



Wigan 
Council

Permanence Planning Strategy 2026-2028

Version Final



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Introduction

Wigan Council is committed to achieving the stability and security of permanence for every child in its care. This policy underlines that commitment and sets out how we assess, plan and deliver permanence to achieve the best possible outcome for each individual child.

Our definition of “permanence” is a framework of emotional, physical, and legal conditions that gives a child/young person a sense of commitment, security, and continuity of care throughout their childhood and beyond.

Our Vision and Principles

Permanence planning is based on our philosophy that every child has the right to a permanent, safe, stable, and loving home, preferably with his or her own family. This includes the exploration of extended family network before consideration of an alternative placement would begin. Where children cannot live with their own family, we are committed to supporting children to remain in the Wigan borough, close to people and places that matter to them.

Our permanence planning will be built on the following principles:

- We work with families to build on their strengths, find creative, sustainable solutions to the problems they face and support them to make the changes needed to enable the development, well-being and safety of their children.
- Our Family Safeguarding Model strengthens permanence planning by addressing risk through evidence-informed, whole-family interventions that focus on parental capacity, relationships and sustainable change rather than episodic compliance. Family Safeguarding promotes purposeful, time-limited planning, with robust assessment and review

processes that support confident decision-making, timely legal pathways where necessary, and improved outcomes for children through stable, secure and enduring living arrangements.

- By building resilience and managing risk in this way, we aim to reduce the need for state intervention in family life and the need for children to come into local authority care.
- When children are in care we continue to work with their parents and wider family to enable them to return home where possible, or if this is not possible to enable positive family relationships to be maintained.
- When working with children or young people, at home or in care, we work alongside them to explore how to improve their outcomes.
- When a child in care cannot return to their family, we actively seek a suitable alternative placement that will provide them with security, stability and a where possible an alternate route to permanence.

Our guiding questions include:

Would this be good enough for my child?

Will this support the child or young person to become a confident resilient and happy adult?

Wigan Council is committed as a corporate parent for cared for children and young people and will work relentlessly to find permanent, safe homes for children in care that meet their specific needs, in a timely manner.

Signs of Happiness

Wigan has developed our Signs of Happiness approach to care planning, in consultation with our children in care and care leavers and been co-produced. Our Children identified that they would want us to prioritise their happiness and supported the title of this Framework. The Framework identifies that overall, we want our children to be happy, and we will support this through focusing on key areas including:

Belonging, Success, Confidence, Recovery, Aspiration and Connectedness.

What we want for our children is:

- To recover from the trauma they are likely to have experienced
- To have a sense of belonging (permanence) in their lives, including where they are living and going to school
- To be connected to significant people and not feel alone
- To feel confident in areas of their life where they can achieve (and have achievements celebrated)
- To have hopes and aspirations for the future (that we can support them to achieve)
- To be successful, and have the successes noted, and celebrated.

Key Practice Objectives in Permanence Planning

Permanence planning should start from the first point of contact between a child and the service; The professionals involved work in partnership with parents/families to meet the following objectives.

This includes, but is not limited to:

- Considering their journey to date, and the impact this has had upon them, when determining subsequent intervention and decision making; being mindful of repeat interventions which have not achieved desired or sustained change previously.
- Being professionally curious; respectful challenge and asking the right questions.
- Undertaking an eco-map/genogram with the family and exploring their network.
- Engaging those in the network who can offer support and/or protection to the child and involving them in safety planning and contingency planning.
- Engaging absent/non-resident parents, and their networks, as appropriate.
- Considering the long-term prognosis and capacity for change, rather than solely focusing on the here and now; exploring the social history of parents/carers as part of the assessment of their parenting capacity.
- The question "how are the child's permanence needs being met?" must be at the core of everything we do.
- Where it is necessary for a child to leave their family, this should be for as short a time as is required to secure a safe, supported return home; or
- Where it is not in the child's best interests to live within the family network, it will usually be in the interests of the child for alternative permanent carers to be identified and the placement secured

through adoption, long term foster care, Child Arrangements Orders or Special Guardianship Orders

