



Kinship Care and Support Policy 2021 – 23

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Introduction

- Legislation and statutory guidance underpinning this policy
- Values and principles
- Legal framework
- Definition of kinship care
- Planning for possible kinship placements – family network meetings
- Assessment and approval process for connected person(s) carers
- Support available to kinship placements
- Kinship care arrangements not covered by this policy
- Complaints / complaints
- Appendices

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this policy is to set out the London Borough of Brent's approach towards promoting, assessing and supporting the needs of children living with kinship carers.

LEGISLATION AND STATUTORY GUIDANCE UNDERPINNING THIS POLICY

- Children Act 1989
- Children (Leaving Care) 2000
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Children and Adoption Act 2006
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Children and Families Act 2014
- Fostering (England) Regulations and National Minimum Standards (2011 as amended)
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations (2010 as amended)
- The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015
- Special Guardianship Regulations 2005
- Special Guardianship (Amendment) Regulations 2016
- Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities
- Special Guardianship Guidance, 2017
- The Designated Teacher for Looked After and Previously Looked After Children: Statutory Guidance on their Roles and Responsibilities, February 2017

VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

Brent is committed to:

- Enabling children to remain within the care of their kinship network, unless this is not consistent with their welfare.
- Promoting children’s permanent care in their kinship network.
- Ensuring that assessment of support for all types of kinship care is based on the needs of the child.

DEFINITION OF KINSHIP CARE

Kinship Care is where a child or young person is living with a family member, friend or a person of significance to them for a short, long or permanent length of time.

This document refers to Connected Person (‘Family and Friends’ fostering) arrangements, Special Guardianship and Child Arrangement Order (formerly known as Residence Order) arrangements, and informal kinship arrangements. Although Private Fostering is considered to be a kinship arrangement and is briefly touched upon within this document, please refer to the specific guidance and regulations governing Private Fostering arrangements for full details.

Kinship Care can be separated into 3 main categories for the purpose of Local Authority involvement:

- 1) Connected Persons (‘Family and Friends’) Foster Care – for children/young people who are “Looked After Children”. Refer to sections 20, 38 or 31 of the Children Act (CA) 1989.

The Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services defines a connected person as “a relative (defined as section 105 of the 1989 Act as a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle, aunt (whether of the full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or step parent), friend of or other person connected with the looked after child.”

- 2) Private Fostering – Parents who make their own arrangements for the care of their child/ren with someone other than a close relative (as defined by the Children Act 1989, above), and for longer than 28 days, enter into a private fostering arrangement. Whilst this is a private arrangement, the local authority must be notified and they are required by law to assess, monitor and support this arrangement.
- 3) Private kinship arrangement – for children/young people who are residing with a relative (as defined by the Children Act 1989), but who are not “Looked After Children”. This type of arrangement can include: informal kinship arrangements; Testamentary Guardianship; Child Arrangement Orders; and Special Guardianship.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Brent is committed to informing kinship carers of the different options available to them should they currently be, or considering, caring for a child with whom they have a connection.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that members of the public have the necessary information to make informed choices about the most appropriate route for them to follow. Information is shared, with all potential or current kinship carers, about the implications of different legal options, the rights of carers and of the children's parents, and the nature of decisions which kinship carers will be able to make in relation to the child.

Please refer to **Appendix A**, which includes a link to statutory guidance outlining the legal framework that may apply when caring for somebody else's child and the entitlement to support services relating to each option.

PLANNING FOR POSSIBLE KINSHIP PLACEMENTS – FAMILY NETWORK MEETINGS

Brent fully supports the use of Family Network Meetings to ensure that family and friends are explored and involved in the care plans for children.

Within Brent, the allocated child's Social Worker will arrange and co-ordinate Family Network Meetings where there is a clear risk of family breakdown and/or children may already be in care.

Social Workers from the Kinship Care Team are able to attend Family Network Meetings when requested to assist in explaining permanence options, assessment processes, and support available to the child's friend and family network.

There may be occasions when a Family Network Meeting is not appropriate. In these circumstances, Brent will work with the family to establish an alternative way in which they are able to contribute to the local authority's decision making.

ASSESSMENT AND APPROVAL PROCESS FOR CONNECTED PERSON(S) CARERS

Kinship carers are considered to be 'Connected Person(s) carers' when they are caring for a child who is "looked after" by the local authority before they are fully assessed and approved as 'family and friends' foster carers. The below information applies to these cases, whether the placements were made on a planned or unplanned basis, and is applicable when any of the following applies:

- a child who cannot remain within his or her birth family is assessed as needing to be looked after by Brent Council and is placed with relatives or friends;

- a child is already living with a relative or friend and subsequently becomes looked after by Brent Council;
- a child who is already looked after is placed with a relative or friend.

1. Viability assessment

Whether in an emergency, in a planned way, or as part of a long-term plan, a viability assessment should be undertaken prior to a child being placed with a kinship carer. This viability is a joint assessment, carried out by the child's Social Worker and a kinship Social Worker. Brent uses an internally designed tool for undertaking viability assessments of potential kinship carers, based on the recommended viability template used in the "Initial Family and Friends Care Assessment: A good practice guide", published by the Family Rights Group in February 2017. This guide can be found at <https://www.frg.org.uk/involving-families/family-and-friends-carers/assessment-tool>.

