



Practice Guidance for Inspection without Notice Visits

The purpose of this guidance is to provide clarity around the processes for Supervising Social Workers undertaking Inspections without Notice visits to Foster Carer's homes.

Why do Foster Carers have Inspections Without Notice?

Inspection without Notice visits allows the Fostering Service to gain a picture of the child's living circumstances within the foster home. Although the Regulatory requirement is at least once a year, the BCFT expectation is that there will be a minimum of at least 2 Inspection Without Notice visits per year. A visit should take place at least once every 6-months.

The requirement for 2 visits each year allows a view of the changing compositions of fostering households and will allow the service to have opportunities to monitor the experience of children.

Further Inspection Without Notice visits should be considered if there are concerns about Standards of Care or as part of an action plan agreed with carers.

The main purpose of these visits is for the Supervising Social worker to check that the home environment meets the Fostering Standards.

Standards and Regulations

National Minimum Standard 21: Support and Supervision of Foster Carers

National Minimum Standard 21 is about the supervision and support of Foster Carers. In this it is stated that "Each approved Foster Carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the Foster Carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year."

Fostering Services, Guidance and Regulations – Statutory Guidance (2011)

5.67 states "Every Foster Carer should be allocated an appropriately qualified social worker from the fostering service (the Supervising Social Worker) who is responsible for overseeing the support they receive. It is the Supervising Social Worker's role to supervise the foster carer's work, to ensure that they are meeting the child's needs, and to offer support and a framework to assess the foster carer's performance and

develop their skills. They must make regular visits to the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year.”

3.82 states that “The Fostering Service must have a written health and safety policy, which should be covered in the assessment and training of foster carers. Foster Carers should be supported to ensure that their homes are free of avoidable hazards, in keeping with family life. Every foster home must be visited without appointment by a Supervising Social Worker of the fostering service at least once a year, as a check on the standards of care being provided.

National Minimum Standard 10: Providing a suitable physical environment for the Foster Child

10.5 “The foster home is inspected annually, without appointment, by the fostering service to make sure that it continues to meet the needs of foster children.

The Inspection Without Notice Visit

- Inspection Without Notice Visits will mostly be undertaken by the allocated Supervising Social Worker; however, they can be completed by any Social Worker or Fostering Team Manager. Workers will identify themselves with Bradford Children and Families Trust ID badge and it is expected that they will have access to the foster home at any time this is requested.
- If the Supervising Social Worker is off work for any reason, the Fostering Team Manager is responsible for ensuring that the Inspection Without Notice visit is undertaken by an appropriate member of staff within the required time frame.
- At least 1 Inspection Without Notice visit in the 12-month period should be timed for when the Foster child or young person will be at home. This allows the Supervising Social Worker to observe the relationship between the Foster Carers and the child or young person and speak to the child or young person about how they are getting on in the fostering household.
- If the Foster Carers are not at home, the Supervising Social Worker should leave a note for the Foster Carers to say that they have visited. If the Foster Carers are not at home but the child is present and being looked after by someone else, the Supervising Social Worker should check the identity of that person but should not continue with the visit.
- Unsuccessful Inspection without Notice Visits must be recorded in Case Notes on LCS under the appropriate drop down (Inspection without Notice (Unsuccessful))
- If the foster carers are not at home and the foster child or young person is home the SSW will check what the arrangements are for the supervision of the child

or young person and record who is in the household during the visit (e.g. back up carer, another family member).

- During the Inspection Without Notice visit all areas of the home need to be seen, this includes the foster child/young person's bedrooms, plus the carers' own children (if similar in age or under 16), the garden and any outbuildings. The supervising social worker will be checking that standards are consistent throughout the home e.g. bedrooms for foster children and young people are of the same standard as other children's bedrooms within the foster home.
- Although it is not necessary to complete a full health and safety during the Inspection Without Notice visit, consideration should be given to issues of health and safety which may cause concern. For example, are windows and doors locked, are the stairgates and fire guards in place if appropriate.
- Any issues should be addressed during the visit and checked on the next supervision visit between the Foster Carer and Supervising Social Worker.
- If it is not possible for the Supervising Social Worker to see all areas of the home and undertake appropriate checks a further Inspection Without Notice visit should be completed.
- Where children and young people are present, whether foster children or children of the Foster Carers, their permission should be sought to view their rooms. The Supervising Social Worker should explain the reason for the request and be clear that it is not about whether bedrooms are tidy but about home safety and safeguarding.
- Inspections Without Notice visits can feel intrusive at times, however they are an important part of safeguarding in fostering. If safeguarding concerns are identified, social workers may be required to complete additional IWN visits. Any safeguarding concerns should be discussed with the Fostering Team Manager and Child's Social Worker.
- It is not necessary for SSWs to check cupboards and fridges for food or the quality and amount of clothing during IWN unless there are concerns raised in relation to the care of the children or safety/hazards in the home. Additional checks in the fostering household may be required.
- The Foster Carer should be informed of any concerns, and the SSW should clearly explain the reason for any additional checks and visits.

