

Stability Network Meeting Procedure for Children in Care

September 2019

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Children in Care nationally and locally are considered to be amongst the most vulnerable groups of children. Children in Care do less well than their peers in all areas of life and are more likely to encounter adversity in adulthood. Improving outcomes for Children in Care is a priority for the whole Council and partner agencies.
- 1.2 As Corporate Parents, departments within the Council, other statutory agencies and the voluntary sector must work together to improve services and service responses to Children in Care. We should do everything possible to work in partnership to prevent placement breakdowns which can impact negatively on young people. On a service level, every professional and carer who works with, or cares for a Child in Care must take personal responsibility for ensuring that each individual child has their particular needs identified and that provision is made in order to meet those needs.
- 1.3 Of all the needs that Children in Care have, they share one in particular, and that is the need for a stable home life. Placement stability is absolutely essential to the lives of these children. Without a safe and stable home, children and young people will continue to achieve less well at school, present challenging and self-harming behaviour, suffer with poor mental health, be more likely to offend and be more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol.
- 1.4 One of the means by which we are attempting to support and stabilise placements is by the use of Stability Network Meetings to enable services which provide placement support to be coordinated. Stability Network Meetings will be used to support any child whose difficulties are such that either their placement and/or their place at school are in jeopardy.
- 1.5 Stability Network Meetings are the means by which whole systems support is mobilised, if required, to wrap around the placement for as long as is required until the crisis has passed and stability is achieved. Access to the required resources, through Commissioning or in-house support, to stabilise the placement will be agreed through the usual approval processes, and if required to stabilise a placement should not be delayed. Any delays should be escalated to the relevant manager and afforded the requisite priority.
- 1.6 The strength of this model is predicated on the ability and willingness of anyone and everyone who has reasons to believe a placement may be under pressure to foresee potential problems and take action to avoid placement breakdown. There will be an expectation that in the event of a placement disruption the service will be able to evidence that stability network meetings had been taking place.

2. Stability Network Meetings

2.1 The term Stability Network Meeting refers to a number of key people who have a responsibility and/or a contribution to make in order to ensure that a child's needs are consistently met (see section 4 around Membership).

2.2 The aim of the group is to:

- Predict the warning signs of placement stress and actively support the placement to avoid breakdown
- Promote shared responsibility for finding solutions
- Ensure necessary resources are put in place early on which may avoid future expenditure
- Bring together a range of professionals, family and carers who can share knowledge and provide creative solutions to difficulties.

3. Initiating a Stability Network Meeting

3.1 Most individuals generally dislike the thought that people may be meeting to discuss them, particularly if they themselves are not involved in those discussions. Such intrusion into private lives should be resisted by professionals and restricted to the periods in a child or young person's life when it is deemed to be in their best interests.

3.2 Children in Care tell us that they are particularly sensitive to the fact that lots of different people know private and personal things about them. For this reason Stability Network Meetings will not be implemented for all Children in Care, and this decision will be made by the allocated Social Worker in discussion with their Team Manager and Supervising Social Worker/key Worker and their manager, and this decision is to be recorded with a clear rationale.

3.3 Stability Network Meetings should be instigated in the following circumstances:

- Unregulated placements
- When a placement has become fragile or unstable for any reason
- If there are particular difficulties in containing a child in a school or other educational facility i.e. we know that if a child's school place is at risk instability in the placement is likely to follow.
- Where a placement is planned and it is predicted that it will face particular difficulties because of a child's challenging behaviour or special emotional/mental health needs
- In such cases where black and minority ethnic children are in trans-cultural placements and their needs are quite specific and the placements may require additional guidance and support
- Separated children (unaccompanied asylum seeking young people) at risk of placement instability.

- Young people involved in the Criminal Justice system
- Young people on two or more unplanned placements.
- Where there have incidents of self-harm
- Children who go missing
- Where it is known or believed that the child or young person may be exposed to any form of exploitation (CSE/gangs/county lines/serious youth violence)
- A 28 day notice to end a placement has been received; unless there are serious safeguarding issues identified, the notice should not be accepted until a Stability Network Meeting has taken place.

This list is not exhaustive and there may be other circumstances that could instigate a meeting.

- 3.4 Anyone involved in a child or young person's care can initiate a Stability Network Meeting, through discussion with the child's Social Worker. It is then the child's Social Worker's responsibility to arrange and convene the meeting (see section 7 around Timing of Meetings).
- 3.5 The IRO should be notified that a meeting is being convened and should be informed of the outcome of any meeting.
- 3.6 If proceedings are ongoing for the child or young person then the Solicitor for the Local Authority and the Children's Guardian, should be kept up to date and informed of the meetings and any outcomes.

