

Guidance: Placement Planning for children in care

Operational from: 31.10.23

Agreed by: CYPS Policies and Procedures Group

Version Number: 1

Date of Equality Impact Assessment: N/A as EI considered from creation

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Review Date: 31.10.2024

Document Summary

This guidance is designed to support Placement Planning practice for Suffolk's Children in Care including completion of the Placement Planning Meeting (PPM) and LCS Placement Plan record.

It explores the processes required to ensure that all the necessary information about the child and their needs is shared with the placement provider e.g. foster carer, so that they can care for the child in a fully informed way.

Clear communication and decision-making are essential to a successful placement. Robust, collaborative placement planning is more likely to achieve a high standard of care for children in care and promote good working relationships between care providers including foster carers, early permanence adopters, residential children's homes, parents, and the allocated social workers.

This guidance also aims to ensure that relevant legislation and statutory guidance such as the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review June 2015 is followed.

It is very important that this guidance is read in conjunction with Suffolk's policy on Delegating Authority to Foster Carers and Children's Homes.

Placement planning and decision-making around delegating authority are inextricable.

Please note: References to foster carers and children's homes includes independent providers such as fostering agencies and privately-run residential care as well as local authority provision.

The guidance is not aimed specifically at 16+ Leaving Care supported accommodation provision but will have some relevance as placement planning is just as important for those young people.

We will, on request, produce this policy or parts of it into other languages and formats so that everyone can use and comment upon its content. See final page for Version Control Information.

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1.1 Introduction

Every child in care requires a Placement Plan. This provides clarity for the child and the child's carer (whether a parent, a foster carer or registered provider as the person responsible for the child at their accommodation) about how the day to day parenting tasks will be shared between the child's carer and the responsible authority, including clarity about the financial arrangements for the child's upbringing.

This guidance sets out Suffolk County Council's approach to Placement Planning for children in care. It takes account of government guidance and the need to maximise, wherever possible, the ability for day-to-day decision making to be undertaken by foster carers and children's homes, particularly where the placement is intended to be long term.

The following references information held within the Children Act Guidance 2015.

1.2 The law

The responsible authority is required to draw up a placement plan before the child is placed [regulation 9]. The placement plan sets out in detail how the placement is intended to contribute to meeting the child's needs as set out in the care plan. Indeed, **the placement plan forms part of the overarching care plan.**

Where it is not possible to draw up a placement plan **in advance of the placement**, a placement plan must be made **within five working days** of the start of the placement [regulation 9(2)]. In any event, essential information for providing safe care to the child must be available to the carer **at the start of the placement.**

When a placement is known to be very temporary e.g. overnight or for a few days only, this guidance may not apply. However, as much information as possible should be shared with the carer so they can meet the child's needs regardless of placement duration.

It is possible that the placement plan will be drawn up before the completion of the full care plan to ensure that appropriate information is shared and contacts given in a timely manner to support the child and the carer in the placement.

1.3 Purpose of a Placement Plan

An effective placement plan will ensure that the carer receives **essential information** about the child, including their health, educational, emotional, and behavioural needs, how these may affect the child day to day and appropriate strategies for responding to them. In particular, it is important to identify any behaviours which have been of concern to a child's previous carer and which have contributed to the breakdown of a previous placement.

The purpose is not to label children but to ensure, firstly, that the child is going to an appropriate carer able to meet those particular needs; and, secondly, that the child is not put in a situation in which they can be harmed or cause harm to others. Only by identifying difficulties as well as strengths is it possible to ensure that the child and their carer receive appropriate help and support.

Clarity and specificity in the placement plan will ensure that the carer understands the child's likes, dislikes, routines and who is important in the child's life. It will reduce the

potential for disagreements which can arise when decision-making on behalf of children is the responsibility of different people at different levels in the organisation, such as the foster carer, social worker, or managers. Lack of clarity about who does what can easily lead to role confusion, unhappiness with the situation and even placement breakdown.

2 Information the carer needs in order to look after the child

2.1 The 2010 Regulations [regulation 9 and schedule 2].

These set out the **information which must be provided in the placement plan**

The carer will need to know **personal information** about the child, such as:

- the child's family,
- their race, religion, and culture,
- the language spoken at home,
- any disabilities or other special needs
- other aspects of identity, such as the *child's chosen name* or what they prefer to be *known by*. Names hold great importance and are part of a person's individuality.

2.2 The Care Plan

As well as having the Placement Plan, a carer should also be given **a copy of the child's Care Plan** when it is completed and be clear about their role in implementing it. Within the context of the care plan, the carer needs a realistic estimate of how long the placement is expected to last.

The carer will also need to know:

- the circumstances leading to the child becoming looked after, and
- the child's previous experiences both before and during the care episode.
- what the long term plan is for the child, if known at that time.
- what the objectives are for the specific placement and how these fit with the care plan.
- If the child is subject to care proceedings, the care provider should be given information about this, and be kept up to date on any developments so they can support the child accordingly.

