



Families
First

Edge of Care / ceasing to be looked after Strategy

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<https://www.intra.staffordshire.gov.uk/equality/Translation-and-Interpretation.aspx>

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This strategy has been developed in partnership with representation from services across Families First and is not intended to duplicate or replace any other strategies in place.
- 1.2 The strategy is intended to develop a shared understanding, with clear arrangements and accountabilities in place, for Families First staff to work seamlessly with children and young people and their families who are on the edge of care and require a focused intervention, supporting families to stay together, wherever it is safe to do so.
- 1.3 The strategy is intended to support children, young people and families:
 - Aged 11-17 years, returning home from a period in care (reunification);
 - Receiving support from the Intensive Prevention Service (IPS)
 - Receiving support from Breathing Space Service.
 - Placed with Family & Friends' carers;
 - Under Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs);
 - Known to the Adoption Support Team and at risk of adoption breakdown;
 - Receiving a service from an LST to prevent intervention by statutory services, or as an exit plan from statutory services.
 - Receiving a service from Stafford Short-Breaks' or The Alder's Short-Breaks' Service.
- 1.4 Staffordshire County Council is committed to making changes to service delivery in order to meet the changing demands for the most vulnerable in our community. This strategy therefore, aligns with Staffordshire's corporate ambitions to ensure that the people of Staffordshire will:
 - Be healthier and more independent
 - Feel safer, happier and more supported in, and by their community.
- 1.5 The strategy also supports Families First's priority to ensure that:
 'Children & families in need are offered evidence-based services which support resilience and improved outcomes' (*Families First Strategy 2015-18*)

2. Our Vision

- 2.1 Families First vision is to 'work with partners and families in Staffordshire to enable vulnerable children and young people to be safe and secure; to promote physical and emotional well-being and to help them achieve their full potential within their communities'.
 (*Families First Strategy 2015-18*)

- 2.2 Families First works closely with partner organisations and our approach is built on the firm foundations of an integrated 'team around the family'. We facilitate local support and evidence-based intervention for children and families to prevent needs escalating to a level requiring statutory specialist services. Where specialist services are needed, we ensure that timely and effective decisions are made to secure the best outcomes for a child's future.
- 2.3 There are unique advantages for children experiencing family life in their own birth family and, in most circumstances; children's needs are best met by being cared for within their families (*Families First Permanency Strategy 2014*). Families First, in keeping with this principle, aim to reduce the need for children to become looked after, by supporting families to stay together, wherever safe to do so, and where it is in the best interest of the child.
- 2.4 Where families *do* experience difficulties, Families First will respond effectively and co-ordinate a range of preventative and intensive services with the aim of supporting families in helping them remain together.

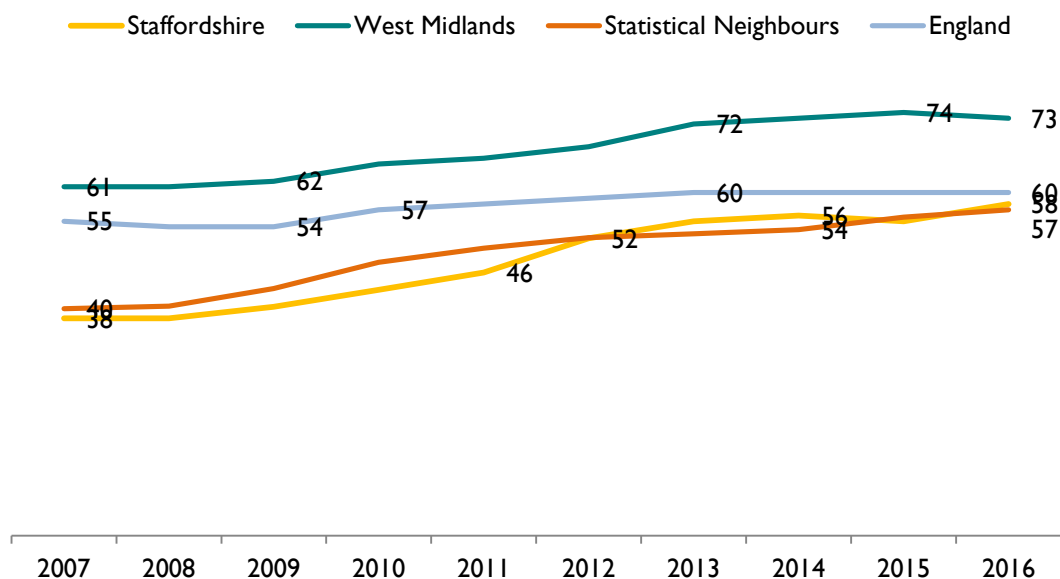
3. Our Principles:

- 3.1 The following principles are referenced throughout the strategy in order to achieve our vision.
- Families will be supported to stay together.
 - The resilience of families will be increased and dependence on Families First will reduce over time.
 - Risk will be managed confidently for those children and young people on the 'edge of care' in partnership with those from within the child/young person's widest family network.
 - Long term implications for coming into care will be considered as part of decision-making processes.
 - Pathways, roles, responsibilities and accountabilities will be made clear for Families First workforce.

4. Local context

- 4.1 Staffordshire is a large county and the number of Looked After Children in Staffordshire has increased over the last few years, with numbers reaching 987 at the end of April 2017. This represents a 28% increase since 2011 and is in line with national trends. The number of children entering care has remained relatively stable over the last 5 years, although there is a variance of up to 8% (A low of 343 in 2015, to a high of 378 in 2014).

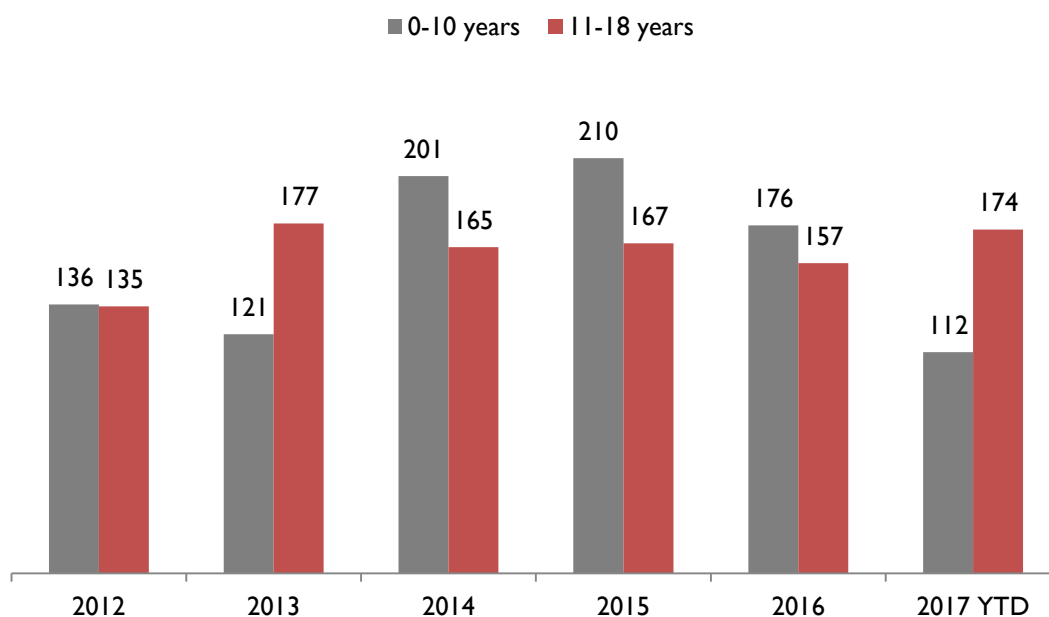
Children looked after rate, per 10,000 children aged under 18



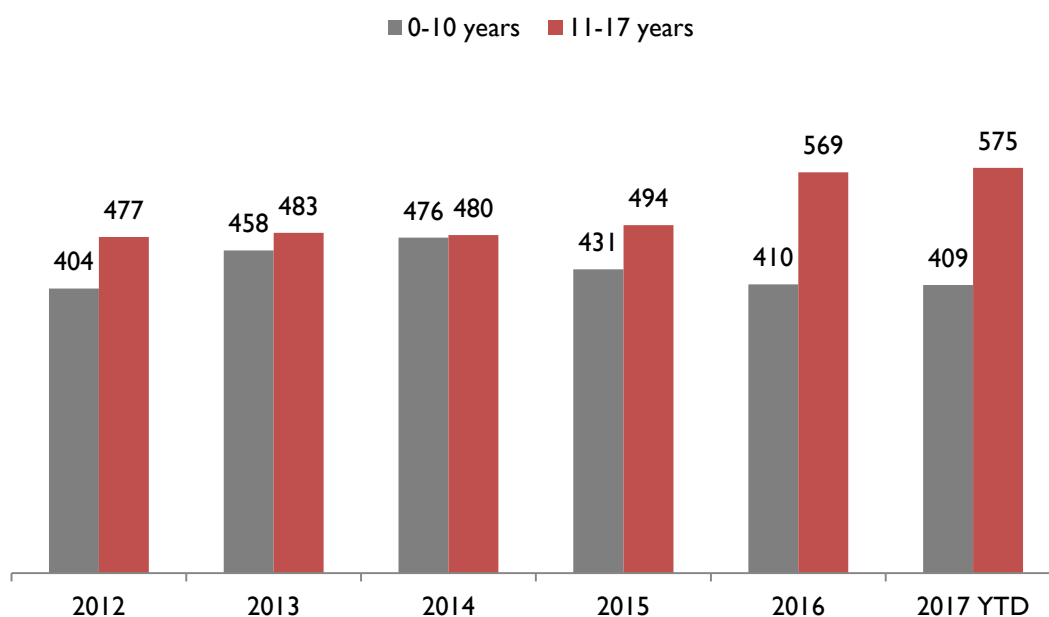
Children starting to be Looked After



Children ceasing to be Looked After



Age of Looked After Children (at the March of each year)



4.2 Average Cost of Placements

4.2.1 Staffordshire's average spend on Looked After Children by placement per week is £983 (CITFA bench-marking 2016). This figure includes both in- house and external fostering and residential placements, but does not include support accommodation or supported lodgings.