Recording the Inspection Without Notice

- If the Foster Carer is not at home this should be recorded on a case note on LCS under the drop-down Inspection Without Notice (Unsuccessful).
- A successful Inspection Without Notice visit should be recorded on a case note on LCS under the drop-down Inspection Without Notice.
- As part of the Supervising Social Worker's supervision, Fostering Team Managers will track IWN visits, discuss whether there have been any issues arising from them, if these issues have been addressed and decide if additional Inspection Without Notice visits are required. Action points and timescales should be agreed and included in the IWN recording in case notes.
- The following headings should be used in the case note recording on LCS by all Supervising Social Workers.

A. Who was present?

B. Areas in the home seen including children/young person's bedrooms

C. Discussion with Foster Carer/s

D. Discussion with child/ren

E. Health & Safety

F. Actions from IWN and timeframe for completion

APPENDIX A

Below are 3 mock examples of an Inspection Without Notice visit. Please remember that you can put the time of the visit in the same section as the date on LCS.

EXAMPLE 1

Who was present? (Please include all household members, children, adults and guests)

Janet – Foster Carer

John – Main Foster Carer

Emily – Birth Child

Matthew – Foster Child

Andrew – Fostered Young Person

Areas in the home seen including children/young person's bedrooms

Matthew's room – The room was clean, there were some cars on the floor from a tipped over toy box. The bedroom window was locked. The bedding looked clean. He has lots of toys in the bedroom, but most are on shelves or in toy boxes. There is enough space in the room for Matthew to have some of his bigger toys out like his car track and train track. When Matthew opened his wardrobe and drawers I saw a good amount of clothing.

Andrew's room – John knocked on Andrew's door and he said come in. John told Andrew that I had come to complete the IWN and asked if I could see him and his room. Andrew said yes. Andrew was sat in his gaming chair playing on the PlayStation with his headset on. The room was messy but not dirty, there were clothes thrown over the chair and the drawers and empty pop bottles on the windowsill. John asked Andrew to tidy up before dinner and Andrew gave a thumbs up.

Discussion with Foster Carer/s

John was in the kitchen making Shepherd's pie. He said they normally sit down at 6pm for it as the children all grab something small when they get back from school. Matthew said he had a ham sandwich and some raisins. Janet was in the dining room helping Emily with her homework...I peaked in and said a quick hello to them both as I didn't want to disturb them. I asked John if I could look around the rooms and garden...John lead the way.

Discussion with child/ren

I asked Matthew which toys/games he was into lately he said he really likes Hot Wheels, and he has loads now. I asked if he could show me some of his toys in his bedroom. Matthew smiled and jumped up to lead the way to his bedroom. Matthew showed me his collection of cars and stuffed animals. I asked which one was his favourite and he showed me a shiny silver car and a rabbit teddy. I asked Matthew if he liked his bedroom, and he said yes because it's in green (dinosaur wallpaper) and that is my best colour. Matthew sat on his bed and bounced while throwing his teddies at me laughing. I asked Matthew what his favourite thing to wear was. He jumped off the bed and opened the wardrobe; he said he liked his black tracksuit. I asked him which socks he would wear with it, and he opened the drawer and showed me his purple socks. I asked Matthew if he wanted to put his cars in his toy box before we went back downstairs; he laughed and said no.

Andrew- I asked Andrew if he was ok...he said yes. I asked if we were disturbing him...he said yes. I thanked Andrew for letting me see his bedroom and left.

Health & Safety

I saw the kitchen, downstairs toilet, dining room, back garden and garage. Upstairs the bathroom, both fostering bedrooms and the foster carers bedroom was seen. I saw no hazards or anything of any concern during the visit. All the areas of the home are clean, tidy and decorated nicely.

Actions from IWN and timeframe for completion

There were no actions identified during the IWN.

EXAMPLE 2

Who was present?

Anthony - Foster Carer

Jenny – Main Foster Carer

Charlie – Adult Birth Son

Bobby – Foster Child

Billy – Foster Child

Areas in the home seen including children/young person's bedrooms

Bobby and Billy are twins and share a bedroom. The room has been recently decorated, and the boys have new toddler beds. There is a stairgate on the bedroom door. The boys are both asleep. The room looks clean, bedding looks clean, and the room is tidy with toys in boxes.