2.2 Key information from the start

Basic Information

Carers need to know:

- **how to access support and advice** - they need the names and contact details of the social worker, the fostering or adoption worker, the child's IRO, independent visitor and, if applicable, the child's personal adviser. [Sch.2 – 1(8) 2010].
- **who to contact** if the named professional is on leave or otherwise unavailable e.g. duty team number.
- who to contact **outside office hours** and how.
- what **specialist help** the child is receiving (for instance, extra help with school work) and how this can be maintained.
- Other **key names, addresses and contact details** should include the school, the designated teacher for looked after pupils, the child's GP, dentist and any other professionals involved with the child's care.

Information to help the child settle

Many children find it difficult to settle in a strange environment, feelings which are likely to be exacerbated if the start of the care episode has been sudden or traumatic. Carers can help children feel at home if they can maintain some of the **routines** that are familiar to them. It is therefore important to record information about bedtimes, mealtimes, special belongings and so on, which the carers can use to help the child feel safe and comforted.

Religious and cultural needs [Schedule 2 - 3(2) 2010 Regs]

The child's carers should be informed about the **child's religion and culture** and the manner in which these are reflected in their daily life, including any help the child will need to maintain these links. Where the child does not have a formal religion, they may still have needs for a spiritual dimension to their life and should be supported and encouraged to develop it. These experiences contribute to the child's sense of identity.

Even in good placements there may be profound **differences between carers and birth families** in matters such as religious observance, dress codes and diet. These issues should be treated sensitively and arrangements to preserve and strengthen the child's links with the religious and cultural practices of their birth family agreed, particularly in circumstances where the plan is for the child to return to live with parents.

Financial [Schedule 2 - 3(5) 2010 Regs]

Detailed discussions concerning **remuneration** and **other costs** may need to take place outside the PPM e.g. if senior management agreement is needed. However, clear arrangements must be made and recorded in the Placement Plan. If a case is with the Child in Need (CiN) team when the child is placed, items that require funding commitment will be reviewed when the case moves to the Child in Care (CiC) Team. This need to review, as part of the handover process, must be made clear in the Placement Plan.

- Carers need to know from the outset how much financial support they will receive and the arrangements for payment.
- Clear information about how exceptional items such as school trips will be paid for.
- In addition to fostering allowance, the authority should consider with the foster carer whether there are any particular needs arising from the placement such as any additional child care costs, bedding, bedroom furniture, equipment, or clothing, particularly if a sibling group is placed in a household not equipped for such numbers.
- For children placed in an emergency where they have few or no belongings, there may be unusual initial expenditure to ensure they have all they need; this must be agreed.
- Placements for children with special needs frequently require specific equipment and therefore involve extra expense. Who provides this must be agreed quickly to ensure the placement is suitable and that safe care can be provided.
- A child may be eligible for or already receiving DLA or other benefits to help meet their support needs. The care provider needs to know what the money is to be spent on.
- If the carer is involved in moving a child on i.e. to another placement, payments for associated expenses e.g. travel to introductory meetings, luggage etc. must be agreed.
- Arrangements for savings for the child, including if they have any existing accounts.

Failure to clarify financial arrangements at the start or to reimburse carers for necessary expenditure can jeopardise the relationship between the carer and the service.

2.3 Day to Day arrangements

The responsible authority is required to set out a range of specific information in the placement plan [Reg 9 and Schedule 2 paragraphs (1) to (8)].

Specific Information [Schedule 2 – 1 and 3(3-6) 2010 Regs]

- the child's **health and education**, including any early year's education or child care
- **contact** arrangements,
- **visits** by the responsible authority and
- any arrangements for visits by an **independent visitor**.

The child's carer needs to know what **their role** will be in:

- **safeguarding and promoting the child's welfare** across all of the child's developmental needs.
- the **child's health plan and PEP** and understand their role in implementing these.

It is important to ensure they have adequate information about:

- **health** including allergies, current medication, and treatment of medical conditions.
- details such as dates of **appointments** with specialists (these can get lost when a child changes placements).
- **additional educational support** provided through the PEP should be included. A PEP should be in place for all school children and those aged 2 to 5 years old in an early years or child care setting.
- **existing arrangements for specialist services** such as psychotherapeutic support or extra tuition and be clear both about their responsibilities in ensuring that these are maintained and their role in helping the child to follow any agreed programmes.

Arrangements for spending time with family and friends [Schedule 2 - 1(2) 2010 Regs]

'Contact' between children, birth parents, siblings including those who are also looked after and other relatives and friends must be clarified and discussed with carers.

The child's carers need to know:

- the provisions of contact orders made under section 8 of the 1989 Act, and
- how any changes to these arrangements should be notified*.
- any person with whom contact is discouraged and the reasons for this,
- if the child is subject to a care order, be given a copy of any orders made under S.34 or if the child is to be placed for adoption, S.26 of the 2002 Act applies.

