



Foster Carer's Handbook

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Contents

Introduction.....	4
Ofsted Inspection Report:	6
Connected Persons	8
Types of Fostering.....	9
Care Planning, Placement, and Case Review (2010)	16
What do You Do?	17
Documentation – Getting Started.....	18
The Role of the Supervising Social Worker (SSW).....	19
Training and Development	20
Out of Hours Support	23
Fostering Network	23
Support from Other Foster Carers	24
Support for Sons and Daughters of Foster Carers.....	24
Waltham Forest Foster Care Association	25
Mockingbird Project.....	25
Why do Children and Young People Need to be Looked After?	26
Language That Cares	30
Children’s Guide.....	30
The Voice and Influence Service	30
Advocates and Independent Visitor Scheme	32
Matching Children and Young People	35
Bedroom Sharing	35
Useful Questions When Considering A Child Coming to Live With You	36
Foster Carer Profile	38
Being Placed and Settling In	40
Settling In Meetings - Sometimes called Placement Planning Meetings.....	40
Delegated Authority.....	41
Moving On.....	43
Annual Household Review of Approval.....	45
PEP Meetings.....	46
Roles and Responsibilities	47
The Role of the Fostering/Placement Team	47
The Role of the Child or Young Person’s Social Worker	47
The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)	48
The Role of the Leaving Care Coach	49
The Role of the Primary Mental Health Clinician.....	50
The Role of the Guardian.....	50
The Role of the Virtual School Head	51
Health and Wellbeing.....	51

Identity	54
Family Time - Contact	55
Promoting Positive Behaviour	56
Memories and Life Story Work	62
Overnight Stays	64
Preparation for Independence and Staying Put	65
Care Leavers’ Charter	66
Relationships and Sex	68
Safeguarding	69
Standards of Care	73
Drugs, Alcohol and Smoking	86
Gang Affiliation	88
Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)	90
Money Matters	91
Housing Benefits	97
Budgeting	97
Travel costs	97
Pocket money	97
Emergency payments	98
Festival and Birthday allowances	98
Holiday allowances	99
Equipment	100
Savings	100
Transport	101
Membership of the Fostering Network	103
Children with special needs	103
School meals	103
Promoting Family Time ‘Contact’	104
Respite	105
Overpayments to foster carers	106
Carers subject to allegations	106
Training expenses	107
Parent & Child Fostering	111
Comments and complaints	112
Making a Formal Complaint	112
Appendix	115
Minimum items of clothing	115

Introduction

The Waltham Forest Fostering Service wants to work with foster carers in a way which helps us to achieve the best possible outcomes for children who are looked after. We also hope that as part of that journey we can also achieve the best possible experiences for you and your families.

This foster carer handbook is designed to be a reference guide for both prospective and existing foster carers. The purpose of the handbook is to provide information and guidance to all our foster carers on fostering issues. It will also provide additional sources of information, provide practical help, identify standards of care that are expected from you and in return what you can expect from us.

The Handbook is a useful tool for social workers and other professionals.

This Handbook has been written in consultation with the Waltham Forest Foster Carers Association (WFFCA). Many thanks go to all those who have contributed to the content of the book.

If you have any feedback to give to us then please contact Roberta OnyeKwelu at Roberta.onyekwelu@walthamforest.gov.uk

About Us – Our Mission:

Here in Waltham Forest, foster carers are the ‘Heart of our Place’. Foster carers play a vital role to the function of the council in caring for our looked after children in the local community. We are committed to working collaboratively with our foster carers to make their experience and work as positive and rewarding as it can be. We want to ensure that foster carers, social workers, and others can work together to harness opportunities to provide looked after children and young people stable and loving family homes where they can live normal, ordinary lives like their peers in the community.

Here are the people that make up our Fostering Service –

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Waltham Forest Service Mission Statement COVID-19

As a Council, Waltham Forest will make working with COVID-19 adjustments a top priority. As a Service, the Fostering team will continue to adhere to all the Council's COVID 19 adjustments and guidelines by working closely with our local in-house foster carers and our foster carers who live in other local communities to ensure good health of their families and our most vulnerable children in their care.

Ofsted Inspection Report:

Ofsted inspects Waltham Forest services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers.

Inspections look at the experiences and progress of:

- Children who need help and protection, including early help.
- Children looked after, including adoption, fostering, the use of residential care, children who return home, and achieving permanent homes and families for children and young people.
- Young people leaving care or preparing to leave care.

The inspection reports are always published on the Ofsted website and we encourage you to have a look at these for Waltham Forest Council is www.ofsted.gov.uk

In our last Ofsted Inspection in January/February 2019, the Inspectors praised the good quality of the services accessible to the children and the foster carers. There was strong evidence to showcase progress in establishing a resilient, sustainable, and child-focused service that enables foster carers to meet the needs of the children in their care. Foster carers and children receive the right level of services when they need them. Meaningful partnership work takes place amongst the social workers for the children, the supervising social workers for the carers and the foster carers. The children are also involved in the decision-making process whilst living with a foster family.

The Foster Carer Charter

The Government launched the Foster Carers' Charter in March 2011. The Charter has been jointly produced by Government, fostering organisations, charities, and children. It is part of the Government's wider programme of reform to improve the entire care system – including reducing barriers and delays to adoption and improving the quality of children's homes. The overall aim is to make sure that all children in care have greater stability, less upheaval, and a better chance of a stable family life.

You can find out more information regarding the Foster Carer Charter from the Fostering Network website. The charter states:

Children come first:

- Children in foster care deserve to experience as full a family life as possible as part of a loving foster family with carers who can make everyday decisions as they would their own child and without the child feeling that they 'stand out' as a looked after child.
- Children must be given every support to develop their own identities and aspirations, fulfil their potential, and take advantage of all opportunities to promote their talents and skills. Above all, they should be listened to.

Local authorities and fostering services must:

- Recognise in practice the importance of the child's relationship with his or her foster family as one that can make the biggest difference in the child's life and which can endure into adulthood.
- Listen to, involve foster carers and their foster children in decision-making and planning, and provide foster carers and their foster children with full information about each other.
- In making placements, be clear about the continuing care or support there will be (including for the child into adulthood), be sensitive to the needs of the foster carer and the child in making and ending placements and have contingency plans should the home not work.
- Treat foster carers with openness, fairness, and respect as a core member of the team around the child and support them in making reasonable and appropriate decisions on behalf of their foster child.
- Ensure that foster carers have the support services and development opportunities they need to provide their foster child with the best possible care. That includes liaising with local foster carers groups and seeking to respond to problems and disseminate best practice.
- Make sure foster carers are recompensed on time and are given clear information about any support, allowances, fees, and holidays they will receive including in cases of dispute with the service or during gaps in placements.

Foster carers must:

- Provide positive adult role models, treat the foster child as they would their own child, and be a “pushy parent” in advocating for all aspects of the child’s development, including educational attainment and physical and emotional health and wellbeing and co-operate fully as part of a team with other key professionals in the child’s life.
- Support their foster child and do all they can to make the home work. Take part in learning and development, using skills and approaches that make a positive impact and enable the child to reach his or her potential. Support their foster child to help them to counter possible bullying and discrimination because of their care status.
- Waltham Forest have signed this charter and are committed to working alongside foster carers to ensure that the children and young people that we look after are provided with the best quality care and greater stability. In addition, Waltham Forest has also produced a charter for our foster carers and the aim of this is to narrow services and visions down to our local in-house practice and to ensure consistent overall effectiveness of support and service provision to children, their families and foster carers is maintained.

Connected Persons

We think it is important to acknowledge that some people come to fostering in a completely different way. It can feel as though fostering has happened to you, rather than you are making an informed choice as career foster carers do.

Connected Persons are people connected to the children and already have an established relationship or link with the child or young person who is looked after by the Local Authority and where they make the decision to care for the child of young person. These people can include grandparents, uncles and aunts or family friends.

It is important to note that as Connected Persons you are still subject to the same fostering regulations as outlined in this handbook and we hope that you gain support from your supervising social worker with these processes as we know they may not always seem logical, for example when we are asking you to record about your grandchild or asking you to attend supervision and training.

It’s important to note that these processes are there to keep you and the child or children safe and importantly for you all to get the support that aim to benefit you and the children in care. If you have any questions about the way that we work with you, please speak to your supervising social worker, or contact team manager; marilyn.stange@walthamforest.gov.uk. Moving forward we aim to create a more bespoke service and have started this process with Connected Persons Forums and Support Groups. Please ask your supervising social worker for more information about these.

Temporary Approval Foster Carers

The Care Planning Regulations also provides the legal framework for temporary approval of a connected person as a foster carer. The Local Authority has the power to grant temporary approval

to a connected person for an immediate home to be made. However, the Local Authority must be satisfied that the home is the most appropriate way to safeguard and promote a particular child's welfare and that the home cannot wait until a full foster carer assessment is completed. Once temporary approval has been granted the foster carer Assessment has to be completed within 16 weeks. This can be extended for a further 8 weeks in exceptional circumstances, but the fostering panel would need to give a view on this, and the Independent Reviewing Officer of the child or young person would need to be informed.

Under the COVID-19 Regulations the government has made some changes that would allow LA fostering service to extend the assessment period to 24 weeks in the first instance.

Types of Fostering

Long-term Fostering

This is a foster home made with foster carers who are prepared to make a commitment to a child or young person until they reach adulthood.

Many of the children and young people who are cared for in foster care are unable to return to their birth parents. The fostering team works in consultation with the childcare social work team and family finders to match carers and children who require a long-term home.

If you are caring for a child for whom the care plan is long-term foster care, and you feel you could make this commitment you should discuss this with the child or young person's social worker and your supervising social worker. Alternatively, you may be caring for a child or young person for whom a long-term home must be found. The social worker in the team will work with you and the child or young person's social worker to identify a home and make plans to move the child on in a planned and child centred way to long-term foster carers. Foster carers are required to contribute to matching reports and attend Fostering

Panels for long-term matching to advocate for and support their child/young person's journey to permanence.

It is important to note that the expectation of being able to offer a child a long-term home is that you would be able to offer a home and family through to adulthood and beyond. When considering whether a home may be viable longer term, we don't just consider what the relationships and dynamics are looking and feeling like now but consider what these may look like in the longer term. Fundamentally Waltham Forest want the best possible home for the child and young person and not the easiest.

There is a clear process to be undertaken when considering a long-term home. This provides time to ensure that the long-term needs of the child or young person are well matched with what the foster carer can offer. If through this process it appears to be a good match, then arrangements will be made to consider linking the child or young person with the foster carer(s). The linking application is presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel. If the matching/long term linking is agreed, then the

foster carer will be notified, and the child/ children will receive notification/letter from the ADM to confirm that their home is linked long-term. The child would also be issued with a matching certificate and a celebration of the match will take place.

There may be some occasions when it is considered that the child or young person should remain long-term with a particular foster carer but it is not considered to be in the best interests of the child or young person to formally link them to the foster family. This decision would be made through the review process for the child or young person.

Respite Carers

These are carers who look after children for respite breaks on a regular basis. This provides an opportunity for looked after children to experience new relationships, environments, and activities.

Short-term Carers

Some carers look after children short term. These are carers who will take children and young people and look after them until it is clear what their longer-term plans are. This could involve bridging children to adoption or a permanent foster family, for the child to return to their birth family or move into a special guardianship ordered arrangement or a move towards independent accommodation. It is difficult to define how long short term is as it will depend on individual circumstances and the care plan. It can be for a few weeks or go on for over a year.

Parent and Child Homes

These are foster carers who look after a young person or adult as well as their child. This can be with a view to assessing the parenting skills of the parent or supporting the young person and teaching them parenting skills. In some cases the court and Guardians might also be involved.

Foster to Adopt Homes

This is when a child is placed with foster carers who are also approved as foster to adopt carers. All Waltham Forest adoption process is managed through Coram Ambitious for Adoption through the Regional Adoption Agency.

Fostering a Child who Travelled to the UK to Seek Asylum

You may hear several terms used to describe children and young people who have come to the UK to claim asylum – UASC (which stands for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Child), Unaccompanied Migrant Child and Separated Migrant Child are all terms that you may hear being used. In the Fostering Service we generally refer to UASC.

They are children who have come from a part of the world where they say that it wasn't safe for them to stay, and it would not be safe for them to return. This could be due to war, religious or ethnic persecution, genocide, or a range of other adverse conditions. Waltham Forest has provided foster homes for children and young people from Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Morocco, Albania, Somalia, Ukraine and several other countries. Generally, they are separated from their families to make the journey to the UK, which they see as providing a haven.

Who are UASC children?

They are nearly all boys, and nearly all teenagers, aged from 13 to 18. They come from many locations around the world. They have often made a difficult and dangerous journey to reach the UK. There is research evidence which shows that they mostly do very well in foster care.

How can foster carers assist UASC young people?

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children have the same basic needs as any other young person coming into a foster home. They need love, food, shelter, and security.

If you foster one of these young people, there are a few considerations for you to bear in mind:

- They may have been upset by some very frightening experiences, e.g., being caught up in a war, or a dangerous journey to the UK. They may have seen family members killed, or not know whether their parents are alive. This may show itself by them being nervous or finding it hard to sleep, or in other ways.
- They may speak little or no English when they first arrive. Usually they start to attend ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes and start to pick up the language quickly.
- They may have lived in a culture that is very different from the one they are living in now. Foster carers need to help them to adjust to the way of life in their new country, while also helping them to retain some sense of their own culture and history.
- You don't need to become an expert in asylum law, but if the young person is claiming asylum, then you would need to take them to a lawyer who can help them make their claim, and you may need to go with them to their interview with the Home Office officials who will assess their claim.
- Foster carers who have experience of taking these young people into their homes have reported that it has been a rewarding experience. Usually, they have no family in the UK, and many form strong, long-term bonds with the families who foster them.

The Legal Context Children Act 1989

All childcare law relating to children being accommodated by the Local Authority comes under the Children Act 1989. The main principals of the Children Act are that:

- The best place for children to be looked after is within their own homes. The welfare of the child is the paramount consideration.

- Parents should continue to be involved with their children and any legal proceedings that may concern them, and that legal proceedings should be unnecessary in most instances.
- The welfare of children should be promoted by partnership between the family and the Local Authority.
- Children should not be removed from their family, or contact terminated, unless it is absolutely necessary to do so.
- The child's needs arising from race, culture, religion, and language must be taken into account.

