

## Stability Meetings

Providing stable loving homes is at the heart of working with children and their families in Swindon. Securing stability in a home where children feel they have a sense of belonging is important and offers children and young people living away from their birth parents the best opportunity to thrive, and grow in a secure, stimulating and consistent environment.

A placement stability meeting is an early intervention mechanism designed to act on concerns of carers, social workers, children we care for and their families, before a care arrangement disrupts in order to remedy the situation and resolve problems in the interests of the child.

It is the responsibility of all Children and Family Service social work staff including the Supervision Social Worker, IRO or other professionals, to recognise and report to their line manager any concerns about stability for children in their home (residential or foster) so that a meeting can be convened to address issues at the earliest possible time.

No agreement to seek an alternative care setting, increased funding or commissioned resources will be given until a stability meeting has been undertaken unless there is a significant safeguarding concern that warrants immediate action.

Examples (not exhaustive) of where a stability meeting might be convened include: Concern is raised through the child's, foster carer's or children's home review and monitoring process;

- An allegation or complaint has been made;
- The child or young person is repeatedly missing or being absent from the home on a regular basis;
- Where there is relationship fragility of the home because the relationship between the child, foster carer or provider gives cause for concern that the home may disrupt,
- The child or young person has made it known that they want the home to end;
- The carer(s) / providers have expressed concerns that they are experiencing difficulties or that they feel they can no longer care for the child or young person without additional funding or resources;
- The child or young person's social worker or other professionals raise concern that the home does not meet the needs of the child or young person.

It is the aim of the Fostering Service and Home finding service, in collaboration with the child's social work team, to make every effort to prevent the disruption of a home (when this is assessed to be in the best interests of the child).

Where it appears that a care arrangement is unstable, every effort will be made to resolve the presenting difficulties. This will be in the form of added support through the holding of a multi-agency care planning meeting with the aim of addressing the issues of concern. In many cases, this will be sufficient to resolve the presenting difficulties, but a stability meeting should be held if this isn't sufficient to make lasting change.

The Fostering and Home Finding Services are responsible for coordinating a stability meeting in collaboration with the child's social worker.

The aim of the meeting will be to encourage open discussion, reflection and hear from all parties involved in the provision of services to increase and share an understanding of the areas of difficulty and seek to develop an action plan that has support from all those attending to find ways to reduce the risk of disruption and improve the experiences and quality of the arrangement.

The Stability Meeting should include the child and young person where it is appropriate to do so. Occasionally it might be decided to hold the meeting in two parts to have some discussion between the adults first and then include the child. This will be an exception and the reasons for this need to be documented in the minutes and on the child's electronic record. Consideration should be given to the role an advocate can provide for the child.

### **Some suggestions/ solutions for promoting stability:**

- There is no substitute for good care planning, preceded by a clear assessment of the child's needs. This may include specialist assessments (preferably before the child is placed as opposed to some months after);
- An assessment of the child will be an ongoing priority and should be updated and reviewed throughout the child's care history. At least every 12 months. Outcomes from the assessment of the child help to monitor the child's development and progress, and should be reviewed at every child we care for statutory review;
- Matching the child to the most appropriate carer is still a priority in promoting stability, as is support to the carer, and matching resources to needs. Matching can also give the child a greater sense of permanence;
- The carer should be well informed of the child's needs and family time arrangements prior to the child moving into their care and their capacity to promote this;
- The child needs to be prepared for any move into or from one home to another. This is particularly pertinent for 15+ young people moving towards independence. The child should be advised of his/her care plan and understand the reasons for being placed with the carer.

Social work practice will have an influence on stability. Research notes that where the worker demonstrates the following, the care arrangements are more likely to be sustainable:

- Sensitivity to child and carer's needs;
- Effective advocacy on behalf of the child, [particularly in relation to school];
- Professionalism;
- Mutual trust between all parties; ongoing support.
- Access to therapeutic resources is essential not only to support the child but also to advise and support the carer(s). From February 2025 Referrals to the *In Reach* service which is a trauma focussed support service to children and their professional networks should be considered.

Trauma Informed and behaviour management training to carers is essential to enable the carers to manage children with challenging and difficult behaviour.

**Please note:**

- If it is recommended that where extra external services (i.e. those with a cost implication) are being sought the child's social worker needs to present this to the Care & Resource Panel first to seek agreement for any proposed funding;
- Where the decision of the meeting is that the care arrangement will end in a planned way, for external resources, it may be necessary to give notice to external providers and the Commissioning Service must be notified of this immediately (if they have not been at the meeting when this was agreed).

The meeting needs to be chaired by an experienced Social Care Manager; the children's social work manager when an IFA placement, the Fostering Manager for in house foster care providers.

## Draft Agenda and discussion points:

- Introductions;
- Apologies;
- Purpose of the meeting;
- Presenting issues and reflections from the perspective of all attendees;
- Support provided to date and outcomes;
- Current assessment of needs and how these are being addressed;
- Child's experience within the current home;
- Child's voice;
- Carer's experience within the current arrangement;
- Identified plan for future support/ services for the child to remain in the home;
- Actions, roles and responsibilities;
- Date of next meeting if required.

## List of proposed attendees:

- Child / Young Person;
- Child's social worker;
- Team Manager / ATM
- Foster carer(s) / key worker / provider;
- Supervising social worker;
- Fostering Manager;
- IRO;
- Home Finding / Commissioning Service;

- Other relevant professionals;
- Advocate for the Young person where appropriate.

Each person attending the meeting is responsible for making a note of any actions they need to progress moving forward and a copy of minutes with the agreed action plan should be circulated to all those attending as soon as possible, and not later than 5 working days after the meeting. A copy of the minutes should be recorded against the child's electronic record and the foster carer's electronic file.

If a manager is not in attendance or in role of Chair there should be management oversight recorded on the child's file to provide directions and decisions.

The decision as to whether to book a review stability meeting must be made and agreed at the time of the meeting. In some situations, it may be that a series of stability meetings are held to review progress and take small steps to bring about positive and lasting change. The actions within the plan should be reviewed. There will be times when it may be necessary to facilitate and manage a planned ending of a care provision.