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## I. Aim and Scope

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Care proceedings must be considered an option of last resort, however nationally, over recent years we have seen a significant rise in the issue of Public Law Proceedings. The East Riding of Yorkshire Council are determined to address this issue and in collaboration with our partners we will work to reduce the number of children entering care proceeding unnecessarily.

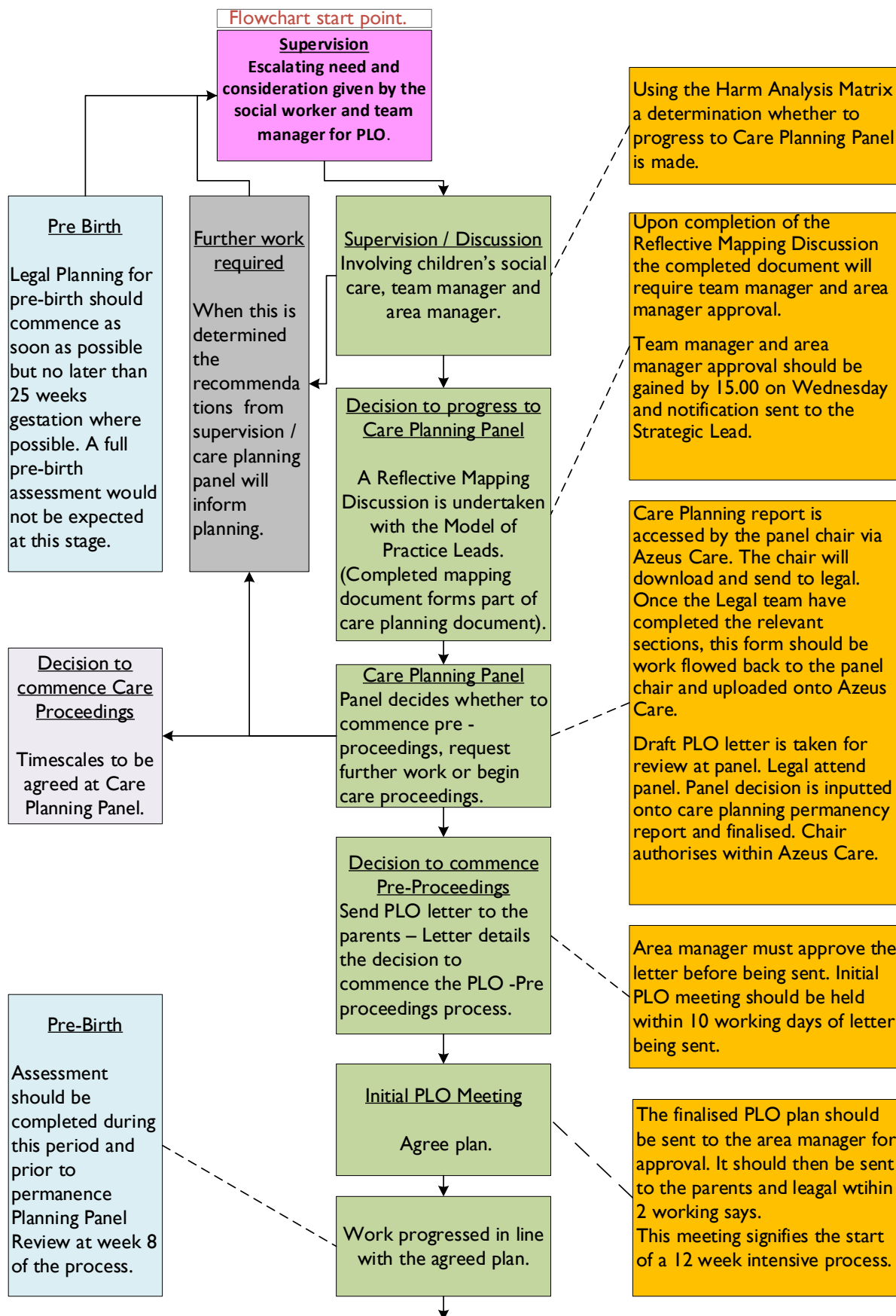
We have developed our own arrangements to support this aim. Working with children, families, and their networks, we want to ensure that children can continue to live in the care of their parent(s) where it is safe and consistent with their welfare. Or where this is not possible, arrangements which cause the least possible disruption to their lives. Our newly developed PLO, Pre-Proceedings Local Arrangement, provides a clear framework for all practitioners involved in this vital work.