There are several terms that are used which come from the Children Act 1989 and are useful to know.

Parental responsibility:

This summarises the duties, rights, powers, and responsibilities of a parent in respect of their child. People other than parents can acquire shared parental responsibility. The Local Authority acquires parental responsibility if a Care Order or Emergency Protection Order is made. However, in the case of a Care Order the extent to which parental responsibility can be exercised by a parent may be limited by the Local Authority. If a Child Arrangements Order is made, parental responsibility can be awarded to the person looking after the child. Parents can delegate responsibility to someone else without losing it themselves. This is something that should be discussed at Home Planning Meetings when a child or young person is first placed with you and may need to be updated at subsequent statutory reviews.

Routes into Care:

Children's Act 1989 section 20

Children Being 'Looked-after' by the Local Authority: Accommodation may be provided on a voluntary basis and this comes under **Section 20 of the Children Act 1989**.

When a child or young person is accommodated under Section 20, the person with parental responsibility (PR) may remove the child at any time. However, 'a person named in Child Arrangements Order as a person with whom the child shall live or a person with Special Guardianship Order or a person who has care of the child under wardship by court can override parental wishes.

The foster carer should always check with and inform the child's social worker and fostering social worker as soon as possible if a person with PR decides to remove a child from their care. This is very important especially if there is a particular risk to the child or young person

if they were removed. The police may also need to be involved to protect the child or young person.

However, young people aged 16 and over may choose to be, or remain, accommodated against the wishes of someone with parental responsibility and this would be assessed by a social worker.

The Children's Act also states that, if reasonably practicable, a child should be placed with a person whom he or she knows, should be placed as near to his or her home as possible and siblings should stay together. If a child has a disability, the accommodation should be suitably equipped. These are all things that would need to be considered by a social worker when considering where a child or young person should be placed.

Accommodating a 16 or 17-year-old under section 20 Children's Act 1989

A local authority must provide accommodation to a young person in the above age range if the young person needs care and if the young person's welfare would be seriously affected if he or she is not accommodated.

There are different types of Court Orders-

Children may be looked after under a Court Order. This may be an Emergency Protection Order, Remand, or an Interim or Full Care Order. A parent may not remove a child if he or she is subject to a legal order.

Children and young people can be placed with foster carers under any of these orders. It is important as foster carers that you know which legal arrangement the child or young person is looked after as it will affect who has parental responsibility of the child or young person.

If court proceedings are in process the legal status may change while the child or young person is placed with you. If, as a foster carer, you are not sure of the legal status of the child or young person you should ask the social worker for this information.

Welfare of the child: This is the most important principle of the Children Act and one that is regarded as paramount by a court in considering any question of the child's upbringing. When the court is making a decision, it must use the following checklist as it decides what to do:

- The wishes and feelings of the child, as far as the court can find these out.
- The physical, emotional, and educational needs of the child.
- The likely effects on the child of any changes in his or her circumstances.
- The age, sex, background and any other characteristics of the child that the Court considers to be relevant.
- Any harm which the child has suffered or is at risk of suffering.
- How capable each parent or other relevant person is of meeting the child's needs.
- The range of power available to the Court under the Children Act.

Duty to investigate (Section 47). This is the part of the Children Act which gives the Local Authority the duty to investigate if there are concerns regarding any child or young person who is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm. This also includes children and young people in foster care. If there is any information which causes the Local Authority to be concerned about a child or young person then the Local Authority has to make any enquiries which they believe is necessary to enable them to decide whether there needs to be any action taken in order to safeguard the child or young person's welfare.

Overview of the Fostering Legislation

The legal framework for fostering services was revised in April 2011. There are three parts to this.

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011: These regulations are legislation in the same way as acts of parliament and must be complied with by everyone concerned.

Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011): These are issued by the government and explain what local authorities must do, as well as complying with the acts of parliament and regulations, when they are delivering services or buying them from other organisations.

Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011): These describe the minimum standards that the government requires of organisations delivering services. These are used by inspectors to judge the quality of the service and whether these comply with the regulations. Each standard also has a related outcome which is to be achieved by the fostering service.

There are other regulations and statutory guidance which also impact on the fostering service and upon you as a foster carer. This includes areas such as Leaving Care, Care Planning, Placements and Case Review, Short breaks, Family and Friends Care, Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children, Promoting the Health and Well-being of Looked After Children, Guidance on Children who Run Away or go Missing from Home or Care and Working Together to Safeguard Children.

These regulations and guidance are incorporated within the practice and policies of Waltham Forest Council. If you would like further information on any of these they can be found on the Department for Education Website www.gov.uk/dfes.

It is not possible to provide all the legal information in this handbook. The Fostering Network has published a book for foster carers which you may find helpful and is available from the Fostering Network website. Don't forget Waltham Forest pay for all their foster carers to be members of the Fostering Network so you can buy books at the reduced membership rate. The book is called "All you need to know: Fostering Regulations, Guidance & NMS 2011 (England)".

It may be useful to know the headings of the National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Fostering as these will be referred to throughout this book and within the policies of the fostering service.

There are 31 standards and they come into two headings:

Child Focussed Standards:

- The child's wishes and feelings and the views of those significant to them
- Promoting a positive identity, potential and valuing diversity through individualised care
- Promoting positive behaviour and relationships
- Safeguarding Children
- Children Missing from Care
- Promoting good health and well-being
- Leisure activities
- Promoting educational attainment
- Promoting and supporting contact
- Providing a suitable environment for the foster child
- Preparation for placement
- Promoting independence and moves to adulthood and leaving care

Standards of the Fostering Service:

- Recruiting and assessing foster carers who can meet the needs of looked after children
- Fostering panels and the fostering service's decision-maker
- Matching the child with a home that meets their assessed needs
- Statement of purpose and children's guide
- Fitness to provide or manage the administration of the fostering service
- Financial viability and changes affecting business continuity
- Suitability to work with children
- Learning and development of foster carers
- Supervision and support of foster carers
- Handling allegations and suspicions of harm
- Learning, development and qualifications of staff
- Staff support and supervision
- Managing effectively and efficiently and monitoring the service
- Records
- Fitness of premises for use as a fostering service

- Payment to carers
- Notification of Significant Events
- Family and friends as foster carers
- Home Plan and Review

All the above standards have their own outcome and sub-standards under them which gives further guidance as to how the standard should be met.

Care Planning, Placement, and Case Review (2010)

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review guidance and regulations came into force in April 2011. This guidance covers all aspects of care planning for children and young people and covers the following areas:

- Care Planning
- Placement
- Case Review
- Ceasing to look after a child
- Short Breaks
- Case Records
- Application of the 2010 regulation to children who are in contact with youth justice services.

The principle of the guidance is to:

- Increase scrutiny and oversight of the care plan for children and young people
- Increase participation of children, young people and their families in these processes
- Secure greater stability for looked after children
- Have a clear process of assessment, care planning, intervention and review to improve the experiences and the outcomes of looked after children.

The legislation and guidance reflect the importance of careful planning which is child focussed and based on thorough assessment of the child or young person's needs. It reinforces that ending of placements should be determined by the child's needs and not the needs of the Local Authority.

This document can also be found on the Department of Education website www.gov.uk/dfes

Being a Foster Carer

What do You Do?

Foster carers have many responsibilities. The legislative framework aims to ensure that foster carers and fostering providers are clear about their roles and that foster carers get the recognition and support that they require to undertake this complex task. The list below is not exhaustive and what may be helpful to hold onto is the idea that children need the experiences of a healthy, happy and holding family where they can feel safe and cared for. As stated previously by a young person, foster carers don't have to be perfect but, the children and young people need to know that they matter.

As a foster carer you are expected to:

- Protect children and young people in your care from coming to harm and help them to look after themselves.
- Teach children and young people to recognise inappropriate behaviour from adults and older children and make sure that they know how to get help if they feel unsafe.
- Build relationships with the children and young people in your care and help them to relate to and trust others.
- Help children and young people to keep links with their family and friends and actively promote family time in line with the care plan.
- Help children to understand and feel positive about their religion, origin and culture.
- Follow an agreed care plan and keep written records of the progress of all children and young people in your care.
- Work alongside other professionals who are involved with the child or young person.
- Promote the education and development of a child or young person placed with you.
- Actively promote a healthy lifestyle for any child or young person placed with you and ensure that their regular health appointments are kept up to date.
- Be an advocate for the child or young person, listening to them and their views and help them to be able to articulate their views appropriately.
- Attend statutory reviews and other meetings as requested by the social worker for any child or young person placed.
- To keep up to date with practice and legislation relevant to the role of a foster carer.
- Complete Training Support and Development Standards (TSDS).
- To have regular supervision with the supervising social worker.
- You may also be asked to be an 'Appropriate Adult' if a child or young person you are looking after is called to the police station. An Appropriate Adult is responsible for safeguarding the rights and welfare of a child or 'mentally vulnerable' adult who is detained by police or is interviewed under caution voluntarily. The role was created alongside the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) 1984. The role of the Appropriate Adult is to assist the detainee (the looked after child) to ensure that they understand what is happening at the police station

during an interview and investigative stages. The Appropriate Adult should support, advise and assist the detainee. More information about this role and a Guide for parents and carers in their role as an Appropriate Adult is available on the National Appropriate Adult Network website www.appropriateadult.org.uk. This is an area of work that your supervising social worker will discuss with you directly and look at any specific training / support required.

Documentation – Getting Started

Foster Carer Agreement

You will have signed this and received a copy when you were first approved as a foster carer. Schedule 5 of the Fostering Regulations (2011) states what needs to be included within the Foster Care Agreement. It is a document which outlines what is expected of you and what you can expect from Waltham Forest. It will also include your approval details on it. Your supervising social worker will have gone through this with you to ensure that you understand it fully. You should the signed a copy and one will be placed on your foster carer file .This document will need to be resigned if there are certain changes to your approval following a review and agreed by the Agency Decision Maker after presentation at Fostering and Adoption Panel.

Supervision Agreement

This should be completed with your supervising social worker and will include information about the frequency of your supervision and the areas of discussion that need to be covered.

Notice of Approval

When you are approved you should receive a Notice of Approval letter from the Agency Decision Maker or ADM which will include all the information about your approval as a foster carer.

Safer Caring Policy

All foster carers need to have a Family Safer Care Plan, and this should have been completed one as part of the fostering assessment. There should also be an Individual Safer Caring Plan for each child or young person placed with you to consider individual needs and risks. The Home Planning Meeting is a good time to consider this. It is important to note that in line with this each child or young person should have an individual risk assessment. If you do not have one of these, it is important to consult with your supervising social worker and the child's social worker.

Policies and Guidance

There are several policies that are relevant for the fostering service and to you as foster carers. The key relevant ones are on the Waltham Forest website and include all the necessary policies that will be updated as necessary. Talk to your supervising social worker about the policies to show you understand what is expected of you as foster carers and of us as a fostering service and just in case these are in the process of changing. Policies and procedures can be found at [here](#).

Support and Supervision

There is not a legal requirement regarding supervising social worker visits but the Waltham Forest Policy (and what is stated in the foster carer agreement) is a minimum of every 6 weeks or as agreed 12 weekly for long term and settled placements or when the foster carers do not have a child living with them. It does state in the National Minimum Standards for Fostering (Standard 21.8) that meetings should have "...a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure that the foster carer is meeting the child needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills".

Supervision should be a dynamic process which is both supportive and challenging, in an aim to enable development in practice. Although we are there to support you, we also need to be child led in our thinking and work together to achieve the best outcomes for children in care.

Supervision should cover the following areas:

- Providing foster carers with information, advice, and guidance.
- Reviewing practical and emotional support needs for the carers and other family members.
- Checking standards of care.
- Responding to comments, concerns, and allegations.

The Role of the Supervising Social Worker (SSW)

The supervising social worker is responsible for supervising and supporting the foster carer, this could include:

- Making regular supervision visits. This should be every four to six weeks but could be more frequently if appropriate or required. If you have a longer term more settled home, then this could be changed to a visit every 12 weeks.
- Supporting all those in the fostering household as and when required. This could mean telephone/email support as well as face to face contact.
- To undertake a minimum of one unannounced visit a year.

- Provide the foster carer with emotional and practical support.
- Supporting the sons and daughters of foster carers if applicable.
- Liaise with other professionals.
- Help to coordinate Placement Planning meetings.
- Supporting the foster carer at other meetings e.g., statutory reviews.
- Maintain a foster carer file which includes all relevant documents.
- Complete reports and recommendations for the foster carer's annual review of approval and or panel/ other meetings.
- Work with each foster carer regarding their personal professional development and monitor how this is maintained.

Training and Development

The local authority provides training for carers in line with the National Minimum Standards. It is essential that foster carers attend training, as a means of improving their skills and knowledge and contributing to their professional development. The timing and organisation of training takes account of the carer's fostering and childcare responsibilities. All training is run within a framework of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice.

Prior to approval carers will have attended Skills to Foster training. After approval carers attend post approval and Core training. Prospective foster carers may also attend training whilst undertaking the CoramBAAF Form F assessment.

All foster carers must complete the Core training listed below and update their knowledge in these areas every three years:

- Attachment and Separation and Loss
- Family Time/Contact
- Health and Safety
- Paediatric First Aid
- Recording and report writing skills
- Safeguarding and Child Protection
- Safer Care and Allegations
- WRAP (Workshop to raise awareness of Prevent)

Waltham Forest provide a resource called Virtual Reality which aims to help carers develop understanding of children's behaviour and some lived experiences and techniques for self-regulation managing it.

Apart from Core training, foster carers have access to a range of courses run by the department and other agencies, such as education and health. To support their professional development and specialist areas of interest carers can attend courses including but not limited to:

- Equality, Diversity and Identity

- Working with Children who have been Sexually Abused
- Delegated Authority
- Fostering Changes
- Life Story Work
- Child Development
- Behaviour Management
- De-escalation and Diffusion

Additionally, there are foster carer forums biannually, which incorporates workshops and presentations on various topics.

Course selection should be done in collaboration with the supervising social worker, who will work with foster carers to produce a personal development plan. All carers will need to evidence that they have completed 28 hours of learning each year.

Details of how to register for places on training events are available on the website: <https://fosteringwalthamforest.co.uk/>

This will detail course content, venue, start time, finish time and trainer details for each event.

