

Children in care

Hammersmith & Fulham Family and Friends Care Policy

Placement with Connected People

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1. Introduction

The following procedure covers immediate placements of looked after children with a Connected Person where the carers are not already approved as foster carers. As with any placement the responsible Authority must be satisfied that the placement is the most suitable means to safeguard and promote the child's welfare, notwithstanding the Connected Person is not yet approved as a foster carer. The Authority must be satisfied that it is necessary for the child to be placed with the Connected Person before the Connected Person's suitability to be a foster carer has been assessed in accordance with the Regulations. These provisions are to be used only in exceptional circumstances and where there are clearly defined reasons why a full foster carer assessment cannot be undertaken before a

placement is made. There is a risk that if a child is placed before the full approval of the carer as a local authority foster carer they may not be approved at the end of the process resulting in a further move for the child.

A Connected Person is defined as "A relative, friend or other person connected with a child. The latter is someone who would not fit the term 'relative or friend', but who has a pre-existing relationship with the child. It could be someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity such as (for example) a child-minder, a teacher or a youth worker."

Relative is defined as "a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or step-parent."

The procedure sets out the checks that need to be made before such a placement can be made.

It also covers the procedure to be followed to carry out the required assessment and approval of the Connected Person as foster carers if the placement is to last longer than 16 weeks.

2. Situations where these procedures do not apply

These procedures do not apply where a child (under 16 yrs) goes to live with a relative or friend and this is a private arrangement between the parent/person with **Parental Responsibility** and carer.

If this placement continues for 28 days or more, the child may come within the definition of a Privately Fostered child, in which case the local authority's duties in relation to the placement are set out in the Private Fostering Procedure.

3. Making a referral to the shared services friends and family team

The child's social worker should make a telephone referral to the duty officer of the Shared Services Friends and family team for initial discussion. The telephone call should be followed up by email giving the name of the child and the prospective carer and the reasons why a placement is being proposed.

The friends and family social worker should enter the referral as a friends and family assessment on the shared services data base and make arrangements to carry out an initial assessment visit with the child's social worker.

The shared services duty social worker should send the initial screening assessment/referral form to the child's social worker. It is the child's social worker's responsibility to complete the screening assessment/referral.

4. Approval of immediate/emergency placements of looked after children with Connected Persons (placements made under regulation 24 of the fostering regulations)

Before any placement with a Connected Person who is not already approved as a foster carer is made, the approval of the **Nominated Officer** in the relevant sovereign borough is required.

Any such approval can only be given for 16 weeks from the date of the placement. After that period of time, further assessment must be carried out and further approval sought.

The child's social worker should visit the prospective carer's home with a social worker from the Shared Services Connected Person's Team and complete an initial screening assessment, which will also serve as a formal referral to the Shared Services Connected Person's Team. In carrying out the visit the social workers should have regard to the **eligibility criteria for friends and family carers** - see Appendix A: Eligibility Criteria for Friends and Family carers and other People Connected to a "Looked After" Child.

Matters to be taken into account when assessing the suitability of a Connected Person to care for the child are:

- a. The nature and quality of any existing relationship with the child;
- b. Their capacity to care for children and, in particular in relation to the child (or children) concerned, to provide for his/her physical needs and appropriate medical and dental care; to protect the child adequately from harm or danger including from any person who presents a risk of harm to the child; to ensure that the accommodation and home environment is suitable including where relevant an initial risk assessment of any pets, together with the environment in which the pet is kept; in relation to the child's age and developmental stage, to promote his/her learning and development; to provide a stable family environment which will promote secure attachments for the child, including promoting positive contact with parents and other connected persons, unless this is not consistent with the child's welfare;

- c. State of health (physical, emotional and mental), and medical history including current or past issues of domestic violence, substance misuse or mental health problems;
- d. Family relationships and the composition of the household, including the identity of all other members of the household, their age and the nature of any relationship with the connected person and each other including any sexual relationship; any relationship with the parents; any relationship between the child and other members of the household; other adults (not members of the household) likely to have regular contact with the child; any current or previous domestic violence between members of the household, including the connected person;
- e. Their family history, including their childhood and upbringing, and the strengths and difficulties of their parents or others who cared for them; their relationship with parents and siblings and each other; educational achievement and any learning difficulty/disability; chronology of significant life events; particulars of other relatives and their relationships with the child and the connected person;
- f. Any criminal offences of which they have been convicted or in respect of which they have been cautioned;
- g. Past and present employment and other sources of income;
- h. Nature of the neighbourhood and resources available in the community to support the child and the Connected Person.

The child's wishes and feelings (subject to age and understanding) must be ascertained and recorded and wherever possible, an opportunity must be provided for the child to visit the home before the decision is finalised.

The views of parents/ those with Parental Responsibility must also be obtained.