5. Our Pathways (See Appendix 1)

- 5.1 Our pathways to services providing support to children and young people on the edge of care, and in care are designed to provide clarity around which service has the responsibility for engaging, co-ordinating and supporting the team around the family.

6. Governance and Accountability

- 6.1 The strategy has been developed within the context of the Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board's (SSCB) *Early Help Strategy (2015-18)* and in response to Families First's Transformation agenda. Families First Management Team (FFMT) and the County Manager's Operational Group will monitor the effectiveness of the Strategy and the performance framework developed to measure its impact.

- 6.2 The effectiveness of the strategy will also be monitored via the following processes:

- Critical-friend discussions in circumstances where a situation cannot be maintained until the next accommodation panel. Robust discussions will take place to consider Section 20 accommodation and alternative courses of action, wherever safe and feasible to do so.
- Discussions to accommodate, both planned and retrospectively, will be presented at the accommodation panel and chaired by the Strategic Lead, Specialist Safeguarding. These will provide an additional level of scrutiny and problem-solving prior to decisions being made to accommodate a child/young person.
- The Independent Placement Overview Panel (IPOP), which provides critical challenge and scrutiny to the financial costs of placements and also challenges drift in securing appropriate placements and delivery of outcomes, including a return home; reunification, and transition from residential to a foster care placement, or independent living.
- Decisions made to hold a Family Group Conference (FGC) to encourage early response to issues from the child/young person's wider family network.
- Use of the decision-making tool to inform assessments in relation to vulnerability and pros and cons re Section 17/20.
- Application of the criteria protocol for the accommodation of 16 and 17 year olds.
- Where children are already looked after under s20 arrangements and an exit plan is being considered, the IRO will give independent scrutiny

to the care plan review and where it is appropriate will make recommendations to support the child's return to their family. Where children are subject to a child protection plan and there are indications this is likely to escalate to the child becoming looked after, child protection conference members will give due consideration to what provision from the edge of care services should be in place.

7. Outcomes/Success measures

7.1 While a separate Edge of Care Report Card is being developed to measure the impact of this strategy, services provided in the delivery of *Edge of Care* will be independently performance managed via the following success measures:

- Reduction in the number of children coming into care
- Increase in the numbers of children ceasing to be looked after
- Children and young people open to IPS re-referred into the service within 6 months.
- Reduction in repeat removal of babies (Breathing Space cohort).
- Numbers of Family Group Conferences.
- Use of short-breaks' service for children on the edge of care.
- Use of short-stays' placements at The Alders.
- Parents, carers, children and young people reporting they feel confident in support offered. (Voice Project)
- Evaluation and feedback from those using IFSS.
- Effectiveness of supported accommodation/supported lodgings commissioned for 16-17 year olds.

8. Services provided in delivery of Edge of Care

8.1 Local Support Teams (LSTs)

Families First Local Support Teams (LSTs) provide an early help assessment and referring to the Intensive Prevention Service and/or in-reach service for vulnerable children and young people. LSTs also provide support to special guardians and care leavers with additional needs.

8.2 Building Resilience in Families & Communities (BRFC)

Building Resilient Families and Communities is Staffordshire's model for the government's Troubled Families programme developed order to improve multi-agency responses to the needs of families who are experiencing a range of difficulties. The programme aims to improve outcomes for children and intervene earlier in families who are experiencing problems such as anti-social behaviour, poor school attendance, children identified as in need or subject to a Child Protection Plan and families affected by domestic abuse. As part of the programme, Family Intervention Projects (FIPs) are district teams of who will work intensively with identified families, adopting a whole-family approach

to their support recognising that problems are interconnected and affect family members in a variety of different ways.

8.3 The Intensive Prevention Service (IPS)

The IPS supports children and young people with emotional, psychological and behavioural problems, who are at risk of coming into care, to remain in their home, or to return home from a period of short term accommodation and to ensure that those individuals with greatest need are supported before their problems become entrenched. The service is targeted at young people aged 11-17 who are at risk of becoming permanently accommodated by the Local Authority, or at the point of entry into care.

8.4 Breathing Space

Breathing Space is an intensive support service for women who have had children removed from their care and are in the early stages of a further pregnancy. The project offers intensive support to families and prevention support to women who have had children removed from their care, and who are at a high risk of a repeat pregnancy within 12 months of care proceedings being initiated.

8.5 Reunification Project

The Reunification Team supports children and young people who have been accommodated by the Local Authority and a planned return home has been identified. The child/family's needs are assessed and a robust plan to support a return home is then put into place. The aim is to ensure that the child/young person remain living at home and that they achieve the best possible outcomes.

8.6 Intensive Family Support (IFS)

The Intensive Family Support service works with families where parental substance misuse is causing significant concern, to the extent where consideration is being given to the child(ren) being taken into care. The service is based on an evidence-based approach with the objectives of keeping families together safely whenever possible; identifying goals for sustained change and transforming how existing services work with families.

8.7 Family Group Conferencing Service (FGC)

The Family Group Conferencing service provides support to families where there is a risk that their children may not be able to remain in their care. Families are supported to find their own solutions, identify support mechanisms and develop a plan in order to meet their child's needs. Young people and vulnerable adults participate with the support of an FGC advocate.

8.8 Stafford Short Breaks Service

This service provides planned short break packages to children/young people who are open to the IPS Service and aged between 11-17 years. The aim of the Short Breaks' Service is to build resilience and stabilise the family's situation so that children/young people can remain at home and ultimately prevent them from becoming looked after.

8.9 The Alders

The Alder's children's home provides short term placements (4 weeks) for up to five young people aged between 12-17 years. Young people may be admitted to the home due to:

- Family crisis / breakdown
- A foster placement disruption
- Where young people need a bed in an emergency situation while an alternative suitable placement is found (including asylum seeking young people).

During a period of accommodation, support will be provided to the young person and the family to re-engage them and to rebuild their relationship to enable (wherever possible) the young person to return to the care of their family or foster family.

8.10 Independent Reviewing Officer's/Chair's Service

The core purpose of the independent reviewing officer (IRO) role is to ensure that the statutory care plan for looked after children fully reflects the child's needs, and to ensure that each child's wishes and feelings are given full and due consideration. For many children, permanence is achieved through a successful return to their birth family and the role of the IRO/Independent Chair can have a key impact on this decision-making, where it has been possible to address the factors in family life which led to the child becoming looked after.

8.11 Care Planning and Court Teams

The Care Planning and Court Teams are responsible for undertaking care proceedings for children and young people, from granting of the Interim Care Order to final orders for Looked After Children aged 0 to 12 years of age on permanency plans. Staffordshire is working in a new and exciting way by bringing Care Proceedings and Permanency/Adoption work into the same team in order to enhance care planning for children, with an emphasis on achieving the best outcomes for children as early as possible.

8.12 Families & Friends' Team

Family and friends play a unique role in enabling children and young people to remain with people they know and trust if they cannot, for whatever reason, live with their parents. Staffordshire Family & Friends' Team offers a full range of fostering services to family and friends carers and is involved in the care planning process including the preparation of reports for court and for foster panels. The team also promotes permanence through special guardianship orders and/or long term fostering.

8.13 Adoption Support Team

Staffordshire provides a range of support to adoptive families and birth relatives of adopted children, including information about adoption issues; advice for adoptive families who may be in need of additional support, including understanding managing emotional and behavioural difficulties; and direct work with children and young people. Therapeutic services can also be

provided from the Adoption Support Team to provide support to families in need.

8.14 Virtual School for Looked After Children

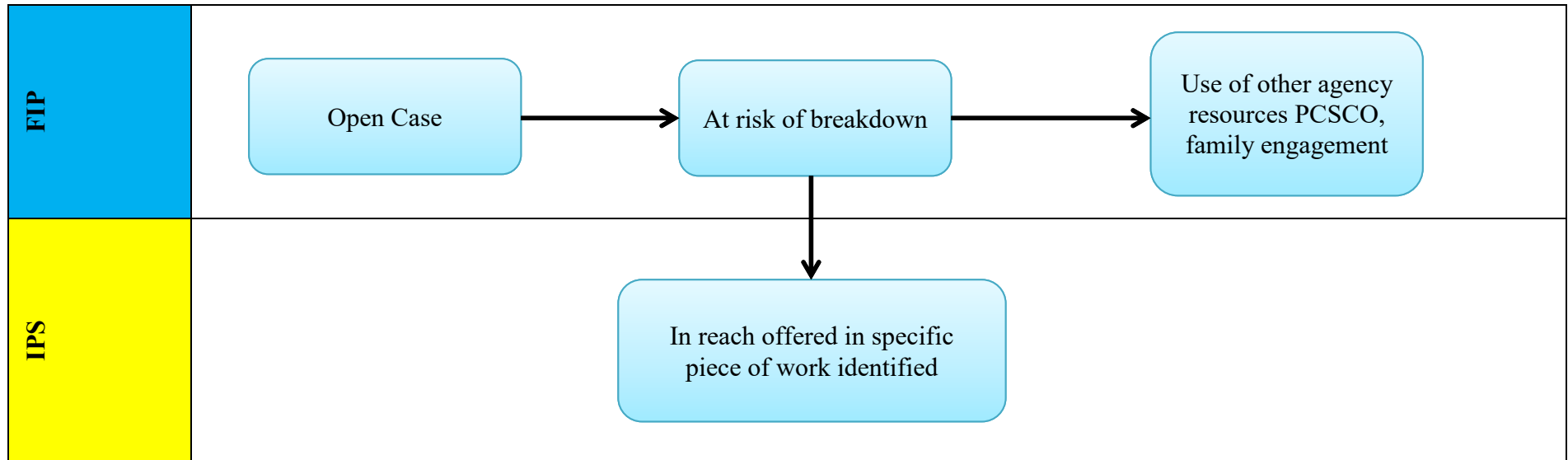
The Virtual School supports children in care in recognition that education can be an important factor in preventing children coming into care. The Virtual School team offers signposting and advice to teams working with children on the edge of care and leaving care to support the stability of their educational placement. Recognising and understanding a child's educational needs is crucial to providing a protective factor and to ensuring stability.

