



POLICY

**Children in Need and Children
in Care**

FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARE POLICY

Policy Summary

This policy provides information about local services and policies to help family and friends carers be aware of the choices and services available to them.

Statutory Basis for the Policy

Children Act 1989 Children
and Young People Act 2008 Private
Fostering Regulations 2005
Family and Friends Care Statutory Guidance 2011

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FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARE POLICY

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1. Introduction

The Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, Family and Friend Care published in 2011 makes it a requirement for each Local Authority with responsibility for children's services to publish in collaboration with local partners, a policy setting out its approach towards promoting and supporting the needs of children living with Family and Friends Carers, whether or not they are looked after children.

Stockport Council recognises that whilst most children are brought up by one or both of their parents, a number of children are cared for full time by a relative, friend or other person connected with the child. Family and friends play a unique role in enabling children and young people to remain with people who they know and trust if they cannot, for whatever reason, live with their parents. Many children who live in family and friends care do well in life, but others are vulnerable and are failing to achieve good outcomes.

Many Family and Friends Carers both want and need support to enable them to meet the needs of the children they care for. Each case will bring different challenges but research evidence tells us that family and friends care can bring stability to children and enhance their behavioural development and emotional wellbeing.

Family and Friends Carers have said that they are often uncertain as to what help is available and how to access services. This policy will help Family and Friends Carers and anyone in contact with them to understand the type of arrangements they are undertaking, the duties and responsibilities involved in these care arrangements, the types of services available and where to go for further information.

2. Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of the policy is to provide guidance and information on how Stockport Council, in collaboration with its partners and local services, will support the placement of children with their extended family and friends. These arrangements can be made informally by parents and family and friends or, more formally in the case of Stockport Council children who are looked after. The aim of the policy is to ensure that Family and Friends Carers receive the support they require to meet the needs of the children they are caring for.

3. Scope of the Policy

When there is a crisis in the family, family and friends often rally round to make sure the children are well looked after, and often make arrangements between themselves to look after children until the crisis has passed. Mothers, and most fathers, have parental responsibility which gives them the authority to make such private arrangements. Stockport Council only becomes involved if there are welfare or protection issues with which the

family needs support or intervention; if the arrangement falls within the definition of private fostering; or if the child is or becomes looked after.

This policy comprises two areas of family and friends care support which cover:

- **Informal/private arrangements for children in need** – the placement of children by parents with their family/relatives and friends when these arrangements are for children in need.
- **Public arrangements for children who are looked after** – the placement of children who are looked after with their family/relatives and friends.

4. Values, Principles and Objectives

The Council recognises the vital contribution family members and friends make in providing care for children. The great majority of children living with families and friends do well and prosper without the intervention of the Council. There are occasions and circumstances where assistance may be requested or required to support family and friends who care for children who are unable to live with their parents. This policy clarifies how that support, if any is assessed as needed, will be arranged and provided.

This policy is based on principles which are described below:

- The child's welfare and safety is paramount
 - ☐ Children are best looked after within their families, with their parents playing a full part in their lives, unless compulsory intervention in family life is necessary.
 - ☐ Children and young people will become looked after only where this improves their life chances and no child or young person will become looked after by Stockport MBC or be on care orders unnecessarily.
 - ☐ The aim should always be to assist families in resolving their problems which would enable them to be reunited or be found permanent stable placements with family, friends, or alternative families close to home.
- Parents should be expected and enabled to retain their responsibilities and to remain as closely involved as is consistent with the child's welfare, even if that child cannot live at home either temporarily or permanently.
 - ☐ If children have to live apart from their family, both they, their parents and carers will be given adequate information and support to enable them to make an informed choice about the most appropriate form of care.
 - ☐ Continuity of relationships is important and attachments should be respected, sustained, and developed.
 - ☐ All children need to develop their own identity, including self-confidence and a sense of self-worth.
 - ☐ The over-riding duty of the Local Authority is to safeguard the child.