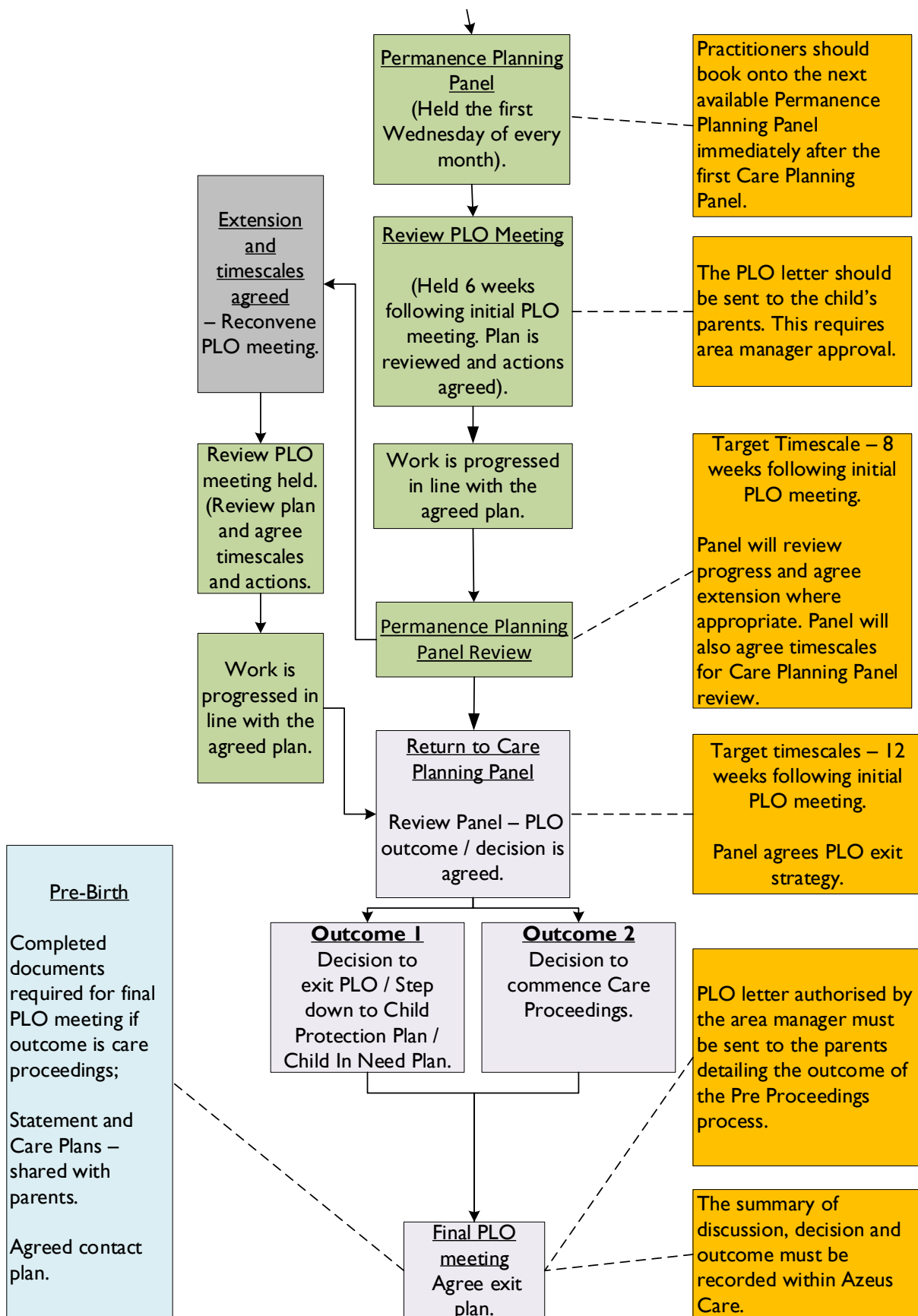
The local arrangements framework sets out clear guidance to practitioners undertaking pre-proceedings work and highlights the attitudes, values and activities required to maintain high standards in practice. The framework also provides clear timescales for the completion of pre proceedings work throughout the various stages of the process. The guidance aims to inform managers and practitioner of their actions and responsibilities at each key phase. This document is underpinned by the National, Public Law Working Group - 'Best Practice Guidance' and should be read in conjunction with the guidance outlined within. ([BPG](#))

The Public Law Outline (PLO), Pre - Proceeding's process represents a crucial time in a child(ren's) and family's journey with Children, Young People, Support and Safeguarding Services. It presents a significant opportunity to undertake meaningful and purposeful work with children, parents, and their family and wider networks, to help them to address the needs which have led us into Pre-Proceedings. It is essential therefore that practitioners work in a motivated and determined way to support families and prevent the need to enter care proceedings where with the correct support, this can be avoided.



