



Family and Friends Connected Carers Policy April 2017

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1. Policy

The purpose of this policy is to outline the different arrangements that can help children and young people to be cared for by their immediate family and by people they know, if they are not able to continue to be cared for by their parents.

Family, friends or connected persons will be supported to enable them to care for a child to the best of their ability. This policy sets out the assessment, planning and decision making processes which will be carried out to determine the support which will be provided.

This policy is accessible to family, friends and connected persons who are caring, or wish to apply to care, for a child or children who are known to them.

2. Values, Principles and objectives

The main aim of the LA is the safeguarding of children and young people. As such, paramount consideration of children's best interests will be central to all decision making.

It is recognised that children thrive best when living within their extended family and friends if they are not able to live with their birth parents. Keeping children as close as possible to their family and social culture reduces the anxiety in children having to live with strangers in an unfamiliar environment, reduces the likelihood of placement breakdown and often results in better outcomes for children.

Before consideration is given to any form of stranger care, every effort will be made to ensure that all relevant family, friends and connected persons have been ruled out.

All support provided for caring for someone else's child will always be based on the assessed needs of the child.

Children and young people will be included and or encouraged to express their wishes and views, age appropriate, about decisions that will affect them. Due consideration will be given to their views and where they cannot be acted on a clear and honest explanation will be given.

Support and assistance will be given to children and young people to promote their independence, reach their full potential and play an active part in their community.

Permanency for children/young people will remain a crucial aspect of all stages of planning and where it has been decided that a child cannot be safely returned to their birth family, the LA will make permanency plans within an appropriate timescale. Ideally, this will be to remain within the extended family by means of a Special Guardianship Order (SGO), Child Arrangements Order (CAO) or Adoption.

Where this is in the best interests of children and young people, contact will be promoted providing it is safe to do so.

Services to children and young people, family, friends and connected persons' will respect and positively promote needs relating to their race, culture, language, disability, sexuality and religion.

Information on the LA's complaint procedure will be made available to children and young people, family, friends and connected persons, so that any dissatisfaction with support and/or service provided can be addressed.

3. Family Group Conferences

A Family Group Conference should be held:

- If a parent or other person with Parental Responsibility asks the LA to provide accommodation for a child, or
- When a decision is made to start Care Proceedings

If there are serious concerns regarding a child's safety or welfare the Local Authority may take immediate action to remove a child from their parents, or those who have Parental Responsibility. In such situations a Family Group Conference should be held once the child is safeguarded.

Parental Responsibility may lie with a child's parent or parents, or someone who has been given Parental Responsibility through an order made in court, for example, a Child Arrangements Order or Special Guardianship Order. (Definition: Parental Responsibility means all the rights, responsibilities, duties and powers which a parent of a child has which enables them, by law, to make decisions about a child and his property).

A Family Group Conference is organised by a co-coordinator and will bring together all those who are involved with a child to discuss and plan for the child's future. The co-ordinator helps those attending to formulate a plan, within their own resources, to support the child and, where appropriate, their current carers. The plan is recorded and regularly reviewed.

4. Range of outcomes for children and young people who are not able to live with their birth parent(s).

4.1. Informal arrangement with a family member or friend made by a parent (or person with parental responsibility).

Birth parents or those with Parental Responsibility may ask a relative to care for their child, either temporarily, or on a more permanent basis. The legal definition of a relative is:

A grandparent, aunt or uncle, brother or sister (whether full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or step-parent.

Birth parents can also make arrangements for a non-related friend to care for their child for up to 28 days but any longer than this would be considered Private Fostering (see section 4.2).

The financial responsibility for maintaining the child remains with the person who has Parental Responsibility. If there are no safeguarding concerns for the child's safety or welfare the LA will have no involvement in the arrangement. However, help or advice, including financial advice, is available to relatives under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. An assessment will be undertaken to determine the type of support required and will be based on the needs of the child. This will be a child in need (CIN) assessment and the child or young person will not be deemed as a Child Looked After, as the LA was not involved in making the placement.

A child or young person in need must be living within the area of the LA (Croydon). A child in need is defined by the Children Act 1989 as follows:

- *He/she is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him/her of services by a local authority;*

- *His/her health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for him/her of such services; or*
- *He/she is disabled.*

4.2. Private fostering

The LA has a separate policy relating to private fostering. The LA has a duty to assess and monitor the welfare of all privately fostered children.

4.3. Immediate or emergency placement by the Local Authority with a connected person

The Children Act 1989 (amended by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008) requires a local authority to seek first to place a child looked after with a relative, friend or someone connected to him or her. This requirement is strengthened by the Public Law Outline, which requires local authorities to show that they have considered family members and friends as potential carers at each stage of their decision-making process.

A child who is placed by the Local Authority with a family member, friend or connected person, will be a Looked After Child. A Looked After Child is a child or young person up to age of 18 years who:

- Birth parent(s), or anyone having Parental Responsibility, has asked the LA to care for them on their behalf. The child is 'accommodated' under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, or
- Is subject to a Care Order, including an Interim Care Order, under Section 31 of the Children Act 1989

A Looked After Child can only be cared for by an approved foster carer. If you are caring, or have been asked to care for a Looked After Child you will have to be assessed to become a Family and Friends foster carer. An immediate or emergency placement with a connected person can be made under

Regulation 24 of the Case Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.