- ☐ Stockport Council is guided by the principle that support is based on the needs of the child, rather than merely their legal status and aims to ensure that Family and Friends Carers (whether or not they are approved foster carers) access the appropriate support to ensure their children do not become or remain longer than is needed, accommodated under Section 20 of the 1989 Children Act.
- ☐ No child should become looked after purely to receive support.
- ☐ Many children who are in care are able to return to their birth family, where changes have been made to the concerns which caused them to come into care. Where this is not possible, family and friends can often provide permanence by an alternative route such as a Child Arrangement Order or Special Guardianship.
- ☐ Stockport council wants the best outcomes for children so that they can become confident, able adults and develop their full potential. In order to achieve this, it is crucial that children have the opportunity to form attachments with adults who will help them.
- ☐ Children and young people's views will be sought in ways appropriate to their age and understanding.
- ☐ Children's views will always be considered and their participation in the planning process will be fully supported.

5. Evidence Base

Evidenced based research is used to improve services and develop ways of working that will continue to improve services for children and young people, families, friends and carers. We have strong links with local universities and we work in partnership with them to improve social work training, social work placements and continued professional development.

Our Workforce Development Team provides bespoke training to improve standards and practice amongst the social care workforces.

We maintain a direct link to Research in Practice and use information from them that is based on evidence from research and engage in selected training events provided for us by them.

6. Management Accountability

Stockport's management accountability in supporting families who care for relatives or friends who are included in this policy in the following way:-

1. There is a senior manager who has overall responsibility for the family and friends' policy, Service Manager, Family Placement

2. This manager will:

- Ensure that information on the number of family and friends foster carers and the number of families receiving special guardianship or adoption support services is collated, updated and made available to partner agencies in Stockport.
- Ensure that this Family and Friends Policy is publicised within Stockport so that anyone who is considering becoming a family and friends carer can read it and know how to contact the relevant services in Stockport.
- Lead on the on-going work needed to provide a coordinated and appropriate multi agency response to family and friends caring for children.
- Allocate resources so that that staff in Social Care who are responsible for implementing the family and friends policy receive training so that they understand the issues faced by Family and Friends Carers; also that they are competent and have knowledge and skills in fulfilling their obligations, powers and responsibilities in this area of work. The training will be made available to the fostering service, social workers and should include the Independent Reviewing Officers.
- Be responsible for leaflets and information being made available which signpost carers and potential carers to relevant services and support.

7. Legal Framework

All local authorities have a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need living within their area and to promote the upbringing of such children by their families. The way in which they fulfil this duty is by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's assessed needs (Section 17, Children Act 1989). This can include financial, practical or other support. Financial support is only provided in exceptional circumstances to provide urgent assistance to families following an assessment of needs (see section 9).

It is important to note that local authorities do not have a general duty to assess all arrangements where children are living with their wider family or friends network rather than their parents but it does have a duty where it appears that services may be necessary to safeguard or promote the welfare of a child in need.

(A 'child in need' is defined in Section 17(10) of the Children Act 1989, as a child; who is disabled or who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision of services by the local authority).

Children in need may live with members of their family or friends in a variety of different legal arrangements, some formal and some informal. Different court orders are available to formalise these arrangements.

Looked after children are by definition children in need, whether they are accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 (with parental consent) or in care subject to a court order whereby the local authority shares parental responsibility for the child. The local authority has a responsibility wherever possible to make arrangements for a looked after child to live with a member of the family (Section 22 of the Children Act 1989).

In relation to financial support, local authorities may provide carers of 'children in need' with such support on a regular or one-off basis, under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. This is discretionary. However, the status of the placement will determine the nature and amount of the financial support. Additionally the legal status of the child may have a bearing on the levels of financial support which may be available to carers, as there are different legislative provisions which apply to children living with family or friends in looked after/adoption/special guardianship/child arrangement order arrangements. The following sections of this policy set out the support we may provide to family and friends who are caring for children within these different contexts.

8. Types of Family and Friends Care

In arrangements where there is no Stockport Council involvement parental responsibility remains with the birth parents but with day to day parenting tasks and decisions delegated to the carers. In arrangements where there is involvement by Stockport Council it is essential that all parties have a clear understanding of the status of the arrangements. Parents and carers and staff involved in facilitating private/informal arrangements need to be clear about the child's legal status i.e. the child is a child in need not a looked after child, and the role of the parents and carers in making and adhering to these arrangements.

