

Leicester City Council Permanence Strategy 2020-2023



Introduction

Leicester City Council is committed to support children and young people to be safe, independent and ambitious and to live the best life they can. This strategy outlines our approach to achieving permanence for our children and young people to ensure they have a safe place to live and thrive and that they achieve the best outcomes possible.

Though some children and young people who become looked after by the council can return to their family home after a period of care, this is not always the best option for all children. For those children and young people unable to return to their family home plans will be made to achieve permanence.

Permanence is the long-term plan for a child or young person's upbringing.

Permanence provides an underpinning framework for all social work with children and their families. It aims to ensure that children and young people have a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging. There are three key parts to permanence:

1. **Legal**
Defining who has parental responsibility
2. **Emotional/psychological**
The child feels attached to an adult who provides a stable, loving and secure relationship
3. **Physical or environmental**
The child has a stable home environment

Core principles

When we work with children and young people, we follow a set of principles that help us make sure they achieve the best possible outcomes:

- We will understand the impact and value of what we do
- We will intervene early, quickly and as effectively as possible
- We will personalise our approach to fit the needs of the individual
- We will ensure we give those we work with the best life opportunities
- We will forge links with the community and encourage safe support networks
- We will establish and maintain the trust and confidence of those we work with through strong partnerships

Our objectives

The objective of planning for permanence is to ensure that children have a stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond, and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging. Achieving permanence is as important for adolescents as it is for younger children.

Where it is necessary for a child to leave their family, the following will be considered:

- A child should be in care for as short a time as is required to secure a safe, supported return home.
- If a child cannot return home, plans must be made for alternative permanent care. Family members and friends should always be considered in the first instance.
- Where families and children are unable to live together, planning must be swift and clear to identify permanent alternative plans.
- Where it is not in the child's best interests to live within the family network, alternative permanent carers will be identified.
- Permanence should always be secured through the appropriate legal order to meet the children's needs.
- Wherever possible, care should be provided locally unless clearly identified as inappropriate.
- Contact with the family, connected persons and extended family should be facilitated and built on unless this is clearly identified as inappropriate.
- The professionals involved will work in partnership with parents, families and carers. The wishes and feelings of the child or young person will always be considered, taking into account their age.
- Children's link with their ethnic, cultural and religious heritage will be promoted when undertaking permanence planning, however this will not be allowed to introduce delay in achieving permanence for the child.



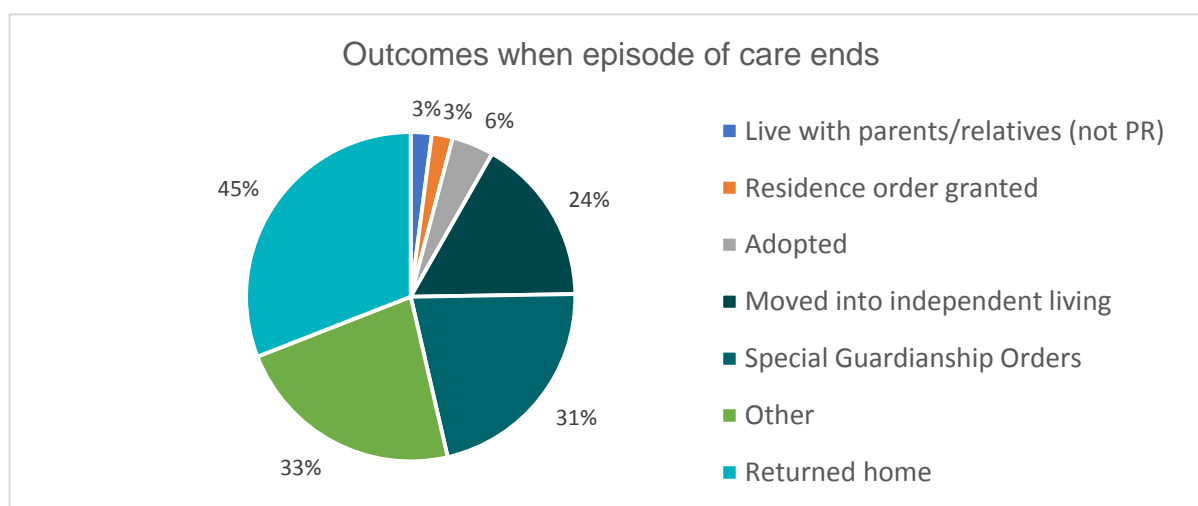
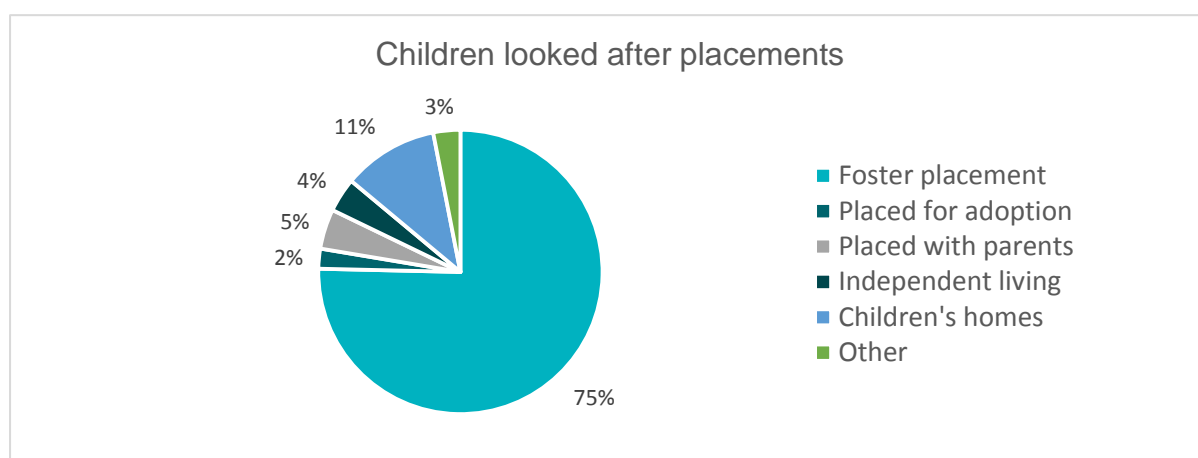
Permanence in Leicester