- Residential group living is provided only when a need for this is identified within the Care Plan and when substitute family care is not appropriate.
- For older children arranging for their independent living must be considered in a timely manner. It is important to remember that older children and young people also need to achieve permanence in their lives although they may not wish (for a variety of reasons) to be in a foster home or to be adopted. For example, they may prefer to live in a children's home where they can also achieve a sense of security and belonging.
- Where it is clear that families and children are unable to live together, planning must be swift and clear to identify permanent alternative settings.
- Wherever possible, care should be provided locally unless clearly identified as inappropriate. Wigan has a strong track record of providing homes for our children locally where possible.
- Contact with the family, Connected Person and extended family is facilitated and built on (unless clearly identified as inappropriate).

The wishes and feelings of the child are always to be considered.

The older and more mature the child, the greater weight should be given to their wishes.

When undertaking permanence planning, it is important to promote the child's links with their racial, cultural and religious heritage, however this should not be allowed to delay achieving permanence for the child.

How we provide support

Life Story Work

Life Story Work is crucial for children to understand their experiences. This includes the child's experience within their birth family, their history and supportive relationships. Life Story Work should include a narrative as well as pictures and other forms of information to help the child understand why they came into care and any subsequent changes.



The work should include the child, their birth parents and extended family where appropriate. It should include information collated by parents (where possible), carers, social workers and other key people. Life Story Work should start from the beginning of our involvement with the child and be updated alongside the child as they grow to help them process and form an accurate narrative of their life journey.

Life Story Work must be recorded sensitively using 'language that cares' on the child's file using language which is compassionate about children's birth families and recognizes 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.

The use of genograms and ecomaps will support social workers understanding of key relationships for children.

Life Story work is integral to children's understanding of their journey and route to finding a settled stable home. In Wigan we have introduced a suite of bespoke tools into children's records, ranging from memory capture and decision explanations in the My Journey Tool, transition letters to therapeutic life story workbooks. This ensures that children and young peoples' experiences are recorded meaningfully and young people can make sense of them. This practice impacts on children's wellbeing, and ultimately their permanence plan and outcomes.

Emotional wellbeing

Children's emotional wellbeing is hugely significant in care planning and ultimately impacts on placement stability and therefore permanence.



We work closely with health partners to support children's mental health, including a bespoke range of services we have developed including *Our Safe Space*, *Reach*, and *ATOM (No Wrong Door)*. These have been shaped to provide trauma-informed support for children experiencing trauma and instability, reunification plans or transitioning from residential care. These services have positively impacted on placement stability, which is also seen in our data, showing fewer than average children move homes, and more children benefit from stable long-term homes.

Permanence is tracked from children entering care via our Court Progression Officer, regular Permanence Planning Meetings, and final Care Planning Meetings chaired by the Service Lead for Family Safeguarding.

Permanence continues to be tracked by the Service Lead in Children in Care, Care Leavers and Adoption, including 8 weekly Permanence Tracker meetings, and monthly Permanence Panel. This is where children's plans are matched, scrutinised and approved by a multi-agency panel.

Stability Panel

Children's permanence is further supported via a weekly multi agency Stability Panel where collaborative discussions support social workers to make good decisions and identify support packages.

Permanence is also key for our young people transitioning to adulthood and we have significantly increased our numbers of children remaining in a Staying Put arrangement, thus ensuring young people can continue to benefit from stable and meaningful relationships post 18.

Impact of Services

The Emotional Wellbeing Service, named Our Safe Space by our children in care forum, has positively impacted on permanence. Our Safe Space provides evidenced based trauma and attachment training, alongside consultations, to our foster carers and external residential carers resulting in highly skilled and attuned carers who feel more confident to care for some of our most complex children. Direct work with young people, supports carers and children when this is needed, which has also built resilience in children and carers and increased stability measures and permanence. Our young people contribute to our Foster Carer training programme and deliver training sessions that are impactful. This includes a co-produced video designed to advise foster carers about what children need when they first go to live with them.