Engagement with the Learning Process

- Delegates are expected to actively engage with the learning process, for example by attending the course in its entirety, contributing to group exercises and discussions and by completing post-course evaluations, both immediately following the training and a period after if required to do so.
- Challenge respectfully – there is the importance of debate and discussion to encourage learning in a safe environment however this should be done in a respectful manner.
- All attendees must observe health and safety requirements and take account relevant information provided to them at training events.
- Training should be a valuable learning experience. Behaviour, which is deemed to be inappropriate, intimidating, or aggressive will not be tolerated. The display of inappropriate attitudes, e.g., racist, ageist, homophobic or any other forms of discrimination will not be tolerated and will be challenged by the lead trainer. Any delegate who displays such behaviour may be asked to leave the training and their social worker or line manager will be made aware of the concerns about their behaviour.
- Comments which cause concern about safeguarding issues will be challenged and passed to the relevant social worker or line manager for consideration
- If there are two adults in the household approved as foster carers, both will be expected to complete the relevant training.

Online Training

Our e-learning programme provides carers with essential knowledge and skills for working with our children and young people. Our programme of short courses is specifically designed to enable foster carers to gain valuable skills and knowledge while growing in confidence. It allows learners to increase their knowledge at any convenient location where there is access to a PC/Mac and the internet. To access our e-learning programme contact the Training Coordinator who will set up an online account for you to access the courses.

Non-attendance and Cancellation

If a delegate is unable to attend a training course they are booked onto, they are required to contact the Training Coordinator no less than five working days prior to the date of the training by email or telephone call.

Comments, Compliments and Complaints About Training

If participants have any comments, compliments, suggestions, or complaints they should be directed in the first instance to the Training Coordinator.

Training, Support and Development Standards

The Training Support and Development Standards (TSDS) for Foster Care have been designed to support foster carers from approval through their first year of fostering. They provide the fostering service with a framework to guide the training and professional development of foster carers to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge, to provide consistently high-quality care to looked after children and young people.

The purpose of the standards is to:

- Provide consistency and quality in training for foster carers across England.
- Provide foster carers with access to the most up-to-date information and knowledge;
- Allow opportunities for career progression and development by providing underpinning knowledge.
- Improve the status of foster carers by ensuring they are recognised as trained professionals.

Carers must complete this work within one year of approval or 18 months for family and friends carers. Where there are two foster carers jointly approved in one household, only one portfolio is required; however, supporting evidence should be provided by both carers. There are separate standards for short break carers and family and friends foster carers which take account of their specific roles.

There are seven standards:

1. Understand the principles and values essential for looking after children, young people.
2. Understand your role as a foster carer.

3. Understand health and safety and a healthy lifestyle.
4. Know how to communicate effectively.
5. Understand the development of children and young people.
6. Understand how to safeguard children and young people;
7. Understand how to develop yourself.

Each of these standards has several sub-standards which carers need to evidence that they are meeting. Evidence can take several forms including witness testimonies, reflective accounts of work with children, accounts of what carers have learnt from training and evidence of reading.

Foster carers receive support in completing their compilation of the evidence of fulfilling the standards through attending workshops and one-to-one meetings with supervising social workers.

After completion, the evidence will be checked and signed off by a manager. Sometimes additional work may be required before a certificate of completion is issued.

Out of Hours Support

An out of hours telephone support service for foster carers is provided by the fostering service. This covers periods for when the office is not open usually after 5.15pm until midnight during the week and until all day until midnight over the weekend. The number for this is 07740046145.

At all other times this is covered by the Emergency Duty Team on 0208 4963000

Emergency Duty Team (EDT)

Foster carers must contact the Emergency Duty Team to report matters such as a child who has gone missing, the death or serious illness of a child in their care, a child protection matter or any other serious incident in the foster home, for which they need support.

The Emergency Duty Team deals with all emergencies social care referrals and situations out of working hours and it covers all Waltham Forest. It deals with emergencies in adult and children's social care.

If an emergency arises out of office hours the Emergency Duty Service can be contacted on 02084963000.

Fostering Network

All Waltham Forest foster carers have membership to the Fostering Network paid for by the Council. Fostering Network provides newsletters and regular information, consultation, information about national developments and training etc. The Fostering Network is the only national charity whose

sole interest is working with foster children, foster carers and social workers.

It was formed in 1974 by foster carers and social workers, to give all those involved in day-to-day fostering a greater say in what was happening in foster care.

Fostering Network have a helpline for members on 020 7401 9582 from 10.00 am - 3.00 pm, Monday to Friday. The lines do get busy so be ready to leave your name and phone number and they will return your call.

You can also email them at info@fostering.net or write to them at 87 Blackfriars Road, London, SE1 8HA.

Fostering Network have several useful resources that foster carers can access as well as publications which can be brought at membership rates.

Allegation and Standards of Care Independent Support

Independent support for foster carers who are subject to an allegation is available from Fostering Network. If you need support from this service, you can ask for a referral to be made to them. For more information regarding Fostering Network look at their website: www.fostering.net

Support from Other Foster Carers

It is recognised by the fostering service that not all foster carers find support groups to be the most helpful means of support. However, support groups are held regularly, and foster carers are encouraged to attend these where possible.

There are often invited speakers to support groups, so this provides carers with important information and structured support time as well as the more informal aspects of the groups.

Foster carers are also encouraged to buddy up with other foster carers. This can happen naturally through pre-existing relationships or relationships that grow from carers meeting at support groups or training courses. However, supervising social workers can also link new foster carers up with more experienced carers as an additional support which can be very helpful as foster carers start their fostering career and take on their first placement.

Support for Sons and Daughters of Foster Carers

It is important to recognise the impact that fostering can have on all members of the household including the sons and daughters of foster carers. Your supervising social worker will arrange to meet your children on a regular basis in aim to ascertain their views and offer and support or guidance that they may need. It is also possible that we can offer certain training where appropriate.

There is also a sons and daughters support group that is run by the Service to provide the foster carers own children a space to meet each other and attend activities together.

Waltham Forest Foster Care Association

The Waltham Forest Foster Care Association is an independent service run by Local Authority foster carers for Local Authority foster carers. Membership is offered to all Waltham Forest foster carers once they are approved.

Aims of WFFCA

To support advocate and promote foster carers who work with the London Borough of Waltham Forest to protect and advance the wellbeing and development of children and young people in care and uphold and respect the dignity and rights of registered/Approved Foster Carers. We aim to work with Children Services and other organisations to maintain, promote and develop good foster care policies and practices within the London Borough of Waltham Forest.

All approved carers automatically become full members of the Carers Association and have full voting rights. We encourage carers to attend and participate in all general/open meetings i.e., AGM, EGM etc, vote on decisions, and to hold office or be elected to the Committee.

We positively welcome all members regardless of race, culture, disability, age, religion, sexual orientation, or marital status.

As part of carer induction an electronic welcome pack is sent to new carers which includes a letter from WFFCA.

For any further clarity or to know more please email: walthamforestFCA@gmail.com

Mockingbird Project

The Mockingbird model was originally developed by The Mockingbird Society in America in 2004. The Fostering Network, the UK's leading fostering charity, has transposed the model to the UK and is a licensed provider of the UK model. London Borough of Waltham Forest fostering service is working in partnership with Fostering Network to deliver the Mockingbird programme

The programme has the potential to improve home stability, safety and permanency for children and young people in care and to improve support for, and retention of, foster carers.

The Mockingbird programme is an alternative method of delivering foster care which centres on the idea of an extended network of family support. It empowers families to support each other and overcome problems before they escalate and offers children a more positive experience of care. The programme uses the concept of a constellation, where six to ten satellite families live near a dedicated hub home which provides peer support, planned and emergency respite care and regular social activities. Because of its structure, Mockingbird offers immediate practical support - similar to that a non-fostering family might receive from friends and relatives.

The constellation also builds links with other adults important to children's care plans and to resources in the wider community that can provide them with enhanced opportunities to learn, develop and succeed.

To find out about the national programme please visit: www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/mockingbird



Why do Children and Young People Need to be Looked After?

Children and young people may need to be looked after for many different reasons and each individual child or young person will have their own care plan to take into account their own personal needs and support as well as future planning. As foster carers you may be looking after a child with a plan to return home, moving towards independence, adoption, special guardianship, or long-term foster care.

As foster carers you will hear references that a child or young person has come into the care of Waltham Forest as they have suffered from physical, emotional, or sexual abuse or from neglect. Here are some definitions of the different types of abuse and possible indicators.

It does not mean that all children in a certain category will have the relevant indicators and equally so some children and young people who have been abused may present differently. As a Local Authority we do not always know what the child or young person has experienced in the past so it is important that you are aware of possible indicators and you alert the social worker of the child or young person if you see evidence of them and discuss this with your supervising social worker. It is important to record these as advised by your supervising social worker however insignificant they may appear it can help to piece together the whole picture.

Physical abuse:

Occurs when parents or adults deliberately inflict injuries on a child, or do not protect the child from injury.

Possible indicators of physical abuse are:

- Unexplained injuries – bruises, scars, bites or burns, particularly if they are recurrent injuries of varying ages and types or in unusual places.
- Child shows fear about returning home.
- Withdrawal from physical contact.
- Bruising on very young babies.

Neglect:

Occurs when a parent or carer fails to meet a child's essential needs for food, clothing, shelter or medical care, or when children are left without proper supervision that leaves them unsafe or unprotected.

Possible indicators of neglect are:

- Consistently unkempt, dirty appearance.
- Medical needs of child unmet.
- Delay in the child's development without other clear cause.
- Lack of responsiveness with peers or adults in everyday social situations.
- Behaviour such as head banging or rocking.
- Repeated failure by parents/carers to prevent injury. • Consistently inappropriately clothed for the weather.
- Hazardous living conditions.
- Failure to attend any sort of appointments.
- Non-organic failure to thrive.

Sexual abuse:

Occurs when an adult or older child involves a child in sexual activity to which the child does not or cannot consent, because of his or her age or understanding. Sexual abuse also includes exposing children to inappropriate sexual material either on the phone, internet, laptop or books and magazines.

Possible indicators of sexual abuse are:

- Withdrawn, fearful or aggressive behaviour to other children or adults.
- Poor concentration at school or learning problems which do not match intellectual ability.

- Behaviour with sexual overtones inappropriate to age.
- Complaints of genital itching or pain.
- Unexplained abdominal pain.
- Distrust of a familiar adult or anxiety about being left with a particular person, relative, babysitter or lodger.
- Unexplained gifts or money.
- Apparent secrecy.
- Wetting day or night when previously dry and clean.
- Severe sleep disturbances or nightmares.
- Chronic illness, especially throat infections.
- Venereal disease or other sexually transmitted diseases.

- Marked reluctance to take part in physical activity or to change clothes for PE etc.
- Phobias or panic attacks.

- Self-mutilation or attempted suicide.
- Running away from home

Child Sexual Exploitation:

Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse that affects children and young people. It can happen to any young person whatever their background, gender, and age. Many victims of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) have been groomed by an abusing adult who may befriend them and make them feel special in some way e.g., gifts. Victims may be targeted both in person and online.

Possible indicators of sexual exploitation are:

- Going missing for periods of time or regularly returning home late
- Regularly missing school or not taking part in education.
- Appearing with unexplained gifts or new possessions.
- Associating with other young people involved in exploitation.
- Having older boyfriends and girlfriends.
- Suffering from sexually transmitted infections.
- Mood swings or changes in emotional wellbeing.
- Drug and alcohol misuse.
- Displaying inappropriate sexualised behaviour

Emotional abuse:

Occurs when parents or carers fail to show their children sufficient love or attention or when they threaten, taunt or belittle them, causing them to become nervous, withdrawn, aggressive, or disturbed in their behaviour.

Possible indicators of emotional abuse are:

- Very low self-esteem.
- Lack of any sense of fun.
- Excessively clingy or attention seeking behaviour.
- Over reactions to mistakes or overanxious to please.
- Substantial failure to reach potential in learning.
- Self-harming.
- Compulsive rituals.
- Unusual patterns of response to others showing emotion

Language That Cares

Language that cares is a collaborative effort led by TACT (The Adolescent and Children's Trust) that aims to change the language of the care system. See the suggestions in this guide.

https://www.tactcare.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/03/TACT-Language-that-cares-2019_online.pdf

Children's Guide

The fostering service must ensure that, subject to age and understanding, each child receives a Children's Guide when they are placed with foster carers. This gives the child or young person more information about the fostering service and information regarding their rights and important phone numbers. Every foster carer should also have a copy of the Children's Guide as stated in the Fostering Regulations (Regulation 3 (4)). The foster carer should go through the guide with the child or young person. <https://youtu.be/r6-UPbBdfZE>

The Voice and Influence Service

The Voice and Influence Service works to give children and young people an opportunity to have their voice heard and to influence the decisions affect them. Plus, they organise a lot of fun events.

If you have a young person living with you or know a care leaver, the Voice and Influence can work closely with them to help them better understand their experiences of being in the care system and to come up with ideas about how to improve services for them. As foster carers you can encourage and support children and young people's attendance at these groups.

Alongside the fun stuff, the Voice and Influence Service also gives young people the opportunity to speak directly to managers in social services and give their views to improve things, such as how social workers do their jobs. They also help children and young people get involved in recruiting social workers.

The Voice and Influence Service works closely to support the Children in Care Council (CiCC).

Children in Care Council

The Children in Care Council (CiCC) is a group of children and young people in care and care leavers who meet regularly to discuss important issues about care. They make sure the views of children and young people have influence over the way care services are run.

If the child or young person in your care is interested in this, they can join the CiCC. Being a member will give them a chance to meet other children and young people in care, learn new skills and do fun stuff like going on trips. In the last year, the children, and young people in the CiCC have also been on trips to Thorpe Park, bowling, go-karting, and a residential activity weekend. If you know a child

or young person that may be interested in this, please call 0208 4966874 or email voiceandinfluence@walthamforest.gov.uk.