As of May 2020, there were 617 children looked after with an open episode of care in Leicester. 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.

Most children who are looked after by Leicester City Council live in foster care households (75%) as of May 2020, while 2% were placed for adoption, 5% are placed with parents, 4% are in independent living and 11% live in residential children’s homes. The remaining 3% are living in specialist placements.

Leicester City Council has a good record of placement stability, with 72% of children and young people having one placement in the last two months. For those looked after children aged under 16 who have been looked after for 2 ½ years or more, 70% have been in their placement for two years or more. When an episode of care ends, most children return home to live with parents or relatives.

Leicester City Council’s fostering and adoption services are among the top performing. The council ranks highly nationally for both the percentage of looked after children who are adopted (17% in 2019, compared to 12% in England) and for the time between the local authority receiving a court authority to place a child and deciding on a match (114 days in 2015-18, compared to 201 days in England). Additionally, Leicester compares favourably with the national average for the average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family; In Leicester this is 438 days while in England it is 486 (2015-18).

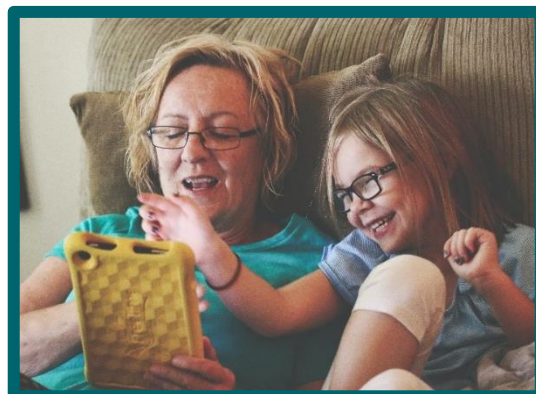


What to consider when a child cannot remain at home

When a child can no longer remain at home, the following considerations will need to be made.

Supporting reunification with birth or extended family

Where the plan is for children to return home, it will be made clear to the family what needs to happen and by when. Professionals will explore family ties and long-term relationships with family, school and community, using Family Group Conferences to facilitate this when appropriate.



Identifying the best permanence option

When deciding on a permanency option we will take account of children's wishes and feelings and work with multiagency partners to identify which option best meets the needs of the individual child or young person. The assessment process must ask how stability for this child will be achieved and consider the following factors:

- 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, and changes of school and placement;
- Educational experiences, links with extended family, hobbies and friendships and support from carers, contribute to reducing the risk of disruption and placement breakdown;
- 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; planning for a child's return home whilst at the same time developing an alternative Permanence Plan, within strictly limited timescales. Where children's cases are being considered by the court in Care Proceedings, the Court require twin track planning to be reflected in the Care Plan.

