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Fostering Service

Staying Over Care Policy

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Date: October 2022

Reviewed: November 2022 Julia Sawers & Foster Carer Strategy Group

Review date: November 2024

**Contents**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. | Introduction | Page 2 |
| 2. | Principles of the policy | Page 2 |
| 3. | Planning staying over care | Page 4 |
| 4. | Staying over care arrangements with mainstream foster carers | Page 5 |
| 5. | Staying over care arrangements within the foster carers’ support network and family | Page 5 |
| 6. | Staying over care arrangements with birth family members | Page 6 |
| 7. | Financial arrangements | Page 6 |
|  | Appendix 1: Information about the child for staying over arrangements | Page 8 |
|  | Appendix 2: Information about the family members with whom the child will stay | Page 9 |

1. **Introduction**

In South Gloucestershire, we recognise the rewarding and sometimes challenging role foster carers play in looking after children and young people who are in care. Many of these children will have experienced trauma, and all have experienced separation and loss. This can bring a range of sometimes significant difficulties for them, which they will deal with in different ways, sometimes leading to behaviour and challenge that can push family life to the limits.

The Fostering National Minimum Standards set out the following:

*‘Foster carers are provided with breaks from caring as appropriate. These are planned to take account of the needs of any children placed.’* NMS 21.5.

88We need to balance the needs of the foster carers with the needs of the children and young people when we consider staying over care with the aim of supporting the relationships and stability of the arrangements to the benefit of all.

1. **Principles**

This staying over care policy is written with permanence in mind. Ensuring children have continuity in their foster home is of paramount consideration together with meeting the needs of the child/young person concerned. In order to maintain their family life and provide stability for the young person, some foster carers and some children may need a short break from each other. Staying over care is based on what the child and the carer are assessed to need to achieve permanence and promote the best outcomes for the children or young people in foster care. Not all carers will feel the need to take breaks from caring for foster children, but some will, and for some it can make the difference between feeling able to continue to offer a child a place in their home and not.

The needs of the children should be thoughtfully considered. If looked after children are unsettled by the staying over care, they may be dysregulated when they return to their main carer. Their life experience will have taught them to be wary of change and staying over care may cause them to be hypervigilant. Main carers should be aware that it may take a while for them to settle back into the family and routines.

Many foster carers have their own children who may also benefit enormously from being part of a fostering family – but this too can bring challenges. To quote one child of foster carers:

*‘Make sure your children understand and are ready to foster. It is very difficult for them to share their lives and they need a lot of reassurance. Also make sure you have time to spend with your children so they know they can come to you with any problems, and you are never too busy.’*

The needs of all the children and young adults in a foster home must be considered and staying over care can be a positive way to meet the whole family’s needs.

Some carers know their staying over care needs in advance – for example, perhaps when the family start their fostering career, parents can assure their own children there will be some undivided attention away from home on a break together to re-charge. Other more experienced foster carers can reach a stage where they recognise for the best interests of all, that some time away from foster children and at times their birth children is needed. It is important foster carers do not feel guilty about this. Equally it is important that the foster children are not made to feel abandoned or unwanted, and that arrangements can be of positive benefit to them too. The staying over care may be arranged to enable a child or young person to experience social or leisure pursuits which they would not otherwise have an opportunity to experience.

In South Gloucestershire we believe that arranging staying over care breaks should as far as possible be managed as it would within an every-day family environment, as a positive option with positive outcomes for the child. It is not acceptable for a child to feel that they are having time away from the family because of their behaviour or that the carer does not want to be with them. Children need to feel that staying over care is a positive experience and one which also happens in ordinary families.

The planning of holidays is a significant event for families and as such foster children should be able to have these experiences and not be excluded. If foster carers plan to have a holiday without their foster child they should also have plans for another holiday with their foster child as well. It is not acceptable in the vast majority of circumstances for a foster family with a child living with them on a long- term basis to have a holiday with their own family and not offer this experience to their foster child. Any such plans should be discussed with the supervising social worker.

A balance needs to be struck to meet the needs of all, but with careful thought and sympathetic management, breaks can be facilitated that benefit everybody.

