



PRACTICE NOTE

SGO Assessments

July 2024

Version Control

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This document is only valid on the day it is printed

Date Issued:	Version	Summary of Changes	Created by
01/07/24	1	Final approved	A Osei / E Rae

About this document

Title	Practice guidance to ensure timeliness of Viability Assessments and SGO assessments
Purpose	To improve the timeliness of assessments
Updated by	Andrews Osei / Eleanor Rae
Approved by	Andrew Carter
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Audit Scheduled	

Intended Audience

This document has been issued to the following people for Review (R) Information (I) and Review and Sign off (S). The Scheme of Delegation is mandatory and must be shared with all managers, and social work staff to ensure decisions are being made at the appropriate level within the organisation.

Name	Position	S/R/I
Andrew Carter	Corporate Director Children Families and Education	S
All staff	All staff (issued by email from R Bielby)	I

This guidance draws together the recommendations from the PLWG 2020 and from the practical and legal experience of the authors who work in various roles within legal and children’s social care.

It is intended to provide brief guidance on the steps which need to be taken to ensure robust IVA’s and SGO’ assessments are completed within the timescales agreed with the Court: 2 weeks for IVA’s and 12 weeks for SGO assessments: a total for both of 14 weeks. **The guidance on joint IVA’s does not apply to the CAT Team.**

It does not include an overview of the legal framework.

Action to be taken as soon as soon as Children’s Services are notified a family member of friend or relative wishes to care for a child or the direction for an assessment is made.

Action	By when
<p>1. The Initial Viability Assessment (IVA) of family and friends seeking temporary approval as Connected Person’s foster carers under REG 24 considerations (whether to seek substantive approval as Connected person’s foster carers or whilst an SGO assessment is being progressed) MUST be jointly undertaken by the child’s allocated social worker and the fostering duty SSW for the IVA rota. This process does not apply to the CAT Team</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">A. A copy of the draft order with the relevant direction is sent to the Fostering and Permanency and SGO Service and the Social Work Team as soon as it is received in draft.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">OR</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">B. If family members wish to be assessed, the social worker immediately notifies the Fostering and Permanency and SGO Service and legal and an IVA must commence. The only exception is if the assessment is being completed by CAT.</p> <p>2. All requests to complete a joint IVA is to be submitted by the social worker on the ‘Request to complete a</p>	<p>On date of direction/draft order agreed or the date of notification/confirmation by a family member or friend.</p>

<p>joint IVA' proforma and sent to IVAconnectedpersons@lambeth.gov.uk.</p>	
<p>3. Within 1 working day of the referral request being received, the Fostering Duty worker (IVA) for the day is to make contact with the referrer (allocated children's social worker) to arrange the joint IVA within 5 working days. Not applicable to CAT</p> <p>This action is to be recorded as a case note within MOSAIC and the IVA Duty Visit calendar and an email sent to the allocated Fostering IVA duty worker to make them aware.</p>	<p>Day One</p>
<p>4. An assessment planning meeting with both teams and the ISW if instructed, must take place by Day 3</p>	<p>By Day 3</p>
<p>5. Joint IVA visit is completed. The detail of the joint IVA proforma needs to be completed at the visit and shared with all professionals as required within 2 working days to obtain their views and recommendations.</p>	<p>By Day 5</p>
<p>6. Within 1 working day of the joint IVA proforma being fully completed, this needs to be presented to the Nominated Officer (within Lambeth, this is the Assistant Director responsible for the Service Area) and the decision as to whether to grant temporary approval under REG 24 is made.</p>	<p>By Day 6</p>
<p>7. AD decision as to whether or not to grant temporary approval under REG 24 considerations.</p>	<p>By Day 7</p>
<p>8. If temporary approval is granted under REG 24, within 1 working day, a copy of the fully signed Joint IVA assessment needs to be sent to:</p> <p>IVAconnectedpersons@lambeth.gov.uk</p> <p>Fosteringpanel2@lambeth.gov.uk</p> <p>ComplianceChecks@lambeth.gov.uk</p> <p>9. This action is recorded as a case note to MOSAIC.</p>	<p>By Day 8</p>

<p>10. Upon receipt into the Fosteringpanel2@lambeth.gov.uk inbox the connected person's fostering assessment is booked into fostering panel at 14 weeks from the date of the REG 24 being agreed. Should the assessment not be completed within this timeframe, the panel slot is to be used to request a REG 25 extension to the connected person's fostering assessment.</p>	<p>By Day 9</p>
<p>11. Upon receipt into the ComplianceChecks@lambeth.gov.uk inbox, all indicated Stage 1 checks are to be immediately initiated and the Stage 1 check tracker kept updated as the fostering assessment progresses.</p>	<p>By Day 9</p>
<p>12. The reviewed and approved and signed IVA document is sent to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) The person being assessed along with the actions they need to take if they wish to proceed with the SGO assessment or challenge a negative outcome, and ii) Legal (if directed so it can be filed and served). Two copies, one redacted and one unredacted. 	<p>By day 9 or 3 days in advance of the direction to file.</p>
<p>13. The fostering service will have allocated a SSW and set up foster payment allowance.</p>	<p>By Day 10</p>

If the IVA is positive and/or the Court makes a direction for an SGO Assessment:

Action	By when
1. A copy of the draft order with the relevant direction is sent to the Fostering and Permanency and SGO Service and the Social Work Team as soon as received.	On date of direction/draft order agreed or the date of notification/confirmation by a family member or friend.
2. Contact details of the proposed carer must be sent to the allocated assessor in the Fostering and Permanency and SGO Service (unless IVA already completed and sent to the relevant inboxes - see above).	Day One
3. An assessment planning meeting with both teams and the ISW if instructed, must take place.	By Day 3
4. Assessment plan to be completed and sent to legal and the proposed carers. The assessment plan should clearly state what actions are needed, when and by whom.	By Day 5
5. Information in writing (see below) must be provided to the proposed carer including timescales for the assessment and the actions they need to take. A copy of the assessment plan and timetable must be provided. They should be informed of where they can access free legal advice.	By end of Week 1
6. Reference information should be received and references requested. All checks must be applied for if not done so already. Medical report from GP requested (for receipt in 14 working days).	By end of week 1
14. Parts A and B of the assessment must be completed by the allocated (child's) social worker no later than week 2 (preferably by the end of week 1).	By no later than the end of week 2
7. Mid-way review meeting with both teams and the ISW if instructed. Minutes to be provided to legal and the person being assessed	By end of week 6

Action	By when
8. Draft support plan to be completed by the child's social worker and the assessor.	By end of week 9
9. The medical report and DBS and references must be received.	By week 10
<p>10. The SGO assessment and support plan must be completed in draft by the assessor and child's social worker and be sent for management review and approval.</p> <p>11. Any issues with the quality of the assessment must be resolved before circulation and filing.</p> <p>12. Once approved, the documents must be sent in draft to the proposed carers and with information as to the next steps or how to challenge a negative assessment.</p>	By end of week 10
<p>13. The assessment, checks, medical report references and support plan completed by the assessor and child's social worker and reviewed by the relevant manager must be sent to legal to be reviewed and filed and served.</p> <p>Two copies must be sent: one copy must be unredacted and the second copy must be redacted to remove sensitive/3rd party information.</p>	By week 12 or 5 working days before the Court filing date

Points to note:

1. The allocated social worker should work alongside the social worker from the fostering and kinship service when completing the assessment. This allows for a combination of the knowledge and understanding of the child (including their needs, wishes and feelings) that the child's social worker will bring, and the expertise and specialist practice of the fostering or kinship social worker. This model can provide better information to carers and a more rounded assessment of the ability of carers to meet the child's needs in both the short and long term.
2. All assessments should be conducted in a spirit of enquiry and partnership.
3. At the VA stage and again at SGO stage, the proposed carers should have the assessment and any court process explained to them. This should include easy-to-digest information about the options before the court for the child's future. In particular, social workers should explain:

- i. about the assessment process, so they know what is expected of them, how they will be assessed, including the criteria that will be used and how particular issues for family and friends foster carers will be addressed, and any support offered during the assessment process.
- ii. the differences between fostering, special guardianship and child arrangements orders.
- iii. the implications in respect of any further assessments and support required, thereby enabling the family to make a more informed decision about the options.
- iv. that the process is a complex one and social workers may well have to go over information more than once.

This explanation should be supported with the provision of written information about the assessment and court process and inform them about sources of independent legal advice, including the Family Rights Group's free advice line and website and other sources of independent support.

4. Whilst respecting confidentiality, the proposed carers should be informed about why a IVA/SGO assessment is being conducted and they should be provided with the information that will help them understand the child's needs; just because someone is part of the family network, it should not be assumed they have all the relevant information.
5. Proposed carers **must** be told of the support that the local authority could provide to enable them to care for the child.
6. Directions will be made surrounding legal advice to be funded to anyone being positively assessed and actions they must take if they wish to challenge assessments and this must be communicated to the proposed carers and form part of the assessment plan.
7. Give parental contact careful consideration in terms of purpose and the factors which are relevant in determining the form of contact, direct or indirect the frequency and professional input required to support carers in facilitating this over time. Set out the planning and support required to ensure the stability of the placement in the context of ongoing contact. Evidence has suggested that insufficient contact planning can have a significant impact on placement stability.
8. The assessment must:
 - i. remain focused on the child(ren) and their needs and development.
 - ii. be an evidence-based, sound assessment which includes an analysis of the evidence.

- iii. show that the carers have been provided with the necessary information such as the child's needs, the LA support available and so on, as detailed above.
 - iv. set out that the child's social worker has worked alongside a social worker from the fostering or kinship service or the ISW in completing the assessment.
9. The support plan should consider short term need and also longer-term need. The plan needs to address (like in adoption) how the needs, welfare and development of the child will be met throughout the child's minority.
 10. Adequate attention should be paid to the time taken to build a relationship between proposed carer and child – arrange and observe contact.
 11. Where relationship building work has not been formed, further time will be needed to allow this work and this must be factored into the timetable.
 12. Where there is little or no prior connection / relationship between the child and the proposed carer, and after an analysis of all the available evidence and of the child's best interests, it is very likely to be in the child's best interests that the child is cared for on an interim basis by the prospective Special Guardian's. The period of time required for further assessment will be determined by a number of factors and a timetable will need to be prepared and submitted to the Court. The legal framework will need to be agreed on a case by case basis. Any period of further assessment should no more than 12 months from the interim placement of the child with the prospective Special Guardian.
 13. Give consideration to providing training to prospective Special Guardians and take adequate steps to prepare them for caring for the child.

Action to be taken if the timetable/assessment plan slips.

14. Please keep an eye on the timetable/assessment plan and contact legal and refer to tracking panel if there is an issue or the timetable slips. Any issue, such as a GP's not responding to the request for medical information may need to be referred to the Court.

06.2024