8.15 Throughcare Service

The Throughcare Service is responsible for all aspects of care planning for young people in care in Staffordshire aged 12/13 and above. The service is also responsible for Care Leavers in Staffordshire. The transition from care to independence is a crucial time for young people and the Throughcare 12-25 model is designed to make this transition as smooth as possible. The service also undertakes care proceedings for older young people if they are aged 12/13 when care proceedings are initiated.

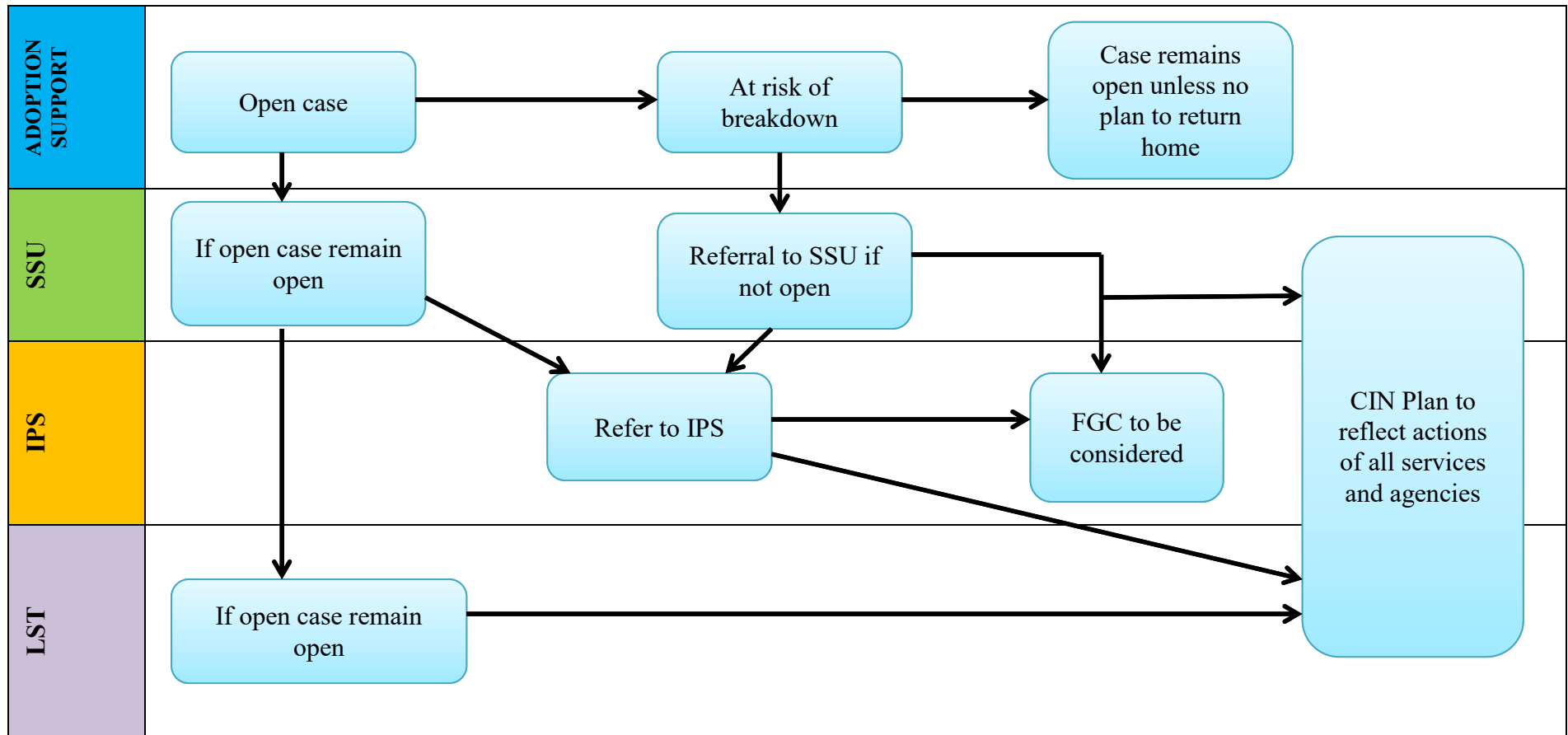
Appendix One – Pathways

Building Resilience in Families & Communities (BRFC)