1. **Planning staying over care**

Staying over care should be well planned and should be written into the child's care plan where this is a regular arrangement. This includes the frequency, how it will be provided and how it meets the needs of the child. Staying over care arrangements should be carefully reviewed at each review of the child’s care plan or statutory review, or more frequently if necessary, and at the foster carers annual review. The arrangements must always be based on the needs of the child and to maximise placement stability.

There should be careful thought about the timing of staying over care, it is wise to avoid “trigger times” in a child’s life such as birthdays or Christmas times. It is also helpful not to arrange it for when a young person has exams or starting a new school.

Carers should never arrange their own staying over care within their own network. Only supervising social workers can arrange staying over care.

**Planned arrangements**

Ideally, agreement to the level of staying over care required by a child or by the carers should be reached when the child first goes to live with new carers. This will have formed part of the young person’s care plan and the matching process. It can be recorded in the Placement Planning Meeting notes.

Where staying over care is identified as a need after the child has gone to live in their new home, it must be clearly documented as quickly as possible through formal review of the child’s care plan. Where possible any request for a carer’s break should be made 3 months prior to the break period through the carers’ supervising social worker. This allows time for the break to be agreed by the child’s social worker and their line management and to plan with the carers the appropriate staying over care provision for the child or young person. It will also give time to prepare the young person for the staying over care and space for introductions. Planned staying over care should be documented as ‘planned or programmed short term breaks’ on Mosaic.

**Emergency situations**

It is understood that there may also be occasions when carers require a break due to an unforeseen emergency such as going into hospital, family bereavement or illness. In these cases, foster carers will inform their supervising social worker as soon as possible, or a duty supervising social worker so that an alternative carer can be found urgently.

**Information about the child or young person**

Staying over carers should be provided as a minimum with the child’s care plan, delegated authority documentation and any risk assessments in place.

If a child or young person is having staying over care, the supervising social worker, along with the foster carer is responsible for completing the ““Child Profile For Staying Over Care”. Please see appendix 1. This form ensures that the staying over carer has all the information they need to care well for the child and help them settle. It is really helpful if the staying over carer parents in a similar way to the main carer as this will offer security to the child. It is particularly important that the staying over carer observes strict safe care practice to help the child feel safe.

1. **Staying over care arrangements with mainstream foster carers**

There are some foster carers who specifically only undertake staying over care. These staying over carers are fully approved as foster carers and are allocated a supervising social worker. Often, they look after the same children on a regular basis. This works well for the young person and the carer as it is a predictable arrangement, and they develop a bond through shared memories of the times they spend together.

Approved staying over carers are also needed on some occasions, especially in short term situations when the child does not yet know the carers’ wider family.

As soon as a need becomes apparent for staying over care;

* the supervising social worker should talk to the child’s social worker and contact the placement finding team making a referral for staying over care.
* The primary foster carer completes the “Child Profile For Staying Over Care” which describes some of the young person’s preferences and routines.
* The placement finding officer will identify a foster carer who is a good match for the young person.
* The child’s social worker, the child or young person, the foster carers and the supervising social worker will make plans covering introductions and arrangements. It is important that the child is provided with the staying over carers ‘Welcome to our home’ booklet and is introduced to the carers prior to their stay.

1. **Staying over care arrangements within the foster carers’ support network and family**

We strongly encourage foster carers to develop their support network with people who might be able to look after the children in a staying over care arrangement. This is really beneficial for the young people as they have a break with people who they know and are familiar with. These arrangements work well for the carers too as they know the substitute carers well and are confident on the continuity of care and parenting style.

If a family member or member of the foster carers support network can look after the child/young person on a staying over care basis, the supervising social worker will be responsible for making sure safeguards are in place. As a minimum the supervising social worker would:

* Undertake DBS checks on the proposed staying over care fostering household
* Undertake a health and safety check of the property
* Visit the family to check the arrangements, and ensure the family member understands the needs of the child and can meet the practical needs, - the school run, medical needs etc
* Ensure the staying over carers understand safe care
* Ensure the staying over carers understand what the child’s views and wishes are
* Liaise with the child’s social worker to inform them of the staying over care arrangements and to seek agreement from child’s parents to place the child temporarily with the alternative carers if the child is on a Section 20 agreement

Please see appendix 2 for the template of this form. The supervising social worker or the child’s social worker may also undertake an unannounced visit during the time of the staying over care.

