

**Isle of Wight Council**  
**Fostering & Adoption Service**

**Placement Stability initiative**

**October 2009**

**Start date:**  
**End date:**  
**Review date:**

## 1. AIM OF THIS INITIATIVE

Before we look at the strategy, what exactly does this initiative aim to achieve?

Because placement stability for looked after children and young people is a contributing factor in them achieving positive outcomes, it stands to reason that our overall goal in this case should be **to ensure placement stability**, i.e., to ensure the pressure felt within a fostering placement is relieved in some or other way, taking into account that the best interests of the child is paramount in all circumstances.

What makes a placement “unstable” then? An “unstable” placement – a placement under pressure – is one in which:

- a. a child is displaying behaviour which:
  - i. cannot be managed; and/or
  - ii. is placing the welfare of that child and/or others at risk of harm; and
- b. factors other than a child’s behaviour is jeopardising that placement.

Our aim is therefore twofold: (1) to reduce the challenging behaviour through the provision of additional support, and (2) to reduce the factors, other than a child’s challenging behaviour, that are jeopardising placements.

## 2. STRATEGY

Theories of child and adolescent development have a number of premises they agree on. One of these – also explained in the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families – is that challenging behaviour is largely a symptom of an unmet developmental need. However – and as you are aware – not all placements break down because a young person’s needs are not adequately met. This implies then that we would need to assess whether the placement is under pressure as a result of needs not being met or whether the pressure is due to any other factors.

Our strategy then must begin with:

1. an opportunity to assess – together with the Carer and other significant people – what the causes of the pressure might be (including a basic assessment of developmental needs), and then
2. together with the Carer, we need to establish whether we can do something about the causal factors while the welfare of people in the placement are at various levels of risk, and then
3. plan for the necessary support to address these causal factors, and so sustain the placement.

If we establish that, for whatever reason, the placement has irretrievably broken down, we still need to:

1. identify what the causes of the pressure might have been (including a basic assessment of developmental needs), and
2. plan for a smooth transition for the child to the next placement, and

3. plan for the necessary support to address these causal factors, and so help to sustain the next placement.

The benefits of a meeting together with the Foster Carers is that they hold a lot of insight into how a child thinks, feels and behaves – all of which is crucial to an informative assessment.

To summarise then:

- a. Where we intervene at the point of breakdown, the intended outcome would either be a Support Plan to sustain the existing placement, or a Support Plan to ensure a smooth transition to the next placement.
- b. Where we intervene before a potential breakdown, the intended outcome would be a Support Plan to strengthen the existing placement.
- c. Where we intervene directly after an emergency breakdown, the intended outcome would be a Support Plan to ensure the next placement is not jeopardised.

Lastly, this and other strategies addressing the problem of multiple placement changes in a child's time in the care system must be informed by accurate statistics. Statistics show trends in the causes – both within the foster placement itself and the factors from outside – that might have had a bearing on the placement change. These statistics and trends will assist in developing further strategies to address the problem of multiple placement changes jeopardising children's achievement of positive outcomes.

### **3. PLACEMENT STABILITY/DISRUPTION MEETINGS**

If a placement is disrupting or becoming fragile, the child's social worker should contact the Fostering Deputy Manager to request that he/she chairs a placement stability or disruption meeting. The child's social worker will be responsible for arranging the meeting and inviting the relevant parties.

Where a Placement Stability meeting is held, there will not be a requirement to hold a Disruption Meeting as the Placement Stability meeting will replace a Disruption meeting in these cases.

A Placement Stability meeting does not have any authority to decide on the type of resource a child or young person should be accommodated in. However, it is hoped that the assessment of developmental needs at the Placement Stability meetings will inform the decision as to the type of accommodation resource required to best meet the developmental needs of the child or young person, and for that matter, to inform the existing daily intervention in a child or young person's life.

A Placement Stability meeting does have the authority to authorise more respite than is currently used. However, it would be the Fostering & Adoption Service that needs to decide whether the additional use of respite care for a particular child would affect the approval level of a particular foster carer for that child.

### **4. PROCEDURE**

- a. No agency foster placement should end without a Placement Stability meeting taking place. ***The only exceptions to this is when (1) a young person returns home or (2) moves on into semi- or independent living, or (3) there are immediate child protection issues, or (4) a Court has ordered a specific placement other than the existing foster placement.***

- b. The Fostering Deputy Manager will chair Placement Stability meetings. Depending on the volume and demand for such meetings needing to be convened, it may be necessary on occasions for Team Managers to chair the Placement Stability meetings/Disruption meetings.
  - i. Team Managers will not be responsible for chairing meetings where the child or young person is allocated within their team, and
  - ii. Team Managers will have the authority in the same way the Placement Stability Chair has, and
  - iii. Support Plans drawn up by Team Managers at these meetings must be ratified by the Fostering Deputy Manager before being actioned.
- c. A PS meeting needs to be convened at the earliest signs of placement breakdown.
  - i. The target is to have a PS meeting within 5 working days of the referral.
- d. In order to trigger a meeting, either the child's allocated Social Worker or Team Manager must
  - i. Contact the Fostering Deputy Manager to request available dates, and
  - ii. Ensure the latest Care Plan is provided to the chair at the earliest opportunity.
- e. If deemed necessary, the PS Chair will confer with the Caseholder to gain their view of the matter;
- f. If deemed necessary, the PS Chair will also confer with the Supervising Support Worker to gain their view of the matter;
- g. The PS Chair will then convene a meeting via the Caseholder. The Caseholder will therefore be expected to arrange with the Foster Carers, the child/young person (if appropriate), the Supervising Support Worker, and other professionals if deemed necessary, and to book a venue. A meeting will be booked as close as possible to 5 working days of a request being made.
  - i. Meetings are not to be convened in the Foster Carer's home if at all possible.
  - ii. The meeting will last between 1 – 2 hours, but no longer than 2 hours.
  - iii. Those that are invited and expected to attend:
    - i. Fostering Deputy Manager, Chairperson
    - ii. Child/young person where appropriate
    - iii. Foster carer/s
    - iv. Case holder/Allocated worker
    - v. Supervising Social Worker
    - vi. Team Manager where appropriate
    - vii. Any other appropriate person/agencies, e.g., representative from Education, Health, etc.
    - viii. The PS Chair is responsible for chairing the meeting, identifying a Support Plan (to sustain the placement) which is SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely plan), with clear lead areas of responsibility for attendees and distributing the decisions and minutes of the meeting within 5 working days.
    - ix. Minutes of the PS meeting will be distributed to the following people:
      - a. The Caseholder
      - b. The Supervising Support Worker
      - c. Reviewing Officers (via the Supervising Support Worker)
- h. These minutes must accompany the Placement Planning meeting for the next placement should there be a placement breakdown.

- i. If it is clear during the process of the meeting that the placement has irretrievably broken down, the Support Plan needs to clearly identify a planned move, and actions and timescales to enable this to happen in a constructive way.
- j. Where a placement has irretrievably broken down, a Statutory Review must be convened within the statutory period of 28 days to ratify the decision to move the young person, in line with procedures.
- k. Future Statutory Reviews are responsible for ensuring the implementation of all PS meetings' Support Plans and incorporating them within the Local Authority Care Plan. Statutory Reviews will need to ratify changes to the Care Plan. Reviewing Officers will be responsible within the Statutory Review to follow up on actions and decisions made at individual PS meetings.

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