The Voice and Influence Service can be contacted in several ways:

Voice and Influence Manager

Phone: 0208 4966895

Mobile: 07891957365

Email: casey.harman@walthamforest.gov.uk

David Reece

Voice and Influence Participation Officer

Phone: 0208 4966874

Mobile: 07891957365

Email: David.reece@walthamforest.gov.uk

When working with young people please remember the following:

Please do	Please don't
Respect that young people aren't always perfect	Make promises you can't keep
Understand that even suggesting social workers can make young people feel anxious	Assume that people can't change, everyone can make changes, recognise the small changes
Gradually build up the relationship	Make decisions without young people there
Listen to young people's views	Share things you're told by young people with your friends and neighbours.
Be honest	Judge me on my past
Promote having positive family time	Think I am the same as all other young people

Support young people and help them to support each other	
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Other resources that may be helpful to you:

<https://thetransformedyou.co.uk/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7hXsBi9jG8> My Name is Joe Cambridge

Advocates and Independent Visitor Scheme

The rights of looked after children to have a say in decisions about their lives is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and in the Children Act 1989. Before making any decision with respect to a child who the Local Authority is looking after or proposing to look after, the authority must ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child. Where children have difficulty in expressing their wishes or feelings about any decisions made about them, consideration must be given to securing the support of an advocate. See also Advocacy services for children and young people – A guide for commissioners (The Children’s Society).

An appointment of an advocate for a Looked After child is appropriate where a child wishes to be represented at a meeting (for example a Looked After Review) or assisted in making a complaint or bringing a matter to the attention of the care provider, the Local Authority or the Regulatory Authority.

Information must be provided to all Looked After Children about how they can gain access to a suitably skilled Independent Advocate. In Waltham Forest an independent Children’s Rights and Advocacy Service is provided by Barnardos. <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/what-we-do/voice-influence-young-people>

This information should be included in the Children's Guide or provided to them at any time by their social worker or Independent Reviewing Officer especially where their wishes and feelings may not be in accordance with plans being made for them. Information should be in a range of accessible formats. The IRO should regularly consider whether a disabled child needs an advocate to ensure their voice is heard and their best interests represented.

Assistance must also be given to enable an advocate to be appointed for the child for example by approaching the independent organisation on behalf of the child. Particular consideration needs to be given to the needs of disabled children, very young children, children placed out of the Local Authority area and those with complex communication needs who need the support of an advocate.

Duties of an Advocate

An advocate's key objective is to promote children and young people's central involvement in decisions affecting their lives. The nature of support advocacy provides varies considerably as it is dependent upon each Local Authority's commissioning arrangements, but every service follows core principles:

- The advocate should not be directive or judgmental but help the young person to express their views;
- Young people should be offered full information in expressing their views;
- Young people should decide upon the best course of action;
- The advocate should always remain fully supportive of the young person.

Independent Visitor

A decision to appoint an Independent Visitor will usually be made at a child's Looked After Review except where the child is placed in secure accommodation, in which case arrangements must be made by the child's social worker for the appointment to take place as soon as practicable after the placement.

A Local Authority should assess whether it would be appropriate to appoint an independent visitor for the child they are looking after if either of the following is satisfied:

- Where it appears to be in the best interests of the child to make such an appointment.
- It appears that communication between the child and parent has been infrequent.
- The child has not been visited (or has not lived with) a parent or any person who is not the child's parent but who has parental responsibility for the child, during the preceding 12 months.
- The Local Authority should consider the following factors when deciding if it is the child's interests to consider appointing an independent visitor.
- Whether the child is placed at a distance from home.
- Whether the child is unable to go out independently or experiences difficulties in communication and building positive relationships.
- Whether the child is likely to engage in behaviour which puts them at risk as a result of peer pressure or forming inappropriate relationships with older people
- Whether a child placed in a residential setting would benefit from a more individualised setting.
- Whether it would contribute to promoting the child's health and education.

Where an appointment is considered necessary, the child's social worker will identify a suitable person to be appointed. The Independent Visitor may be a person already known to the child and independent of the Local Authority who may be suitable.

Before the appointment is made, the proposed Independent Visitor must have been checked with the Disclosure and Barring Service, local Children's Services and Probation records and have the agreement of the social worker's manager. The appointment must be confirmed in writing and the visitor must provide the names of two personal referees.

The child must be consulted about the appointment and if he or she objects, the appointment should not be made.

Duties of Independent Visitor

The Independent Visitor will have a duty to make regular visits to the child and maintain other contact, by telephone and letter as appropriate.

The main purpose of the visits and contacts will be to:

- Befriend the child.
- Give advice and assistance as appropriate with the aim of promoting the child's development and social, emotional, educational, religious, and cultural needs.
- Encourage the child to exercise their rights and participate in decisions which will affect them.
- Support the care plan for the child.
- Complement the activities of the carers.

On appointing an independent visitor, the Local Authority will decide how much information to give him or her about the child's current situation and history. The child should be involved in deciding what information is made available to the independent visitor. Independent visitors have no right to inspect a child's file. No information should be withheld if it places the child or visitor at risk.

Local authorities should arrange for the preparation of carers and provide them with support and explanation about the role of independent visitors.

The Foster Home

Preparing for a child to come and live with you

When preparing for any home there are important things that need to be considered. Wherever possible any child coming to live with you should be planned ahead and this should allow for the appropriate preparation for the home to take place. However, there are times when there is an emergency and plans need to be made more quickly but care should always be taken that even in these situations you are prepared and get as much information as possible if this is known at the time.

Matching Children and Young People

Matching the right child or young person to the right foster carer is always an important task. If a foster carer has been approved to take a specific child, the matching would have been considered as part of the approval/assessment process. For foster carers who do not care for named children they will have a preferred and agreed approval category. This should have been discussed with you when you were being assessed or as part of the annual household review and should be the age and gender that would best fit into your home and family.

When considering inviting a child into your home you will need to consider more than just the age and gender group and will also need to take into account the needs of others who are living within the home and any other issues for the fostering household. Sometimes a lot of information is known about the child or young person other times less is known but before making a final decision it is important to obtain as much information as possible to ensure that the potential home will work well for the child and young person and work well for you as a foster family. If there is likely to be any children or young people sharing a bedroom a risk assessment must be completed by you and the supervising social worker prior to agreement of placement. This must include information about any children or young people who may be sharing and not just the child or young person currently being placed. This assessment must be signed off by the Head of Service.

As part of your assessment you may have started to think about questions that you may want to ask when considering a child or young person. It is helpful to have a list of these handy so you are prepared for when you receive home requests.

Standard 15 of the Fostering NMS (2011) is all about matching the child with a home that meets their assessed need. It is recognised that sometimes a match may be agreed but there are still areas where the child or young person's needs are not fully met within the fostering household. These areas need to be identified and a plan put in place as to how these needs may be met. This should be done before a home is made and confirmed at the Home Planning Meeting. It is stated in Fostering Regulation 17 (3) and within Standard 15 that foster carers should be provided with all the relevant information for that child or young person. If there are gaps in the information provided the fostering service (probably your supervising social worker or the duty worker) should follow up with the child's social worker/ the social work team manager to get this information ASAP.

Bedroom Sharing

The National Minimum Standards for Foster Care (2011) state: "In the foster home each child over the age of three should have their own bedroom. If this is not possible, the sharing of a bedroom is agreed by each child's responsible authority (Waltham Forest) and each child has their own area within the bedroom. Before seeking agreement for the sharing of a bedroom, the fostering service provider considers any potential for bullying any history of abuse or abusive behaviour, the wishes and of the children concerned and all other pertinent facts. The decision-making process and outcome of the assessment are recorded in writing where bedroom sharing is agreed."

In Waltham Forest, where possible the fostering service will aim for all looked after children over the age of three to have their own bedroom.

For children sharing a bedroom with their foster carer the Waltham Forest policy is that foster carers can have children up to the age of two in their bedroom. If there are exceptional circumstances or needs after this then the supervising social worker should undertake an assessment of the risks and issues and ensure this is recorded on the foster carer file.

Link to Personal Care and Relationships procedure available [here](#).

Useful Questions When Considering A Child Coming to Live With You

It is useful when considering having a child or young person coming to live with you to have a list of questions available to ask the social worker about the child or young person you are being asked to take.

Information you need will be dependent upon the age and gender of the child being placed and your questions need to reflect this. Below is a list which tries to reflect many of the questions foster carers may need to consider asking before accepting a child or would need to know as soon as the information is available. This list may also include questions you would want to ask at the home planning meeting.

Child and Family:

- Physical description of the child
- How is the child's personality described?
- What is their cultural background?
- What is the child or young person's favourite activities? Are they currently involved with any clubs or activities?
 - Are there any specific likes and dislikes expressed by the child?
- How does the child present? For example, introverted, extroverted, shy, verbal, aggressive, withdrawn, scared?
- Does child like animals? Are they safe with animals?
- Any there any known phobias?
- Does child have a history of absconding?
- Is the child using social networks? Do they have a mobile phone?
- Are there any sexualised behaviours? What are these?
- Are there any police interventions, convictions, or on-going court proceedings?
- Any information regarding the child or young person's behaviour and how they respond to other children and young people.
- Does the child have an Education, Health, and Care Plan?
- Are there any issues / risks with access to the internet and mobile technology?
- Are there any issues with keeping themselves safe – for example drugs, grooming, radicalisation, use of weapons?

- What is the family makeup? For example, is it a one or two parent /carer family?
- Are there any siblings (including half and step siblings)?
- What is child's position in family? i.e., first-born.
- Who are the significant others in the child's family?
- What does the child see as the most important relationship for them in their family?
- Who are the child's close friends?
- Are there any friendships to be avoided / promoted?
- For babies, what was the pregnancy like? Any issues during pregnancy, i.e., substance abuse; drug and alcohol issues,
- How does the baby/child manage separation from family or main carer?

Health

- Is the child/young person registered with a GP? Name, address, contact details • Is the child/young person registered with a dentist? Name, address, contact details
- Are there any known allergies?
- Is child on medication? If so what medication, how is this administered?
- Does the child/young person have any health issues for example, meeting milestones, toilet trained, hearing difficulties, wears glasses, wears braces etc
- What immunisations has the child or young person had and are there any outstanding? Are there any medical conditions? Any there any appointments pending, or treatments needed?
- When was the last health assessment?
- What is the name, contact details for health visitor or school nurse? Does baby or child have their health monitoring book available?
- Are there any mental health issues? Contact details for health professionals caring for the child or young person.
- Are there any issues regarding diet; allergies, formula feed for babies, milk intolerances etc?
- Are there any physical disabilities? Any special needs or learning difficulties?
- Are there any hygiene issues? Can child/young person wash, bathe without assistance or do they require assistance?

Education

- Name, address and contact details of school? Name of the Designated Teacher for looked after children if known
- How does the child/young person get to school? What expectations are there for foster carers to transport them to school? Is school transport involved? If so, what are the contact details and the arrangements?

- What is the school routine, timetable, uniforms etc? Are there any current exclusions or do they attend any after school clubs etc?
- Does child/young person have a learning mentor? If so, name and contact details?
- Does the child/young person have a statement of educational need?
- Does the child or young person have school lunches or packed lunches for school?

Routines

- What routines does child/young person normally have going to bed and getting up?
- What is the child or young person's usual bedtimes and getting up times?
- Are there any special routines for bedtime, for example, drinks, toys, stories?
- Has the child/young person been used to sharing a bedroom at home?
- Are there any issues re: bedwetting, soiling?
- Is a nightlight / intercom required or not?
- Does child/young person sleepwalk?
- Does child/young person have any nightmares / night terrors? If so, what soothes them?
- Can the child/young person dress themselves? What help is required?
- Can the child/young person manage going to the toilet themselves? What help is required to support them?
- Is the child or young person menstruating? Are they able to manage this? Are any interventions needed?

Foster Carer Profile

Children and young people tell us that when they move into a new foster home it can be very scary as they often don't know a lot or anything about the family that they going to be staying with. This can be the same if they are going to stay for a very short time or a longer period of time. Some carers will have completed a welcome book to introduce their family to the children and young people that come to live with them. However, what we would like to do is ensure that all children and young people could see where they are going to live and learn a little bit about the family before they arrive on the doorstep.

The aim is for the child or young person to know as much as possible about the family before going to live with them. Foster carers can help this process by ensuring that they have completed a Foster Carer Profile. Foster carers should complete these and give them back to their supervising social worker who can scan them and keep an electronic copy on the file. When placements are being made these can be accessed and sent to the social worker or other nominated person who can show this to the child or young person before they leave to go to the foster home.

The benefits of creating this are:

- The child/young person has something tangible which describes their new home and environment.
- It begins the process of creating memories for the child. Something they can take with them. It can contribute to future life story work when/if they leave your home.
- The foster carer profile card can be forwarded by email to a social worker who can give it to and talk to the child/young person prior to the home beginning. This helps quell some of the fears the child/young person may have about their move.
- The child/young person can engage with information and form questions about the home which can be used as part of your introductions when the child comes into your home or used by the social worker to help initiate discussions about the move.
- The child/young person begins to think about the move with less apprehension.

Profiles need to be updated when changes occur within your household. For example, we would not want any child or young person coming to the household expecting to find a pet who is no longer with you. When a child or young person first moves into the foster home there is always a lot of information to take in at a time when they may well be anxious. It is therefore useful to have a paper copy for the child or young person that they can refer to if they forget information, like names.

Some of you may wish to go further than this and develop an additional welcome book for the children and young people that they can keep. This is all good practice and is helpful to children and young people and we do not want to take away some of the creative books that some foster carers use. However, this is a way of ensuring that all foster carers have a profile as a minimum which can be shared with the children and young people who are planning to come and live with them. Please make sure your profile is completed and up to date.

Video made by children and young people in care - link [here](#).

Being Placed and Settling In

Preparing Your Home

Here are a few suggestions of things you might consider when preparing your home for a new placement. The first experience a child has in their new environment can make a difference to how well they settle into your home, especially during the first few days / weeks.

Sometimes the little special things you do to welcome the child can set the home up in a positive way. The age and gender of the child will impact on what and how you do this.

- Check the bedroom. Ensure the bed is made up with fresh, clean linen. Check your mattress for any smells and wear and tear. Turn the mattress or re-order if necessary.
- Wash, sterilise and check baby bottle and equipment, cot, highchair, buggy/push chair etc.
- Check soft furnishing such as curtains, blinds and cushions in the child or young person's room. Dust, wash or replace anything that requires replacing.
- Check walls and wash down dirty marks or drawings, remove any cobwebs.
- Obtain a supply of age-appropriate toiletries for the age range of approval.
- You might want to place a soft toy, magazine / children's story book, some pens/ pencils, notebook/colouring in book, flowers, welcome card, set of soft towels or linen on the bed. A nice welcome gesture may be a toilet bag containing appropriate things, for example, toothbrush, deodorant, shampoo, conditioner, soap, soft moist wipes. A small box of tissues in their room may also be useful.