8.1 Private/Informal Arrangements for Family and Friends Care

Where a child cannot be cared for within their immediate family, the family may make their own arrangements to care for the child within their family and friends network. Frequently family and friends carers are the child's grandparents, who may be older, in poorer health and less well off financially than others who are bringing up children. Significant numbers of aunts, uncles and older siblings are also family and friends carers. The impact of caring for a child can have a significant impact on the carers' lifestyles, and there may also be a range of practical problems to address, such as accommodation needs.

The local authority does not have a duty to assess any such informal family and friends care arrangements, unless it appears to the authority that services may be necessary to safeguard or promote the welfare of a child in need. In

such cases, the local authority has a responsibility under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to assess the child's needs and provide services to meet any assessed needs of the child. Following assessment, a child in need plan will be drawn up and a package of support will be identified. This can comprise a variety of different types of services and support, which in some instances of assessed need will include financial support.

The different arrangements in this category are as follows:

- a) Children placed with close relatives by their parents at the parents own initiative, under the 1989 Children Act. The definition of close relatives is a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of full blood, half blood or by marriage) or a step parent.
- b) Children placed with friends or more distant relatives for a period of less than 28 days. These are relatives other than those defined as close relatives under the 1989 Children Act. The local authority does not need to be involved.
- c) Young people aged 16 plus who are living with a close relative by their own choice, (under 18 if disabled)

Children Cared for under the arrangements above are NOT Looked After Children

8.2 Private Fostering Arrangements

There will be circumstances when private/informal arrangements made by parents constitute private fostering arrangements. Stockport Council holds statutory powers and responsibilities as a Local Authority in relation to private fostering arrangements. Privately fostered children and young people are a diverse group and come from a large variety of backgrounds and circumstances. All professionals should take into account the specific needs of each privately fostered child/young person including that of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation, class, disability and marital status. The Council is committed to ensuring services are provided in a manner which does not discriminate at organisational, family or individual levels.

Legal Definition of a Privately Fostered Child

A child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) who is cared for, or proposed to be cared for, and provided with accommodation by someone other than:

- Their parent
- A person who is not their parent but has Parental Responsibility
- A close relative, i.e. aunt/uncle/step-parent/grand-parent/sibling but not a cousin or great aunt/uncle.

And is:

- Cared for and accommodated by that person for 28 days or more, or the period of actual fostering is less than 28 days but the private foster carer intends to foster him/her for more than 28 days.
- The arrangement is seen as private fostering if it meets the criteria above whether for reward (monetary or otherwise) or not,
- A child is not privately fostered if the person caring for him/her had done so for a period of less than 28 days and does not intend to do so for any longer period.

Parents, carers and partner agencies have a duty to notify Stockport Council about private fostering arrangements and Stockport Council has a duty to satisfy itself that the welfare of privately fostered children in its area is being safeguarded and promoted. It will assess the suitability of the placement and visit the child in a private foster home in line with regulations to ensure the child is safe and well. Parents and carers involved in the arrangement will be given information and offered professional advice and support.

8.3 Family and Friends Foster Carers – 'Connected Persons'

This section covers the arrangements for the placement of children with their relatives, friends or connected person when the child is a Looked After Child.

Stockport aims to ensure that Family and Friends Foster carers receive appropriate support to enable them to meet the needs of the children they are caring for.

When a child needs to be looked after, Stockport will ensure that preference is given to the consideration of the child's family, friends or a connected person and will be proactive in considering appropriate adults within the child's community and network. The following circumstances may apply:-

- The local authority has instigated care proceedings and the child requires a placement as he/she is the subject of an interim or full care order.
- In agreement with the birth parent(s) the child becomes a looked after child and lives with family, friend/connected person.
- The child is already in placement with approved foster carers or residential placement and the care plan is to assess family/friends as carers – short or long term for a planned move.
- Where a looked after child/young person (usually older) decides to live with a connected person and stay there.

In order to care for a Looked After Child the adults who are connected with the child must be approved as foster carers under 2011 Fostering Regulations or temporarily approved as foster carers under 2010 Care Planning Placements, Review Regulations. This means that the adult(s) takes on the responsibilities and obligations of being an approved foster carer including being supervised and working in partnership with the local authority to achieve the child's care plan.

Stockport will consider the prospective carers by looking at their ability to look after the child and appropriately ensure their welfare and safety and support them in meeting their developmental needs and reaching their potential

It has to be acknowledged that no individual has the automatic right to become a foster carer in line with Standard 13 of the Fostering Minimum Standards 2011 but all potential applicants in Stockport will be treated fairly, without prejudice, openly and with respect.