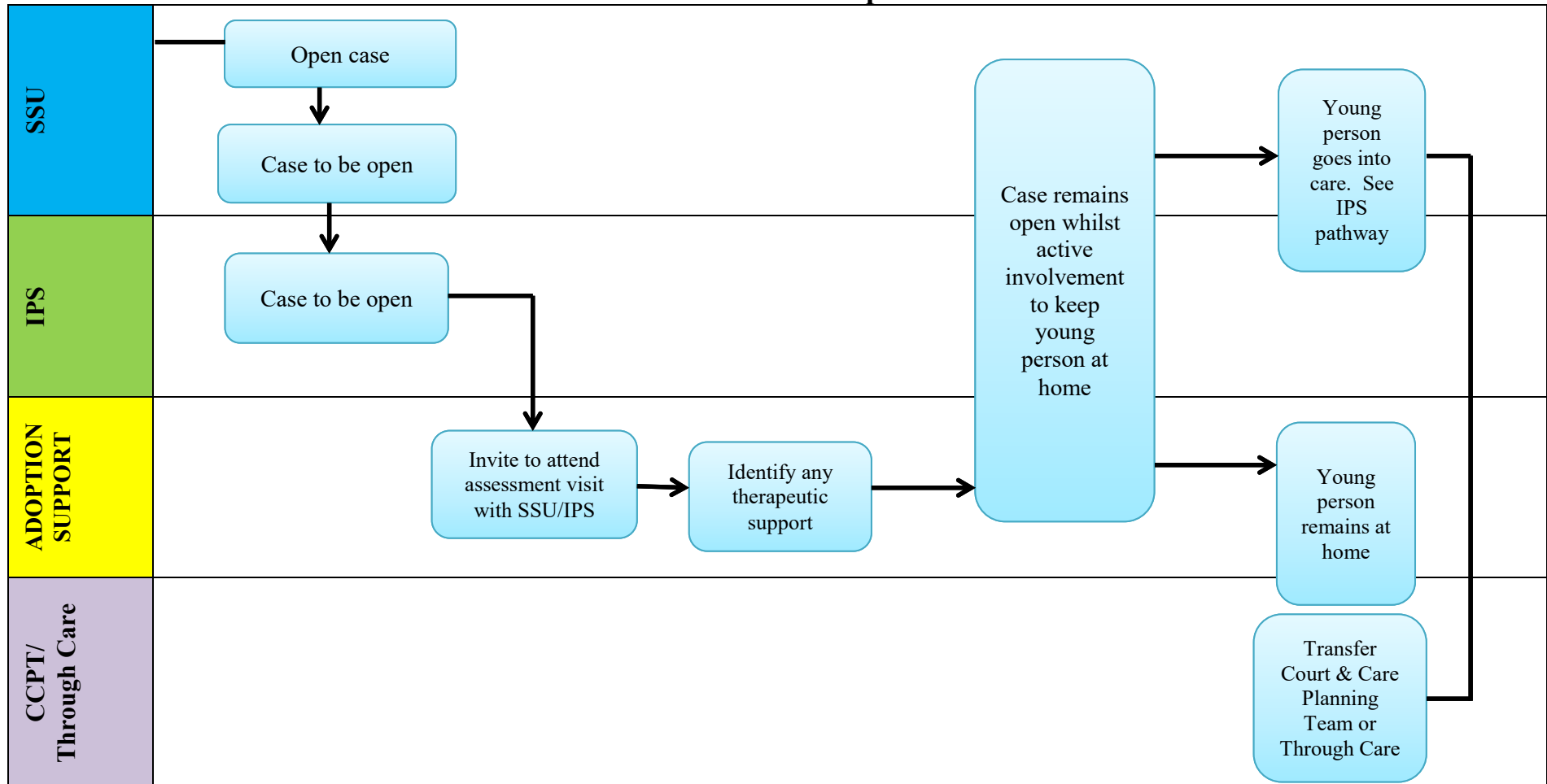


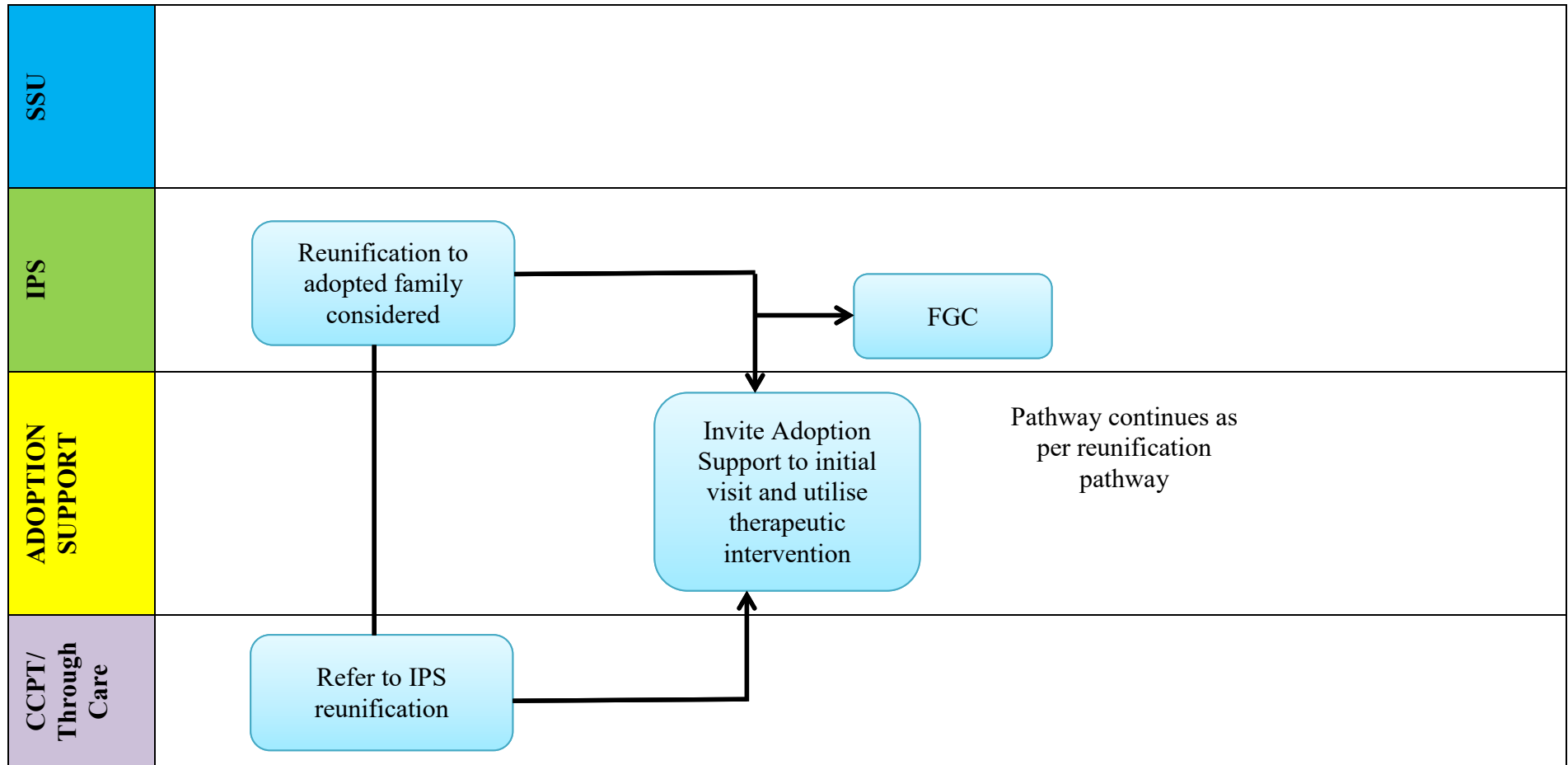
ADOPTION AT RISK OF BREAKDOWN

Known to Adoption Support

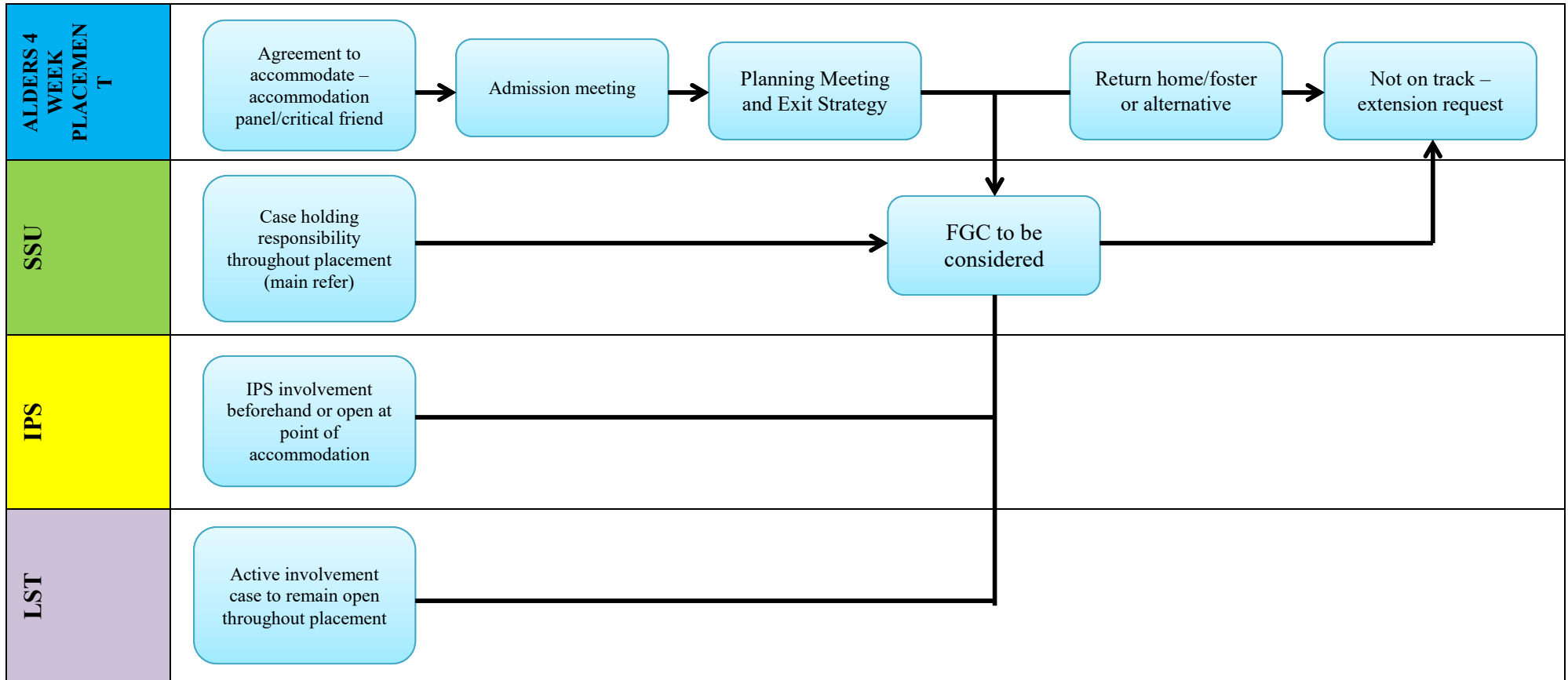


ADOPTION AT RISK OF BREAKDOWN Not Known to Adoption