The proposed carer should be given information about the assessment process which will follow if the placement is to last longer than 16 weeks, including the need for Disclosure and Barring Service checks and other agency enquiries on all members of the household aged 16 and over, as well as interviews with referees, adult children and ex-partners, which will be part of any such fostering assessment.

After visiting the home with the shared services duty worker, if the child's social worker is in any doubt as to the suitability of the placement, s/he should consult the shared services connected person's duty manager for advice before the placement is agreed by the Nominated Officer.

Where the placement appears suitable and is approved by the Nominated Officer in the child's home borough a written Placement Agreement should be completed by the child's social worker with the proposed carer.

The prospective carers need to be made aware that any approval is only temporary and does not imply continued approval beyond the 16 (sixteen) weeks.

The child's social worker should arrange for a family meeting or, preferably a **Family Group Conference** as soon as possible after the placement begins in order to assess the support available to the prospective carer and clarify the child's long term **Care Plan**.

The placement may only continue after sixteen weeks if the carer is approved as a foster carer - see Section 7, Assessment and Approval of a Connected Person as Foster Carer - or in exceptional circumstances where the temporary approval is extended.

This temporary approval can be extended for a further period of up to 8 weeks (if it is likely to expire before the assessment is completed) or until the outcome of an Independent Review (if the outcome of the assessment is that the Connected Person is not approved and seeks a review of the decision - see **Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers Procedure**). The IRO must also be informed. A decision to extend the temporary approval must be approved by the Nominated Officer.

As the **Connected Person** will be temporarily approval as a foster carer, the Connected Person will be required to sign a foster carer agreement. A Connected Person approved under these regulations will be entitled to the same support and services including fees, allocation of social worker and allowances as a foster carer.

Before deciding whether to extend the approval, the child's Local Authority must consider if the placement is still the most appropriate placement available, and it must be considered by the Shared Services Fostering Panel before the above approval is given.

5. Assessments of prospective carers where the child is not placed until the carer is approved

If the assessment is not taking place in the context of an emergency under Regulation 24 of the fostering regulations the child's social worker should contact the Family Group Conference coordinator for the child's sovereign authority to arrange a family group conference.

The child's social worker should then refer the case to the shared services connected person's duty service as above and complete an initial screening assessment and referral as above.

If the prospective carer meets the eligibility criteria the duty manager in the shared services connected person's team will allocate a social worker to make a viability assessment. If the viability assessment is positive the prospective carers may proceed to a full assessment and thence to approval by the fostering panel. See Section 7, Assessment and Approval of a Connected Person as Foster Carer.

6. The placement

A placement planning meeting should be held before the placement or, where this is not possible because of the urgency of the placement, within 5 working days.

On the placement of the child, the child's social worker will ensure the child's Care Plan and the written Placement Plan is given to the carer.

If the child was not previously Looked After, the child's social worker will send a notification of the child's placement and a request for the child's first Looked After Review to the Independent Review Unit.

If the child was already looked after, the social worker will send notification of the placement to the child's **Independent Reviewing Officer**.

The child's social worker must visit and see the child alone in the placement (unless she/he refuses) each week until the first **Looked After Review** and thereafter at intervals of not more than 4 weeks during the period of temporary approval. This also applies where the child is placed under an Interim Care Order. The visits are to be fully recorded as statutory visits.

The child's social worker must update the electronic record with the details of the placement and immediately notify their team's finance officer of the placement to trigger payments to the carer.

The child's social worker must also send notification of the placement to the relevant local Children's Services Department if the placement is in a different local authority area.

The child's social worker will notify all family members consulted and involved in the decision-making process of the placement.

These notifications must be made in writing, advising of the placement decision and the name and address of the person with whom the child is to be placed. The child's social worker must send them before the placement wherever possible or within 5 working days of the placement.

The child's social worker should also notify - preferably in writing but it may be verbally - all those involved in the day to day arrangements for the child, including nursery/school, GP and any health professional or YOS worker actively involved with the child.

The child's social worker must ensure the child is registered with a GP, Dentist and Optician, either retaining practices known to him or her (which is preferable) or in the area where they are placed.

In relation to a first Looked After placement the child's social worker must arrange a Health Assessment - see [Health Assessments and Health Care Plans Procedure](#).

The child's social worker must also arrange for the child's Personal Education Plan meeting see the [Education of Looked After Children Procedure](#). Every effort should be made to enable the child to remain at the same school unless there are reasons which would be detrimental to his or her wellbeing.

7. Assessment and approval of a connected person as foster carer

If the plan is for the placement to last longer than 16 weeks, the fostering assessment process should commence as soon as possible after the placement is made. The child's social worker should complete the initial screening / referral to the shared services connected person's team immediately so that a friends and family social worker can be allocated for this purpose.

This temporary approval can be extended for a further period of up to 8 weeks (if it is likely to expire before the assessment is completed) or until the outcome of the Independent Review (if the outcome of the assessment is that the Connected Person is not approved and seeks a review of the decision - see [Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers Procedure](#)).