The impact of the Panel and our Emotional wellbeing offer provides the foundation of our permanence strategy for our children in long term care.

Planning for Permanence

Wigan Council will always look to provide high quality support and intervention to children and families to enable children to remain living with their family where it is safe to do so, where this is not possible for the child, the following factors will be considered when planning for the child.

Family solutions

If it is not possible for the child to be cared for by her/his birth parents, then options within the extended network of family and friends will be considered as a priority. We will support all families to look to use resources within their own family.

All families will be offered a Family Group Conference to harness the resources of the network.

Family Time

It is important for children's identity that they experience positive on-going interaction with parent(s), family and friends where appropriate. The purpose of the time spent together should be clearly agreed and recorded in the child's plan and meet the child's needs.

Children will be placed together whenever possible unless the individual assessed needs of children indicate that children's needs will be better met placed separately.

Learning

Stability in educational provision/training and extra-curricular activity is crucial to permanence. Children cannot move school without multi agency scrutiny of Stability Panel. Virtual School support educational outcomes for all children in care, and carers are encouraged to have high aspirations for children. All children's achievements are celebrated by their carer to support self-confidence and self-esteem. Depending on the age of the child,

they will be given some choice with regard to where they will live, as far as is possible particularly to ensure they can maintain school, hobbies, and their friendships.

The Virtual School Head (VSH) in the local authority where the previously looked after child is resident has an advice and guidance role for parents /carers and for schools at a system-level or at a child-level with parental consent. This can involve support at meetings for parents. Where a child's permanence pathway is identified and shared with the VSH while they are looked after, cross-border support can be arranged to ensure prospective parents or legal guardians feel supported. This might be in areas such as transition to a new school.

Additional education support is available including the Early Years Pupil Premium funding, which is available to settings to support in meeting need, and also Pupil Premium Plus funding is available to schools to support in meeting need.

Preparation for Independence

Our children and young people are assisted and supported into independence when they choose, and this is safe and appropriate. Planning for independence starts at the earliest opportunity for each child to prevent any drift or delay. Our Preparation for Independence tools supports the work by identifying children's needs and areas requiring support. Our plans for our 16- and 17-year-olds are reviewed fortnightly by our multi agency Transition Panel to ensure young people's transition into adulthood and the next steps are as smooth as possible.

Staying Put and Staying Close

We want our children and young people to feel a sense of belonging to their carers as they move into adolescence and

adulthood. We work on an understanding that belonging does not end at the age of 18 years.

Early planning

A child's permanence plan should be established at the four-month review and recorded in the review decisions. Where the plan is to achieve permanence with current carers then there should be no delay in achieving this.

The service will strive to deliver the commitments outlined in this policy by providing the following:

- High quality, robust, evidence-based and timely assessments of a child's needs.
- Any assessment of the child/young person's lived experience will help to ensure appropriate planning and best practice in line with their plan.
- Clear plans include clear timescales, identifiable outcomes, support services and provision and actions to meet those needs; these plans should be reviewed meticulously to accurately measure progress, or otherwise, of actions set.
- Multi-agency commitment and effective joint working processes to ensure that the services necessary to support children in permanent family placements and/or prevent them ending in an unplanned way are prioritised and delivered.
- Robust reviewing arrangements via Permanence Trackers are in place for the early identification of the need for permanent arrangements and to prevent drift.
- The opportunity for the lived experience of the child to be heard and evidenced in their plan and to include their views and feelings, Child Friendly Care Plans are updated prior to each CLA Review.

Effective permanence planning ensures children achieve stable, secure and lasting care arrangements without unnecessary delay. Planning begins at right from the beginning of our involvement and is built on early, proactive planning—assessing rehabilitation home, connected carers, and alternative permanence options such as adoption or long-term fostering at the same time. This approach reduces drift, minimises uncertainty and supports each child’s emotional, psychological and developmental needs.

