

Unannounced Visits to Foster Carers

Introduction and Legal Framework

Unannounced visits are expected to be undertaken within the fostering household a minimum of once a year. The main purpose of these visits is for the supervising social worker to check that the home environment that the child or young person is living in is of a good enough standard and consistent with the rest of the home.

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

This is further reinforced in paragraph 5.67 of the Fostering Guidance (2011) which states “Every foster carer should be allocated an appropriately qualified social worker from the fostering service (the supervising social worker) who is responsible for overseeing the support they receive. It is the supervising social worker’s role to supervise the foster carer’s work, to ensure that they are meeting the child’s needs, and to offer support and a framework to assess the foster carer’s performance and develop their skills. They must make regular visits to the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year.”

Fostering Guidance (2011) paragraph 3.82 states that “The Fostering service must have a written health and safety policy, which should be covered in the assessment and training of foster carers. Foster carers should be supported to ensure that their homes are free of avoidable hazards, in keeping with family life. Every foster home must be visited without appointment by a supervising social worker of the fostering service at least once a year, as a check on the standards of care being provided.

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

Swindon Borough Council Policy

1. All supervising social workers must ensure that they complete a minimum of one unannounced visit within every 12-month period. Where possible some of the unannounced visits should be undertaken by another team member who is not the allocated supervising social worker of the foster carers.
2. If the supervising social worker is off work for any reason, the team manager is responsible for ensuring that the unannounced visit is undertaken by an appropriate member of staff within the 12 month period of the previous one.
3. At the unannounced visit all areas of the home should be seen, this includes the garden and any buildings in this area. Consideration should be given to issues of health and safety, and will include the wardrobes of looked after children, cupboards, children’s mattresses, fridges etc.
4. The supervising social worker should be checking that standards are consistent throughout the home e.g., bedrooms for looked after children are of the same standard as other bedrooms within the foster home.

5. If any children are sharing a bedroom, it should be checked that a bedroom sharing assessment is completed and up to date.
6. If neither of the foster carers are at home when the unannounced visit is undertaken then the visit should not be continued, even if other household members are at home. It should be recorded that the visit was attempted but a further unannounced visit will need to be undertaken.
7. If the foster carers are not at home and the looked after child or young person is home the SSW should check what the arrangements are for supervision of the child or young person (e.g., alternative carer, or if there is none when the carer is expected home).
8. If it is not possible for the SSW to see all areas of the home and undertake appropriate checks a further unannounced visit should be completed.
9. If the SSW visits and does not get an answer a note should be left for the carer to say the SSW has called and this should be recorded on the fostering file.
10. The SSW should complete the unannounced visit on Care director. A copy should be given to the foster carer in the next supervision visit and should be recorded that the carer has received this and if there are any areas of disagreement this should be recorded on the unannounced visit form.
11. Any issues arising from the unannounced visit should be addressed at the time of the visit and reinforced at the next supervision session.