When a potential carer is identified information will be gathered with the person and relevant professionals to ascertain if an assessment as a foster carer will be undertaken.

8.3.1 Wishes and Feelings of the child

The wishes and feelings of all children will be taken into account when an assessment of a connected person is being considered or undertaken.

8.3.2 Temporary approval of a connected person as a foster carer

There will be circumstances when a placement is required for a Looked After Child and the most appropriate placement is with a connected person but as the need is urgent it is not possible to fulfil all the requirements of the approval process under the 2011 Fostering Regulations. Regulations 24 and 25 of the 2010 Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations allow for the temporary approval of a connected person as a foster carer to allow an immediate placement. The local authority must be satisfied that this is the most suitable means to safeguard and promote the child's welfare and that the placement cannot wait until the full assessment approval of the adult is completed. The connected person must have a pre-existing relationship with the child.

The 2010 Regulations set out the criteria and key information to be ascertained in order for a decision regarding temporary approval to be agreed. This includes discussions and obtaining information about previous criminal convictions, visits to the home, information about household members, quality of relationships and their view about the proposed placement. In Stockport, the social worker and a member of the Fostering Team will undertake a visit to the home.

The Director of Operations Stockport Family is the nominated officer in Stockport who has the authority to grant the temporary approval of a foster carer. He/she will make the decision on the receipt of the specific written report, prior to placement.

The person is temporarily approved for a period of 16 weeks (or exceptionally 24 weeks) and is in all respects a local authority foster carer. The Regulation 25 of the 2010 Regulations set out the exceptional circumstances when the 16 weeks can be extended to 24 weeks by agreement of the nominated officer.

The period of 16 weeks approval is to allow for a foster carer approval to be undertaken.

Where the full assessment is not completed within 16 weeks (or exceptionally 24 weeks from the date of temporary approval) then the child must be moved from the placement.

8.3.3 The Planned Assessment Process

Wherever possible, the practice in Stockport is that placements should be planned in order to ensure that a thorough assessment of the applicant is completed under the 2011 Fostering Service Regulations.

The proposed carer(s) must satisfy the requirements of the DBS checks and statutory references before approval can be recommended. All members of the household over 18 years must satisfy the requirement of DBS.

It may be necessary at times and especially if there are a number of potential relatives, for a brief viability assessment to be completed in order to inform the appropriateness of a full fostering assessment.

As set out in the Standards, prospective Family and Friends Carers will be considered in terms of their capacity and ability to look after a specific child(ren) in a safe and responsible way that meets their developmental needs.

Stockport use a competency based assessment tool which follows National Minimum Standard 30. The format enables the assessor to focus on the specific needs of the child(ren) whilst assessing the carers' skills, qualities against the required Standards.

The assessment process should be set out clearly for applicants. Potential Family and Friends Carers will be provided with information about the assessment process, so that they know what is expected of them, how they will be assessed, including the criteria used and how particular issues for Family and Friends Carers will be addressed and the details of any individual support which will be offered during the assessment process.

The assessment should include:-

- Details of the assessment format, how this will be completed and by whom.
- Details of any tasks for the applicant.
- Details of the timescales are to be agreed and how any changes are to be negotiated.
- Other relevant information, including health and safety checks, safer caring policies etc.

When completing the assessment and making the recommendation the assessors will take into account the likely length of the placement, the age of the child and (especially if the carers are older), the capacity of the wider family to meet the child's long-term care. The assessment will focus on the experience and strengths the applicants bring and the support they will need to provide safe care for the looked after child. Details of the support needs and how these will be met and reviewed will be included in the report.

The assessment will need to balance the strengths of the carers arising from their position within the family network against any aspect which make them less suitable. The needs of the child will be kept central to the assessment process and the recommendation.

- **Specific Considerations for a Family and Friends Foster Carer Assessment**

A) Family Relationships and Safeguarding

- i. Family and friends will have previous knowledge of the child(ren), and will often have established a positive trusting relationship; however they may need to adjust the relationship since parenting requires a more authoritative role.
- ii. The relationship between Family and Friends Carers and birth parents can be more complex – see below for contact.
- iii. Assessment and balancing of needs as in some families the tensions within the family can sometimes outweigh the benefits of a placement within family networks. The age of the child should be taken into consideration.