Settling In Meetings - Sometimes called Placement Planning Meetings

These should take place prior to a child or young person being placed and should include the foster carer, supervising social worker, child or young person, parents of the child or young person and the social worker of the child or young person. These often take place in the foster carers home but can be arranged in local offices if this is more appropriate. If the meeting cannot be arranged prior to the home, then by law it should happen within 5 working days of the home being made (This is a legal requirement under the Care Planning Regulations 2010 – Regulation 9).

The Guidance for Care Planning, Home, and Case Review (2010), paragraphs 3.130 to

3.132 states:

“An effective home plan will ensure that the carer receives essential information about the child, including his/her health, educational and emotional and behavioural needs, how these may affect the child day to day and appropriate strategies for responding to them. It is important to identify any behaviours which have been of concern to a child's previous carer and which have contributed to the breakdown of a previous placement.

The purpose is not to label children but to ensure, first, that the child is going to an appropriate home able to meet those particular needs and, secondly, that the child is not put in a situation in which

s/he can be harmed or cause harm to others. Only by identifying difficulties as well as strengths is it possible to ensure that the child and his/her carer receive appropriate help and treatment, if necessary, for the child.

Clarity and specificity in the home plan will ensure that the carer understands the child's likes, dislikes and routines, and reduce the potential for disagreements which may arise in situations where decision-making on behalf of children may be the responsibility of different people at different levels in the organisation such as the foster carer, the social worker, or managers. Lack of clarity about who does what can lead to role confusion and home breakdown."

As part of the Settling In Meeting all of the above should be clarified and any delegated authority that is given to the foster carer should be made very clear and this should be agreed by all the relevant parties and recorded in the child or young person's records. Any areas where the home may not meet the child or young person's explicit needs should be discussed and plans put into place as to how these needs can be met.

Delegated Authority

Foster carers often find that they need the authority to make certain day-to-day decisions, such as whether the child they are caring for can stay overnight with a particular friend, or whether she or he can go on a school trip.

Since 1st April 2011 the law has required all local authorities to ensure that the home plan, which sets out the arrangements for the child to live with and be cared for by the foster carers, specifies any arrangements for the delegation of authority from the parents to the Local Authority (Waltham Forest). This should include any arrangements for further delegation from the Local Authority to the foster carer. The home plan should help the foster carer understand what decisions they can make. This is further reinforced in the Delegation of Authority: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations. This was published in July 2013. The key points from this guidance state:

Authority for day-to-day decision making about a looked after child should be delegated to the child's carer(s), unless there is a valid reason not to do this.

A looked after child's home plan should record who has the authority to take decisions about the child. It should also record the reasons where any day-to-day decision is not delegated to the child's carer.

Decisions about delegation of authority should consider the looked after child's views. Consideration should be given as to whether a looked after child is of sufficient age and understanding to take some decisions themselves.

Each Local Authority (Waltham Forest) should have a published policy setting out their approach to the delegation of authority to foster carers and residential workers caring for children the Local Authority is responsible for.

It is important that foster carers do know what they are able to agree to. Delegated authority can also change depending on the legal status of the child or young person, or the nature of the home or due to the age and understanding of the child or young person. This is something that should continue to be reviewed as part of the statutory review that all children and young people have. If there are areas that need to change between reviews, then the foster carer should talk to the social worker of the child or young person as well as the supervising social worker. The IRO should also be consulted.

Those who have parental responsibility for the child and young person should also be consulted and agreement reached if possible. Foster carers should have any delegated authority given to them in writing. In Waltham Forest we have a Delegated Authority Decision form specific for this use. If you don't have one of these for any child or young person in home then please speak with your supervising social worker.

If, as a foster carer, you are not sure if you have the authority to make a decision then it is always best to check it with your supervising social worker or the child or young person's social worker and ensure that the discussion is recorded.

First Week of a New Placement

The first week of a child or young person coming to live in a new home is often very busy; the list below is ideas only of some things which you may want to consider preparing for. Some of this you may already have completed prior to the child or young person coming to live with you. The social worker will guide you on what is a priority.

- Welcome the child; introduce them to your family. Give lots of verbal praise and small rewards.
- Involve the child or young person in age-appropriate everyday activities, i.e., helping get dinner ready with you.
- Ensure you have all the specified paperwork and phone numbers for the social workers, school, health visitor, school nurse, parents and other family members if appropriate, GP, dentist and names and phone contacts for child's close friends (if possible).
- Talk to them in an age-appropriate way about your fire plan of things to consider in the home to keep them safe.
- Show the child around your house and immediate locality of your town or area.
- Talk with them about you and your family. Ask what they like to eat or dislike.
- Introduce house rules in a sensitive and collaborative way. We want them to feel relaxed!

- If you use a welcome book, talk through some of the things in it. Let them show it to you if it has been completed; encourage them to ask questions and give them answers.
- Remind child regularly where things are kept and how to get things they need.
- Check child's clothes, underwear, school uniform. Identify what needs to be purchased for the child.
- Make an inventory of the child or young person's belongings.
- Buy specific toiletries as needed.
- Introduce yourself to the school and leave contact numbers and address. Find out who designated teacher is at the school.
- Make sure you know what the contact arrangements are for the child and ensure you know what is expected of you if you are involved in the arrangements.
- Set up GP, Dental and Optician appointments.
- Check if child is on medication, record on appropriate forms.
- Show child the way to and from school.
- Discuss pocket money, how much and when it is given out to the child or young person. Talk about if there are ways of receiving additional pocket money, for example, if they help with certain chores.
- Start to involve them in personalising their own room, i.e. choice of colours, bedding, posters.
- Start establishing routines with the child.
- Ensure all paperwork, health appointments /follow ups are in place.

Moving On

There will come a time when the child or young person you have cared for and supported will move on, either in a planned fashion, such as a rehabilitation home or a move to a permanent foster or adoptive home.

There also may be occasions when you are experiencing difficulties in meeting the needs of a child or young person. If a home is in difficulty, it is imperative that you talk to your supervising social worker and the social worker of the child or young person as soon as possible.

It may be possible to arrange a meeting to consider the areas of difficulty and what can be done in order to support the home and you as foster carers to meet the child or young person's needs. The earlier you alert others to the challenges you are facing the better, as providing additional support in order to maintain the home is much better for all concerned than an unplanned ending to the placement. It is also possible to request that the independent reviewing officer (IRO) brings forward the statutory review.

The Fostering Guidance (2011) 3.5 state: "Children and young people should not move to another placement, unless this is by agreement following a statutory review, it is clearly in the child or young person's best interests, the decision has taken into account the child or young person's wishes and

feelings, and the move is properly planned. The exception is when remaining in the home is clearly impractical, or significantly compromises the welfare of others in the household. In some cases, placements can break down because people find they are not well matched and do not get on well – it is important not to assume that if a home breaks down it means the child or foster carer is at fault. When a home is ending, foster carers and the fostering service should work with the child’s social worker and others to help the child to understand why they are moving and should support the child through their transition to a new living situation whatever that may be.”

If you as a foster carer do wish to end a placement, it is expected that you would give reasonable notice of this intention which should normally be for 28 days (as stated in the Foster Care Agreement). This is to give time to consider the appropriate plan for the child or young person and prepare him or her for this move.

Whenever a home comes to an end whether planned or not you as the foster carer will always need to consider the following:

- How is the occasion going to be marked e.g., a special meal or treat for the child or young person, so that they can say goodbye to significant people associated with that placement.
- The child or young person’s possessions should be packed in a suitcase or holdall. Never use a bin bag or shopping bags.
- Any photographs that were taken whilst the child was in home should be made available to the child or young person or social worker. The life story book should also be handed over.
- As the current foster carer, you should ensure that information about daily routines is shared with the new carers to assist in the transfer of care.
- Any future appointments are written down so that the new carer has the dates.
- Pocket money, savings, items of value, certificates etc should be handed directly to the child’s social worker who will sign for these (and the life story book).
- As the current carer you may experience a change in the child or young person’s behaviour as the end draws near. They may have mixed emotions of excitement but also anxiety. It is important that you reassure the child or young person that you care about them.
- The end of a home can be emotional for all concerned. It is important that as foster carers you do all you can to make this positive for the young person. However, it is a time when you and others in the household may also need additional support. Do talk to your Supervising Social Worker and allow others in the household to talk also, this may help to manage the emotions that you could all be feeling at the time or afterwards.
- The fostering service has developed a practice using the ‘Getting to Know You Form’ which assists foster carers and children in transitioning in and transitioning out of placements. It details the young persons likes and dislikes and helping the children and their carers to manage expectations, anxieties and help settle situations

Working Together

Statutory Reviews for Children and Young People

All children and young people who are looked after have a care plan which is reviewed by an Independent Reviewing Officer. Foster carers are expected to attend these meetings and also write a report for it. The purpose of the review is to monitor the progress of achieving outcomes set out in the care plan and to make decisions to amend if necessary. There cannot be any significant changes to the care plan unless it has been considered at a review unless this is not practicable, and then the IRO should be consulted. The Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO) role is to ensure that the people responsible for implementing decisions do so and if they don't the IRO should bring it to the attention of the line manager. Reviews are a legal requirement and must not go out of the timescales stated but can be more frequent if the circumstances of the case require it. Time scales are as follows:

1st Review – within 20 working days of the child becoming looked after

2nd Review – within 3 months of the first review

3rd and subsequent reviews take place every 6 months.

Further information can be found in Volume 2 of the Care Planning, Placements and Case Review Regulations (2010) and the Independent Reviewing Officers Handbook both of which can be found on the Department of Education website www.education.gov.uk

Annual Household Review of Approval

This is the review for the foster carers and their family and will take place a minimum of every 12 months or in some circumstances an early review will need to be arranged. An early review would be arranged if a foster carer has been subject to an investigation under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 and it has been concluded or if there has been a major change of circumstances within the fostering household. An early review can also be requested from the foster carer or the supervising social worker of the fostering team.

The review is an opportunity to consider how fostering is going for all those concerned and to check if there have been any relevant changes since the previous review (or since approval for the first review). It is expected that where there are two carers in the household that both carers attend and participate in the household review. The review should be held in the foster carer's home.

The foster carer's learning and development is also reviewed as well as support that the foster carer has had and whether any additional support is required. In order to get the views of all those who have been involved with the fostering household there are a number of consultation forms that are sent out to relevant people e.g., social workers of children, parents of children and young people, as well as all members of the fostering household. The supervising social worker also completes their report.

Although there are specific forms for the child or young person in care to complete, the supervising social worker and child's social worker should be speaking to the child or young person at regular intervals and in a more organic way to ensure that any feedback is authentic and meaningful. The forms should be completed by the child or young person independently or in consultation with someone other than the foster carer.

It is important to note if there are any concerns raised regarding the foster carer household these are addressed at the time of the concern and not wait until the next annual review.

The reviews are chaired by an IRO who is independent of the fostering team, and it is a good opportunity to reflect on the previous year and think about any changes that need to be made. The approval will be considered at every review. All first reviews have to be presented to the fostering panel and this is a requirement under the Fostering Regulations (2011) Standard 28 (5). Other reviews will be presented to panel at least every 3 years and may also be presented to the fostering panel if significant changes have occurred, or if a Section 47 investigation has taken place or if a change of approval is recommended. Foster carers are invited to the fostering panel when the household review is being presented. The decision about ongoing approval and changes are made by the Agency Decision Maker. There is an opportunity for the foster carer to make representations about any proposed changes. Once finalized any changes agreed in approval range requires a new foster carers agreement to be completed.

PEP Meetings

A Personal Educational Plan (PEP) provides a record on how all the professionals involved will enable the child to achieve their educational achievements. A PEP should be in place after the first review.

Waltham Forest make sure that every single child in our Virtual School has an effective and meaningful Personal Education Plan (PEP). Those PEPs are reviewed every term. The Virtual School do not attend every single PEP but will attend where our input is warranted.

Waltham Forest Virtual School support foster carers by ensuring that their input into the PEP process is recognised and valued.

Please don't wait for a PEP meeting to raise any issues. Talk to Virtual School, child's social worker or your supervising social worker.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Role of the Fostering/Placement Team

- Liaise with social workers and supervising social workers regarding placement requests and placement options available.
- Discuss potential placements with foster carers and provide them with as much information as possible to enable them to make a decision about whether the home is suitable. This will be done in consultation with the Fostering Service.
- Liaise with foster carers regarding planning for placements that are made or informing them if the home is not required.
- Contact foster carers on the day a placement is made to ensure that the home has gone ahead as planned and that the foster carer has the appropriate paperwork.
- Start and end foster carer payments on electronic system.
- Keep updated lists of foster carer's vacancies.

The Role of the Child or Young Person's Social Worker

There is a legal requirement regarding the frequency that social workers should visit the child or young person and this is set out in the Care Planning Guidance (2010). During visits the social worker should see the child or young person on their own, for at least part of the visit, unless the child refuses or the social worker considers that it is inappropriate.

Frequency of visits for children and young people in foster care (not with temporary approved foster carers) are within one week of the start of any new home (whether it is the child's first placement). After this time the child must be visited at intervals of not more than every six weeks for the first year of the placement. In subsequent years the minimum 6 weekly visiting should continue unless the home has been formally agreed as permanent which is intended to last until the child is 18 years of age. In these circumstances the legal requirement allows for the intervals between visits in the second and subsequent years to not longer than every 3 months.

The child's or young person's social worker is responsible for the individual care plan for the particular child or young person. They will need to work closely with the child or young person placed with you as well as with you as the foster carer.

They should:

- Ensure that the foster carer has all the information you need to care for the child or young person, including the care plan. This is an on-going process as new information may become known during the placement.
- Provide advice, guidance, and assistance to help the foster carer to meet the child or young person's needs in accordance with the care plan.