The viability assessment is designed to assist Social Workers establish the strengths, risks and support needs of prospective kinship placements and the relationship between the child and the prospective carer. It covers:

- an assessment of the quality of the existing relationship between the child and the connected person;
- the child's wishes and feelings about the placement;
- a visit to the connected person's home by the Social Workers, which should confirm that the physical environment and space available is suitable for the particular child/ren;
- whether the connected person would require any additional resources in order to meet the particular needs of the child/ren;
- the quality of the relationships between the members of the household, including children and young people, and their views about the proposed caring arrangement, impact of the proposed caring arrangement on other children and young people in the household, based on information about their history and current lifestyle;
- the connected person must be interviewed to consider their ability to provide safe and appropriate care, to promote contact to birth family, to work with the Care Plan and to ensure they understand that should the placement continue, they will need to be fully assessed as foster carers;
- the accommodation, including sleeping arrangements, must be inspected;
- information must be obtained about other persons in the household;
- the proposed carer and all members of the household aged 16 and above must give written consent to Police, DBS and other relevant checks; and
- the wishes of those with parental responsibility for the child must also be ascertained.

If an immediate, emergency placement is required, this viability assessment forms the basis for making this decision (see below for **Approval of immediate placements under Regulation 24**).

2. Approval of Immediate Placements under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations (2010 as amended)

In the event that a child needs to move to a connected person in an emergency (before a full Connected Person(s) Care assessment can be completed) under the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations (2010 as amended), approval needs to be sought from the Agency Decision Maker (Head of Service, LAC and Permanency).

The viability assessment provides the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) with the information to make the decision. The addition of the ADM's comments and signature at the end of the completed Viability Assessment forms the decision to place under an emergency and grants interim approval of the placement.

Interim fostering approval can be provided to a connected person for a period of up to 16 weeks, during which time the kinship care team should complete a full short-term Connected Person fostering assessment. The carer should also be formally approved via the fostering panel process, including ratification of this decision via the Agency Decision Maker (Head of Service, LAC and Permanency), within the 16 weeks.

In exceptional circumstances, temporary approval can be extended for up to a further 8 weeks (including the presentation to panel and subsequent ratification by the ADM). These circumstances include:

- Where temporary approval is likely to expire before the assessment can be completed; or
- The outcome of the assessment is that the connected person(s) are not approved and a review is sought.

An extension to temporary approval must be agreed by the Agency Decision Maker (Head of Service, LAC and Permanency). Please see **Appendix B** for a "Request to Extend Kinship Approval" template form. The reason for requesting the extension must be clearly stated. The will then decide whether an extension can be given. This needs to be agreed by the manager, Independent Reviewing Office and Head of Service.

Early considerations in the assessment process include:

- Identifying the child/children's specific needs in order to accurately assess the prospective carer's ability to meet those needs and any information from the child's record, including the chronology would be useful information to consider as a preliminary before undertaking the assessment;
- Historical information in respect of kinship carers where there has been Social Care involvement in the family must be checked by inspecting the old case files to identify any issues or risks, these should be included in the assessment (contact the child's Social Worker for this information as this may have already been checked);

- Clarifying the legal proceedings with the Social Worker or legal representative;
- To have sight copies of any other assessments that have been done, or are any to be commissioned;
- Access to a copy of the viability or Regulation 24 report will be required from the Social Worker.

Such a placement can only be approved for a period of 16 weeks from the date of placement after which time the case needs to be presented to Brent's Fostering Panel. An extension of up to 8 weeks can be made in exceptional circumstances before their full assessment needs to be presented and a recommendation needs to be made as to whether they are suitable to be approved as 'Family and Friends' Foster Carers.

3. Checks required before immediate placement

The Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on Family and Friends (Kinship) Foster Care states that the local authority must ascertain as much information as is possible in the circumstances. Where a child is placed with a connected person who is to be temporarily approved, every effort has to be made to maximise the level and quality of information that will be used to decide whether the connected person should be temporarily approved. In addition to the ratified viability assessment, the child's Social Worker must arrange for the following checks to be carried out on the prospective carers and all household members over the age of 16 years:

- PNC (police checks); and
- Child Protection checks.

4. Checks required during full 16-week Connected Person(s) Carer assessment

- The allocated kinship care Social Worker will arrange for the prospective carers to undertake a medical examination with their GP, with support from a business support officer. Where the applicants live or have lived outside the local authority area, the checks must be made with the local authority and health trust where the applicants live/have lived;
- Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks must be progressed urgently by the assessing Social Worker;
- Where the applicant or any member of the household has been known to any Social Care Department, information should be obtained from the Social Worker and/or files in that department;
- Where applicants have recently moved to the UK (within the last 10 years), checks will also be made through International Social Services and/or the relevant Consulate on all members of the household aged 16 and over; and

- Where the applicant has school age children, the relevant school(s) will be contacted, with the permission of the applicant, for information regarding the applicant's ability to promote the child's education.

