

A better start for Children and Young People

'Every conversation starts with the child'



When working with families to co-develop plans for children it is vital that a contingency plan is developed which sets out what will happen if the primary plan does not continue to protect the child within the timescales set out in the plan.

The contingency plan must be a robust, clearly defined plan which sets out exactly what needs to happen and which has been discussed with children, families and with multi-agency partners. What it should not be is a statement which indicates that the contingency is 'to seek legal advice' or advise the IRO of escalating concerns'. IRO's are an integral part of the child protection process and should be advised regularly if concerns are increasing. They should be advised of the progress of the plan via the core groups and regular conversations with SW's.

The threshold for child protection plan is S31 Children Act 1989 and as such, if a child is already subject to a plan the threshold is already met. If legal advice is required this should be sought at an earlier stage, including this as a contingency adds the potential for delay in a case and subsequent delay for the child.

The establishment of a robust contingency plan can prevent the need to consider emergency placements for children. Enabling children, where possible, to live with a relative/family friend/neighbour. This is likely to have a much less traumatic impact on the child and the family as this is someone they already know.

Considering this early with the family, working with them can reassure that their views are being listened to. This is relevant to both the child, parents and wider family and is a much more Systemic way of working.

A contingency plan must be developed for every child and needs to be recorded clearly on their file. This can then be seen by the Emergency Duty team or the duty worker in times of crisis. This may also be used where a child's file has closed and a further referral is received and could then limit the involvement required by the Local Authority.

It is vital that contingency plans are kept up to date to take into account the child's changing needs and circumstances.

CONTINGENCY PLANNING GUIDANCE

Contingency plans MUST include;

- What will happen to the child if progress against the current plan is not as expected?
- Where might the child live?
- What do we need to do to make this happen? – What do we know about the extended family, is there anyone who could care for the child, have viability assessments been considered/undertaken?
- What is the child's view about where they might live if they are unable to remain with their current carers?
- What are the parents/carers views?
- What legal processes need to take place to progress the contingency plan – application to the court for a S31 order, instigate the PLO process, move the child to the care of an extended family member accommodate the child?

During your first visit to the family consideration needs to be given to the contingency plan for the child. Completing a cultural genogram or ecomap helps you as a worker consider and understand who is part of the child's life, who they already spend regular time with and have built up good relationships and as such who may be able to care for them long or short-term should their parents or current carers not be able to meet their needs.