- Visit the child or young person on a regular basis and see them alone.
- Be part of the Settling In Meeting and ensure that agreement is reached regarding the areas of responsibility. This includes any delegated authority which may be given to the foster carer.
- Working with the family of the child or young person in line with the care plan.
- Preparation of paperwork and attendance at the child or young person's statutory review.
- Liaise with other professionals who may be involved with the child or young person. This may include arranging or undertaking therapy or direct work with the child or young person.
- Clarify frequency of arrangements for contact with the child or young person's family and/or significant others.
- The Role of the Fostering Independent (Household) Reviewing Officer
- This role is independent to the Fostering Service. They should:
- Chair all annual household reviews (reviews of approval) in line with the fostering legislation.
- Consider all feedback that is received for the household review.
- Chair any early household reviews that are required due to significant changes.
- The IRO prepares a report from the review which will include recommendations regarding the future approval.
- The IRO have a quality assurance role and will follow up to see if actions from reviews are completed.
- The IRO is managed through the Quality Assurance Team which is separate from the Fostering team management structure.
-

The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

The IRO is responsible for reviewing the care plan for each child or young person who is looked after. No significant change to the care plan can be made unless it has been considered first at a review, unless this is not reasonably practicable. The IRO will chair the statutory review for the child or young person. They need to be informed of any significant changes which may occur between reviews. Such changes, as stated in the Care Planning Regulations (2010), include:

- A proposed change of care plan, for example, arising at short notice in the course of proceedings following directions from the court.
- Where agreed decisions from the review are not carried out within the specified timescale.
- Major change to the contact arrangements.
- Changes of allocated social worker.
- Any safeguarding concerns involving the child, which may lead to enquiries being made under section 47 of the 1989 Act (child protection enquiries) and outcomes of child protection conferences, or other meetings that are not attended by the IRO.
- Complaints from or on behalf of the child, parent or carer.
- Unexpected changes in the child's home provision which may significantly impact on home stability or safeguarding arrangements.

- Significant changes in birth family circumstances, for example, births, marriages or deaths which may have a particular impact on the child.
- If the child is charged with any offence leading to referral to youth offending services, pending criminal proceedings and any convictions or sentences as a result of such proceedings.
- If the child is excluded from school.
- If the child has run away or is missing from an approved placement.
- Significant health, medical events, diagnoses, illnesses, hospitalisations, or serious accidents.
- Panel decisions in relation to permanency.

As foster carers you should be given the name of the IRO for the child or young person you are looking after. For newly accommodated children this will be decided when a review is arranged. Although the social worker should inform the IRO of such changes.

As the foster carer you are also able to contact the IRO direct if you have any concerns or you consider that actions are not being undertaken when they should be. The IRO can request that an early review should be convened if the changes are significant. The child or young person can also contact the IRO directly.

The Role of the Leaving Care Coach

When young people leave care the Local Authority (Waltham Forest) does not have to provide them with a social worker but do have to provide the young person with a personal advisor. The role of the Leaving Care Coach (as stated in the Care Planning Regulations 2010) is to:

- Provide the young person with advice and support (this will include direct practical help to prepare them for the time when they move or cease to be looked after and emotional support).
- Participate in reviews of the pathway plan which for an eligible child will include the care plan.
- Liaise with the responsible authority about the provision of services (this function may be carried out by the personal advisor working as a member of a social work or a specialist leaving care team; it will also involve liaising and negotiating with the full range of services that make up the Local Authority's services, for example, education and housing services).
- Co-ordinate the provision of services, ensuring that these are responsive to the young person's needs and that s/he can access and make constructive use of them.
- Remain informed about the young person's progress and keep in touch with him/her – visiting at no less than the statutory intervals.
- Maintain a record of their involvement with the young person, monitoring the effectiveness of services in preparing the young person for a time when s/he will move to greater independence or when s/he ceases to be looked after.

The Role of the Primary Mental Health Clinician.

The role of the Primary Mental Health Worker is to work across the corporate parenting team, offering support and reflective consultations to social workers and their teams regarding the child's current needs. Reflections take place in the context of the child's background history, mental health, attachment needs, and stability. The consultations offer a space for thoughtful planning, so the child's needs are met more accurately and holistically.

The role of the PMHW is diverse as they attend Peer Supervision Groups offering a multidisciplinary approach in reflecting on children's presentations and needs. They also offer support by consulting on complex cases, attend professionals' meetings, attend stability, and transition meetings and work closely with the home teams, fostering teams and the post order adoption and special guardian teams.

On occasions the Primary Mental Health Worker may have direct contact with foster carers, parents or care leavers if agreed as appropriate in consultation with the lead social worker or leaving care coach.

The Role of the Guardian

A Guardian will be appointed by the court for a particular child or young person. If a Guardian is appointed, they are likely to wish to meet with you as the foster carer as well as the child or young person they have been appointed for.

Guardians are employed by CAFCASS – Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service.

Guardians are qualified social workers completely independent from Children's Social Care (Waltham Forest).

Guardians are appointed by the court when the Local Authority (Waltham Forest) is seeking a legal order in respect of a child.

The Guardian appoints a solicitor for the child who specialises in working with children and families.

The Guardian advises the court about what work needs to be completed and information gained before the court makes its decisions.

The Guardian writes a report for the court saying what he/she considers would be best for the child. The report must tell the court about the wishes and feelings of the child.

The Guardian must ensure the interests and needs of the child are always put first.

The Guardian will spend time getting to know the child and members of the family. He or she will visit the child, talk to foster carers and any other people who can help inform what is the best plan.

The Guardian may recommend to the court that other professionals are asked to help, such as a psychologist or a paediatrician.

The Role of the Virtual School Head

The Virtual School Head (VSH) is the lead responsible officer for ensuring that arrangements are in place to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of all Waltham Forests

looked after children, wherever they are placed. The VSH ensures that the educational attainment and progress of children looked after by Waltham Forest are monitored and evaluated as if those children attended a single school. This includes, amongst many other responsibilities:

- Ensuring that an effective Personal Education Plan (PEP) system is in place which focuses on achieving good outcomes for individual children.
- Ensuring that the foster carers and all stakeholders understand their roles and responsibilities in creating high quality PEPs and in promoting good educational outcomes more generally.
- Ensuring that children are admitted to suitable schools in a timely way and that systems are in place to support regular attendance.

In Waltham Forest, the VSH leads the Virtual School team. See separate sections on PEPs and Education and Leisure for more information.

Caring For Children

Health and Wellbeing

For reliable and up to date health information and for finding health services locally in Waltham Forest go to www.nhs.uk.

As a foster carer you should receive basic essential information prior to placement, identifying any health issues and the name of the child's current doctor, this should be further discussed at the Home Planning Meeting. You should also be given information regarding which immunisations the child or young person may have and any medication they may be taking or require.

Unfortunately, it is not always possible to obtain full information; sometimes the information is not available, or parents are too anxious and confused to provide it at this time. However, if this is the case, you should ask the child's social worker for further details as soon as possible as it is important for the child's medical care to have this information recorded.

Foster carers should also receive a copy of the child's Personal Child Health Record (often called the red book). This is a way of keeping track of the child's progress. If you do not get a copy of this discuss it with the health visitor as although the information is not duplicated it may be possible to get another copy and add information that is known and then as the foster carer you can continue to keep this up to date. It is important that the red book is presented at any health appointments for the child or young person and kept up to date by the health professional, you or the child themselves

as they become older. As the child becomes older and more independent they should be encouraged to keep the red book themselves as it provides their health history and contributes to their life story. The decision for the child to hold the red book would be taken with the agreement of the review to avoid any chance it will be destroyed or lost.

LAC Health process

Health Care Assessments are provided to all children who are looked after.

- The first assessment should be completed prior to their first review.
- For under-fives the Health Assessments should be completed at least 6 monthly.
- For children over 5 years old, Health Assessments should be completed annually.

It is the foster carers responsibility to ensure that all children in their care have their health needs met and that in an age-appropriate way ensuring that the children are party to discussions about their health needs and understand about any treatment offered to them, encouraging them to take increased responsibility for their own health needs as they get older.

Consent for Medical Treatment

It is important as foster carers that you understand what consent you have in relation to medical treatment. This will depend on what has been drawn up and agreed in the delegated authority form and which will highlight what permissions you have. Always seek advice and guidance from your supervising social worker and child's social worker as necessary.

Young People over 16

Young people over 16 can give or withhold medical consent. It is partly your role as a foster carer to encourage and support young people in making good decisions about their health, offering them informed advice and guidance as necessary.

For young people in care, it can often feel as though decisions have been made for them, so from an early age ensure that you include young people in decision making processes in an aim to encourage them to make good decisions about their health

As a foster carer you still have a responsibility to seek medical advice about a young person where there are concerns and advice should be sought promptly if you think a young person is at risk.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

CAMH is a multi-disciplinary service which aims to support to children with a range of mental health issues. They can also offer support directly to you as foster carers. The support may include group work, direct one to one counselling, family therapy, or more specialised support.

If you think a child or young person is struggling with their mental health, discuss this with your child's social worker and supervising social worker.

Immunisations

Immunisations are an important part of promoting good health. Some children may not have had the recommended immunisations before coming into care, possibly because of neglect or parental choice. The immunisations that are to be given will be agreed at the home planning meeting and will form part of the care plan for the child.

The current recommended schedule for immunisations in the UK can be found [here](#).

It is recommended for foster carers to have HEP B immunisations. It is your responsibility as a foster carer if you wish to have this and you should seek advice from your GP. Some GP surgeries will not undertake these and in these situations the GP surgery should make a referral to another surgery for this to take place. In some situations, a charge will be made and when this happens the foster carer is responsible for the payment.

Uncertain or incomplete immunisations

If there isn't a reliable vaccine history for a child or young person, it should be assumed that they are unimmunised, and a full course of immunisations started in accordance with the Department of Health's vaccination of individuals with uncertain or incomplete immunisation status schedule.

www.gov.uk/government/publications/vaccination-of-individuals-with-uncertain-or-incomplete-immunisation-status

Healthy Eating

Many children who become looked after may have had inadequate or poor nutrition and may have developed poor and unhealthy eating habits. Foster carers are in an excellent position to improve the health of a child. They can provide a variety of appropriate foods and drink and can also act as good role models to the children and young people by ensuring that mealtimes are relaxed, enjoyable and nutritious.

Further information about healthy eating can be found at www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/Goodfood/Pages/Goodfoodhome.aspx

Giving of Medication

It is very important, as foster carers, that you have the appropriate assessment and training regarding the giving of any medication to any children or young people you look after. Please see full Medication Policy for detailed information, you should be able to get this via your supervising social worker.

Identity

It is important as foster carers that you get to know the children and young people that you are looking after and maintain a curiosity about what may influence how they see themselves. Identity is the personal characteristics that make up who a person and can include aspects of their beliefs, values and the way that they experience themselves to also include their gender, sexuality, language, ethnicity, culture, religion, age and abilities.

A person's identity is important to them and as a foster carer you will be expected to promote a positive sense of identity with children that come to live with you. You can start to do this by trying to develop your understanding into a child or young person's background at the point of placement. You may get some of the information in the referral and can expand upon this at the Home Planning Meeting.

A more authentic and child led way of finding out more about a child's background or culture is where age appropriate is asking the child about what is important to them. What is it that they used to do at home or within a previous foster home that they will miss and want to keep hold of? How would they describe themselves? If practicing a religion, how can you support them with this?

Where a child's background or culture is different from your own, your supervising social worker can support you with living and working with them in a way which promotes their identity.

A child is likely to bring into your home different experiences and narratives about family and themselves for example, some children have never experienced having a meal at a table, celebrating certain festivals, or having a parent that works. As a family and individuals, you will also have your own ways of being which are normal to you and it will be important to not impose your way necessarily on the child and young person coming into your life. Remember that you have as much to learn from them as they have from you and the aim would be to try and blend some of what you all must bring in a respectful way.

It may be that you have a child placed with you where English is not their first language. It's important that you support and encourage their use of their first language as this makes up an important part of their identity. As foster carers you may also embrace learning a potentially new language from the child or young person. Your supervising social worker can support you with how to care for a child or young person where this is the case.

Children and young people may have questions about gender identity and should be supported in their curiosity in a sensitive, empathic, and understanding way. Equally if a child or young person has questions about sexuality, they should be supported in their curiosity and opportunities embraced to have helpful and supportive conversations about what this means to them. Again, your supervising social worker can you support you with this.

A child's religious upbringing is an important part of a child or young person's identity and as a foster carer you will be asked to continue to support this. This may be particularly important for birth parents.

It is important that children and young people are protected from any form of bullying and discrimination in relation to any identity issues.

Family Time - Contact

As a foster carer you will be expected to work with the families of the children and young people you look after. It will be different for each child or young person, so it is important that you are aware of the care plan and about contact arrangements with the families and friends of any child or young person you are caring for. Whatever has happened, the child's or young person's family is still their family. Even if there are no direct visits, it is important that as a foster carer you promote a positive attitude towards the child's family while at the same time listening to and recognising the child or young person's own feelings about their family and background.

There is a strong emphasis within the legislation about supporting children and young people with staying in touch with their family and other significant people in their lives. As a foster carer you have a very important role to play in this.

Family time between the child and their family will vary with each child and will depend on the long-term plans and legal situation for the child. Family time may well vary over time.

For example, if a return home is imminent, visits are likely to increase. There may be some situations where it is agreed that the child or young person should have no contact with his/ her parents.

Family time will normally be discussed at a Settling in Meeting and at the statutory reviews for the child or young person. You should be aware of all the important family members and the frequency, length of time, time of day and exactly which family members and/or friends can visit or telephone. If you receive contact at other times or from other family / friends you are or are not aware of, then you should contact the social worker immediately.

Family visits can take place in different places; this may be the foster carer's home, family centres, parent's homes etc. Generally, arrangements for family time are made through the social worker and this will include arrangements for transport and supervision. You may be asked to help with transport or at times supervise a family time arrangement. If you are asked to supervise, make sure you are clear of your role and what to do if things do not go to plan, for example a parent arriving who is under the influence of alcohol. Sometimes the courts will also give instructions regarding contact arrangements, and you should be informed of these.