On receipt of the statutory checks, the prospective carer's electronic records must be updated to record the outcome.

Where there are concerns about an applicant's circumstances as a result of the information obtained from the above checks, this should be referred to the manager and the applicant may be advised not to proceed with the application.

Where the checks relate to an offence which does not automatically disqualify the applicant, for example because the applicant is seeking approval in relation to a specific child only, the manager must consider whether the application should still proceed. Such convictions will not necessarily preclude an application, but this will depend on the seriousness of the offence and how long ago it was committed. In a case where the conviction would usually disqualify an applicant, the case should be referred to the Fostering Panel and the Agency Decision Maker (Fostering) for a preliminary decision. In any other case where there is doubt, discussion with the kinship care team manager and Social Worker will be required. An early referral may be made to the Fostering Panel and/or Agency Decision Maker (Fostering).

5. References

- Each applicant will be asked to provide the names of two personal referees, who are adults, who have known the applicant for at least five years. One of the referees can be a family member; the second reference must be a non family member. All referees should be people who know the applicants well in a personal capacity. For a kinship foster carer it is useful if one of their personal referees is someone who has known them whilst parenting their own children.
- Where there is a joint application, referees must know both applicants, or additional referees will be required. A proforma questionnaire must be sent to the referees prior to the visit. This information can then be used in the interview to lead the discussion. A separate record of the interview must be completed and the fostering officer must comment on the weight to be given to the referee comments.
- A written reference must be obtained from each applicant's current employer regardless of the applicant's occupation. Where the carer has had a previous job working with children it will be useful to follow up a reference with an ex-employer. Where the prospective applicant has made a previous application to foster or adopt, the relevant agency must be asked to confirm in writing the outcome of the application and provide a written reference.

- Referees and any other family members spoken to during the preparation of the report should be informed in writing about the position in relation to confidentiality. A written reference will not be shown to an applicant unless the applicant requests disclosure and the referee consents to disclosure. The same applies to information and opinions shared in the course of conversation. These will not be disclosed to an applicant without permission. However, referees and others should be made aware that it will often be necessary to discuss with applicants information and opinions expressed although where this happens, the particular source of the information or opinion will not be disclosed.
- Where there are existing children in the household, contact with health visitor, nursery or school may be made. All adult children of the applicant(s) living away from home or adult children who are no longer household members must be contacted and interviewed. The assessing Social Worker will also contact the previous partners / spouses of the applicants, particularly if they have cared for children together (taking care not to disclose confidential personal information about the applicant). Where there were any children of the relationship or where children were cared for jointly, the Social Worker will arrange to interview them face-to-face wherever practicable.

6. Presenting to the Fostering Panel

The assessing Social Worker will present the completed Connected Person(s) Carer report in the form of a full assessment covering the following areas:

- Summarizing the prospective carers circumstances;
- highlighting any issues or concerns that have arisen during these enquiries
- a full chronology;
- an analysis of the implications for the placement; and
- a conclusion with an analysis of the risks and benefits of the proposed care arrangements, including what actions need to be taken to minimise any identified risks.

If a long-term placement is proposed, the report must clearly outline how the carer is able to meet the child's current and developing needs and their understanding of the levels of commitment this could entail.

The assessing Social Worker will submit the following documents to support their assessment report:

- Feedback of any medical reports (applicants only);
- Details of enhanced DBS checks for all household members over 16;
- Details of agency checks;
- Record of interviews with referees;
- Record of interviews with adult children and ex-partners;
- Health and safety report, including any pet questionnaires; and
- Safer caring report.

The Child's Social Worker must complete and present:

- The profile on the child's needs

The child's Social Worker and assessing Social Worker must both attend the Panel meeting when the report is considered.

The Panel's recommendation regarding the suitability of the Connected Person(s) Carers is presented to the ADM for a decision to be made.

The ADM will notify the carers in writing of the decision, and the terms of their approval within 7 working days. Verbal feedback will be given to the applicants by their assessing Social Worker or the Team Manager within 48 hours of a decision being ratified.

7. Action required by the child's Social Worker and assessing Social Worker immediately following the child's placement

Immediately following the child's placement, the child's Social Worker must:

- provide the carers with the following documents relating to the child:
 - Copy of the child and young person's care plan
 - Copy of the Initial Assessment and Core Assessment
 - Child/Young Person's Placement Plan
 - Details of out of hours contacts, e.g. EDT
- record the details of the child's admission to local authority care on Mosaic
- arrange a Placement Agreement Meeting
- visit the placement and see the child weekly for the sixteen week period of immediate placement under Fostering Regulations

The assessing Social Worker will:

- Provide support to the placement;
- Complete the assessment, including referee interviews, birth children interviews, ex-partner references, health and safety and safe caring policies;
- Initiate all statutory checks, medicals and DBS;
- Arrange for the fostering allowance to be paid to the carers; and
- Complete a "Notification of Kinship Placement" step on Mosaic.