While there is an expectation that the child's carers will **facilitate reasonable contact**, social workers need to be aware of the difficulties that can arise when birth parents (and other relatives) have extensive contact with children, whether in the carer's home or at another contact venue. Contact arrangements should be sensitive to the needs of carers and their families as well as those of parents.

*If contact plans are changed or sessions are cancelled (by the parents or anyone else), the carer must be advised as soon as possible to prevent them from making unnecessary journeys; but importantly to be able to support the child with any upset or disappointment they may experience. Equally, carers must know who to advise if planned contact with friends and family cannot go ahead e.g. because the child is unwell or there are other difficulties preventing it.

2.3 Delegation of authority

[Please also refer to Suffolk's *Delegating Authority Policy*]

Suffolk County Council has a duty to ensure foster carers/children's homes have authority to make day to day decisions on the child's care but, by law, anyone who is caring for a child can do what is reasonable at the time to safeguard and promote the child's welfare.

Managing the relationship between a child in care's parents (or other persons with parental responsibility), the local authority, the foster carer(s) or the registered manager of a children's home is challenging, particularly as those providing the day-to-day care do not hold parental responsibility (unless the child is living at home).

To fulfil the local authority's duty to safeguard and promote the child's welfare, it is essential that, wherever possible, the most appropriate person to take a decision about the child has the authority to do so, and that it is clear **who has the authority to decide what**.

Poor planning around delegation of authority can delay decision-making and lead to children missing out on opportunities that enable them to experience a fulfilled childhood and feel part of their foster carer's family or daily life of their children's home. Children in care say problems obtaining parents' and local authorities' consent for everyday activities make them feel different from their peers and cause them embarrassment and upset.

Failure to delegate appropriately, or to make clear who has the authority to decide what, can make it more difficult for foster carers and residential workers to carry out their caring role and form appropriate relationships with the children in their care.

3 Placement Planning Meeting (PPM)

This meeting should be used to discuss the content of the proposed placement plan with the care provider and any other involved professionals. It should aim to resolve any issues arising and finalise and record agreements e.g. on delegated authority.

As far as possible, agreement should be made on any issue that is likely to arise so that **the child's experience of care can be as normal as possible**. Tasks agreed within the placement plan should have corresponding authority delegated.

The meeting should be held **in person** and, where possible, at the **placement location**. Those who **must** be present are the foster carer or residential care worker; the supervising (fostering) social worker; the child's social worker and, where appropriate, the **child or young person** themselves. It may be that they will not be present for all the meeting, depending on the topic under discussion. However, it is important especially for older children to have a say in the plans and decisions being made about and for them.

The person who needs to **instigate the PPM** will differ depending on the type of provision; whoever it is, should initiate the PPM as soon as the placement is known. As above, the meeting should take place **before** the child is placed but, if this is not possible, it must occur within **5 working days**.

For Suffolk foster placements (in-house and connected person) the **supervising (fostering) social worker** will instigate the meeting and be responsible for the completion of the Placement Plan on LCS.

For independent fostering agencies and residential homes, the **child's social worker** will hold this role. *NB Residential Care homes have a separate LCS Placement Planning Form*

The **relevant social workers (fostering and child's)** can draft the Placement Plan in advance, preparing any information that needs to be shared ahead of the meeting. It is good practice to share a copy of the draft plan with the care provider e.g. the foster carer and other attendees, before the meeting. This allows time for reflection on what is expected of the provider and can also save a great deal of time on the day.

The **placement plan cannot be finalised** and agreed without the contribution of the care provider. This is a process that requires respectful collaboration; without that, providing the required level of care will be challenging and risks the child having unmet needs and the placement breaking down.

Whilst it is unusual for the **parents** to be present for the placement planning meeting, it is not inappropriate to include them. Indeed, where the child is placed in care under Section 20 Children Act 1989, it is essential that the parents (who are the sole retainers of PR) are included in the decisions made for and about their child.

The **child's IRO** should also be consulted on arrangements for the placement and in particular delegated authority. It is their responsibility to **review the placement plan and arrangements for delegating authority at each statutory CiC review** to ensure they remain fit for purpose. As a child grows and circumstances for them change, the placement plan may also need to change; and the IRO can make recommendations on changes to arrangements where this is in the child's best interests.

4 Dispute Resolution

In the first instance, any disagreement about the content of the placement plan should be handled collaboratively and between those who are party to the planning process. If this is unsuccessful then the matter should be escalated to the relevant managers for fostering or residential care and fieldwork services who will be able to negotiate a solution.

In the case of foster carers, if a resolution is still not found, then they should be given information about how to make a formal complaint.

References

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 – online at [The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review \(England\) Regulations 2010 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](http://www.legislation.gov.uk)

Version Control	Reason for revision and summary of changes needed	Date