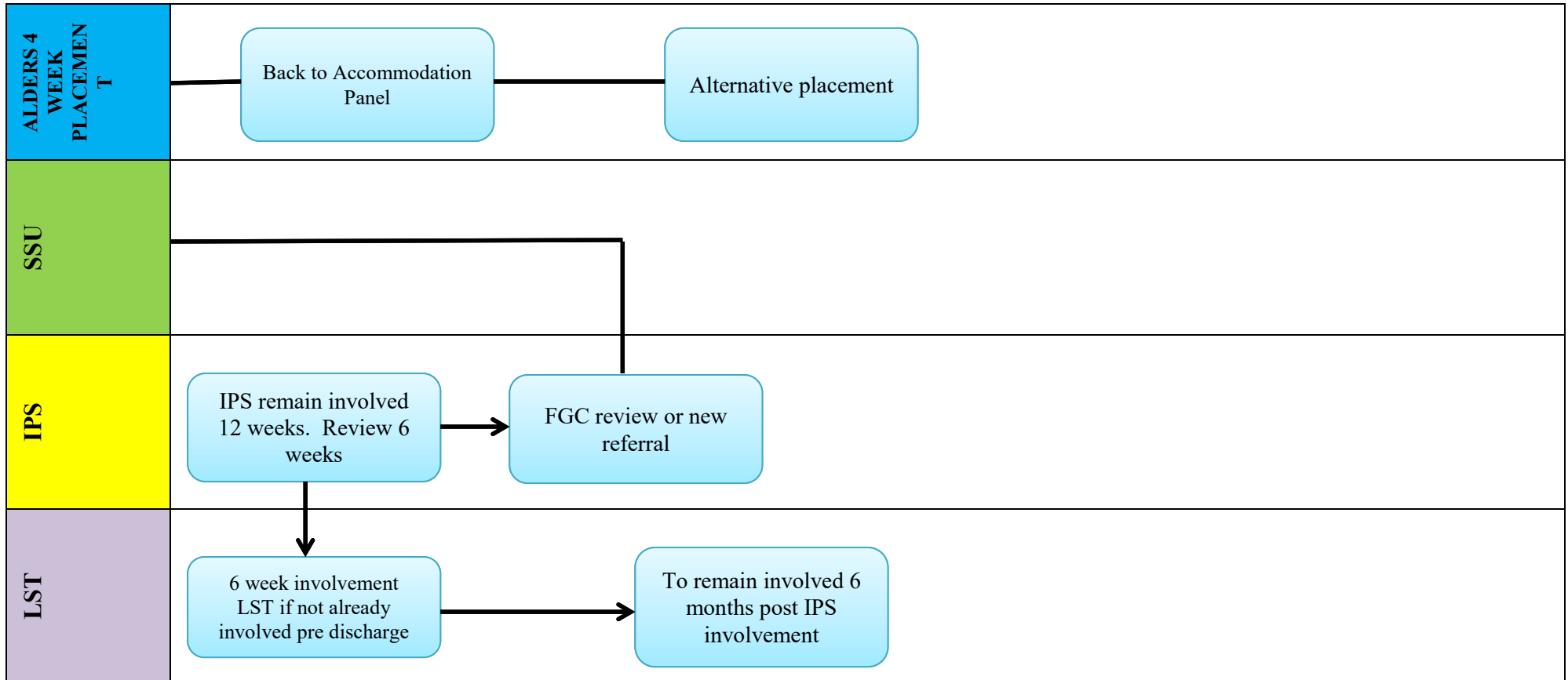




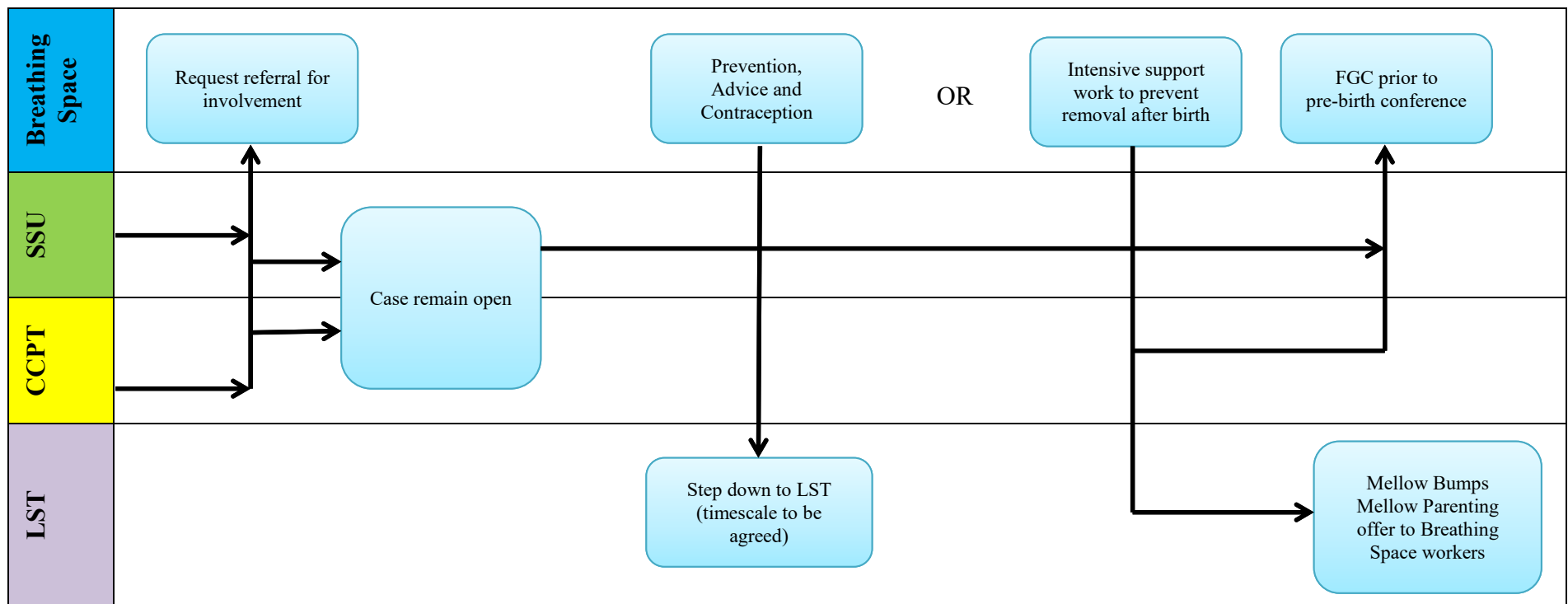
ALDERS 4 WEEK SHORT STAY



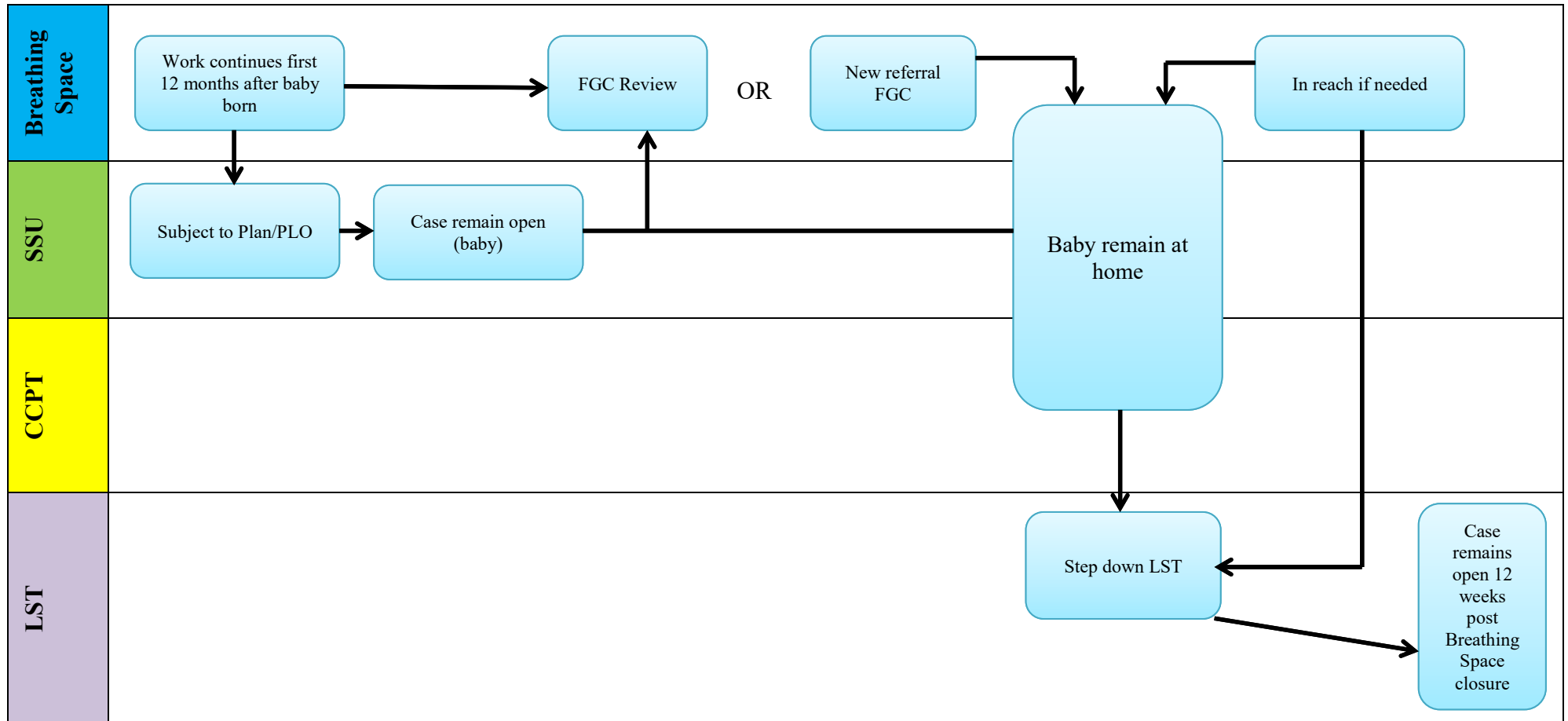
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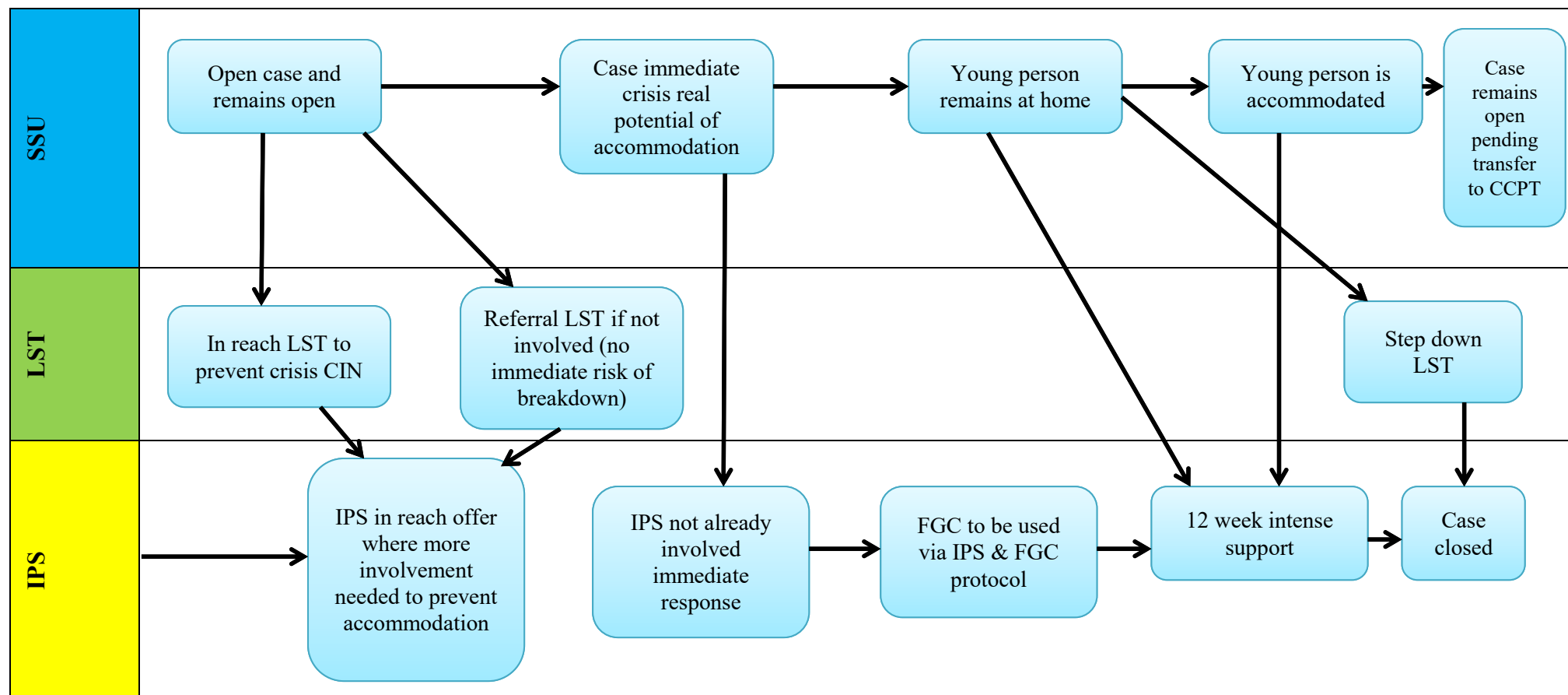
BREATHING SPACE