8. Court directed assessments of family and friends during care proceedings

It may be that the court requires an assessment of a prospective kinship carer to be undertaken prior to placement, in which case they should be assessed and approved whilst the child is with birth parents or with local authority foster carers. Planned placements of children with relatives or connected person(s) carers should enable sufficient time for the

full assessment of the proposed carers. The 'Assessment and Approvals of Foster Carers Procedure' should be followed.

Where the relatives of children who are the subjects of court proceedings are to be assessed it is the responsibility of the child's Social Worker to make the necessary referral for viability assessment. However, this assessment is carried out jointly by the child Social Worker and a kinship Social Worker.

If the court directs a full assessment of identified family members, a referral for a full assessment should be made to the Kinship Care Team.

In all assessments involving a connected person, consideration should be given to specific practice issues, including working with black and minority ethnic families and grandparents. BAAF Practice Guide "Relative Benefits" offers useful guidance and practice principles.

SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO KINSHIP PLACEMENTS

a) Social work and practical support:

- **for those caring for looked after children**

Each connected person looking after a child/ren that is "looked after" by the Local Authority will have access to the child's Social Worker and also a kinship assessing/supervising Social Worker. They will receive support via telephone and home visits.

Supervising Social Workers have a minimum statutory responsibility to visit Connected Person foster carers every 6 weeks once they are approved foster carers. During a Connected Person fostering assessment, visits will be more frequent due to the assessment process and safeguarding responsibilities. Connected Person foster carers can also expect that some of these statutory visits will be unannounced visits in line with regulations.

Children's Social Workers also have a minimum statutory responsibility to visit the child in placement every 6 weeks.

As approved foster carers for the Local Authority, Connected Person foster carers can expect to receive financial support via a fostering allowance, support groups and training. They will be expected to complete their Training, Support and Development Standards workbook within the first 18 months following approval.

All supervising Social Workers are qualified practitioners and registered with Social Work England.

- **for those caring for children under Special Guardianship Order (SGO) / Child Arrangements Order (CAO)**

Social work support will be dependent upon the needs of the children and the support plan devised before the granting of the court order.

Children will continue to receive social work support from the relevant Care Planning Team for 3 months following the granting of a Special Guardianship Order if they were 'looked after' prior to the order being granted. After 3 months, these families will be transferred to Brent's Regional Adoption Agency, *Adopt London West*, for support.

The transfer process is completed by the child's Social Worker in the Care Planning Team by completing a referral form and sending to Adopt London West.

- **for those caring for children under Private Fostering arrangements**

A private fostering assessment will be carried out by the local authority's front door team once a private fostering referral has been received. Private Fostering arrangements will be monitored by a Social Worker from the Kinship Care Team with 6 weekly visits and an annual review of the placement.

- **for those caring for children under private family arrangements**

Under these arrangements, local authority involvement should be based on the needs of the child.

The Kinship Care Team is able to provide information and advice to all private kinship carers either in person or via telephone, or signpost them to a service that can assist.

b) Training and Support groups

Connected Person carers will be encouraged to attend training to enhance their skills and assist them to meet the needs of the child/ren they are caring for. This is a specific expectation of those carers who are approved as Brent Connected Person Foster Carers. Training is offered to Connected Person foster carers, Special Guardians and Child Arrangement Order holders via the general Brent Fostering Training.

The local authority encourages kinship carers to meet with other kinship carers as an opportunity to network and seek support, and encourages all kinship care applicants to attend the Kinship Training day during the process of assessment.

Support groups for kinship carers are managed by Brent's Regional Adoption Agency, *Adopt London West*.

c) Contact:

Contact between young people and their families is supported by the local authority where it is seen to be in the best interests of the child/ren.

Contact is often a difficult area for kinship carers, and the Local Authority recognises that there may be situations when carers are not able to manage the contact between the child/ren in their care and their birth parents.

- **for Looked After Children**

In these situations, the Brent Contact Service can assist the approved Connected Person foster carer by supervising contact and providing transport in situations where this is necessary. Referrals to the Contact Service for this support should be made by the child's Social Worker. Contact support provided to Connected Person foster carers will be reviewed on a regular basis.

- **for children under SGO/CAO**

Where possible, any contact needs for children in SGO or CAO placements will be identified as part of the assessment and support plan prior to a court order being made.

Financial commitments required of the local authority will require agreement by the Head of Forward Planning, Performance and Partnerships, and may need to be presented at the Children's Placement Panel.

While some families require assistance with contact, other families will be able to manage contact between children and their parents and extended families with minimal intervention from social services and it is felt that children benefit from this type of arrangement where possible. It is an expectation that all carers will work with the local authority where possible towards a situation where they are able to manage contact for the child/ren in a safe and suitable environment. There is usually a period of transition where management and supervision of contact is transferred from the contact service to the special guardian.

d) Therapeutic / Behavioural Support

Children in kinship placements have often experienced abuse and neglect and consequently often have emotional and behavioural needs, which require therapeutic intervention. The local authority is committed to making sure that each child has the

appropriate emotional and psychological support that they need in order to assist them with any emotional or behavioural needs. The specifics of this support will be discussed as part of a social work assessment, LAC Care Plan or in a Special Guardianship Support Plan.