The LA will ensure that family, friend and connected person carers, regardless of whether they have temporary or full approval, will be fully supported in the care of any child placed with them. This will include assistance in making and supervising contact between a child and other members of their immediate or extended family.

Carers with temporary approval will have access to support groups and relevant training and the LA will facilitate access to professional support, for example the LAC psychologist, if it is felt to be appropriate.

4.4. Immediate placement with a local authority or independent fostering agency carer whilst a connected person is identified or assessed.

In an emergency the LA may place a Looked After Child in a foster placement whilst they make enquiries as to whether there are any relatives, friends or connected persons who could care for the child.

If there is a relative, friend or connected person who is a potential carer the LA will undertake a viability assessment. This requires the family member, friend or connected person to work with the placing social worker to complete a report that considers their suitability to care for the child. If the outcome is positive the child may be placed immediately (see 5.1) or a full assessment will be carried out by the Fostering Service whilst the child remains in an approved foster placement.

5. Placement of a child or young person with a connected person

5.1. Criteria for making a Regulation 24 placement

When an immediate or emergency placement is required it can only be considered under Regulation 24. Although the determining factor in the placement being made is that it is felt to be in the child's best interests, the LA must be satisfied that those who will be caring for the child will be able to prioritise and meet their needs, and will work in partnership. Therefore an assessment is carried out prior to the child being placed.

5.2. Pre-placement assessment (Schedule 4 report)

The proposed carer(s) for the child have to be approved and an assessment is carried out using Schedule 4 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.

This outlines the information and checks, including a local police check, required before a child can be placed. The LA has a duty to safeguard and promote a child's welfare and before a decision can be made it is important to have as much information as possible about the carers and all those living in the household.

The assessment is carried out by the placing social worker. The assessment, which must be substantially completed before a child is placed, will determine if approval is given.

5.3. Approval of a placement with a connected person

The assessment is considered by the manager of the placing team in conjunction with the relevant Service Manager. If they are in agreement, the potential carers will be granted temporary approval as foster carers for 16 weeks only.

Immediately the child is placed a referral is made to the fostering team for a full assessment to be completed within 16 weeks. If the assessment is not completed within 16 weeks, temporary approval can be extended for up to 8 weeks by the Nominated Office who is the Agency Decision Maker for Fostering (Head of Service, Looked After Children).

6. Responsibilities of the placing social worker

6.1. Notification of the placement

The child's social worker must notify all those involved with the child that the placement has been made and an initial Looked After Child review should be arranged to take place within 20 days of the placement starting. However, if the child is 5 or under, it should take place within 10 days.

Prior to, or within 5 working days of, making the placement a Placement Plan should be drawn up. The information to be recorded in the Placement Plan is specified in Schedule 2 of the 2010 Regulations. Carers need to have as much information as is available to support them in caring for the child. The carer should be given advice and support to put a safer caring policy into place.

6.2. Financial support for the placement

Arrangements for financial support of the placement will be made by the fostering team from the start of placement. Payments will be made at the maintenance rate only and will not include the fee paid to general foster carers.

If a carer requires additional finance to enable them to care for a child, for example, to purchase a bed or pushchair a setting up allowance of up to £500.00 is available. This amount is not paid in full straight away and prior to any purchase taking place a discussion must be had with the child's social

worker and or the assessing social worker. Receipt of all purchases must be submitted.

6.3. Visits to the placement

If a child is placed under Regulation 24 (temporarily approved foster carer) a visit must be made at least weekly, until such time as the first Looked After Child review is held. Following this, visits must take place not less than once every 4 weeks until the carer is granted full approval under Regulation 27 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, or the final hearing of the care proceedings has taken place and permanency has been determined.

7. Responsibilities of the fostering service

7.1 Assessment of connected person following temporary approval

The assessment will comprise of a series of interviews with all members of the household. Checks and references will be required, which will include contact with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) friends, family and employers. Confirmation of income and housing status will also be required. The assessment is the same as is carried out for any prospective foster carer regardless of whether or not they are related to the child.

However, there is greater flexibility in the assessment of family and friends and connected persons in respect of certain issues, such as accommodation. Looked After Children are expected to have their own room but if the child is a family member or a relative of a friend it may be appropriate for the child to share a bedroom with the carer's own child.

7.2. Assessment of potential family, friend or connected person where the child is not placed under Regulation 24

If a child is placed with a LA or independent agency foster carer and a potential family, friend or connected person carer is identified, the same assessment as described in 7.1. Is carried out. Unlike Regulation 24 carers who have temporary approval, the full assessment may take longer than 16 weeks.

A preparation group is available to all those who are caring or wish to care for children known to them and this will provide greater understanding of the expectations of the LA and the support and advice carers can access.

All family and friends carers are considered on their ability to meet the individual needs of the child related or known to them. However, following approval, carers will be expected to meet the National Minimum Standards for Foster Care.