B) Timing of Assessment, motivation and impact on family

A Family and Friends carer often makes the decision to care for the child in an emergency or in response to the need of the child and will need help/support and time to think through the implications for all concerned and to take on board what it means to be a foster carer. Other members of the household will need the same opportunity.

C) Carer's own feelings

Particular sensitivity may be needed for the potential carers who have experienced trauma within the family which has resulted in the child(ren) needing to be in care.

D) Accommodation

In approving the carer, the fostering service will need to be satisfied that there is adequate space of a suitable standard for the child – as stated in standard 16 of the National Minimum Standards. If this is not met, the service will need to be satisfied as to how it will be met in the future. The views of the child will be an important part in informing the decision and there may well be more flexibility for a child who is willing to share with a well-known relative. A bedroom sharing risk assessment must be undertaken.

In seeking to support family and friends foster carers the fostering service will work closely with the Housing Department in order to mitigate any limitations to the carer's capacity to care for a foster child.

E) Location

A balanced decision will need to be taken as to whether it is appropriate to place a child with relatives who live at a distance from the child's community. Familiar surrounding may be less important than the ability to reinforce family ties. [The requirement that a decision to place a Looked After Child outside the local authority area must be approved by the nominated officer does not apply].

Arrangements for supervision of the placement must be made.

All relevant factors must be ascertained and taken into account, including the wishes and feelings of the child and parents.

F) Health

All applicants will be required to undergo a medical examination and the advice of the medical adviser will be taken. Where there is a particular concern, the assessor will seek the views and responses of the wider family to ascertain if they will offer support or be prepared to take over the caring role should the carer become unable to care for the child.

G) Parenting Capacity

This is core to the assessment of a potential family and friends carer's capacity to meet the individual child's assessed needs and work to the care plan.

The assessor should assess the carer's past experiences of parenting and if they have experienced particular parenting issues, their ability to reflect and learn from the experiences.

H) Criminal Convictions

The Fostering Service may consider the approval of a foster carer for a particular child even though they would otherwise have been debarred by the

2011 Fostering Regulations, if they or a member of their household are related to the child, providing the service is satisfied that the placement is commensurate with the child's welfare.

The decision should only be made when the Agency Decision maker is satisfied that approving the applicant is the most appropriate way to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. The reasons need to be explained and recorded.

I) Contact

The local authority has a responsibility to promote contact for Looked After Children with their parents, relatives and other significant individuals, unless to do so is not practicable, reasonable or in their best interests. During the assessment, the views of the child and the potential Family and Friends Carers will be taken into account and this will inform the plan for contact with significant family members. The overriding criteria will always be that the welfare of the child.

8.3.4 Approval

The assessment will be presented to the Stockport Fostering Panel. As with other fostering assessments, the applicants will read and comment on the assessment and will be invited to attend the Fostering Panel. Usually, the terms of their approval will be for a specific child(ren). The agency decision in making the decision about the approval will take into account the needs, wishes and feelings of the child and the capacity of the carer to meet them.

All Family and Friends foster carers, including those who have temporary approval, must sign the Foster Carer Agreement.

All Family and Friends foster carers are required to meet the many demanding requirements as laid down by the Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards. It is important that when first considering the placement, potential carers are made aware of this and are fully in agreement with meeting these requirements on an on-going basis.

8.4 Child Arrangement orders

In child arrangement order cases in which the LA has not been involved in any way, there is no obligation to carry out any assessment/to provide support unless the child is considered to be a child in need under section 17 CA 1989. So if for example the LA has not been involved in any way in the proceedings/events that led to the child living with the carer, then the only thing that the LA has to consider is whether or not the child is a child in need under section 17.

If the child is a child in need, then under section 17, support, including financial support may be provided. If financial support is provided to a carer on this sort of scenario, any support, if offered, is offered under section 17.

If financial support is to be paid to a carer under a child arrangements order – and whether or not that order is made within public law proceedings, private law proceedings commenced by one party in which the LA has had some involvement, or in private law proceedings in which the LA has had no previous involvement whatsoever – the calculation/assessment for financial support should be carried out on the same basis as cases where the LA has been involved.