The permanence planning process is structured around three key meetings that track progress and maintain momentum. The initial meeting, held before or shortly after the first court hearing, identifies viable permanence options, sets actions to progress each in parallel and ensures work aligns with the court timetable. A mid-way meeting then reviews the progress of assessments, the viability of different permanence routes, and any required planning around reunification, kinship, adoption or long-term fostering, ensuring timescales and court expectations are met.

A final permanence meeting takes place once all assessments are completed and confirms the child’s final permanence plan, including the preferred legal order, where the child will live, family time arrangements, transition planning and any long-term support needed. This structured approach ensures multi-agency coordination, timely decision-making, and clear, evidence-based pathways that lead to stable and secure outcomes for children.

Assessing for Permanence

Assessments of a child's needs in relation to their Permanence Plan must:

- Focus on outcomes.
- Consider stability issues, including the child's and family's needs for long-term support and the child's needs for links, including contact, with their parents, siblings, and wider family network.
- Social workers must ensure the child's Permanence Plan is clearly linked to previous assessments of the child's needs.

A court, in deciding whether to make a Care Order, is required to consider the permanence provisions of the Care Plan for the child.

The provisions setting out the long-term plan for the upbringing of the child - to live with a parent/family member/family friend; adoption; or other long-term care, and the plan's provisions in relation to any of the following:

- The impact on the child concerned of any harm that he or she suffered or was likely to suffer.
- The current and future needs of the child (including needs arising out of that impact).
- The way in which the long-term plan for the upbringing of the child would meet those current and future needs.

In considering the child's needs, full consultation with family and community networks should be undertaken to establish the child's attachments and supports.

In all cases, the child's own wishes and feelings must be ascertained and considered.

By the time of the second Looked After Review, the child must have a Permanence Plan (incorporated into the Care Plan), to be presented for consideration at the review.

Where the Permanence Plan includes a Parallel Plan, the social worker must ensure that the parents are informed of the reasons why two plans are being made to meet the child's needs and prevent unnecessary delay.

Options for Permanence

We recognise that different children and young people have different needs and to enable us to make the best plans for them we have several routes to a permanent home:

- [Staying/Returning Home](#)
- [Placement with Family or Friends/Connected Persons](#)
- [Adoption](#)
- [Foster to adopt placements, concurrent planning and temporary approval as foster carers of approved prospective adopters](#)
- [Special Guardianship](#)
- [Child Arrangement Orders](#)
- [Long-term Fostering](#)
- [Long-term Residential Care](#)

Staying / Returning Home

The first stage within permanence planning is work with families and children in need to support them staying together. This will be appropriate when there is a need for existing relationships with birth family to be stabilised and strengthened to support the child's well-being, identity and sense of belonging. With skilled intervention there is evidence that the family can achieve positive and sustained change within functioning and family dynamics. The possibility of children returning home to parental care is reviewed annually in the Annual Assessment and via the Child Looked After Review.

The **Staying Together (ST)** Edge of Care Team provides intensive support for young people aged 12–18 who are at significant or imminent risk of entering care. Families usually enter the service through a planned consultation and referral route, where social workers explore risks, vulnerabilities, consent, and suitability before a formal referral is taken to the ST Panel. During the initial *finding out* stage, KFT provides short-term stabilisation while cases remain with Duty; ST begins intensive work once

Duty confirms the family will remain open to a social worker and a referral is progressed.

Alongside the planned pathway, an urgent route allows for immediate crisis intervention—including attending Challenge to Care (C2C) meetings—where an out-of-panel decision is agreed by ST or REACH management to prevent imminent family breakdown. Once allocated, ST practitioners provide longer term, high-intensity intervention, with frequent visiting delivered by practitioners trained in PACE and NVR, supported by a mental health therapeutic clinician as part of the REACH multidisciplinary model. The service's intensive wraparound offer is further strengthened through strong links with Psychologist, short breaks, family therapeutic support, and art-based therapeutic work, all of which help stabilise relationships, enhance safety and prevent the need for care

Placement with Family or Friends/Connected Persons

If the assessment concludes that the child cannot safely remain at home, every effort must be made to secure a placement with a family member or friend/Connected Person as their carer. 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. It is very important to establish at an early stage which relatives or friends might be available to care for the child, to avoid the kind of delays that can happen during court proceedings where this work has not been done.