If the assessed support need requires a service which requires funding, agreement needs to be sought prior to the service commencing. This will be in the form of a presentation at Children's Placement Panel.

Support can include the following:-

- Mentoring
- Advocacy
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- Psychological and Psychiatric intervention
- Training for carers.

Connected persons will be provided with a comprehensive list of supports available and a list of contacts. See **Appendix C** for a list of community organisations.

e) Financial Support:

- **Fostering Allowances for carers of Looked After Children**

Kinship carers who are caring for Looked After Children are considered to be (Connected Person) foster carers for the Local Authority and as such will receive a fostering allowance for each looked after child in their care. These allowances are based on the age of the child.

The Local Authority has clear guidelines for foster carers in the use of these fostering allowances and more information can be found in the annual 'Placements Rates and Guidance' document. All Connected Person foster carers will receive a copy of the 'Placements Rates and Guidance' policy once they are approved, or following a placement being made.

- **Allowances for children cared for under CAO/SGO**

Brent approved Connected Person foster carers who go on to apply for Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Orders for the children in their care will continue to receive the fostering allowance until the court orders are granted.

Brent is guided by the Department for Education in applying the *standardised means test model for adoption and special guardianship financial support* to assess the allowance available to Special Guardians. This takes into account any other grant, benefit, allowance or resource available to the guardian in respect of their needs as a result of becoming a Special Guardian of a child and is reviewed annually based on their incoming and outgoing

finances. Financial support cannot duplicate any other payment available to the Special Guardian.

Payment start dates will be taken from the date of referral to the Kinship Care Team or from the date the order was granted, if current.

Child Arrangement Order allowances will **not** be paid to birth parents that are caring for or living in the same household as their own biological children under this legal arrangement. Brent do not usually consider paying any allowance for children placed under this order, however consideration is given to specific requests for one-off items (equivalent to a 'settling-in grant'). In exceptionally rare cases, the council will consider paying an allowance in cases of extreme hardship, but only if it can be shown that the proposed placement is impracticable without such an allowance.

Generally, the local authority will only consider financially assessing and paying a SGO/CAO allowance in situations where children were "looked after" by the local authority prior to the making of the court order. However, there may be some private application cases where the family's circumstances are considered to be exceptional. These cases will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and if deemed exceptional, a financial assessment can be completed as part of the support plan. In these situations, the applicants will be provided with the local authority's rationale for why this is an exceptional case in writing.

All SGO/CAO allowances are reviewed annually.

It is important to be clear that a special guardian's right to apply for financial help does not mean that they are entitled to receive financial support.

All special guardians and Child Arrangement Order carers may also be eligible for Child Benefit and Child/Working Tax Credits. Prospective carers should speak to their assessing Social Worker for more information about benefits to which they may be entitled, and speak to their local DWP office.

A benefit pack can be requested by contacting the enquiry line on 0845 3021444, or online at www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk.

To enquire about Child Tax Credit call 0845 3003900 for information.

In addition to the above, special guardians are entitled to the same benefits as birth parents. They are entitled to claim child tax credit and child benefit, though the amount they receive is dependent upon their income. Special Guardianship Allowance is not counted as income when working out means-tested benefits.

If the carer was previously a foster carer before being granted the SGO and received income support they need to update their details as they are no longer seen as 'employed' as a foster carer.

Special guardians should check if their benefits allowance now reaches the benefits cap. There are exemptions e.g. for families with a disabled child.

Pension claimants who are special guardians are exempt from the 'bedroom tax' and benefit cap as they are not in work and can claim for child benefit and child tax credit.

If the child has been receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) the special guardian may need to start managing this.

A special guardian may be entitled to Guardian's Allowance, which is different to the Special Guardianship Allowance. They might qualify for this if the child is in their care because one or both parents have died. It will not affect their pension credit or any means-tested benefits they are claiming.

Some benefits have now been replaced by Universal Credit. These are:

- Housing Benefit
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Income Support

Special guardians can check which benefit they should claim by visiting the Universal Credit information website or referring to www.direct.gov.uk.

- **Financial support for private fostering arrangements**

Financial support may be offered under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and is considered on a case-by-case basis.

- **Financial support for Private Family arrangements**

Financial support may be offered under Section 17 (Children Act 1989) in exceptional circumstances and this is considered on a case-by-case basis.

Advice on financial support to kinship carers caring for children under private family arrangements/private fostering arrangements can also be sought from a Local DWP office and the Family Rights Group, please refer to **Appendix C** for details of national organisations.

f) Accommodation

Kinship placements must comfortably accommodate all who live there and are expected to be warm, adequately furnished and decorated, and maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene. The home and immediate environment must be free of avoidable

hazards that might expose a child to risk of injury or harm and contain safety barriers and equipment appropriate to the child's age, development and level of ability.

The Viability Assessment must clearly state the appropriate sleeping arrangement for each child. Each child must have his or her own bed and accommodation arrangements must reflect the child's assessed need for privacy and space or for any specific need resulting from a disability.