Placement/Contact with Siblings

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. While practical steps will be taken to place sibling groups together, it may be harder to achieve this in some circumstances, such as:

- Siblings entering care at different times
- Siblings that have different needs related to past experiences, current behavioural or emotional needs
- There is a significant difference in age
- Children that belong to a large sibling group

When siblings cannot be placed together, children will be supported to understand why they cannot live together. Where it is in the best interests of each individual child, sibling contact should be promoted and maintained.

Where the plan is for adoption a decision should be made as early as possible as to whether it is in the best interests of each sibling to be placed together or separately. The decision should be based on an assessment of the individual needs of each child in the group, and the likely or possible consequences of each option on each child.

Contact with birth family members and others

Where it is for the benefit of the child, they should remain in contact with their family. This will help children to maintain their identity, minimise the sense of loss, give reassurance and give the child permission to live with alternative carers. Contact must always be for the benefit of the child, not the parents or other relatives.

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 contact 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.

Indirect contact between the child and their new family with people from the past should be facilitated where appropriate.

Planning for permanency

When we work with a child or young person, we will always consider how their permanence needs are being met. We will make every effort to work with the child, their family, all relevant connected persons and our multi-agency partners to develop the right plans.

The permanency planning process will:

- Start from the point the child is likely to become looked after
- Look beyond the initial period of care
- Set high quality outcomes
- Meet the individual's needs
- Consider the child's wishes and feelings
- Identify which option is most appropriate to their needs
- Set out the journey and intended destination



Where it is in the child's best interests, we will always work towards them returning home but will also develop an alternative permanence plan with clear time frames.

We will focus on the long-term outcomes for the young person and work with the young person to understand their wishes and ambitions. This will help us create a plan that builds the foundations for adulthood. Plans will support the development of strong networks and relationships that will endure, providing young people with the resilience and support that is needed in adulthood.

When we assess a child's needs in relation to their permanence plan, we will focus on outcomes and consider stability issues based on the child's and family's needs for long term support and for links with their parents, siblings and wider family network.

To inform our decision making we will consider how stability will be achieved. Stability means ensuring continuity of care for children who are going to be in care for a brief period before going home, and for children who are going to need a more permanent arrangement (short-term or medium-term stability); and providing a sense of a permanent home (long-term stability)

The assessment will include:

- Outcomes for the child
- Their wishes and feelings
- The child's and family's support needs
- How the child and family, friends/connected persons remain in contact when it is in their best interests
- Evidence that the plan is clearly linked to previous assessments of the child's needs

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. Children should be placed in local provision wherever possible for these reasons.



Any decision to place a child away from their community should be based on the needs of the child and considered within the context of a Permanence Plan. Where this is in 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.

Options for permanency

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 options available for permanency. These are:



Staying/returning home



Placement with family or friends/connected persons



Long term fostering



Fostering for adoption



Special Guardianship Orders



Child Arrangements Orders



Adoption

Permanency options

Staying/returning home

The first stage within permanence planning is work with families and children in need to support them staying together. The best place to provide care is in the family. We will support the family to stay together and ensure that the home is a safe and caring place where this is possible.

What this means

- The child remains with their birth family
- It is more likely that a family will stay together
- This gives the best chance of stability

Other considerations

- Will staying at home or returning home require continuing social work involvement?
- May not always be successful

Placement with family or friends/connected persons

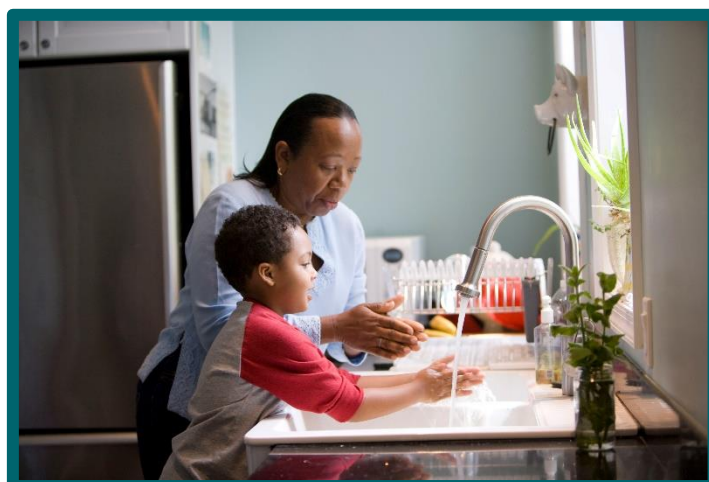
If the assessment concludes that the child cannot safely remain at home, every effort must be made to secure a placement with a family member or friend/connected person as their carer. This will either be as part of the plan to work towards a return home or, if a return home is clearly not in the child's best interests, as the preferred permanence option. Every effort will be made at an early stage to establish which relatives or friends might be able to provide the care the child needs.