This option will be suitable where:

- Primary need is for a stable, loving family environment whilst there is still a significant level of continued involvement with the birth family.
- Child has a clear sense of identity with the birth family, whilst needing to be looked after away from home.
- There is need for continuing oversight and monitoring of the child's developmental progress.
- Birth parents are able and willing to exercise a degree of parental responsibility in the best interests of the child or young person.

Adoption

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).

Research strongly supports adoption as a primary consideration and as a main factor contributing to the stability of children, especially for those under four years of age who cannot be reunified with their birth or extended family.

Adoption is suitable where:

- Primary need is to belong to a family who will make a lifelong commitment.
- Child's birth parents are not able or not willing to share parental responsibility to meet their child's needs, even though there may be direct or indirect contact.

- Child needs an opportunity to develop a new sense of identity whilst being supported to maintain or develop a healthy understanding of their past.
- Child expresses a wish to be adopted.

Adoption has the following advantages as a Permanence Plan:

- Parental Responsibility is held exclusively by the carers.
- The child is no longer Looked After.
- No future legal challenge to overturn the Adoption Order is possible.
- The child is a permanent family member into adulthood.
- As a previously Child in Care, the child is entitled to additional education support throughout their school career.

Adoption has the following disadvantages as a Permanence Plan:

- It involves a complete and permanent legal separation from the family of origin.
- There is no review process.

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 is made.

Foster to Adopt Placements, Concurrent Planning and Temporary

Approval as Foster Carers of Approved Prospective Adopters

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 a 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.

This option is advantageous as it:

- Provides consistency, safety and stability.
- Reduces the number of moves that children experience before they achieve permanence.
- The child or young person is no longer looked after.
- Parental responsibility is transferred to the carers/adopters once the adoption order has been granted.

Other considerations

- There is no absolute guarantee that the court will recommend adoption.
- The foster carer/adopter will be required to meet the child's birth family and support contact with the child's birth family if appropriate, while court proceedings are ongoing.

Where the local authority are considering adoption for a child, or are satisfied that the child ought to be placed for adoption but is not yet authorised (either by consent or by Placement Order) to place the child for adoption, the authority MUST consider placing the child with a relative, friend or other Connected Person who is also a local authority foster carer or, where they decide that such a placement is not the most appropriate placement, then they must consider placing the child with a local authority foster carer who has been approved as a prospective adopter.

In such a situation, the requirements under the Section 22 of the Children Act 1989 to ensure that placements allow the child to live near the parents' home, be placed within the local authority area, remain at the same school and to be placed together with sibling(s), do not apply.

The carers may be dually approved by being fully approved adopters and foster carers for any child, or they might be approved prospective adopters who have been temporarily approved as foster carers for a named child under regulation 25A of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review

(England) Regulations 2010. This temporary foster carer approval process can be carried out at the same time as the adopter approval process.

Special Guardianship Orders

Special Guardianship addresses the needs of a significant group of children, who need a sense of stability and security within a placement away from their parents but not the absolute legal break with their birth family that is associated with adoption. It can also provide an alternative for achieving permanence in families where adoption, for cultural or religious reasons, is not an option.

The parents of the child may not become the child's special guardians.

Any of the following can apply for special guardianship:

- Any guardian of the child.
- A local authority foster carer with whom the child has lived for one year immediately preceding the application.
- Anyone who is named in a Child Arrangement Order as a person with whom the child is to live.
- Anyone with whom the child has lived for three out of the last five years.
- Any person who has the consent of the local authority (where the child is subject to a Care Order).
- Anyone who has the consent of all those with parental responsibility for the child.

Special Guardianship Orders offer stability, and whilst they can be revoked, there are restrictions on those who may apply to discharge the Order.

Parental responsibility will be given to special guardians, which will be shared with the child's parents. However, the special guardian will have the legal right to make all day-to-day arrangements.