If a child is required to share a bedroom with other young people/carers, it is imperative that the child's views are sought prior to the placement being made if they are of an age and ability to consult.

It is acknowledged by the local authority that space is an issue for many connected person carers, whether they are foster carers for the LA or they have entered into a private kinship arrangement.

The local authority is unable to support kinship arrangements by providing financial support for loft conversions, extensions or building works. The only possible exception to this may be placements for children who have a complex disability that requires this type of support or modification.

For carers living in social housing, the local authority is able to assist carers with support letters, assistance with meetings with housing officers and possible housing nomination (this is subject to the local authority's social care quota)

For approved Brent Connected Person foster carers living in privately rented accommodation, the local authority may be able to support with rental deposits and time limited rent "top ups" in order to obtain housing which will meet the needs of their own family including the Looked After Child/ren. Carers would be required to manage the rent on their own in these circumstances.

g) Child Care / Nursery Provision

Brent believes that looked after children benefit from being able to grow up in families with good role models in relation to work, and benefit from living in families who are able to provide for them financially, and demonstrate a willingness and desire to work. It is acknowledged that prospective kinship carers do not come to the caring task because they have made a conscious decision or career choice to foster, and therefore this local authority understands that there is a need to support kinship carers if, and when, they are working.

This needs to be balanced with the need for looked after children and children in private kinship placements to have stable and consistent care, with adults that they can develop good, secure attachments.

Brent would generally not support a young child being cared for within formal childcare provision between the hours of 8am-6pm, 5 days a week.

The local authority can support kinship foster carers with applications for social care nursery places in Brent or reasonable financial requests for childcare provision.

For special guardians and Child Arrangement Order carers, funding for nursery provision will be considered within their support plan, or prior to any court orders being granted.

For all nursery funding requests, the Local Authority will use the below scale to make a decision on whether funding will be provided.

Where there is one carer at home full time with the child, there will be no funding agreed for nursery provision.

Carers should be aware that for 2 and 3 year olds, most London Local Authorities provide a certain number of free hours of nursery time and this will be factored in when determining the level of support the Local Authority may provide.

Day/s per week carer is working	1	2	3	4	5
Agreed days of nursery funding	0	1	1 and ½	2	2 and ½

h) After School Clubs

There may also be a need for carers to use before and after school provisions for childcare purposes. Carers will generally be asked to pay for these activities out of the fostering allowance, SGO allowance or CAO allowance paid to them by the local authority.

i) Loss of Earnings / Income

In exceptional circumstances, some children will require the prospective carer to consider time off from work in order to settle the child/ren into a new placement and home. If this is the case, the local authority will consider requests to compensate carers for loss of earnings or income. These requests will be considered when the time off is specifically for settling children into a permanent placement and will be for a time limited period, not exceeding a period of 1 month.

j) Vehicles and Transport

The local authority does not provide vehicles for foster carers, special guardians or Child Arrangement Order carers.

k) Education and Health Support:

- **for Looked After Children**

Children in Connected Person fostering placements are able to access specific support offered to Looked after Children for education and health.

Brent has a Virtual School, which is responsible for supporting all Looked After Children with their academic progression and identifying educational provision.

Brent also offers specific health support for children who are looked after.

Carers should speak to their assessing or supervising Social Workers if they would like support with the health needs of the children in their care.

- **for children cared for under SGO / CAO**

Children in SGO or CAO arrangements should receive education and health support from their schools and local health provisions. If carers are having difficulty in accessing support in these areas, Brent Social Care is available to advocate and support families to be able to access the universal community supports, which should be available to them by contacting Brent's Regional Adoption Agency, *Adopt London West*.

Special guardians and Child Arrangement Order carers should also be aware that children in their care may very well be entitled to additional funding via a Pupil Premium (for educational purposes). If you think that the child that you are caring for requires additional support which could be funded via the Pupil Premium, please speak to the child's school in the first instance.

l) Legal Costs:

Before agreement is given to provide financial support for legal purposes, carers are requested to establish whether they are eligible for legal aid through their solicitors. Social Workers can provide carers with details of appropriate childcare solicitors/firms on request.

- **for Looked After Children:**

Brent will assist carers with legal costs associated with proceedings when they are applying for either Child Arrangement Orders or Special Guardianship Orders for the looked after child in their care and the local authority is in support of this application.

Legal costs can be provided up to an amount of £2500 (exclusive of VAT). For applications being made in relation to children who are currently looked after, agreement for legal funding is given by the Service Manager for LAC and Permanency who manages the Kinship Care Team, in consultation with Brent Legal Service in specific relation to services rendered.

For those (potential) carers who are being assessed within care proceedings where the recommended outcome is that the child/ren will be placed permanently with these carers, Brent is able to fund a one-off legal consultation prior to the conclusion of the proceedings. This funding should not exceed £250.00 (exclusive of VAT) for one consultation. It is recommended that these (potential) carers have their one off consultation once a *draft* support plan is made available to them.