What this means

- The child is cared for by family, friends or connected persons that they know and already have relationships
- The child retains their links to their birth families

Other considerations

- Staying at home or returning home will require continuing social work involvement
- Family, friends or connected persons may not be able to, or may not want to, care for the child

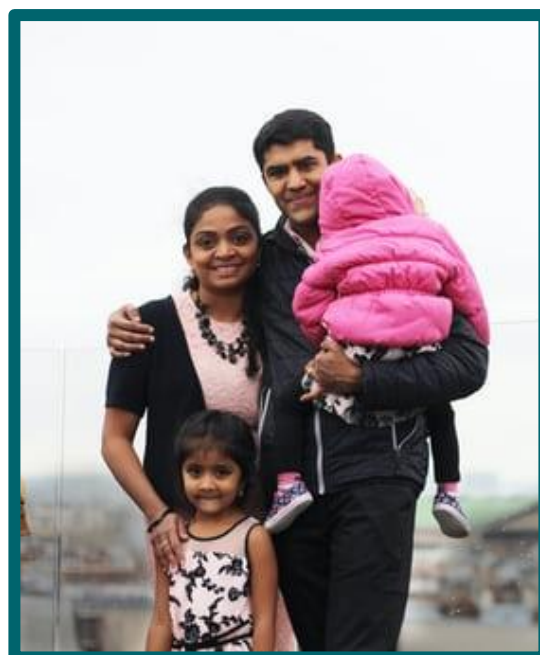


Long term fostering

For children who remain looked after, long term foster care offers an opportunity for achieving permanence. This option has proved to be appropriate for some 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.

What this means

- The local authority retains a role in negotiating between the foster carers and birth families over issues such as contact
- There is continuing support to the child and foster family in a placement which is regularly reviewed
- It maintains legal links to the birth family who can still play a part in the decision making for the young person



Other considerations

- Lack of parental responsibility for the carers
- Continuing social work involvement
- Regular looked after reviews which may be regarded as destabilising to the 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

Fostering for adoption

To achieve early permanence, placements can be considered with carers who are approved as both adopters and foster carers. 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.

What this means

- 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.

Special Guardianship Orders

Special guardianship addresses the needs 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, 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 must be consulted, and their consent required for the child's change of name, adoption, placement abroad for more than 3 months and other 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.

What this means

- The guardians have parental responsibility and clear authority to make decisions on day to day issues
- There is added legal security to the order
- It maintains legal links to the birth family
- The child will no longer be in care

Other considerations

- The order lasts until the child is 18
- Does not necessarily bring with it the sense of belonging to the special guardian's family
- 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

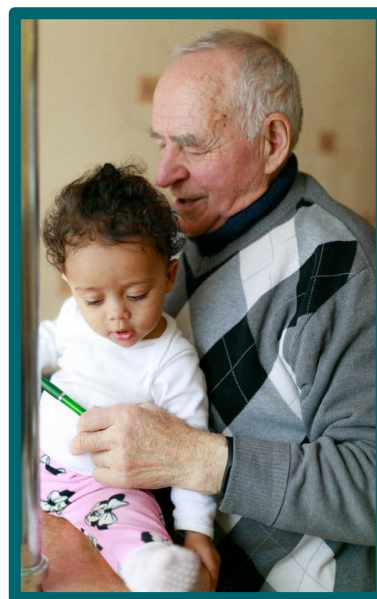
Child Arrangements Orders

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. The order confers parental responsibility, to be shared more equally with the parents than with special guardianship.

Where a child would otherwise have to be placed with strangers, 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.

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 which the child has lived for three years
- A local authority foster carer or relative of the child with whom the child has lived for one 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 local authority
- In any other case, a person who has the consent of all those with parent responsibility.



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.

While support may continue for as long as the Child Arrangements Order remains in force, the aim will be to make arrangements which are self-sustaining in the long run. The making of a Child Arrangements Order can be made until the child is 18.

