CARE PLANNING POLICY

Department for Child Protection
January 2012 (revised version)
Children in the care of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Department for Child Protection require comprehensive care plans that focus on identifying and meeting the needs of the child while in care. The child's best interests must be the paramount consideration in all care planning decisions.

PURPOSE OF THE POLICY
The purpose of this policy is to outline the legislative requirements and practice procedures for completing care planning for children in care.

BACKGROUND
Planning for children in care is a core responsibility and function of the Department. The Children and Community Services Act 2004 (the Act) enshrines care planning in legislation and requires a number of actions to occur when planning for a child in care.

Care planning is distinct from case planning. Case planning relates to the family group, not the individual child, and comprises all aspects of a case, not only the care and needs of the child. However, the case planning decisions will inform the child's provisional care plan or care plan.

Under the Act, a child is in the CEO's care if the child is:
- in provisional protection and care;
- the subject of a protection order (time-limited) or protection order (until 18);
- the subject of a negotiated placement agreement;
- provided with a placement service under s.32(1)(a); or
- in a transitional consented placement made prior to the proclamation of the Act (r.29 of the Children and Community Services Regulations 2006).

LEGISLATIVE MANDATE AND PRINCIPLES
The Act gives the Department the statutory responsibility to protect, support and promote the wellbeing of children in the CEO's care. Sections 7 – 14, 29, 30, 39, 56(2), 881, 89, 90, 91–95, 133 and 247 of the Act relate to the care planning processes and the guiding principles that must be taken into account when planning for children in care.

The care plan must identify the needs of the child and outline the steps to be taken to address those needs. The care plan will set out the decisions about the care of the child including placement arrangements, any secure care decisions and contact between the child and a parent, sibling or other relative of the child, or any other person who is significant in the child's life.

The Chair of a care plan meeting is responsible for the preparation of a written care plan following the consultation process and/or care plan meeting(s). In addition to the legislative requirements, the care plan should also include:
- the overall goal;
- the views and wishes of the participants expressed during any meeting(s);
- a proposal to meet culture and identity requirements for the child;
- the care planning decisions; and
- a brief rationale for the decisions.

1 Throughout this document, the term 'children or child' is used to refer to all children and young people under the age of 18 who are in the care of the Chief Executive Officer of the Department for Child Protection.
The Act requires that as soon as practicable after a care plan or provisional care plan has been prepared, modified or reviewed, a copy of the care plan or modification must be given to:

- the child;
- each parent of the child;
- any carer of the child; and
- any other person considered to have a direct and significant interest in the wellbeing of the child.

**CARE PLANNING FOR CHILDREN IN PROVISIONAL PROTECTION AND CARE**

A provisional care plan must be prepared within seven working days after the child is taken into the provisional protection and care of the Department (unless the child is placed in secure care, in which case the timeframe is two working days). The only required information in the initial provisional care plan is a basic outline of the child’s needs while in provisional protection and care and how those needs are to be met, the placement arrangements for the child, and contact arrangements with the child’s parent(s), sibling(s), relative(s) or any other person who is significant in the child’s life. Other information should be recorded as available. Different requirements are in place for a child placed in secure care (s.881 of the Act).

Where a meeting has not occurred prior to the development of the initial provisional care plan, a planning meeting and/or consultation should occur with all relevant parties within 30 working days.

The provisional care plan may be modified at any time without consultation if the situation changes or more information is gathered. However, good practice requires an inclusive and consultative process with all parties where possible.

The provisional care plan must be reviewed every six months where a protection order has not been granted, as part of case management.

**CARE PLANNING FOR ALL OTHER CHILDREN IN THE CEO’S CARE**

A care plan must be prepared and implemented as soon as practicable after a child first comes into the CEO’s care. In practice, this is within 30 working days.

The care plan is developed through consultation with all parties (the child, parent(s), carer(s) and any other person who is significant in the child’s life). The views and wishes of all parties should be obtained and documented.