- **for Private kinship arrangements/SGO/CAO:**

For carers who are caring for children in a private kinship arrangement who wish to apply for either Special Guardianship or a Child Arrangements Order, support for financial assistance will need to be arranged and agreed by Brent's Locality Teams, via Section 17 (Children Act 1989) financial support.

m) Support for overseas kinship placements

It is acknowledged that kinship placements outside the UK may have specific and unique needs, which require consideration as part of a fostering support plan or a SGO/CAO support plan for Brent looked after children.

Each of these cases should be considered in light of this policy, but also with consideration to the specific needs of the children in the context of their proposed permanent placement.

Areas of additional support may include:

- Education - carers may require support with school fees, uniforms, books;
- Health - there may be situations where carers have to purchase private health insurance/cover due to the health system in their specific country;
- Contact with birth parents and siblings in the UK- this is often an additional cost associated with placing children outside of the UK. It is important to consider these costs as part of the support plan prior to placement being finalised. Birth parents should also be included in these discussions so that all parties are clear about the support being offered and the expectations of the Local Authority in relation to this contact;
- Legal advice and costs for prospective carers in relation to how the legalities of the placement will translate in their country of origin.

Living costs in the particular country of placement should also be taken into account when planning additional support. It is expected that any allowance provided to the carers will be calculated in the context of that specific country's cost of living index and used to contribute to the additional expenses listed above.

There may also be situations when the prospective carers require support from the local authority prior to the children being placed in order to attend court hearings, establish contact with the children in the UK etc. In these situations, it is not the responsibility of the local authority to assist the prospective carers with their passport, visa and immigration needs in respect of coming to the UK.

The local authority will assist the prospective carers with flights, accommodation and maintenance/travel allowance while they are in the UK for the purposes of the proposed placement. This will be for a time-limited period.

There may also be occasions where it is felt that a Social Worker should accompany the carer and child on their journey home. This will be considered on a case-by-case basis and will be specifically related to the Social Worker's assessment and the specific needs of the child/ren.

Contact with the local social services in the carer's country of origin should be made as soon as possible, and should be an essential element of the kinship assessment undertaken. It is imperative to identify the scope of support on offer by the carer's local services, how these services work, and how the carer is to access them if required. This information should be built into the support plan for the identified placement.

Where local services are willing to work collaboratively with the assessing Social Worker, this should be encouraged due to local knowledge. This also offers the opportunity for carers to build a local support system.

KINSHIP CARE ARRANGEMENTS NOT COVERED BY THIS POLICY

This Procedure does not apply when either:

- a child goes to live with a close relative and this is a **private family arrangement** between the parent with Parental Responsibility and the relative. In these situations, it is not necessary for Brent Council to become involved unless there are concerns for the child's welfare or the family request help; or
- a child goes to live with a less immediate relative or friend and this is a **Private Fostering arrangement** between the parent with Parental responsibility and the carer. If this placement continues for 28 days or more, the situation must be assessed under the Private Fostering Regulations. Please refer to the Private Fostering Procedure and **Appendix A** below for options of caring for someone else's child.

COMPLAINTS/COMPLIMENTS

We always try to provide excellent services. But things sometimes go wrong and, when they do, we want to know so that we can put things right, and learn from our mistakes.

For more information about how to make a complaint, please see www.brent.gov.uk/complaints

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Link to the Department for Education’s Friend and Family Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities.

Appendix B – Request to Extend Kinship Approval” template form

Appendix C – List of national organisations for family and friends carers.

APPENDIX A – Link to statutory guidance

Please see the below link to the Department for Education’s Friend and Family Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities.

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/page1/dfe-00025-2011>

Annex A of this guidance outlines the legal framework that may apply when caring for somebody else’s child and the entitlement to support services relating to each option.

APPENDIX B – Request to Extend Kinship Approval template form

REQUEST TO EXTEND (8 WEEKS ONLY) TEMPORARY APPROVAL OF KINSHIP FOSTER CARER (Regulation 24 Placement)

Date of request	
Name of kinship foster carer(s)	
Name of child and date of birth	
Date when child was placed	
Date when 16 week temporary approval expired/expires	
Date of proposed panel	
Name of assessing social worker	
Name of team manager	
Brief synopsis of reasons why child has been placed with Carer:	

PLEASE EXPLAIN THE REASON FOR YOUR EXTENSION REQUEST:

COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING TABLE IN RELATION TO YOUR APPLICANTS?

	DATE INITIATED	DATE COMPLETED
CRB		
MEDICAL		
LOCAL AUTHORITY CHECKS		
SCHOOL REFERENCES (FOR CHILDREN LIVING AT HOME)		
EMPLOYER REFERENCE		
1 X FAMILY REFERENCE		
2 X NON-FAMILY REFERENCE		
EX-PARTNER REFERENCE/S		
ADULT CHILDREN REFERENCES (OF ALL CHILDREN)		

IS THIS PLACEMENT CONSIDERED AN APPROPRIATE PLACEMENT FOR THE CHILD/REN IN QUESTION? Yes No

HAS THE CHILD/REN'S IRO BEEN INFORMED OF YOUR REQUEST TO EXTEND THE ASSESSMENT PERIOD? Yes No

WHAT IS THEIR VIEW OF THIS PLACEMENT?