8.5 Special Guardianship Order

Special guardianship offers a further option for children needing permanent care outside their birth family. It can offer greater security than a residence order without absolute severance from the birth family.

Relatives who are approved as foster carers may apply for a special guardianship order after caring for the child for one year. As special guardians, they will have parental responsibility for the child which, although is still shared with the parents, can be exercised with greater autonomy, on day-to-day matters than where there is a residence order. Any carer wanting further information regarding which order would be the most suitable should seek legal advice.

Again, special guardianship orders can be made within private family proceedings and the local authority may not be a party to any such arrangements. However, a special guardianship order can be made in relation to a relative or foster carer (who was a 'connected person') with whom a child is placed as living as an outcome within public care proceedings as part of a permanence plan for a child in need or a 'looked after' child.

Where the child was 'looked after' immediately prior to the making of the special guardianship order, the local authority has a responsibility to assess the support needs of the child, parents and special guardians, including the need for financial support.

When assessing a prospective special guardian's parenting capacity, the following will be taken into consideration:

Their understanding of, and ability to meet the child's current and likely future needs, particularly, any needs the child may have arising from harm that the child has suffered; their understanding of, and ability to protect the child from any current or future risk of harm posed by the child's parents, relatives or any other person the local authority consider relevant, particularly in relation to contact between any such person and the child; their ability and suitability to bring up the child until the child reaches the age of eighteen.

The following people **must** receive an assessment at their request, in cases involving looked after children or children who were looked after immediately prior to the making of a special guardianship order:

- the child
- the special guardian or prospective special guardian
- a parent

Regulation 11 also provides that the following people **may** be offered an assessment of their need for special guardianship support services:

- the child (where not looked after)
- the special guardian or prospective special guardian (where the child is not looked after)
- a parent (where the child is not looked after)
- a child of a special guardian (whether the special guardianship child is looked after or not)
- any person whom the local authority considers to have a significant and ongoing relationship with a child (whether the child is looked after or not).

If the LA, in a discretionary “may” case decides not to carry out an assessment, it must exercise that discretion reasonably. It is important that children who are not (or were not) looked after are not unfairly disadvantaged by this approach. In many cases the only reason that the child is not looked after is that relatives stepped in quickly to take on the responsibility for the child when a parent could no longer do so.

8.6 Adoption Order

Adoption is the process by which all parental rights and responsibilities for a child are permanently transferred to an adoptive parent by a court. As a result the child legally becomes part of the adoptive family. An adoption order in favour of a relative or foster carer (who was a ‘connected person’) with whom a child is living may be an appropriate outcome as part of a permanence care plan within public care proceedings.

Local authorities must make arrangements, as part of their adoption service, for the provision of a range of adoption support services. They undertake assessments of the need for adoption support services at the request of the adopted child, adoptive parents and their families, as well as birth relatives. The support required is set out in an adoption support plan and may include financial support (see adoption support scheme for more details).

9. Support Available to Family and Friends Carers

9.1 Early Identification and Support

The majority of private/informal arrangements work well and meet the needs

of the child with the support of universal agencies such as Health and Education services. It is important, however, that any difficulties are responded to early. Partner agencies have a key role to play in identifying and supporting children who are living with Family and Friends Carers.

Services need to be aware of and sensitive to the needs of these children and their families.

To enable family and friends to offer appropriate care for children and young people who cannot live with their parents, access to a range of high quality universal and targeted services will be needed. Support services should not be withheld because a child is living with a carer in a private/informal arrangement. Early intervention, underpinned by the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) will help prevent difficulties escalating to the point where specialist services are required.

These services are key to the identification of those children who have a higher level of need e.g. those who are in private fostering arrangements where statutory intervention and the provision of specialist services are required.

Stockport has a wide range of agencies which provide support to families. We recognise that it is important that all agencies are sensitive to the particular needs of children living with their friends and relatives. Stockport recognises the importance of multi-agency support to these families to ensure that they have access to a range of high quality support services including those which are available to all children in Stockport and in addition specialist services, as appropriate. Stockport strives to ensure continued good communication between all agencies.