## 2. PLO - Pre-Proceedings Arrangements





## 2.1 Decision to progress to Care Planning Panel

The child(ren's) circumstances will be discussed within supervision. This will present opportunities to reflect on the progress being made and whether the child and family should be considered for pre-proceedings. Where the social worker and team manager are considering pre-proceedings work a joint supervision/ discussion must be held with the area manager.

The decision to progress to Care Planning Panel for the purpose of Pre-Proceedings, should be made by the social work team manager and the area manager within a planned Supervision / discussion meeting. Additional factors to support decision making can be found on page 12, point 10 of the National Best Practice Guidance, ([BPG](#)). To support decision making and thorough analysis managers will utilise the Signs of Safety – Harm analysis Matrix in forming an evidence-based decision.

Within supervision the following determinations will be made;

- a- Decision to progress to care planning panel with instruction to the social worker to arrange a mapping meeting with the Model of Practice Leads.
- b- Decision to request further work based on identified needs and any identified previous gaps in provision. Outcome from supervision should inform future planning.

(Timescales for further work and intervention with the family should be agreed. The social work team should reconvene supervision following further intervention where it is deemed that progress is not made).

### Bottom lines

The request for Reflective Mapping Discussion must be sent with the subject 'Care Planning Panel' to the 'Stronger Together' inbox – [stronger.together@eastriding.gov.uk](mailto:stronger.together@eastriding.gov.uk). The Model of Practice Leads will contact the social worker to arrange a suitable date and time for the meeting.

The senior manager should make a written record, clearly setting out the reasons for their decision. This will inform the decisions that follow so clear and unambiguous reasoning is important.

## 2.2 Mapping with Model of Practice Leads

The social worker in partnership with the Model of Practice Leads will convene a Mapping Meeting referred to as a 'Reflective Mapping Discussion'. Information on the meetings functions can be found within the briefing paper / guidance available on page 12 of this document.



## Bottom lines

The Reflective Mapping Document is built into the system and can be completed within Azeus Care. Upon completion of the Reflective Mapping Discussion, this document will form part of the Care Planning document, (Care Planning report and Outcome Form) which is also built within Azeus Care.

Upon completion of the Reflective Mapping Discussion the completed document will require team manager and area manager approval.

Team manager and area manager approval should be gained by 15.00 on Wednesday and notification sent to the Strategic Lead.

The Care Planning report will be accessed by the panel chair via Azeus Care. The panel chair will download and send to legal. The form is downloaded as an eForm, and work flowed to the legal team. Once the legal team have completed the relevant sections, this form should be work flowed back to the panel chair and uploaded onto Azeus Care.

### 3. Care Planning Panel

The Care Planning Panel will be held on a weekly basis – every **Monday from 14.00 – 16.30**. Once all the paperwork has been received dates and time slots will be sent out to the social worker, team manager and area manager by the close of business the Thursday before the proposed panel date. Please note: no panel date or time slot will be provided until all the necessary signed paperwork is received by the Strategic Lead. Please see Care Planning Panel terms of reference for details of all panel responsibilities, which are available on page 12 of this document.

The panel will make the following determinations;

- a- Whether threshold has been met and is it in the interest of the child(ren) to progress to PLO – pre-proceedings;
- b- Whether threshold has been met to instigate care proceedings based on the best interests of the child(ren);
- c- Whether further work is required;

## Bottom Lines

The draft PLO – ‘Letter Before Proceedings’ form should be brought to the Care Planning Panel for review.

Consideration for parallel / twin track planning should be made.

The care planning social work report will be completed within Azeus Care. The decision should be inputted onto the Care Planning Permanence Panel report and finalised by the panel chair which is authorised within Azeus Care.



Upon decision to progress to pre-proceedings where this is the agreed action the social worker should send the PLO – pre-proceedings letter to the child’s parents. This is built within Azeus care and can be completed within and downloaded in letter format. This will require area manager quality assurance prior to being sent.

The same process will be followed for the ‘letter of issue’ form, where a decision is made to progress to immediate care proceedings.

Where the decision is to progress to pre-proceedings or immediate care proceedings, the responsible social worker should book onto the next available Permanence Planning Panel, held the first Wednesday of every month.

#### 4. Initial PLO Meeting

The initial PLO meeting should be held within 10 working days of the PLO – Pre-Proceedings letter being sent. This provides time for the family to make any enquiries relating to the letter and to seek free legal advice and representation.

Social Workers must ensure that parents have understood the PLO letter and the reason for the meeting. Practitioners should ascertain the parents’ understanding of the concerns the local authority holds about their child(ren).