Where it is not possible to convene a meeting or a series of smaller meetings with all parties (for example, geographical distance, illness or concerns about family violence), other forms of consultation must occur.

**REVIEW OR MODIFICATION OF A CARE PLAN**

A review of the operation and effectiveness of every care plan must be completed, at a minimum, at least once every 12 months consistent with s.90 of the Act. A more frequent review may be required for children under 2 years of age.

A review of the care plan must be carried out before an application is made to the Court for the extension of a protection order (time-limited) – s.56(1) of the Act.

Like all care planning, a review of the care plan is an inclusive process with all parties (where possible). It should:

- consider the current care plan to see if the decisions were implemented and assess how effective they have been;
- provide a synopsis of the child’s current circumstances;
- present the views of all parties about the current situation and future planning;
• discuss any changes and decisions that may have occurred since the last care plan; and
• identify whether the child is leaving care and, if so, propose steps and measures to meet the child’s leaving care needs.

A care plan can be modified at any time if new information emerges or events occur that have an effect on the planning decisions for the child. There are special requirements for modification of a care plan where a child is placed in secure care - s.881 of the Act.

In the case of a child who is about to leave the CEO’s care, the care plan must be modified so that it identifies the needs of the child in preparing to leave care, and in his or her transition to other living arrangements.

Where modifications are proposed, a care plan meeting should be held but, if this is not possible, the modification(s) can still occur. However, all parties should be consulted where possible. If a modification to the care plan is required, it may be more practical to conduct a review of the care plan, even if it is before the review due date. If a review is conducted, consultation must occur with all parties (where possible).

Care planning is a cyclical and ongoing process that is reviewed and modified to ensure that steps and measures are identified to meet all nine dimensions of the child’s care—refer to Attachment 1.

QUARTERLY CARE REPORTS
A Quarterly Care Report is required for all children in care. The Quarterly Care Report is to ensure the case manager meets with the child on his or her own at least once every three months. This is to determine how the child is progressing in care, to hear their views and wishes, assess their wellbeing and build relationships.

The review or modification of a care plan can constitute a Quarterly Care Report if the case manager has met with the child within one month before or after the report is due.

11 MONTH CARE PLANNING CYCLE
To assist forward planning, and to ensure reviews of care plans are completed within the required legislative timeframe, districts must implement a rolling 11-month planning cycle. This cycle is designed to support a sustainable and systematic approach to ensuring all children in care have an up-to-date care plan.

All care planning requirements should be scheduled to occur between January and November of each calendar year. A letter will be provided to the parent(s), carer(s) and parties significant to the child at the beginning of the cycle. The letter will provide details of meeting dates for the care plan review and quarterly care visits scheduled throughout the year.

RELATED POLICIES AND DOCUMENTS
• Permanency Planning Policy (2010)
• Leaving Care Policy (2011)
• Memorandum of Understanding between the Department for Child Protection and the Disability Services Commission: Joint Roles and Responsibilities for Supporting Children and Parents with Disabilities (October 2009)
• Memorandum of Understanding between the Department for Child Protection and the Public Advocate (January 2011)
• Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Care
• Foster Care Partnership.
GUIDELINES
The Casework Practice Manual provides the guidelines for Department staff based on this policy.

EFFECTIVE DATE: 1 January 2012.

REVIEW DATE: 1 January 2014.

OWNER: Executive Director, Policy and Learning.
IS THE CHILD LEAVING CARE?

CARE PLAN:
- Initial Care Plan to be prepared within 30 working days of a child entering care
- If the child is 15 years of age, commence planning for leaving care

CARE PLAN REVIEW:
- within 12 months
  - A more frequent review may be required for children under 2 years of age

CHANGE IN CIRCUMSTANCES?

CARE PLAN MODIFIED FOR LEAVING CARE

MODIFY THE CARE PLAN