Signed:
Assessing social worker

Date:

Signed:
Team manager

Date:

Signed:
Head of Service, LAC and Permanency, Agency Decision Maker

Date:

APPENDIX C – NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARERS

Family Lives <https://www.familylives.org.uk/>

Works to reduce the negative impact of imprisonment on prisoners' families, amongst other issues facing families. Produces publications and resources, and provides advice, information and training as well as networking opportunities.

Tel: 0808 800 2222

E-mail: askus@familylives.org.uk

We Are With You - <https://www.wearewithyou.org.uk/>

Offers a range of online support developed for families and carers affected by substance misuse.

Open Monday to Friday - 9am to 9pm, Saturday and Sunday - 10am to 4pm

Adfam- www.adfam.org.uk

Works with families affected by drugs and alcohol, and supports carers of children whose parents have drug and alcohol problems.

Tel: 020 7553 7640

Email: admin@adfam.org.uk

Advisory Centre for Education (ACE)- www.ace-ed.org.uk

Offers free independent advice and information for parents and carers on a range of state education and schooling issues, including admissions, exclusion, attendance, special educational needs and bullying.

General advice line: 0808 800 5793

Exclusion advice line: 0808 800 0327

Exclusion information line: 020 7704 9822 (24hr answer phone)

BeGrand.net- www.begrand.net

Website offering information and advice to grandparents, plus online and telephone advice.

Helpline: 0845 434 6835

Children's Legal Centre- www.childrenslegalcentre.com

Provides free independent legal advice and factsheets to children, parents, carers and professionals.

Citizens Advice Bureaux- www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free, independent and confidential advice through local bureau and website.

CoramBAAF

CoramBAAF is an independent membership organisation for professionals, foster carers and adopters, and anyone else working with or looking after children in or from care, or adults who have been affected by adoption. It is a successor organisation to the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF).

Tel: 020 7520 0300

E-mail: advice@corambaaf.org.uk

Department for Education- www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families

Lists details of telephone help lines and online services to provide information, advice and support on a range of issues that parents and families may face in bringing up children and young people.

Family Fund Trust- www.familyfund.org.uk

Helps families with severely disabled or seriously ill children to have choices and the opportunity to enjoy ordinary life. Gives grants for things that make life easier and more enjoyable for the disabled child and their family.

Email: info@familyfund.org.uk

Family Rights Group (FRG)- www.frg.org.uk

Provides advice to parents and other family members whose children are involved with or require children's social care services because of welfare needs or concerns. Publishes resources, helps to develop support groups for family and friends carers, and runs a discussion board.

Advice line: 0800 801 0366 (Monday to Friday 9.30am to 3pm)

Email: advice@frg.org.uk

The Fostering Network- www.fostering.net

Supports foster carers and anyone with an interest in fostering to improve the lives of children in care. Publishes resources and runs Fosterline, a confidential advice line for foster carers including concerns about a child's future, allegations and complaints, legislation and financial matters.

Email: info@fostering.net

Fosterline: 0800 040 7675

Email: fosterline@fostering.net

Grandparents Plus

Champions the role of grandparents and the wider family in children's lives, especially when they take on the caring role in difficult family circumstances.

Tel: 020 8981 8001

Email: info@grandparentsplus.org.uk

National Family Mediation (NFM)- www.nfm.org.uk

Provides mediation services to support couples who are separated, and their children and others affected by this.

Tel: 0300 4000 636

Email: enquiries@nfm.org.uk

Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group- www.partnersofprisoners.co.uk

Operates helpline and provides a variety of services to support anyone who has a link with someone in prison, prisoners and other agencies.

Tel: 0161 702 1000 (Monday – Friday 11:45am – 4:45pm, Saturday – Sunday 8am – 5pm)

Email: info@prisonersfamilieshelpline.co.uk

Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT)- www.prisonadvice.org.uk

Provides practical and emotional support to prisoners and to their children and families.

Telephone: 0808 808 2003

Parents Against Drug Abuse (PADA)- www.pada.org.uk

Delivers support and services to the families of substance users, including a national helpline.

Address: The Foundry Marcus Street Birkenhead CH41 1EU

Phone: 0151 649 1580

National Families Helpline: 08457 023867

Parentline Plus- www.familylives.org.uk

Provides help and support in all aspects of family life, including information, an online chat facility and a 24 hour helpline.

24hr Advice line: 0808 800 2222

Email: parentsupport@familylives.org.uk

TalktoFrank- www.talktofrank.com

The government's national drugs helpline, which offers free confidential drugs information and advice 24 hours a day. Information and advice is also available via the website.

24 hour advice line: 0300 123 6600

Email: frank@talktofrank.com

Coram Voice- www.coramvoice.org.uk

Advocacy organisation for children living away from home or in need.

Tel: 020 7833 5792

Young person's advice line: 0808 800 5792

Email: info@coramvoice.org.uk

Young Minds- www.youngminds.org.uk

Works to improve the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people and empowering their parents and carers.

Parents helpline: 0808 802 5544 (Monday – Friday, 9:30am – 4pm)