The Social Worker should ensure that they review the current child protection plan, to see if there are points on the plan that the parents agree will provide the most immediate change/safety for their children.

The Social Worker should describe what support the local authority will provide to the parents, while they focus on the immediate change work and discuss and agree any additional assessment work and the timetable for this work.

Work during the Pre-Proceedings process must be tailored to the needs of the child(ren) and their family.

The PLO meetings must aim to work collaboratively with the parents and family with a collective aim of enhancing safety for the child(ren) and preventing the need to instigate care proceedings. During this meeting practitioners and partner agencies in collaboration with the child(ren’s) parents, should agree a plan of work aimed at addressing the identified needs, with the aim of stepping out of pre-proceedings at the completion of the 12-week process.





The social worker and supporting practitioners should consider all options in pursuit of these aims;

**Child's welfare is paramount:** this principle is applied consciously and intuitively by practitioners. (Decisions to remove children from their parents should be an option of last resort, where the child's welfare demands it. Where there is a realistic option that care proceedings will be issued, this phase should be used providing risks can be managed.

**Child's views:** Practitioners should seek to gain the views of the child(ren) throughout this process, and these should be accurately recorded. For very young children, and children who have disabilities impacting on speech, language and or understanding, the use of creative approaches, observation, and interpretation by practitioners in their direct work is crucial.

**Managing Harm / Future Harm:** Utilising the signs of safety approach, actions should be taken to ensure the child's safety is always maintained and not compromised during work with them and their family.

**Collaboration:** Practitioners should always seek to work collaboratively with the child(ren) and their family and network. This approach to identifying issues together and co-producing a plan to support change will ensure that families know that they are being worked 'with', not 'to' or 'for'.

Every effort should be made to support this collaboration and consideration given to the social, cultural and health inequalities or differences and how this should inform planning and intervention.

**Multi-Agency working:** It is essential that practitioners work in a coordinated and streamlined way with partners within services such as housing, health and education who are involved with the child(ren) and family, to ensure that assessment, planning, and intervention are both timely and effective.

**Recording and communication:** It is essential that timely and accurate record keeping is undertaken and there is clear communication with the family throughout PLO – Pre-Proceedings work. Recording should accurately reflect the views of the child and family. Keeping an accurate record of the agreed PLO plan, the status of assessments in progress and/or outcomes is vital to inform future decision making. Further guidance can be found here, ([BPG](#)).

**All practitioners should have full awareness of the vital nature of Pre-Proceedings work and ensure that every effort is made to support families to address the issues which have led to Pre-Proceedings.**

## **Intensive Support**

Support must be tailored sufficiently to meet the needs of the child(ren) and their parents. It is essential that direct work / support services are coordinated, targeted and purposeful, focused on the issues which have led to pre-proceedings and undertaken in a timely manner, to support assessment and avoid drift and delay.



## Family Group Conference

It is mandatory that Family Group Conference is offered to all families being supported through the PLO Pre-Proceedings process. This is a crucial opportunity for families to come together with their wider family network to identify solutions and agree their own plan. Details on how to access Family Group Conferences can be found on page 12.

### Bottom Lines

The first PLO meeting signifies the commencement of a 12-week period of targeted intensive support. Practitioners should aim to complete pre-proceedings work during this period.

Upon completion of the PLO Plan, the finalised plan must be sent to parents and legal within two working days. This will require final authorisation by the social work team - area manager prior to being sent.

## 5 Pre-Birth pre-Proceedings work

The timing for initiating the pre-proceedings process is critical. Planning for pre-birth should be commenced as early as possible, with timescales for this work monitored closely. In most circumstances there will be a target that legal planning for pre-birth commences no later than 25 weeks gestation where possible.

Prioritising this work will ensure that the identification of need and the provision of support can be provided as soon as possible.

Decision making around progression to PLO - Pre-Proceedings in respect of Pre-Birth will follow the same pathway as outlined within the PLO flowchart.

There is an expectation that social workers will have completed all pre-birth assessments within the period between the initial PLO meeting and the permanence planning panel review which, save for exceptional circumstances should be conducted 8 weeks following the initial PLO meeting.

Following final care planning panel where a decision is made to commence care proceedings, the social worker must ensure that the statement and care plans are shared with the child(ren's) parents at the final PLO meeting. The contact plan should also be agreed at this meeting.



## Bottom lines

If there is an early view that proceedings will be issued on birth, then draft documents should be ready to send to legal before the child's birth. The parents should be provided with the copies of the approved draft documents at the earliest opportunity.