9.2 Post Approval Support

The support needs of the carer(s) will be identified in the assessment. They will be regularly discussed in supervision sessions, which must happen at no less than 6 weekly intervals, with the allocated Supervising Social Worker and reviewed at the Foster Carer's Annual Review. Carers may need support with securing appropriate accommodation suitable to their new role, and will be given information about education and health resources available locally. Carers will also be assisted via the support planning process to access specialist support services if necessary to meet the child/young person's needs.

9.3 Financial Support

9.3.1 Informal Care Arrangements

In private / informal arrangements (i.e. those described in paragraphs 8.1 and

8.2) parents will always be expected to make appropriate financial arrangements with the carer to enable them to care for the child. However, if a child's needs cannot be met by a family member or friend without financial support in the short term, Stockport Council may and, with the agreement of the parents, provide financial support to the placement under Section 17 (Children Act 1989) rather than accommodate the child under Section 20 so long as this is consistent with the child's welfare.

Following assessment, the Council may make payments under Section 17 to support a child's placement with relatives or friends to promote their best interests and prevent the child becoming looked after. These payments will be monitored and reviewed and parents and carers advised to seek advice about entitlement to benefits.

Under these circumstances, financial support under Section 17 could range from a one off payment to the provision of an agreed level of financial support which will be regularly monitored and reviewed.

In the process of making decision about the funding of arrangements under Section 17 the department may offer:

One-off payments under Section 17 – one-off payments made in respect of costs arising during the course of a child's private placement with family/relatives and friends.

Provision of funding for child maintenance costs subject to monitoring and review – payment for the child maintenance costs may be made, at the department's discretion, under Section 17, where an assessment has concluded that:

- Financial assistance is required to meet the child or young person's needs and to promote and safeguard his/her welfare.
- Stockport Council would have to accommodate the child/young person under Section 20 of the Children Act if no financial assistance was provided and there is clear evidence that the child's needs are likely to be best met without the provision of accommodation under this Section.
- A financial assessment indicates that no person(s) with parental authority is able to fund the placement and the placement cannot be funded by recourse to the national benefits system.

The level of any allowance payable will be based upon Income Support rates for the child minus any relevant deductions due to benefits payable as a result of the child/young person living with the Connected Person.

Parents and carers will be informed in writing of any arrangements for financial support and will be advised that these will be monitored and reviewed with the expectation that parents will fund the arrangements.

Before they are asked to make, or when they make a commitment to a child,

carers should be provided with clear information about the level of support, including any financial assistance that they will be offered. This will include how finances have been or will be calculated and how long this support will last. Carers, who may, for example, have to give up their job to care for the child(ren) will then be able to make an informed choice about whether the placement is feasible for them to enter into.

The considerations for financial support outlined above will apply to private fostering arrangements.

The Child In Need plan will agree the practical and other support, including any financial support, to be provided for the child, to the child's carer and the role and responsibility of the child's parents. This is important as neither the carer or Stockport council has parental responsibility for the child in these circumstances, since no court orders have been made conferring it.

9.3.2 Formal Care Arrangements

In the case of looked after children when an emergency placement is made under Reg. 24 and it is agreed by the Head of Service that the carer has temporary approval, the Family and Friends carer will be paid the appropriate allowance for the age of each child. From full approval as a Family and /friends foster carer, the carer will also receive recompense if the carer has attended the Skills to Foster preparation course. Where there are two carers, the recompense will be paid when both carers have attended the Skills to Foster course. Recompense will only continue to be paid if carers meet all fostering service requirements.

If it becomes clear that the child is unlikely to return home carers may be given advice and guidance on applying for Special Guardianship Order under Private Law. Stockport will normally pay the legal fees for the foster carers where the care plan is for a Special Guardianship Order to that Carer. For information regarding financial support to carers with a special guardianship order or child arrangement order please see above.

9.4 Accommodation Support

Family and Friends Carers may need support and accommodation as their home may not be of sufficient capacity to take on the care of a child or a sibling group. Stockport Council will work in partnership with the Housing Authority and providers to ensure that Family and Friends Carers who come forward can access suitable accommodation. Family and Friends Carers living in social housing will be given appropriate priority to move to suitable accommodation if this will prevent the need for a child to become looked after.

9.5 Contact with Family Support

9.5.1 Informal care arrangements

Schedule 2 paragraph 10 of the Children Act 1989 requires Stockport Council

to promote contact between a child who is not looked after but is a child in need who is living away from home and their parents and family, where it is necessary to do so in order to safeguard and promote the child's welfare.