If a family member is to act as a regular staying over carer for a primary carer who is looking after a child for the long term, best practice would be for the staying over carer to be formally assessed and approved as a connected staying over carer. This would mean that all training, payments, scrutiny and support from fostering would be available to those family members. This would, of course, be subject to the family members agreement.

1. **Staying over care arrangements with birth family members**

There may be exceptional occasions when family time with some members of the birth family is very positive and affirms a child or young person’s identity and origins. These family members may not be in a position to offer full time care to the child, for example an elderly grandparent, but they are involved in the lives of the young person, supportive of Social Care plans and a positive influence in the situation.

It may be that such family members can offer safe staying over care. The decision making about such arrangements should be led by the child or young person’s social worker and manager with support from the supervising social worker. Any planning should be part of the child looked after (CLA) reviews with oversight by the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). It should be thoroughly risk assessed and clear expectations about who the child can see during the staying over care should be explicitly agreed.

If it is agreed that birth family members can provide staying over care, the template found at appendix 2 should be completed.

1. **Financial Arrangements**

The supervising social worker will need to inform the finance department when a staying over care arrangement has been made. If the carer is an approved carer, the finance department will be able to arrange payment to that carer.

If the staying over carer is a member of the foster carers’ wider family or the birth family and not a formally approved staying over carer, payments can also be made directly to them from the Authority, because a level of assessment of suitability has been made. In these cases, the supervising social worker needs to set up the payments in accordance with the Mosaic payment process.

Provided it is intended that the child will return to that foster home, the skills fees should continue to be paid to the primary carer up to a maximum of 14 nights in one year.

The primary carer will also continue to receive 33% of the age-related allowance for the period of staying over care.

Any additional nights should be negotiated.

The staying over carer will receive 67% the age-related allowance for the staying over care episode.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name and DOB  and a little about me | Insert photo here  *E.G. I love animals and being outdoors, I run away when I feel angry, etc.* |
| Any medication or health issues. Name of GP and surgery: | *E.G. Allergies, medication, etc.* |
| Where do I go to school? What clubs do I attend and when? |  |
| What do I like to do? | *E.G. Play video games, football, watch movies, etc.* |
| What is my routine?  Include planned family time. | *E.G. When do you wake up, have breakfast, etc.* |
| What foods do I like to eat? And what foods will I not eat? |  |
| Who is important to me? | *E.G. Mummy and Daddy, I see them once a week, etc.* |
| Things that upset me? Places I should not visit.  Triggers | *E.G. Being told off, getting things wrong, etc.* |
| Things that help me feel better? | *E.G. Cuddles, music, chocolate, etc.* |
| Family time/calls planned |  |
| Who I’m allowed to spend time with |  |

**Child Profile For Staying Over Care.** Appendix 1

Appendix 2

**Information about Foster Carers’ Family Network who will be Staying Over Carers**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name and date of birth of child or young person to be cared for: |  |
| Name and address of main carer: |  |
| Name and address of proposed staying over connected carer: |  |
| Name of supervising social worker: |  |
| Name of child’s social worker: |  |
| DBS checks on all the adults in the household: | *Are they all clear or have reports on offences been written for management agreement?* |
| Health and safety check: | *Has a health and safety check been completed and have any issues been addressed? What are the sleeping arrangements for the fostered child or young person?* |
| Visit to prospective staying over carers.  *Date of visit. All adults spoken to. How often have they met the child or young person, how well do they know them? Understanding of the practical needs of care, - school/college run, medical needs, family time. How caring for the young person will fit into their schedule and lifestyle.* | |
|  | |
| What is the prospective carers understanding of safe care? | |
|  | |
| What is the prospective foster carers understanding of trauma informed behaviour? | |
|  | |
| How will the prospective staying over foster carers listen to the views of the child or young person and make sure they feel safe in the placement? | |
|  | |
| Do the prospective staying over carers understand delegated authority? *Have they been given a delegated authority form? Have the birth family been informed of the staying over care arrangements?* | |
|  | |
| Do the prospective staying over carers know what support will be available from fostering? | |
|  | |
| Do the staying over carers have recording templates and notifiable incident information? | |
|  | |