Before deciding whether to extend the approval, the Local Authority must consider if the placement is still the most appropriate placement available, and it must be considered by the Fostering Panel before the above approval is given. The IRO must also be informed. A decision to extend the temporary approval must be approved by the Nominated Officer.

The allocated Connected Person's SW must open an electronic file on Share Point for the foster carer's assessment. If the assessment is allocated to a sessional social worker the duty manager should open the Share Point file. It is the allocated SW's responsibility to keep the SharePoint file and application progression on FPU database up to date. If the case is allocated to a sessional SW the relevant supervising connected person's Principal SW must keep the data base and case record on SharePoint up to date

It is the shared services business support staff responsibility to keep the statutory checks screen on FPU data base and in the SharePoint file up to date.

The allocated shared services assessing social worker must check proof of identity from the proposed carers and arrange for the carers and members of the household aged 16 and over to complete an application for Disclosure and Barring checks and consent to other agency checks.

The signed consent form and Disclosure and Barring forms should be given to the administrative staff in the Shared Services Family Placement Service as soon as they are completed. Shared services business support staff will send off for the necessary checks as set out in Section 4, Checks and References, of Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers Procedure.

The allocated friends and family worker should explain the assessment process to the carers and provide them with written information from the information pack.

The shared services social worker must record the progress of the application and statutory supervision on the FPU data base and maintain the carer's SharePoint electronic file.

The procedure for the assessment and approval is as for all applicants - see [Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers Procedure](#) using the specific friends and family assessment format.

If and when the carers are approved as foster carers, the procedures in relation to support, supervision and review of the foster carers are the same as for all approved foster carers.

8. Ending the placement

When the placement ends, the child's social worker must update the child's electronic record. The shared services social worker must inform the shared services finance officer so that the payments to the carer/provider will cease. The shared services social worker must update the FPU data base and close the carers' SharePoint record as appropriate.

The social worker will also send copies to those notified when the placement was made.

Where appropriate, consideration may be given to holding a Disruption Meeting in which case the procedure set out in [Placement Planning and Disruption Procedure](#) should be followed.

Appendix A: eligibility criteria for friends and family carers and other people connected to a "looked after" child

The qualities and abilities that make a good carer

1. Long term commitment to the child and ability to put their welfare first, even when it conflicts with loyalty/ concern for the birth parents;
2. Understanding and acceptance of the real reasons which led to the child's removal from the parents' care;
3. Ability to protect the child from further harm;
4. Ability to deal with the strain of changing family roles;
5. Sufficient support network;
6. Sufficient time and space to devote to everyone in the family;
7. Capacity to offer warm, stimulating care;
8. Capacity to understand, adapt to and meet the child's changing needs;
9. Ability to promote the child's educational and health needs;
10. Commitment to helping the child develop an understanding of their history and promote a positive identity, including their ethnic and cultural identity;
11. Capacity to be realistic about the possible problems and special needs which the child may present;
12. Commitment to using training and professional support;
13. Ability to work with professionals and to seek out and accept help.

What makes family and friends carers unsuitable?

1. **Health** - where medical and/or psychiatric history and current state of health give serious cause for concern about the prospective carer's future health prospects;

2. **Age** - where the medical opinion is that the carer may not survive all the years of the child's dependence or retain sufficient energy and vigour to meet the child's needs until independence;
3. **Drug/alcohol problems** - if the carer has a drug or alcohol dependence that is likely to affect your ability to offer safe care;
4. **Criminal record of prospective carer and adults in the household** - Certain types of offences will automatically bar the offender from caring for a child. i.e. any conviction for an offence against a child under Schedule 1 of the Criminal Justice Act. Other offences will need to be discussed in detail to establish if they may impact on the care of the child. Any conviction for an offence involving violence will be of particular concern;
5. **Housing** - where the current accommodation is temporary, overcrowded and/or poorly maintained and there are no realistic prospects for re-housing within near future;
6. **Finance** - Where the family is in debt to the point that it cannot manage its finances, is in danger of losing the home due to arrears or would be wholly dependent on the fostering allowance to support the family;
7. **Work/lifestyle** - where the prospective carer's work responsibilities and/or leisure pursuits severely limit the time available for child care;
8. **Family composition** - where the needs of other children and or dependent adults in the household/network are likely to conflict with the needs of the child to be placed;
9. **Parenting concerns** - where there have been serious difficulties in how the prospective carers parented their own children, particularly a history of abuse or neglect;
10. **Understanding children's needs** - Inability to demonstrate an understanding of children's development and needs;
11. **Meeting needs of a specific child** - Unwillingness or inability to understand or meet the identified educational, medical or emotional needs of the child, including for those who may require a high level of specialist care;
12. **Protecting the child** - Unwillingness or inability to protect the child from abusive parents and enforce restrictions on contact with birth parents;
13. **Working together** - Lack of co-operation with social services and other professional services.