Discussion with Foster Carer/s

When I arrived, Jenny had just put the boys to sleep so she showed me around downstairs first. When we went into the back garden Anthony was assembling a play frame for the children. I noticed that there were cigarette ends in a plant pot. I asked Jenny and Anthony about this. They said Charlie had started smoking again but they would not allow this in the house. I told Jenny I was concerned about this as the boys were only 2 years old. Jenny said that Charlie is never allowed to smoke in the household. I explained to Jenny that the garden was part of the household as the children used the area to play in. Jenny said that the children are never in the garden with Charlie when he smokes.

I informed Jenny that I would speak to my Team Manager as children under 5 years old should not be in a household with a smoker. I explained that I would need to come back and complete a smoking agreement with her, Anthony and Charlie. In the meantime, I asked Charlie not to smoke near the house or any open windows. Charlie

said he wanted to quit as it was expensive, and he didn't want it to impact his Mum and Dad fostering.

Discussion with child/ren

No discussion took place as the children were asleep. The boys are too young to have a discussion, but they were sleeping contently and on my previous visits the boys have showed a good attachment to Foster Carers seeking them when they need reassurance and comfort.

Health & Safety

Downstairs the kitchen/diner was seen, the living room, the front garden and back garden. Upstairs the fostering bedroom was seen and the bathroom. All the rooms were clean, there were no safety hazards identified. The home is in a good state of repair.

In the hallway a stair gate is needed for the bottom of the stairs. Jenny said they have a stairgate for the stairs but have not got around to fitting it. SSW asked that this was fitted straight away and in the meantime that the children were fully supervised if they were in the hallway.

Actions from IWN and timeframe for completion

SSW to discuss Charlie smoking with the Team Manager. SSW to visit next week and complete a smoking agreement with the family. SSW will make sure the stairgate is fitted at the visit next week. Next IWN to be completed asap when the children are awake so interactions between them and the carers can be seen, and a clearer view of the bedroom can be gained.

EXAMPLE 3

Who was present?

Jackie- Main Foster Carer

Alfie – not present as he is at school.

Areas in the home seen including children/young person's bedrooms

Alfie's bedroom was seen. There was bedding that looked in good condition, he has toys in his room and books. There was a towel and PJs on the floor; Jackie says he just throws them down after his shower in the morning and that she needs to get him a laundry basket.

Discussion with Foster Carer/s

I explained to Jackie that there had been an anonymous concern raised with the CSW saying that she keeps huge amounts of alcohol in the kitchen and there is never anything to eat in the house. Jackie was shocked but she said she thinks the referral is malicious from birth family as their family time was cancelled short notice.

I asked Jackie if I could look in her fridge and all the cupboards because I could then feedback to the children's team, and I could record what food/alcohol was in the home. Jackie said it was fine and told me to go ahead. I asked Jackie if she could open the fridge and cupboards for me.

I saw lots of food in the fridge, there was ham, eggs, yogurt, cheese, salad and raw chicken, mince and pork chops. In the cupboards there was noodles, crisps, biscuits, breadsticks, beans, peas, jelly pots, pasta, rice, potatoes, carrots and onions. I asked Jackie where she kept any alcohol; she said she had none in the house as she did not really drink at home only if she went out with friends. She said she sometimes has some alcohol in at Christmas and special occasions, but she keeps that in the garden where the chest freezer is. Jackie agreed for me to check the garage. On inspection there was 1 bottle of red wine and half a bottle of white wine. Jackie said the white one needed throwing as it had been sat there for months.

Discussion with child/ren

No discussion with Alfie as he was at school.

Health & Safety

The kitchen, living room, garage back garden was seen. Upstairs Alfie's bedroom and the bathroom were seen. There were no hazards identified. The home is clean, tidy and there are photos all over of Alfie, his birth family and Jackie. The home has a very homely feeling. The home is very child centred and in each room there is something that belongs to Alfie, like toys, colouring books, bike and scooter in the garden. There is alcohol in the garage, but this is always locked as this is where the chest freezer, gardening equipment's and any chemicals are also kept. Jackie keeps the key for the garage out of Alfie's reach.

Actions from IWN and timeframe for completion

SSW to feedback from the IWN visit to Fostering Team Manager and Child Social Worker.

SSW to ensure Alfie is home on the next IWN visit; additional IWN visit to be completed next week.

SSW reiterated to Jackie that the garage must be kept always locked.