As a foster carer you are expected to help support the child and young person with any arrangements. This includes preparation for the family time and also allowing the child or young person to talk about the visit on their return should they wish to. It may also be important that you record any changes in behaviour prior to or following any family time. All family time details should be routinely recorded in your daily recording

Visits may leave a child upset and angry and behaviour may change / deteriorate for a day or so. You may feel similarly angry or upset, but whereas you can talk about your feelings, the child may not be able to and may remain confused. The child needs you to be strong, reassuring, and positive. It will not help if you voice any negative opinions you may have of the parents to the child. This is more likely to upset them further. The child or young person may well have mixed emotions about family members, and it is important that they are able to express them if they are able. It is not the foster carer's role to judge the parents, but it is important to listen and observe the child or young person and record the relevant information.

Such situations will demand your tact and patience. The visit should be a good experience for the child, but it is sometimes difficult to make this fit with what is comfortable for the birth family and convenient for you. There may be a lot of frustrations, like cancelled dates at the last moment or lateness. You may also need to talk about your feelings about a situation and you can talk to your supervising social worker or the child's social worker about this.

Family time issues can be difficult for newly approved and experienced foster carers. Sharing experiences and gaining support at support groups and with other carers and fostering workers can help you manage what is a critical area for children, which at times can be rewarding as well as most frustrating for carers.

Promoting Positive Behaviour

Many children who are 'looked after' have experienced traumatic situations. Others may have disabilities or conditions which severely affect their opportunity to develop healthily. Such experiences will impact upon their ability to communicate and express their needs appropriately. It is likely that, at times behaviours will be presented which reflect their sense of frustration; anger; confusion; anxiety; loss and hurt. Because of this children and young people who are looked after will need a greater level of care and one-to-one attention. Behaviour that may be viewed as 'naughty' is often an expression of past hurt and abuse.

Waltham Forest fostering service encourages carers to work in a positive way to support behaviour. Foster carers are not allowed to use any form of corporal punishment.

Prevention and De-escalation of Challenging Behaviour

Foster carers are expected to promote positive behaviour in children and young people through the care they provide and should be able to manage perceived challenging behaviour through building positive relationships with the children that they look after. To enable them to do this it is crucial that

foster carers are provided with all the relevant information about the child or young person. This should include any information about previous perceived challenging behaviour and advice about how this should be managed in the future. It is the responsibility of the child or young person's social worker to provide this information, but the fostering service will follow this up if it is not forthcoming.

Previous behaviour and behaviour support of the child or young person should be discussed prior to home as part of the matching process and also at the Settling in Meeting. If there are specific behaviours that the foster carer is likely to have to manage, then thinking about management techniques which could be helpful prior to the event should be considered.

Wherever possible, rewarding acceptable behaviour should be the preferred and usual method of reinforcing and encouraging acceptable conduct and behaviour.

In the main it is best to always consider behaviour in context and try and understand the influencing factors to any behaviour and then respond to this rather than to be reactive.

An example:

A child is verbally abusive to a teacher at school after telling the child he had to wait until break to go to the toilet. The school calls you to let you know that a letter will be sent home with an after-school detention for the following day. The school tells you that this behaviour is unacceptable and wants you to reinforce this message when you see the child when they get home.

Your initial reaction may be one of frustration with the child and shame that perhaps the fostering service may in some way blame you. This may then manifest itself in your response.

It would be important to try and consider the behaviour in context and ask questions around why this may have happened. The child will be less likely to open up to an angry response from you and try and come from a position of curiosity rather than judgement. You can also reinforce that this behaviour has a negative impact, but this should not be your only response.

There may be several things to consider in this case that may have influenced the child's behaviour, for example:

Child who has a background of neglect being denied going to the toilet may be a trigger.

What else was happening for the child on that day?

Who have been the child's role models?

Children who are on high alert and anxious often have a fight or flight response when challenged or told no.

What is the child's relationship with the teacher like? What would have happened had the teacher said "of course, but try and go before class next time?"

Foster carers will be encouraged to seek help and advice where appropriate and this could be from their supervising social worker, the child or young person's social worker or others who may have managed the behaviour previously e.g., school. Referrals can also be made to more specialist services to assist in the management of particularly difficult or extreme behaviours, for example Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. These groups can only advise on non-physical interventions.

Foster carers are to be provided with in-depth information about the child and their family that can help the carer in fully understanding the needs of children or young people placed and any current behaviours or potential future difficulties.

It is always better to catch behaviour before it escalates, and foster carers may have their own ways and strategies which have worked. Below are some techniques that could be useful:

- With younger children, warm face flannel/moist perfumed tissue: gently wipe the face of the child in the flannel/tissue and acknowledge that they are becoming upset etc and that you have noticed that they are finding something hard but that you have also noticed how hard they have tried to control their temper/behaviour etc and think they have done a good job.
- Ignore the behaviour (if safe to do so) and address it in a positive way at another time.
- Divert attention.
- Involve your support network.
- Be calm, reasonable, and reassuring.
- Transmit calm with body language by using normal and relaxed movements.
- Transmit calm with your voice by using normal, reassuring tone.
- Establish eye contact, but don't stare aggressively.
- Try and consider any relevant information regarding the young person or any previous plans.
- Try to involve the young person in solving the problem/situation.
- Work on any positives, confirming any positive statement or behaviour.
- Suggest alternative strategies and help the young person see there is a way out of the situation.
- Offer a choice or a compromise. If doing this always make sure that the options can be given, or further frustration is likely.
- Ask the child or young person if they have a solution (this would depend on age and level of understanding).
- Reflect and recap on events.
- Give personal space.
- Provide empathy for the child or young person's position in an active way.
- Use of humour – care should always be taken with this as it can be misinterpreted.

- Speak in a quieter tone than the child or young person.
- The foster carer should retain their own self-control. Sometimes it may be better to walk away from the situation (if it is safe to do so) rather than risk losing control which is likely to escalate the behaviour.
- Do something unusual – but not frightening – this can help to diffuse the situation.
- Red card: give a child/young person a red card or some such which they can put up to show you that they are getting to a trigger point. This will not only indicate to you that you may need to change tact but also helps the child to start to identify triggers points before they are triggered. This needs to be an agreed and discussed approach beforehand or if the child is aware of this in a sporting context.
- Look at what the child is doing rather than just what they are saying: the child may be provoking you with what they are saying but their behaviour may not be challenging - i.e. a child may consistently tell you they are not going to clean their room but in fact, they are actually attempting to do so.
- It is important for foster carers to remember that the child or young person's comments are not to be taken personally – they are more likely to be a measure of the frustration and anger that the child or young person is feeling.
- Re-frame what is happening by trying to make it positive: i.e., a child may be on the verge of flying into a temper when they could not achieve a task, be positive about how far they did get and suggest they try again later.
- Seeking to reward good behaviour – at times this may be difficult, and carers should try hard to notice something positive, however small. It can also be a good means of de-escalating behaviour. Adopt a non-confrontational approach.
- Establishing a good relationship/rapport with children and young people which is based on mutual respect.
- Establishing house rules which are consistent, explicit and applicable to all the children and young people within the household.
- Acknowledging and appreciating the past life experiences that children and young people bring.
- Working within a multi-agency context – be prepared to discuss with other relevant people the behaviour you are experiencing and work together to consider strategies.
- Working in partnership with children, young people, carers, parents, professionals and voluntary agencies
-

Permitted Methods of Control and Discipline

Listed below are some permitted methods of control and discipline, they include:

- The giving of additional chores to be undertaken as a consequence to their behaviour– these would need to be manageable and ones where it may be possible to complete in say 10 minutes - the aim of this is to reinforce the fact that their behaviour is unacceptable and not for the task to be seen as a punishment. If this is not complied with, then again, the withdrawal of a privilege may result.
- Use of reward systems. Have a clear set of expectations for the child and where necessary use reward systems that the child can participate in and track themselves, e.g., star charts.
- Have a clear set of targets but be realistic and choose achievable targets so that they are attainable. By attaining them, the child will not only obtain their “reward”, but this will go towards improving self-esteem.
- Have a clear understanding about ‘Time Out’. Start with say 5 minutes and slowly add minutes but it should never exceed 9 minutes in total. Before considering ‘Time Out’ consideration should be given to the child or young person’s previous experience to ensure that this form of punishment does not create additional trauma e.g., if being sent to the bedroom is linked with a child’s experience of abuse. Time In in terms of positive reinforcement and not Time Out would always be the preferred choice as we don’t want to add to the children’s already exacerbated sense of loss. Remember what you are trying to do is change the behaviour and develop your relationship with the child or young person.
- Where possible, pre-teach a child a skill - i.e., going to a supermarket without wanting to buy lots of sweets etc. Explain what you are going to the supermarket to buy, give the child the task of finding some of the items etc and if necessary, restrict your time at the supermarket, gradually increasing this as the child is better able to cope.
- The confiscation, temporarily, or permanently, of any article or substance belonging to a child if that article, material, or substance is considered to be potentially dangerous, for example, a knife or gas canister. Caution should be taken when considering this as it could also escalate behaviour and could trigger further negative behaviours

It is important to talk through strategies with your supervising social worker in advance and to clearly record what actions you have taken and why as this may be brought up by the child at a later point. If this happens you will have a record

Prohibited Methods of Control

Foster carers must never use the following methods to control a child or young person that they are looking after:

- Corporal Punishment – Foster carers should not use any element of force as punishment including slapping, pinching, squeezing, shaking, throwing missiles, rough handling, punching, or pushing in the heat of the moment and/or in response to violence from young people.
- Punish or treat in any way that is humiliating, including requiring a child to wear distinctive or inappropriate clothing.

- Threaten to end the home and use this as a way of trying to get the child or young person to behave. Avoid threatening to call the social worker or using phrases such as “they will need to find you another home if you don’t stop”. This is more likely to exacerbate the situation and increase the child’s feeling of being insecure.
- Refuse meals or deprive of food or drinks, deny access to amounts and range of foods and drinks normally available to children and young people being cared for (unless this is on medical advice). If a child or young person has missed a meal the foster carer would need to consider how to manage this, but the principle is that no child or young person should be left hungry.
- Use or withhold medication, medical or dental treatment.
- Use accommodation to physically restrict the liberty of any child e.g., locking or otherwise blocking doors.
- Restrict contact to and from family and friends. This will include, independent visitors, advocate, any officer appointed by CAFCASS, solicitor, social worker, independent person regarding complaints and any person representing Ofsted.
- Intentionally deprive a child of sleep.
- Impose fines, except for reparation and restitution (see acceptable forms of control and discipline). Conduct intimate physical searches. If it is suspected that a child has secreted drugs/ weapons on his/her person, then consideration should be given to notifying the police, following consultation with child/young person’s social worker or the carers supervising social worker.
- Withholding equipment needed by a disabled child.
- Allow participation in the consideration of, or the administration of any form of punishment by a child or young person on any other child or young person. A foster carer’s own children should only do this if they have been clearly authorised to do so and this should only be adult family members. If there has been any physical attack on a foster child either within the foster home or outside this should be reported immediately to the fostering service and the social worker of the child (see also countering bullying policy and procedures).
- Foster carers should not intentionally punish a group of children for the behaviour of an individual child or young person. This could be seen as or encourage bullying.
- Any threat to use any of the above.
-

Use of Physical Restraint

In general foster carers should not use physical restraint with any child or young person.

If it is considered that the use of physical restraint may be required there is a process which needs to be adhered to and appropriate training given. If you have a child or young person placed with you where you consider it may be necessary to use physical restraint please talk to your supervising social worker and the social worker of the child or young person as a matter of urgency as a multi-disciplinary meeting will need to be arranged to discuss the use of it.

Memories and Life Story Work

Every child or young person has their unique life story. Understanding that story is now recognised as a vital part of helping a child or young person feel okay about themselves and understand what has happened and why. When some parts of the life story is unspoken, or missing, all kinds of fantasies can go on in a child's mind. Not speaking about something suggests it is not fit to be spoken of, so the sense of it being 'bad' can be built up in the child's mind.

It is the responsibility of the child's social worker to make sure a child or young person has a life story book when this is appropriate. As foster carers you will often be asked to make contributions to the book if this already in place, or to work with the child on making the book. For babies who have been cared for before they move on to be adopted, a life story book with photographs may be the only information they have about their birth and early months.

The book will give an account of the child's life, where s/he was born, plus details about each move. It will contain information about mum, dad, brothers, and sisters and, where possible, other significant people in the child's life. A life story book is made with the child (provided he/she is old enough) and will incorporate photographs, if possible, maps and pictures and involve the child as much as s/he allows involvement. Some children find that the work brings a lot of sadness and often the child shows their distress to the foster carer after the social worker has gone.

If working on the life story book upsets the child, you may feel that it should stop, but it is important to consider the value of knowing about your past. Think about how old

photographs and people sharing memories can be important to you. The process of putting a life story book together can be very therapeutic and can be immensely valuable later in a child's life.

Decisions on who holds the life story book (the carer who a child) will be made at a review to avoid any known risk of it being destroyed in a rage or lost. It is important to keep a copy of the content and photos in the rare event that this happens. There will be support from your SSW and training and guidance provided by the Fostering service to help carers with this important work.

Memory Boxes

Regardless of whether it is the right time for a child's life story work to begin as foster carers it is important you keep anything that you can to help keep children's memories alive as they get older. These items may include:

- Birthday cards and letters to them.
- Tickets from days out.
- Photographs to include a date, who was in the photograph and a narrative.
- Scrapbooks to include the above and where the child or young person is encouraged to write if older enough about what each item means to them.

- Diaries kept by the child or young person.
- Hand and footprints.
- Red health book when finished with it.
- Baby clothes for new-borns or favourite items of the child's, for example a favourite hat.
- First shoes.
- Any items of important to the child and young person however trivia.

Some foster carers choose to get children and young people a special box for these things as they have maybe done with their own children. If old enough a child or young person should be part of this process and can offer some meaningful time for the child or young person.

Overnight Stays

Children and young people who are looked after should not be treated differently to other children and young people of their age regarding overnight stays. This can be an important part of friendships that they have. The agreement for overnight stays should be discussed at the Home Planning Meeting but unless there are exceptional circumstances it is expected that foster carers should be able to authorise these without having to check this out with the social worker. It is critical that foster carer records and can evidence if asked that they have made the usual checks that a good parent would in making these decisions.

If a child or young person wishes to go on holiday with friends a similar process should be undertaken. The authority to agree this should be clarified as part of the delegated authority document at the home planning meeting.