At any time during the assessment the LA can make a decision not to proceed. A meeting will be held to explain why this decision has been made and applicants will be advised to seek independent legal advice.

7.3. Role of the Fostering Panel

On completion of the assessment a report will be presented to the Fostering Panel by the assessing social worker. Prior to the panel presentation, the report will be shared with the temporary carers and applicants and a full discussion on the recommendation will take place.

Temporarily approved carers and applicants are encouraged to attend the Fostering Panel and may bring a friend or family member with them as support.

7.4. Role of the Decision Maker

The Panel will make a recommendation for the Regulation 24 carer or applicants to be:

- Approved, or
- Not approved

The Panel may also recommended that the case is deferred for further information

The Panel acts independently of the Fostering Service and can only make a recommendation. This is forwarded to the decision maker. The decision maker must make a decision within 7 working days of receiving a final copy of the minutes and the Fostering Panel's recommendation. The decision will be verbally communicated to applicants within 2 working days and a letter confirming the decision will be sent out within a further 5 working days (Standard 14.9, Fostering Services, and National Minimum Standards).

All applicants, including those who are currently caring for a child, can appeal if they do not agree with the decision made by the decision maker. If the carers have been given temporary approval this will be extended until such time as the appeal process is completed.

Appeals must be made within 28 days of receiving the decision letter, which will give details on how to appeal. Applicants may appeal through the LA own appeals process or use the Independent Review Mechanism. This is an independent body, which will be convened to review all of the information presented to the original panel. Details on how to contact the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) will be included in the letter from the Decision Maker.

7.5 Support after full approval

Following approval a supervising social worker from the fostering team will be allocated to Family and Friend carers. Details will be given on the frequency of supervision visits, and the support and training available. Visits will be made not less than once every 6 weeks, or more frequently if it is felt that the carer requires additional support.

Following approval family and friends carers will continue to be paid at the maintenance allowance rate. The allowance covers the cost of caring for the child or children in their care. Family and friend carers do not receive a fee, which is a reward element paid to general carers in recognition of specific skills, qualifications or experience and being available to care for an unrelated/connected child young person at anytime.

8. Responsibilities of connected person carers

Regardless of the existing relationship between the carer and the child, carers are expected to sign an agreement, which confirms that they will:

- Care for the child as a member of the family
- Agree not to use any physical punishment
- Inform the LA of any serious injuries, accidents or illnesses the child may experience
- Inform the LA if a child is missing
- Maintain confidentiality
- Advise the LA of any change of circumstances affecting the child, the carers or any member of the family
- Allow the LA access to the child at any time
- Allow the LA to remove the child at any time

9. Support services to connected person carers

The LA gives an undertaking that children in placement will have an allocated social worker and that all foster carers will have a named supervising social worker. Training, support and advice will be made available to facilitate carers in meeting the needs of the child placed with them.

Carers and Looked After Children (LAC) also have access to the services such as education support and the LAC nurse and psychologist.

Support and services are also available from statutory and voluntary agencies..

10. Long term options

10.1. Child Arrangements Orders

A Child Arrangements Order determines where a child will live and a report has to be completed and presented to court. This should incorporate the views of all those involved, including the child. The LA or the parent of the child does not have to be in agreement with an application for a Child Arrangements Order for it to be made.

The order lasts until a child reaches 18 and the carer may receive child benefit and child tax credit. The LA can agree to the payment of a Child Arrangements Order allowance but this is discretionary, means tested and subject to annual review.

The parent or those who had Parental Responsibility for the child prior to them being looked after, retains Parental Responsibility but the carer is able to make day to day decisions.

10.2. Special Guardianship Order

A Special Guardianship Order (SGO) can be applied for, with or without the support of the LA or the parent of a child, after the child has been resident for a year. A report is completed by the LA and presented to the court.

Although Parental Responsibility continues to be shared by the carers and the child's parents the carers are able to make a final decision. The order lasts until a child is 18 unless it is varied or discharged prior to that age. A parent must obtain leave of the court to apply for a SGO to be revoked.

As part of the report submitted to court the LA must outline the support plan for the child and the carers, both now and in the future. This may include financial assistance, which can be paid either as a one off payment or as regular payment. Any allowance is means tested and reviewed annually. The carers may be eligible to apply for child benefit and child tax credit.

The LA has discretion to provide services or support to the child or the family and, if the child was a looked after child prior to the making of an SGO, they may be entitled to leaving care services and support.

10.3. Adoption

Approved foster carers, including connected persons carers, can apply to adopt if a child has been resident for a year.

Adoption transfers all of the parent's parental responsibilities to the adoptive parents. The LA, acting as an adoption agency, assesses and approves potential adopters and the court makes the order. If the child is a looked after child the carers must give the LA notice that they intend to apply for adoption.

Until such time as an adoption order is made, the LA will continue to supervise the placement of the child with the carers. Once the order is made the LA withdraws, unless their on-going involvement is part of the support

plan drawn up at the time the report was presented to court. Adoptive parents have an entitlement to be assessed for support and services and may receive either a one off payment or a regular allowance, which is means tested and reviewed annually. Adoptive parents can claim child benefit and child tax credit.