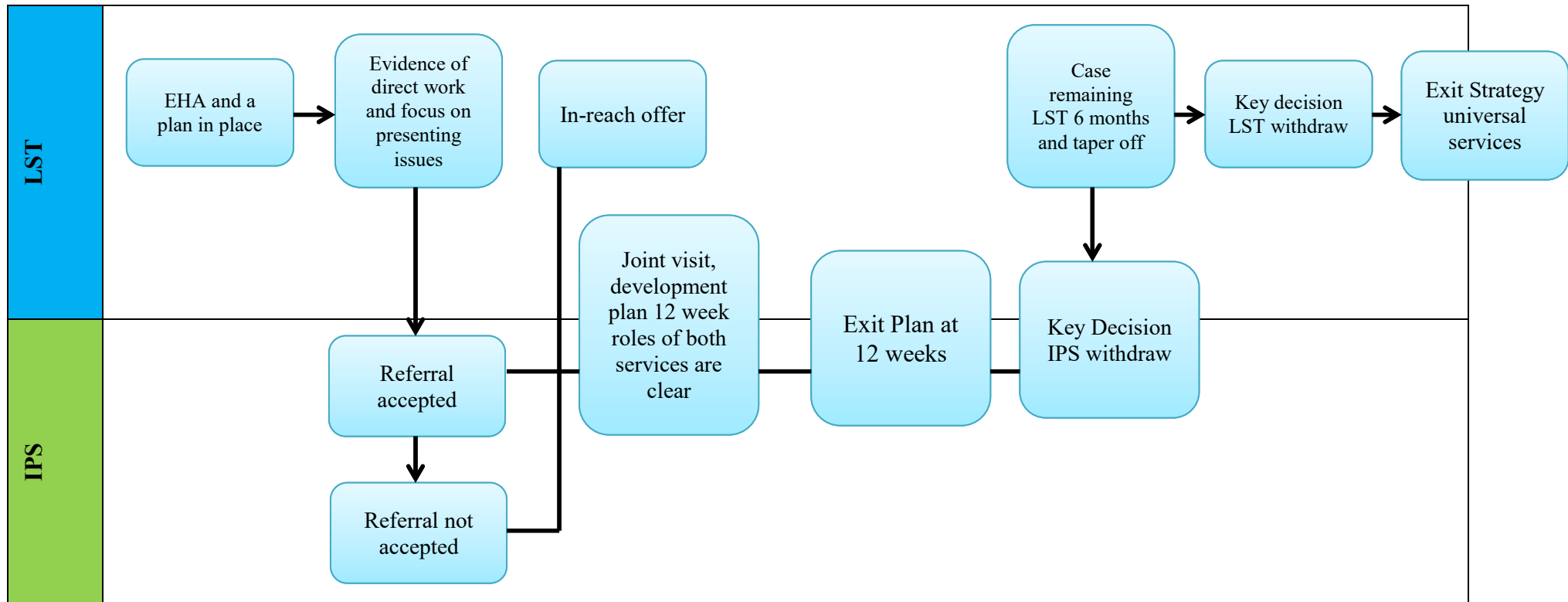
BREATHING SPACE



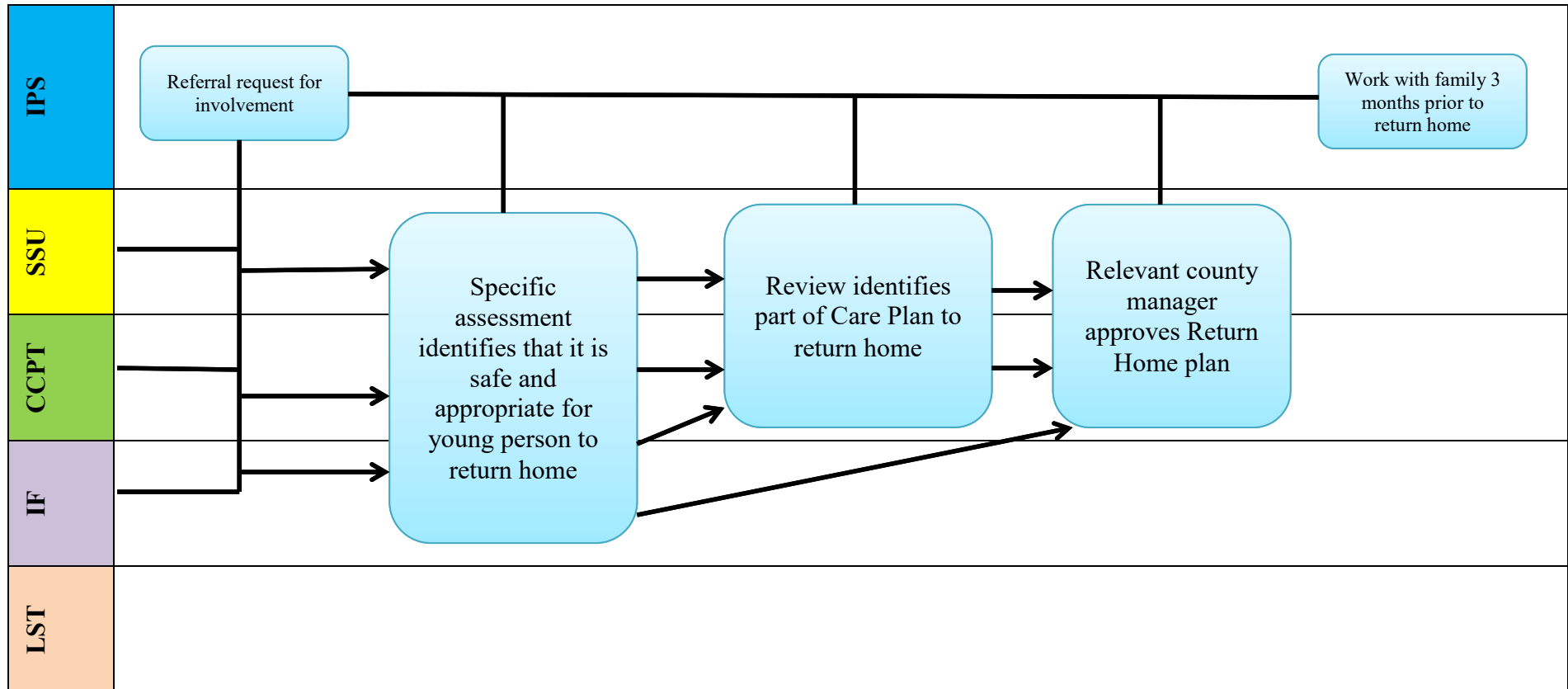
LST/IPS OFFER TO SSU



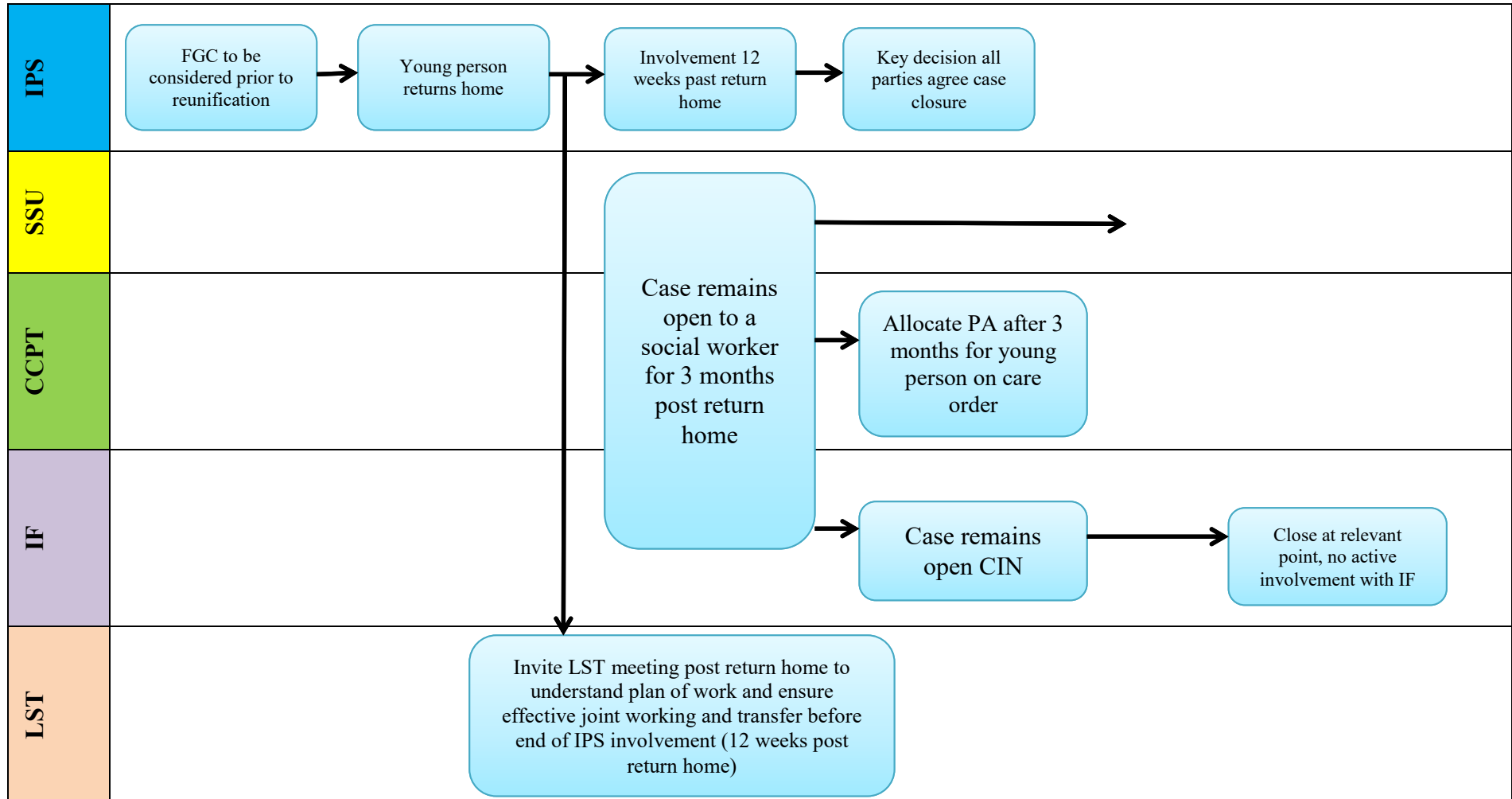
LST OFFER IPS



