



Report for:	Cabinet – 19 March 2013	Item Number:	
Title:	Permanency Policy		
Report Authorised by:	Libby Blake Libby Blake		
Lead Officer:	Chris Chalmers		
Ward(s) affected: All	Report for Key Decision		

1. Describe the issue under consideration

- 1.1 The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations sets out the clear expectation that Local Authorities should, where necessary, secure permanent care arrangements for children in care. This has been strengthened in the revised regulations 2010. The Children and Families Division has developed a policy document to support social work staff in their work to assist families and safeguard children effectively. The key aim of the policy is to ensure high quality, timely, permanence planning for all children in care.
- 1.2 *“Permanence is the framework of emotional permanence (attachment), physical permanence (stability) and legal permanence (the carer has parental responsibility for the child) which gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity. The objective of planning for permanence is therefore to ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond.*
- 1.3 *Permanence provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and families from family support through to adoption. One of the key functions of the care plan is to ensure that each child has a plan for permanence by the time of the second review, as set out in the statutory guidance to the 2002 Act. Achieving*



permanence for a child will be a key consideration from the day the child becomes looked after.”¹

2. Cabinet Member introduction

- 2.1 Children and Families Service has developed the basis for a policy document to support social work staff in their work to assist families and safeguard children effectively, providing the current guidance in the document attached as an appendix to this report. This policy will sit above our Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy (which is due for development next) and to set the principles for this. All major Council strategies and policies must be considered by the Cabinet, and to this end, the Lead Member for Children and Young People has had input into the shaping of the Permanency Policy from an early stage.
- 2.2 Two drafts have been presented to Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee and, before the second consideration by CPAC (4 December 2012), three research papers were circulated to all Committee members to provide them with background to the matters under consideration. The research addressed the permanency options of adoption special guardianship and long term foster care. Members were able to consider the research in advance of discussing key aspects of the permanency policy.
- 2.3 Issues considered at CPAC included:
- Children’s identity needs, including their ethnicity and heritage, and how best to encapsulate this in the policy.
 - The approach to planning for siblings and possible separation of siblings in situations where younger children might have a stronger chance of adoption than their older siblings.
 - Members understood that the process of adoption is governed by a legal framework but they were able to provide officers with a steer about the priority for adoption.
- 2.4 The debate helped to settle the key principles to underpin the policy (see page 8 attached). The most important aim of the policy is to establish consistent quality of practice across the whole Children and Families Division which also links to the expansion of the early help offer to families in Children and Young People’s Service. This new policy will enhance permanency practice from the beginning of a child’s time in care and focus efforts to achieve legal permanency wherever possible. The Children in Care Service is leading the development of professional expertise in permanency and, in conjunction with the Adoption and Permanency service, will drive up the understanding of the key principles across CYPS with the intention of ensuring better outcomes for children in long-term care.

¹ The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations: Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review



3. Recommendations

This policy provides a strong framework to improve the planning for children in need of substitute family placements. It is recommended that Cabinet agree the contents of this policy document.

4. Alternative options considered

Not relevant as this is a policy document to improve practice.

5. Background information

As stated, there has been considerable input across the Children and Families Division to make this policy distinctively appropriate to the needs of children in care in Haringey. There are currently 533 children in care and around 90 of these children have a plan for adoption. Considerable thought has been given to ensuring that our policy provides a clear statement on how best to achieve permanent placements, offering legal security wherever possible, for children within the care system. We are expecting to achieve approximately 45 legal orders, either adoption or special guardianship for 2012-13. This represents a significant increase on last year's figures and it is essential that we maintain a steady upward trajectory for 2013-14.

6. Comments of the Chief Finance Officer and financial implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from the approval of a permanency policy. Application of the policy and principles will lead to more efficient and effective use of resources in the future. Assuming that successful application of the policy stabilises or reduces the numbers of children in care, resources will be released which will contribute to the significant savings targets in 2013-14 and beyond.

7. Head of Legal Services and legal implications

7.1 The policy is in accordance with the expectation that local authorities will prioritise permanence for looked after children and take all reasonable steps to avoid delay.

7.2 The legal framework is set out at section 5 of the policy document.

8. Equalities and Community Cohesion Comments

8.1 When the ethnicity breakdown of the LAC cohort (533 children in January 2013) is compared to the same breakdown for the general population of Haringey (2011 Census, figures for children are not available until April/May 2013), black children are over represented in the care system. Over 36% of the LAC cohort are black, where as only 19% of Haringey's population is black, this also fits with the national



Haringey Council

picture. A further 17% of children are described as being of mixed heritage against a local population of 6%. Of the 533 looked after children, 19 are allocated to the Children with Disabilities team and have a disability recorded on the system. There are a further 28 children who are not allocated to CWD team with conditions that maybe considered as a disability. The Census does not ask a comparable question on disability so we cannot make a comparison with the general population in relation to this area.

8.2 Given the high number of children from minority ethnic groups and with a disability it is imperative that a flexible, proactive approach is taken to identifying families for all children in care to maximise their opportunity for permanency.

9. Head of Procurement Comments

NA

10. Policy Implication

This policy will inform the Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy.

11. Reasons for Decision

To prioritise the planning for secure permanent placements for a high number of LAC children, thereby allowing them to experience family life outside of local authority care.

12. Use of Appendices

Please refer to the attached appendix which presents the policy for consideration.

13. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985