The parents will still have to be consulted and, their consent required to the child's change of name, adoption, placement abroad for more than 3 months and any other such fundamental issues.

A Special Guardianship Order 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.

Special Guardianship has the following advantages as a Permanence Plan:

- The carers have Parental Responsibility and clear authority to make decisions on day-to-day issues regarding the child's care.
- There is added legal security to the Order in that leave is required for parents to apply to discharge the Order and will only be granted if a change of circumstances can be established since the original Order was made.
- It maintains legal links to the birth family.
- The child will no longer be in care and there need be no social worker involvement unless this is identified as necessary, in which case an assessment of the need for support must be made by the relevant local authority.
- A child subject to a Special Guardianship Order will be entitled to additional education support throughout their school career.

Special Guardianship has the following disadvantages as a Permanence Plan:

- The Order only lasts until the child is 18 and does not necessarily bring with it the sense of belonging to the special guardian's family as an Adoption Order does.
- As the child is not a legal member of the family, if difficulties arise there may be less willingness to persevere and seek resolution.
- Although there are restrictions on applications to discharge the Order, such an application is possible and may be perceived as a threat to the child's stability.
- Although a parent requires leave to apply for a Child Arrangements Order, they can apply for any other Section 8 Order (i.e. Prohibited Steps Order or Specific Issues Order) as of right.

Child Arrangements Orders

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 a 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 decide arrangements which are self-sustaining in the long run.

The making of a Child Arrangements Order can be made until the child is 18 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:

- It gives Parental Responsibility to the carer whilst maintaining the parents' Parental Responsibility.
- The child will no longer be Looked After and there need be no social work involvement, therefore, unless this is identified as necessary.
- There is no review process.
- The child will not be Looked After and so less stigma is attached to the placement.
- 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 contact 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).

Long-Term Fostering

For those children who remain Looked After 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 is 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 contact.
- 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 and this may delay or complicate decision making.
- Regular Looked After Reviews, which, 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 18 the carers have no legal responsibility towards the young person.

Long-Term Residential Care

For some children and young people living with a foster family may not be right for them at a point in their life. Their needs may be complex and, they may have experienced several family arrangements including foster placement which have ended in an unplanned way. The focus of residential provision should be to aim to return the child / young person

to a family environment but if this is not likely to be successful, residential care can be a positive and successful option for a very small number of young people. Our ATOM Service is a flexible, bespoke, residential provision in Wigan and is of high quality and the outcomes for young people are good.

We recognise that Residential care can provide a therapeutic environment for some young people to enable them to receive the level of intense support they need to address difficult issues and return them to family arrangements.

It is important that if this is the long-term plan for permanence this should be ratified by the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) at a Children Looked After Review and subsequently approved at Permanence Panel. This decision should be celebrated as a significant achievement for all.

Permanence and Local Placement

Where a child is placed with long term carers, it is important that the child has access to the friends, family or community within which they were brought up, and which form part of their identity and their long-term support network. For these reasons children should be placed in local provision wherever possible.

Any decision to place a child away from their community should be based on the particular needs of the child and considered within the context of a Permanence Plan. Where an alternative family placement is sought in the area of another local authority, the likely availability and cost of suitable local resources to support the placement must be explored. In the case of an adoptive placement, this will be required as part of the assessment of need for adoption support services but should be carried out in relation to any permanent placement.

Good Practice Guidance

The following practice guidance is not exhaustive; it is drawn from research and local knowledge.

Supporting Reunification with Birth or Extended Family

Research points to:

- The importance of clearly communicating to the family what needs to happen to enable the child to return home, and within what timescales.
- The importance of exploring family ties and long-term relationships with family, school and community.
- The use of Family Group Conferences as an effective way of facilitating both the above.

Identifying the Best Permanence Option

The permanence planning process, informed by multi-agency contributions, will identify which permanence option is most likely to meet the needs of the individual child, taking account of their wishes and feelings.

Issues to consider:

- The assessment process must ask how stability for this child will be achieved.
- 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 from what /who is known and changes of school and placement.