4. Membership

- 4.1 The membership of the Network Meeting is likely to differ slightly for each child, depending on their particular circumstances. However, there are certain people who should always be included.
- 4.2 In urgent situations i.e. the placement is breaking down that same day, an urgent meeting should be convened (see section 7 around Timing of Meetings). In an urgent situation, for a meeting to be quorate, minimum attendance required will be the child's Social Worker, the Primary Carer or Key Worker, the Supervising Social Worker and a representative from the Placement Management Service.
- 4.3 Where there are developing worries around the stability of a placement, these meetings should be planned, and those to be invited are:
- Child's Social worker
 - Personal adviser (if the young person is over 16)
 - Primary Carer (or Key worker if the child is in residential care)
 - Someone who can represent the child's educational needs, e.g. Class teacher or Designated Teacher

- Representative from Virtual School team
 - Fostering Supervising Social Worker
 - Representative from Placement Management Service
 - Child or young person – see section 4 below
- 4.4 Other attendees may include the Designated Nurse for Children in Care, Targeted Support, Adolescent Service or any other professionals that are involved in work with the child (i.e. contextualised safeguarding; CSE, missing etc.) or young person or if there is a likelihood that a referral will be made i.e. YOS, CAMHS, LAC Mental Health Team, therapists etc.
- 4.5 It may be appropriate for the primary carer to identify a key member of theirs or the child’s network to attend the meeting for support.
- 4.6 If a child or young person is accommodated under Section 20 or the plan is for rehabilitation home, those with PR should be invited to the meeting. In all other cases, it might be appropriate to invite those with PR if it is felt appropriate to do so, and they have a positive contribution to make. If those with PR are not attending the meeting, their views must be gained prior to the meeting and fed in on their behalf. Those with PR should always be notified of the meetings taking place and the outcome of meetings.

5. Attendance of Child or Young Person

- 5.1 The principle is always that children and young people should be involved and included in decisions that are made about them as much as possible. However, we also accept that children and young people sometimes find participation in meetings difficult.
- 5.2 Children and young people should usually be given a choice about attending Stability Network Meetings, but in reality it is not always going to be practical or appropriate and may not be in the child’s best interests. Any conscious decision not to include the young person should be recorded in the meeting minutes, with an explanation of the reason.
- 5.3 An interpreter must be provided if the young person does not understand English as a first language. Symbols should be used for disabled children and can be used for many children to assist in understanding.
- 5.4 Careful consideration should be given to children and young people with SEN/learning, language, physical disabilities or any other needs, in relation to involvement and also the way in which the group operates. The Chairperson must allow for participation of the child or young person, which is at their speed and level of understanding. Cultural differences, particularly around gender, which may inhibit participation should be assessed and addressed.
- 5.5 If a child or young person does not attend the meeting, if appropriate, the child’s Social Worker, in consultation with the primary carer or key

worker, should gain their wishes and feelings prior to the meeting and feed them in on their behalf.

- 5.6 There should always be consideration, at the point of meetings being convened as to how children and young people are informed about the meetings and the purpose of them. Consideration must be had as to who, when and how children and young people will be informed about the meetings.
- 5.7 When a meeting is being convened, consideration should be given as to whether the child or young person wishes to have an Advocate to attend with them, or on their behalf. They may identify someone from their network who they wish to support them in this way.

6. Preparation for Meetings

- 6.1 Social Workers should attend the first Stability Network Meeting with the child or young person's Care Plan (or Pathway Plan) and any up to date risk assessment/safety plan (essential for situations involving exploitation).
- 6.2 The purpose of the Stability Network Meeting is to consider the Care Plan and agree a Stability Plan that will ensure provision is made within appropriate timescales.
- 6.3 The venue of the meeting should be considered as to where is appropriate to hold such a meeting. It is recommended that the meeting is held at a neutral venue that is not the placement.

7. Timing of Meetings

- 7.1 Meetings should be held as soon as worries around the stability of a placement s identified, if it is appropriate to do so.
- 7.2 There may be times that an urgent meeting is required due to the immediate breakdown of a placement. IN such cases the meeting should be held within 48 hours of notification of concern.
- 7.3 In cases where there is not an immediate risk of breakdown but there are cumulating or increasing concern, the meeting should be held within 5 working days of notification of concern.
- 7.4 Stability Network Meetings should be held no less than 4 weekly, more often if required, to ensure that the Stability Plan is successfully implemented, monitored and reviewed.
- 7.5 Meetings should continue to be held until the crisis has passed, the placement has stabilised or the areas of difficulty have been addressed.

- 7.6 The decision to cease holding subsequent meetings, should be a joint decision which is made and recorded in the Stability Network Meeting that makes this decision.
- 7.7 Meetings can be reconvened, should subsequent worries arise.
- 7.8 Should the decision be made at a meeting that the placement does need to end, this decision needs to be clearly recorded, with a clear plan in place as to how any move will be planned and managed and who is responsible for what action.
- 7.9 If a placement is disrupted a Disruptions Meeting should be convened in line with [Placement Planning and Disruption Meetings procedure](#).

8. Chairing Meetings

8.1 The Stability Network Meetings should be chaired by a Team Manager. In particularly complex situations, it may be appropriate for a Service Manager to chair the meetings. It may also be appropriate in some cases that the Chair of the meeting is independent i.e. not the child's or fostering Team Manager or Service Manager.

9. Minutes of the Meetings

- 9.1 The child's Social Worker, should take the minutes of the meeting.
- 9.2 Minutes should be taken of the meeting, and recorded in the [Stability Network Meeting Minutes proforma](#) (click link).
- 9.3 Minutes should be uploaded onto Care Store, and sent out to all attendees, within 5 working days of the meeting.
- 9.4 Minutes should be sent to the IRO.