Contact arrangements will need to meet the needs of the child. It is acknowledged that management of contact can be a source of considerable anxiety and sometimes conflict for Family and Friends Carers.

Contact arrangements will need to be explicit. If necessary, information will be made available to Family and Friends Carers about local contact centres and how to make use of them. Contact will need to be monitored to ensure it does not become unsettling or harmful to the child.

9.5.2 Formal Care arrangements

Stockport recognises possible intrinsic difficulties and areas of conflict and will have already taken the views of the carers, parents and young person into account before the start of the placement. The Social Worker will therefore ensure that contact for Looked after Children with birth family and friends is carefully managed, monitored and supported. Details of support for those involved will be provided and reviewed.

9.6 Family Group Conferences

Family group conferences are meetings led by family members to plan and make decisions for a child who is at risk. Children and young people are normally involved in their own family group conference, although often with support from an advocate. It is a voluntary process and families cannot be forced to have a family group conference.

Families are assisted by an independent family group conference coordinator to prepare for the meeting. They have the chance to get the information they need from a social worker and other professionals and then meet on their own to make a plan for their children. The family should be supported to carry out the plan, unless it is not safe.

Family group conferences can be used in any serious situation where a plan and decision needs to be made about a vulnerable adult or child.

The underlying principles of the Family Group Meetings model are:

- The child/young person's needs must come first
- The child/young person and their family must wish to have a Family Group Meeting
- Families know best what is going on and any professionals need to work in partnership with them to ensure the best outcome for the child
- The plan for the child's future will be drawn up by the family themselves and will be agreed as the way forward unless there are concerns about

safety.

9.7 Information and Support Groups

9.7.1 General Information

Family and Friends Carers may take on a caring role in an emergency or at a stage in their lives when they are not aware of local support services for children and families. They will be given information to assist them in their caring role and about what resources are available in their local area such as early years provision, day care, out of school services, colleges, health services, leisure and youth support services. They will also be advised of specialist services for children with additional needs.

9.7.2 Independent Support to Foster Carers

All approved foster carers in Stockport have access to an independent support worker who is employed by the Fostering Network. The independent worker advises and supports any foster carer who has a complaint or allegation made against them. She also welcomes contact with regard to other issues. Further information and contact details are available in the fostering service.

As with other fostering placements, the specific role and areas of delegation for the foster carer will form part of the placement plan and be reviewed by the Independent Reviewing Officer at the child's review.

Stockport will also monitor the support needs of Family and Friend's carers, and ascertain their views about attendance at support groups along with other carers or whether a special support group is needed for Family and Friends Carers.

9.7.3 The Role of the Stockport Foster Care Association

All approved Family and Friends foster carers have access to the Stockport Foster Care Association which is run by foster carers and all newly approved foster carers will receive information about the association and contact details. The association welcomes new members and representatives meet regularly with the fostering service to ensure any issues are addressed.

9.8 Training

Family and Friends foster carers will have access to all the training available to foster carers in Stockport. This includes an invitation to the Skills to Foster course during their assessment and they will be able to access this training after approval if there are difficulties in completion prior to approval. This is especially relevant in the case of an assessment undertaken following an emergency placement, given the timescales and the adjustments to be made in the family.

Following their approval as foster carers, Family and Friends Carers will

receive written details of all the training available for foster carers in Stockport and training will be discussed at each supervision meeting with their Supervising Social worker. They will complete a Personal Development Plan and will be supported in meeting the requirement of the TSDS standards within the timescales set by TSD; these are currently 18 months following the date of approval. The carers will be supported in achieving these, taking any individual needs into account and will be able to complete the specific workbook for Family and Friends foster carers. Following approval the carers are also expected to attend the essential training courses.

10. Complaints

10.1 Complaints by children and young people

All children and young people will be provided with information about how to make a complaint, contained within the Children's Guide. Advocacy and support is available via the Children's Rights Service.

10.2 Complaints by foster carers

Foster carers are encouraged to discuss any issues with their allocated Supervising Social Worker. The team manager may also be involved in order to reach a resolution.

If resolution cannot be achieved, or the applicant/foster carer so wishes, a complaint can be made through the Complaints service. All Family and Friends Carers will be given a copy of the complaints leaflet.