Placement options should be considered prior to birth and discussed with parents e.g., parent-and-baby foster placements or fostering-to-adopt placements, to ensure that early permanence is achieved for babies, as appropriate.

## 6 Initial Permanence Planning Panel Review

The permanence Planning Panel has oversight of progression of children's and young people's planning. Panels are held on the first Wednesday of every month. Practitioners must ensure that they have booked onto the next available panel following the initial Care Planning Panel.

Recommendations from Permanence Planning Panel will inform planning with the child(ren) and family.

Timescales for the next review Permanence Planning Panel will be agreed, this should be at week 8 of the Pre-Proceedings process.

## 7. Review PLO meeting

The review PLO meeting should be completed 6 weeks following the initial PLO Meeting, (unless convened following pre-proceedings extension agreement – [See chapter 8](#)). This is an opportunity for the social worker to review progress with relevant services and the family. This meeting will review the child(ren) and family's plan based on the progress made. Any identified gaps in provision should be addressed with relevant services and the family and any additional actions added to the plan. This may result in several ways which include but are not limited to; as a request from the child(ren's) parent(s), from recommendations within supervision, recommendations from permanence planning panel or based on a change in need of a parent(s) or child(ren).

Clear targets and timescales must be agreed with the family and partner agencies, and the family must be fully informed of the timescales of future appointments, meetings / panels.

Upon completion of the review PLO meeting the social worker, partner agencies and the child(ren's) family should continue to work collaboratively in line with the agreed plan.



#### Bottom line

The PLO Letter authorised by the area manager must be sent to the child(ren's) parents in advance of the Review PLO Meeting.

### 8. Review Permanence Planning Panel

Review Permanence Planning Panels should be held at **week 8** of the Pre-Proceedings process. This meeting will review the progress made by the family during Pre-Proceedings work and agree a timescale to reconvene Care Planning Panel. (Usually held at week 12 of the Pre-Proceedings process).

#### Extensions

The review Permanence Planning Panel will also determine whether an extension is required. Extensions require approval by the panel chair. New timescales will be proposed, and the social worker will convene a third PLO meeting.

#### Bottom lines

Where a decision is made to extend pre-proceedings work, the PLO letter authorised by the area manager, must be sent to the child(ren's) parents in advance of the review PLO meeting.

Upon completion of further work in line with the agreed plan, practitioners should attend a final Care Planning Panel to determine the outcome of PLO-pre-proceedings work.

### 9. Final Care Planning Panel

A final Care Planning Panel should be convened at week 12, (unless extension was granted).

Prior to final Care Planning Panel, the social worker should ensure that the outcome of pre-proceedings work is clearly and succinctly summarised and should discuss the outcome with their manager, seeking approval for their draft conclusions.

The final Care Planning Panel will agree the outcome of the pre-proceedings process and agree an exit strategy. The following determination will be made;



- Whether to exit PLO pre-proceedings / step down and at what stage the child(ren) and family will be supported at, for example, Child in Need Plan or Child Protection plan.
- Whether to commence care proceedings.

#### Bottom Lines

The summary of discussion points, record of decisions and outcome, (whether to exit PLO or commence care proceedings) must be recorded. This information should be inputted directly onto the relevant form within Azeus Care.

A PLO letter should be produced and sent to the parents by the relevant team manager prior to the final PLO meeting. This must be approved by the area manager prior to being sent and will consist of either;

A letter detailing the outcome of pre-proceedings.

Letter of issue notifying the parents that care proceedings are being instigated.

#### 10. Final PLO Meeting

A final PLO meeting must be convened following Care Planning Panel to inform the parents of the outcome of the PLO – Pre-Proceedings process. If care proceedings are being commenced this will give the parents opportunity to express their views and ask any questions they might have about the process.

This meeting also presents an opportunity to discuss the PLO exit strategy with the parents, to support the process of stepping down from pre-proceedings and to agree the plan for future work / support. Whether this is through a Child in Need plan or Child Protection plan.




#### **Bottom line**

Following all final PLO meetings, the social worker must complete a summary of discussion and outcome form which is completed directly within Azeus Care.



## II. Forms and Additional Guidance / information

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	<b>Additional guidance and information</b>	<b>Link</b>
A.	Reflective Mapping Discussion' briefing paper / guidance	 Group Supervision Guidance and Reques
B.	Care Planning Panel – terms of reference	 Care Planning Panel TOR revised Novemb
C.	Family Group Conference Policy and procedure.	 <b>FGC Flowchart.pdf</b> <hr/>
D.	Public Law Working Group, Best Practice Guidance: Support for and work with families prior to court proceedings.	<a href="#">BPG</a>

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