- Educational experiences, links with extended family, hobbies and friendships and support to carers, contribute to guarding against disruption and placement breakdown.
- The importance of carefully listening to what children want from the placement, helping the relationship between carer and child to build, making thorough plans around contact with family, 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.

Twin Track or Parallel Planning

Social workers are encouraged to consider working to this model; working towards a child's return home whilst at the same time developing an alternative Permanence Plan, within strictly limited timescales.

Where children's cases are before the court in Care Proceedings, the Court require twin track planning to be reflected in the Care Plan.

Placement/Contact with Siblings - Issues to Consider

Wherever it is in the best interests of each individual child, siblings should be placed together. Being able to live with brothers and sisters who are also Looked After is an important protective factor for many Looked After Children. Positive sibling relationships provide support both in childhood and adulthood and can be particularly valuable during changes in a young person's life, such as leaving care.

A number of factors, however, can militate against achieving the positive placement of brothers and sisters together – they may have entered care at different times and/or they may have very different needs related to past experiences, current emotional and behavioural development and age, especially where there are significant age differences. There may be

practical difficulties in accommodating large sibling groups together. In some circumstances a child may have been abused by a brother or sister. An understanding of family functioning and family history, providing appropriate support to all parties, as well as listening to the wishes and feelings of children, is therefore key to informing these judgements.

There are often some practical steps that can be taken to overcome some of the more logistical reasons for being unable to place sibling groups together. Where siblings placed together in foster care may be separated when one turns 18, consideration should be given to whether Staying Put arrangements may be beneficial for all the children involved.

There will, however, always be circumstances in which it is not possible to place siblings together and children should be supported to understand why they cannot live with their siblings. In these circumstances where it is in the best interests of each individual child, sibling family time should be promoted and maintained.

Where the plan is for adoption, to reduce delay, an early decision should be taken as to whether it is in the best interests of each child to be placed together or separately, and the impact on each child of that decision. The decision should be based on a balanced assessment of the individual needs of each child in the group, and the likely or possible consequences of each option on each child. Factors that may need to be considered will include: the nature of the sibling group (do the siblings know each other/ how are they related); whether the children have formed an attachment; the health needs of each child; and each child's view (noting that a child's views and perceptions will change over time).

Learning from Unplanned Endings

Unfortunately, some situations do not work out, despite extensive planning, preparation and matching. Sometimes it may not be possible to identify the ideal home for our children, but we will mitigate the risks by identifying additional support that may be needed to support carers. If things do not work out, we will ensure that we learn from the circumstances and reflect on what could have been different, what does the child need going forward and what support do the new carers and previous carers need to progress. Our IRO service will provide independent scrutiny of these situations along with an annual report to share any learning.

Direct Contact (Family Time) with Birth Family Members and Others

Family Time must always be for the benefit of the child, not the parents or other relatives.

It may serve one or all of the following functions:

- To maintain a child's identity. Consolidating the new with the old.
- To provide reassurance for the child.
- To provide an ongoing source of information for the child.
- To give the child continuing permission to live with the adoptive family.
- To minimise the sense of loss.
- To assist with the process of tracing.
- To give the adopters a secure sense of the right to parent. This will make the parenting task easier.

Family Time will generally work best if all parties accept/agree to:

- The plan for permanence.
- The parental role of the permanent carers.
- The benefit of contact.
- The adoptive parents being present.

Direct Family Time is not likely to be successful in situations where a parent:

- Disagrees with the plan for permanence.

- Does not accept the parental role of the permanent carer and their own minimal role with the child.
- Has proved to be unreliable in their commitment to contact in the past.
- Does not have a significant attachment with the child.
- The wishes of the child to join a new family without direct, contact must be considered and given considerable weight at any age.

If direct Family Time is a part of the Permanence Plan, a formal agreement setting out how contact will take place, who with, where and how frequently must be negotiated before placement, and reviewed regularly throughout the child's life.