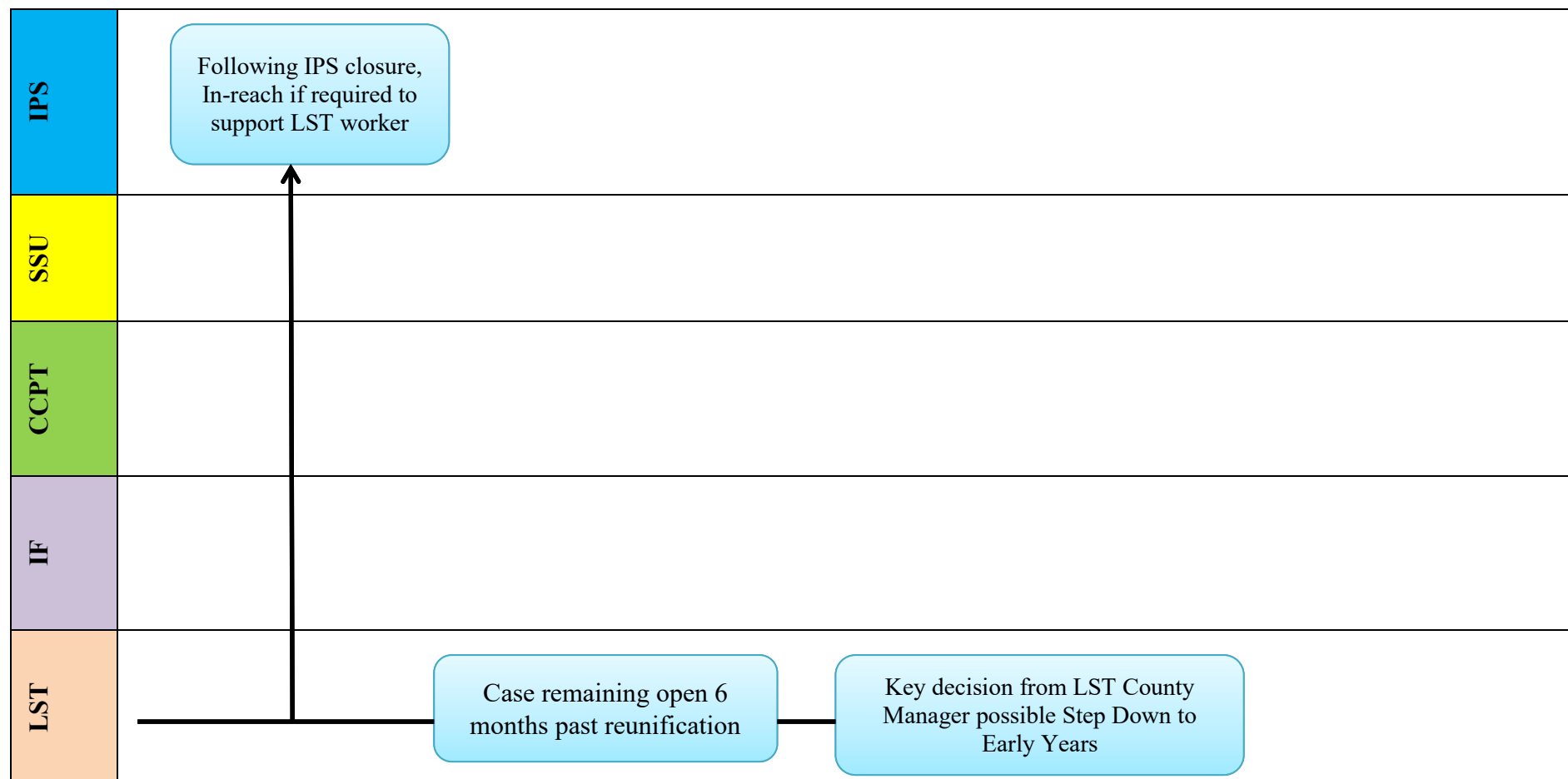
REUNIFICATION



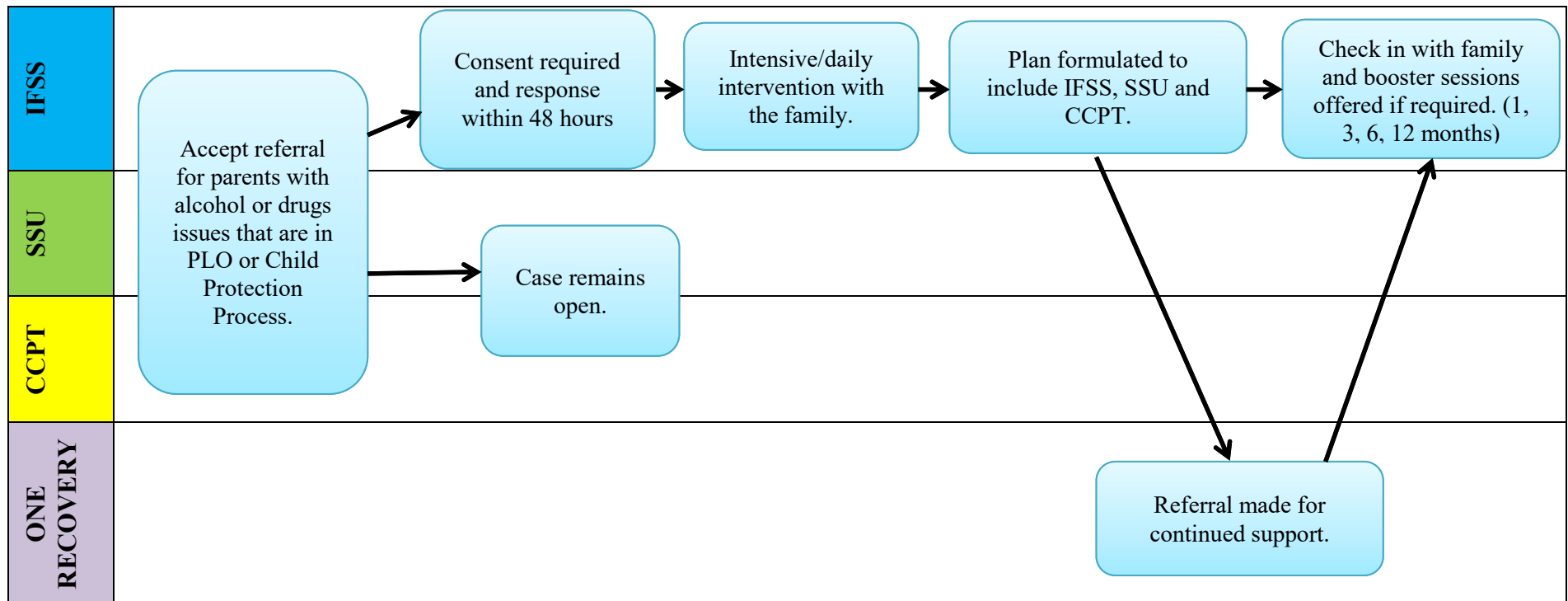
REUNIFICATION



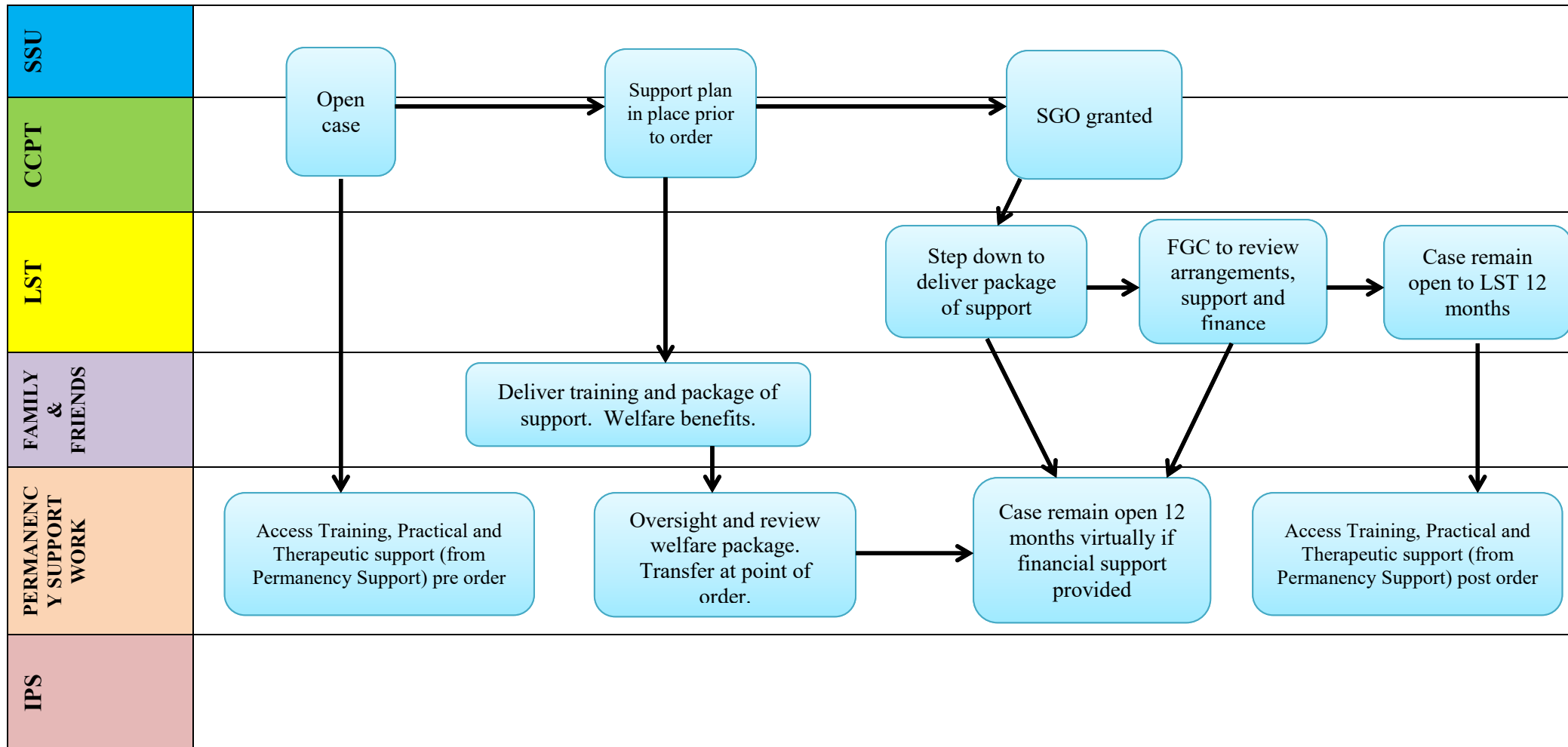
REUNIFICATION

