherence in children and young people's understanding of their history, life story to promote a sense of belonging and stability.</p>
<p>Develop and deploy a range of support offers (people, programmes, approach) to increase stability where circumstances are fragile. Creating equality of opportunity for all children and young people to experience a stable home and care.</p>	<p>Interdependence with Housing, safeguarding partners, Fostering, Placements.</p> <p>Develop practice, policy, and resource approaches to improving stability, warmth and love experienced by children and young people.</p>