What this means

- Child Arrangements Orders give parental responsibility to the carer while maintaining the parents' parental responsibility
- The child will no longer be looked after and there does not need social work involvement, unless this is identified as necessary
- There is no review process
- The child will not be looked after and so less stigmas is attached to the placement

Other considerations

- 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 a revocation without the leave of court
- There is no formal continuing support to the family after the order is made
- There is no professional reviewing of the arrangements after the order unless a new application to court is made

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). This is a main factor contributing to the stability of children, especially for those under four years old who cannot be reunified with their birth or extended family.

The child is deemed to be the child of the adopter(s) as if they had been born to them. The child's birth certificate is changed to an adoption certificate showing the adopter(s) to be the child's parent(s). A child who is not already a citizen of the UK acquires British Citizenship if adopted in the UK by a citizen of the UK.

Adopters 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 adoption order is made. A child subject to an adoption order will be entitled to additional education and early years support. This will be accessed through the designated teacher in the child's school/early years setting.

What this means

- Parental responsibility is held exclusively by the carers
- The child is no longer looked after
- No future legal challenge to overturn an adoption order is possible
- The child is a permanent family member into adulthood
- Decisions about continuing contact will usually be made by the new parents (on the child's behalf) who are most in touch with the child's needs, although this will be subject to any contact order made by the court at the time of the adoption

Other considerations

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

Regional Adoption Agency

There are 21 Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA) operating across the country covering 115 Local Authorities. In January 2020 the existing Regional Adoption Agency partnership of Leicester, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Rutland was expanded to include North Lincolnshire. The RAA was formally launched in October 2020 as 'Family Adoption Links.'

The Regional Adoption Agency will have a central hub to coordinate initial contact from adopters, home finding and data management. The Regional Adoption Agency will share learning and seek opportunities for collaboration and engage with Voluntary Adoption Agencies. The aim is to deliver the benefits of a regional agency without disrupting arrangements that are already working well.

There is a regional family finding hub in place which works to find the best matches for children. There will be a regional marketing and recruitment strategy and a single website, with all enquiries being passed to local teams. By pooling performance information and data, the wider regional picture will allow us to plan more effectively, to deliver regional benefits for children and adopters.

Useful links

[Placement Sufficiency Strategy](#) – a strategy document which describes our overall approach to supporting all our children and young people to have a safe place to live and thrive.

[Corporate Parenting Strategy](#) - our approach to supporting care experienced children and young people

[Permanence Planning Guidance](#) – a detailed look into the procedures for permanence planning at Leicester City Council

[Placement for Adoption](#) – the procedure regarding placement for adoption

[Adoption support](#) – information about adoption support available in Leicester

[Fostering for Adoption, Concurrent Planning and Temporary Approval as Foster Carers of Approved Prospective Adopters](#) – the procedure regarding the placement of a child with carers who are dually approved

[Applications for Special Guardianship Orders](#) – information about special guardianship orders

[Placements in Foster Care](#) – details about placements in foster care

[Out of Area Placements](#) – information regarding the placement of young people outside the local authority area

[Staying Put](#) – an introduction to the Staying Put arrangements

Appendix 1: Care arrangements for children not living with parents

Informal Family Care

Family or friends have chosen to take care of a child without involving the local authority. The child is not a looked after child/has not passed the threshold for entry to care.

Private Fostering

A private arrangement where anybody with parental responsibility and who is not a close relative cares for the child for 28 days or more. The child is not a looked after child/has not passed threshold for entry to care.

Family and Friends Foster Care

The local authority placed a child with family or friends who have been approved as suitable carers. The child is looked after. May be voluntary agreement or subject to Care Order.

Stranger Foster Care

The local authority has placed a child with approved carers under section 20 or a Care Order. The child is looked after.

Residential Care

In some cases, a residential placement may be a more appropriate option to meet the child's needs. The child is looked after.

Possible permanency non-care outcomes

Special Guardianship Order (SGO)

The Child may have been looked after and their foster carer or other relative/friend has applied for a SGO. Or the child may be at risk of becoming looked after and a friend or relative is granted a SGO.

Child Arrangement Order (CAO)

Routes into a CAO are in line with those for a SGO. Relatives are able to apply for a CAO or a SGO after having a child living with them for one year.

Adoption Order

The local authority may decide that the child should be placed for adoption. A local authority approved foster carer can apply for an adoption order if the child has lived with them for a period of three years.

Return Home