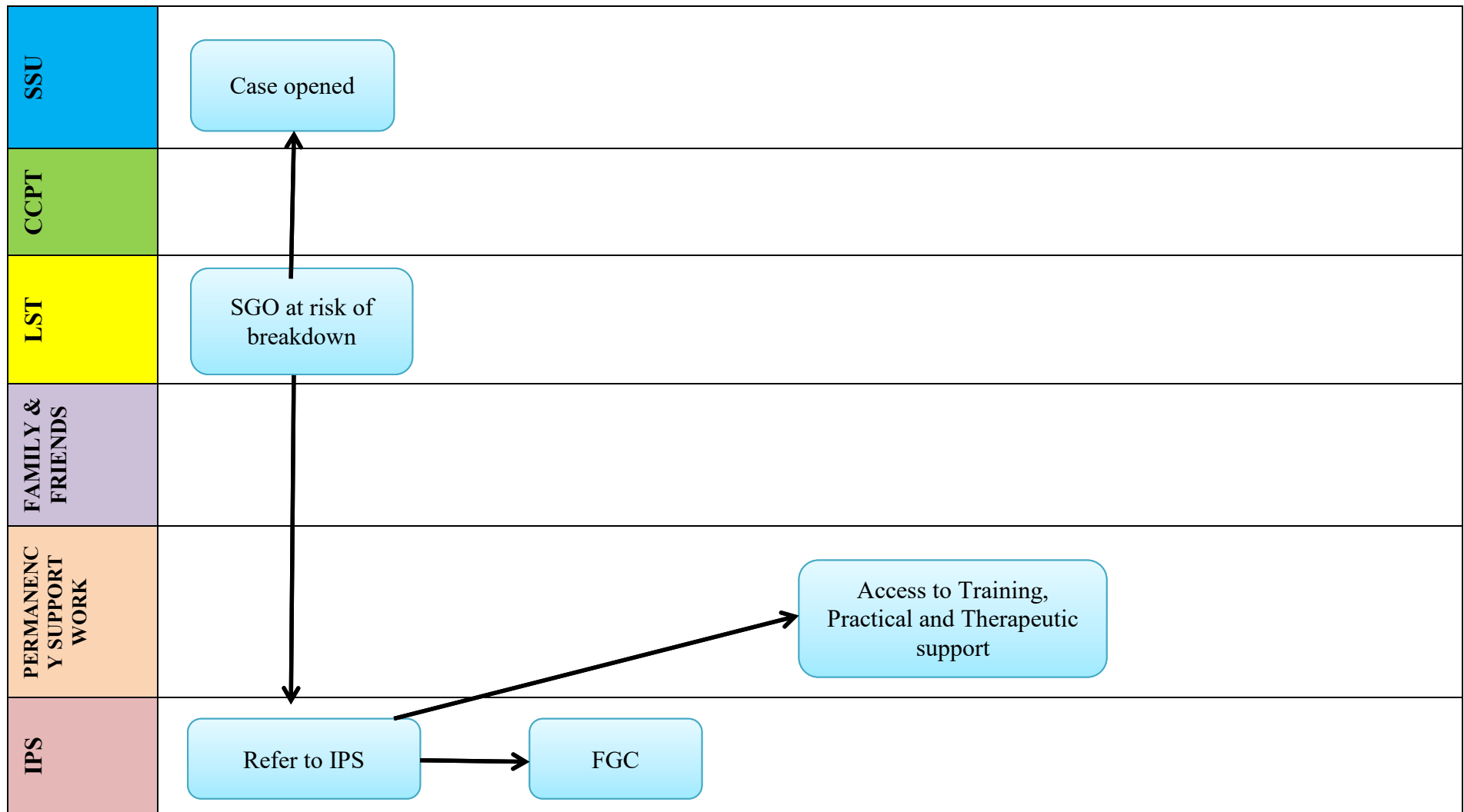


INTENSIVE FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICE (IFSS)

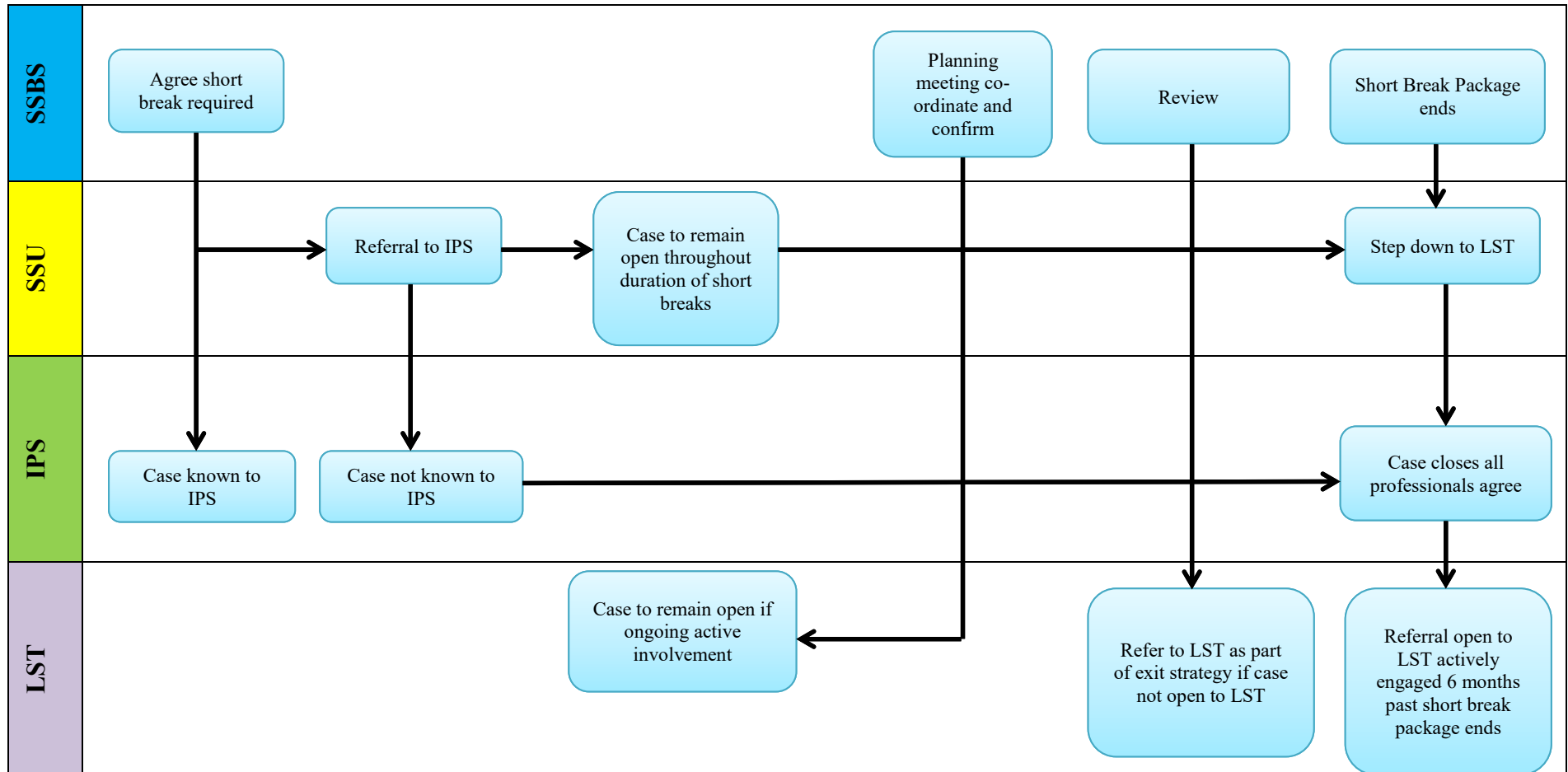


SGO





SHORT BREAKS



THROUGH CARE PATHWAY