Children with Complex needs

Identifying permanence for children with complex needs and disabilities is essential to ensuring they experience stability, belonging, and long-term emotional security. These children often rely on consistent, trusted relationships to support their development, communication, and wellbeing. By prioritising early and thoughtful permanence planning, we create pathways that recognise each child's strengths, adapt to their individual needs, and provide carers with the support required to sustain nurturing, lifelong connections. Placing permanence at the centre of our approach ensures that every child, regardless of complexity of need, has the opportunity to thrive within a safe and loving home.

Indirect Contact with Birth Family Members and Others

We do not all share the same sense of family - it means different things to different people. It helps when children are helped to understand to whom they are related, especially if they have complicated family trees including half-brothers or sisters living in different places. Identity is built on solid information.

Wherever possible, indirect contact/Family Time between the child and their new family with people from the past should be facilitated:

- To leave open channels of communication in case more contact is in the child's interests in the future;
- To provide information (preferably two-way) to help the child to maintain and enhance their identity and to provide the birth relative with some comfort in knowing of the child's progress.

Indirect contact/Family Time must be negotiated prior to placement, and all parties should be asked to enter into an agreement with one another about the form and frequency that the contact will take. Renegotiations of the contact should only take place if the child's needs warrant it.

All parties to the agreement will need to accept that as the child becomes older and is more informed full about the arrangements for indirect contact, the child will have a view regarding its continuation. No arrangements can be promised to remain unaltered during the child's childhood. Those involved need to accept that contact may cease if it is no longer in the child's interests. Alternatively, an older child may need to change to direct contact.

What permanence looks like in Wigan

As of January 2026, there were 647 children looked after. 143 children (22%) live in Kinship Care. For each of these young people every effort is made to ensure they achieve a permanence outcome that will enable them to live the best life possible. Family group conferences are utilised to explore kinship care options when children can no longer remain with their parents. Where possible, siblings live together in homes where they are supported, prioritising keeping children together in their best interests has been one of the reasons for our increased use of IFA placements.

When children come into care it is timely and proportionate. Increasingly children remain living within kinship care which has increased from 13% in 2022 now up to 22% in 2025. This supports children to maintain their identity. When this is not possible, alternative permanence options are fully considered. This year (2025) 60% of proceedings have concluded with children remaining with family.

Leaders proactively track permanency for children. 100% of our proposed final care plans have been approved by the court in the last twelve months (2025).

We have focused on work to ensure that we achieve timely permanence for children. We continue to proactively pursue permanence beyond final care order. We have reunified 90 children in the past 12 months compared to 53 in 2023-24 and 47 in 2022-23. This represents a 70% increase since 2023-24. A further 37 children have left care to live permanently with their family and friend carers via SGO which is up by 37% on the previous year. Over 200 children are matched to their long-term carers, panels are held routinely. As part of the move to our new practice model, all our social workers who work with children in care have attended reunification training led by the Centre for Family Safeguarding in Hertfordshire.

Appendix 1: Identifying Permanence Options

Child Arrangements/Special Guardianship Orders	Adoption	Long Term Fostering
Child needs the security of a legally defined placement with alternative carers but does not require a commitment involving a change of identity.	Child's primary need is to belong to a family who will make a lifelong commitment.	Primary need is for a stable, loving family environment whilst there is still a significant level of continued involvement with the birth family
Child's relation, foster or other carer needs to exercise day to day parental responsibility and is prepared to do so as a lifelong commitment	Child's birth parents are not able or not willing to share parental responsibility to meet their child's needs, even though there may be contact.	Child has a clear sense of identity with the birth family, whilst needing to be looked after away from home.
There is no need for continuing monitoring and review by the Local Authority, although support services may still need to be arranged	Child needs an opportunity to develop a new sense of identity whilst being supported to maintain or develop a healthy understanding of their past.	There is need for continuing oversight and monitoring of the child's developmental progress.
Child has a strong attachment to the alternative carers and legally defined permanence is assessed as a positive contribution to their sense of belonging and security.	Child expresses a wish to be adopted	Birth parents are able and willing to exercise a degree of parental responsibility.