The Statutory Guidance for Fostering Services (2011) state that when a child or young person is going to be away from the foster home the following things should be considered:

- Whether there are any relevant restrictions contained for exceptional reasons in the child's care plan, including the home plan.
- Whether there are any court orders which restrict the child from making a overnight stay, visit or holiday.
- Whether there are any factors in the child's past experiences or behaviour which would preclude the overnight stay, visit or holiday.
- Whether there are any grounds for concern that the child may be at significant risk in the household concerned or from the activities proposed.
- The age and level of understanding of the child concerned.
- What is known about the reasons for the overnight stay, visit or holiday.
- The length of the stay

If, as a foster carer, you are uncertain regarding whether you can agree overnight stays it is important that you discuss this with your supervising social worker.

Foster carers should record when a child or young person stays away from the foster home overnight.

Preparation for Independence and Staying Put

Research states that young people who are leaving care often do less well than their peers who have not experienced the care system and are over-represented in prisons and in the homeless population. Young people who are in the care system are a vulnerable group of young people who need additional help to ensure that they are prepared for leaving care and adulthood.

As foster carers you will play a crucial role in this in helping young people to develop the skills that they need to become more independent.

Leaving care should not be a single event or starting at a fixed point but a process that marks a gradual transition to complete independence. The process involves much more than practical and financial support; it encompasses an appreciation of their individual, social, emotional, health and cultural needs.

It can be a very unsettling time for a young person and supporting the young person in preparing emotionally for this will be central to a successful move, and your full support of the plans will help ease the transition. The young person may need to know that they can keep in contact with you and seek your help and support when they may need it.

Preparation for adult life should be part of your everyday informal interaction with the young person but becomes more formal around their 16th birthday when Local Authorities (Waltham Forest) are required to undertake a Needs Assessment.

This Needs Assessment will cover 8 key areas:

- Practical and Life Skills
- Health
- Development and Identity
- Finance and Budgeting
- Education/training
- Employment
- Family and Social Relationships
- Housing and contingency planning

The child Social Worker or Leaving Care Coach will work with them, you and any family members and other key individuals to build up a picture of the young person's needs. As a carer you will be crucial to this assessment process as you will know how they manage day to day life, their key skills, areas they need to develop and vulnerabilities.

The Needs Assessment will then be used to develop a Pathway Plan (like a Care Plan) which sets out how the identified needs will be met. Goals and targets will be set, and key individuals identified to assist the process and support the young person in moving towards independence.

For some young people the plan may be for them to remain living with you beyond their 18th birthday. Each situation will be considered separately, and you will need to think about the implications of this for you as a family as the young person is no longer considered as looked after so the fostering allowances will cease.

The Children and Families Act 2014 introduced a new duty on all Local Authorities in England regarding Staying Put. This will require Local Authorities in England to facilitate, monitor and support staying put arrangements for fostered young people until they reach the age of 21, where this is what they and their foster carers want, unless the Local Authority consider that the staying put arrangement is not consistent with the welfare of the young person.

See the Staying Put Policy for further information. This is available [here](#)

Care Leavers' Charter

The Charter for Care Leavers was written and developed by a group of care leavers and published by the Department for Education. The Charter is a statement of the values and principles that should underpin the actions and decisions of all professionals who have a remit to work with care leavers. The Charter gives us a set of principles that are designed to improve the experiences of care leavers throughout preparation, transition and on their journeys into adult life. If you are working with care leavers it is good to familiarise yourself with these principles and see how well, we are all matching up to it.

The Charter for Care Leavers is designed to raise expectation, aspiration and understanding of what care leavers need and what the government and local authorities should do to be good Corporate Parents.

We promise:

- **To respect and honour your identity.** We will support you to discover and to be who you are and honour your unique identity. We will help you develop your own personal beliefs and values and accept your culture and heritage. We will celebrate your identity as an individual, as a member of identity groups and as a valued member of your community. We will value and support important relationships, and help you manage changing relationships or come to terms with loss, trauma or other significant life events. We will support you to express your identity positively to others.

- **To believe in you.** We will value your strengths, gifts and talents and encourage your aspirations. We will hold a belief in your potential and a vision for your future even if you have lost sight of these yourself. We will help you push aside limiting barriers and encourage and support you to pursue your goals in whatever ways we can. We will believe in you, celebrate you and affirm you.
- **To listen to you.** We will take time to listen to you, respect, and strive to understand your point of view. We will place your needs, thoughts and feelings at the heart of all decisions about you, negotiate with you, and show how we have taken these into account. If we don't agree with you, we will fully explain why. We will provide easy access to complaint and appeals processes and promote and encourage access to independent advocacy whenever you need it.
- **To inform you.** We will give you information that you need at every point in your journey, from care to adulthood, presented in a way that you want including information on legal entitlements and the service you can expect to receive from us at different stages in the journey. We will keep information up to date and accurate. We will ensure you know where to get current information once you are no longer in regular touch with leaving care services. We will make it clear to you what information about yourself and your time in care you are entitled to see. We will support you to access this when you want it, to manage any feelings that you might have about the information, and to put on record any disagreement with factual content.
- **To support you.** We will provide any support set out in current Regulations and Guidance and will not unreasonably withhold advice when you are no longer legally entitled to this service. As well as information, advice, practical and financial help we will provide emotional support. We will make sure you do not have to fight for support you are entitled to and we will fight for you if other agencies let you down. We will not punish you if you change your mind about what you want to do. We will continue to care about you even when we are no longer caring for you. We will make it our responsibility to understand your needs. If we can't meet those needs, we will try and help you find a service that can. We will help you learn from your mistakes; we will not judge you and we will be here for you no matter how many times you come back for support.
- **To find you a home.** We will work alongside you to prepare you for your move into independent living only when you are ready. We will help you think about the choices available and to find accommodation that is right for you. We will do everything we can to ensure you are happy and feel safe when you move to independent living. We recognise that at different times you may need to take a step back and start over again. We will do our best to support you until you are settled in your independent life; we will not judge you for your mistakes or refuse to advise you because you did not listen to us before. We will work proactively with other agencies to help you sustain your home.
- **To be a lifelong champion.** We will do our best to help you break down barriers encountered dealing with other agencies. We will work together with the services you

need, including housing, benefits, colleges and universities, employment providers and health services to help you establish yourself as an independent individual. We will treat you with courtesy and humanity whatever your age when you return to us for advice or support. We will help you to be the driver of your life and not the passenger. We will point you in a positive direction and journey alongside you at your pace. We will trust and respect you. We will not forget about you. We will remain your supporters in whatever way we can, even when our formal relationship with you has ended.

National Insurance Numbers

All young people should receive a National Insurance Number shortly before their 16th birthday. You may find that the young person you are caring for does not receive one. If so you should alert the social worker who will need to complete a form to enable this to happen.

For more information on National Insurance numbers look at the HM Revenue and Customs website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs

Relationships and Sex

Talking about relationships and sex can for some feel uncomfortable and intrusive. As foster carers it is important that you provide a space in which children and young people can talk about relationships in a safe and honest way. Encouraging open communication about this can really help children and young people along with this. Start these conversations early and not just at points of crisis, this can include when watching a TV programme or conversing about a friend that they know who may be having relationship difficulties or success! Don't avoid uncomfortable conversations and if you're not sure how to respond, ask for advice and support from your supervising social worker.

It may be helpful to familiarise yourself with the school curriculum on sex and relationships so that you can continue conversations at home.

It's important to not project your own relationship experiences and values onto the child or young person and offer them support and guidance, while at the same time encouraging them to develop their own ideas. This would be different however if a child or young person wasn't safe in a relationship. Further advice about this would need to be sought from the supervising social worker and child's social worker.

Where child or young person may have been involved in a sexually abusive relationship, this can make the conversations more sensitive and difficult and foster carers can feel like they are walking on eggshells around the subject of sex. Equip yourself with further training, speak to your supervising social worker and importantly find opportunities to offer an alternative narrative.

Where a child or young person may have questions around sexual identity, follow the same openness and curiosity as described above.

If you are worried that your child or young person is part of an abusive or illegal relationship, seek advice and support from the Local Authority or as necessary call the police.

Safeguarding

Allegations

Section 47 Investigations (Children Act 1989)

If there is a cause to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, a Section 47 investigation will be initiated.

“Harm” is the “ill treatment or the impairment of the health or development of the child” and it is determined “significant” by “comparing a child’s health and development with what might be reasonably expected of a similar child”. If ‘significant harm’ is suspected the Local Authority must make, or cause to be made, such enquires as they consider necessary to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard or promote the child’s welfare.

Role of the Fostering Team Manager:

- Be available to you if you have any questions.
- Liaise with the LADO.
- Attend strategy meetings.
- Liaise with other professionals involved with the investigation.
- Provide any relevant information during the process of the enquiry.

Role of the Supervising Social Worker:

- Keep you informed of the process and any decisions that are made,
- Provide any relevant information during the process of the enquiry.
- Attend strategy meetings.
- Ensuring you are aware of where you can access independent support.

- Will undertake any paperwork required during the process, including household reviews, and fostering panel.

Role of LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer):

The Waltham Forest LADO is specifically involved in cases where there is a concern or allegation that someone working or volunteering with children:

- Has or may have harmed a child.
- May have committed a criminal offence related to a child.
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children.
- They give advice and guidance on how concerns or allegations should be investigated against adults working with children. This should not be confused with allegations made by children against other children, which is not the remit of the LADO.
- They do not investigate but must ensure that an appropriate investigation is carried out, whether that is by the police, children's social care or the employer or a combination of these.

Use of Suspension:

Working Together to Safeguard Children (March 2010) states that suspension should be considered in any case where:

- There is cause to suspect a child is at risk of significant harm;
- The allegation warrants investigation by Police; or
- The allegation is of such a serious nature it might be grounds for recommending termination of approval.

It will be considered in any situation where Waltham Forest Council does not wish to place any further children with you while it undertakes its enquiries.

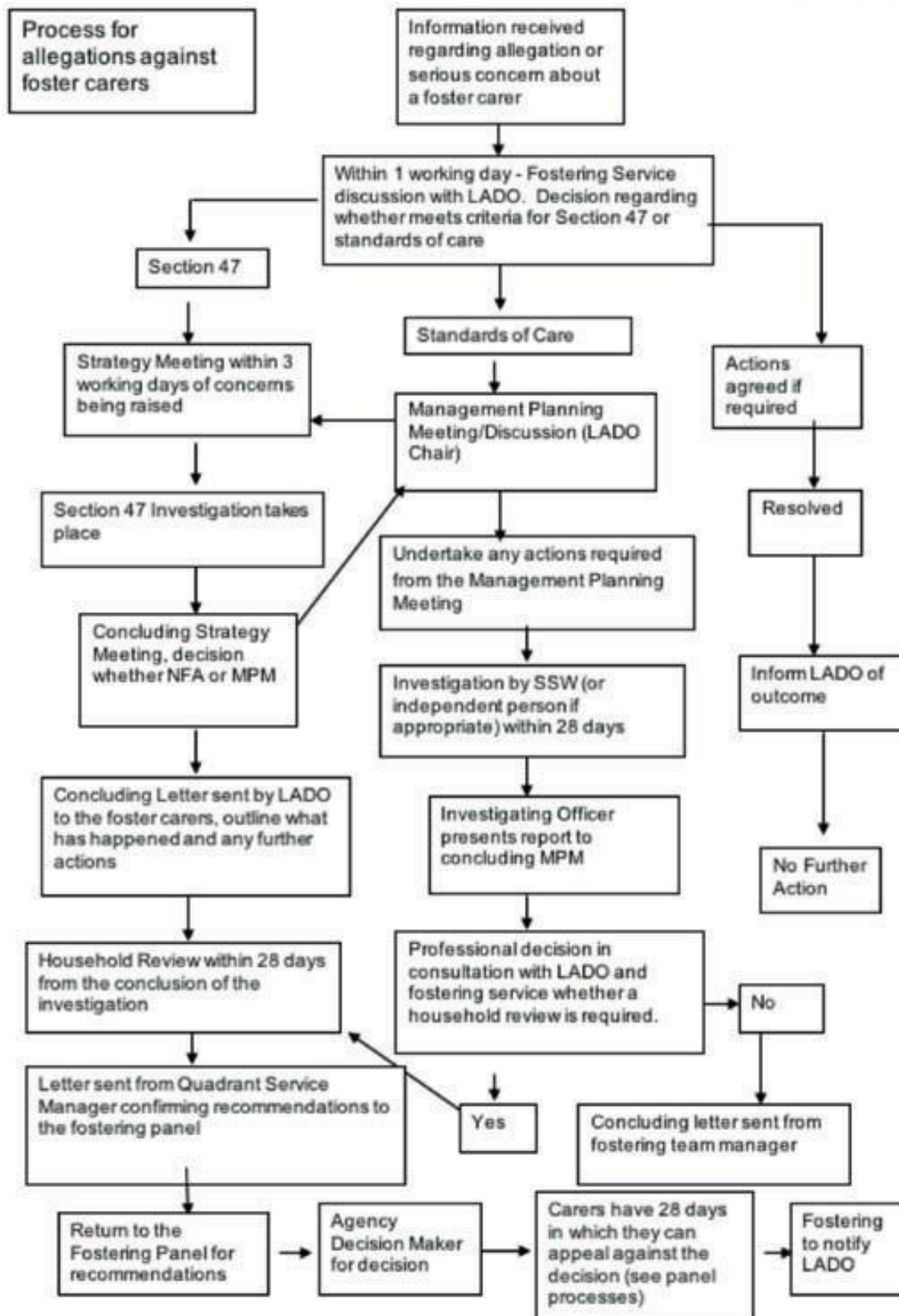
If you are suspended it is 'without prejudice' but you will not be able to continue fostering while the situation is fully investigated.

Support is available to you, and you should be kept fully informed of the process and what is happening. Sometimes we are unable to give you much information about the allegation due to the independent nature of the investigation which we would not want to prejudice. We will give you more information as soon as we are able. It is not possible to be able to say how long this may last but Waltham Forest will try and deal with things in as short a

time as possible but will need to gather all the relevant information in order that a fair assessment is made. **You should also not attend foster carer training or support groups during this time.**

Suspension should not be seen as an automatic response to an allegation or imposed as a 'knee jerk reaction'; in some cases it will not be immediately obvious that suspension is appropriate. The need for suspension may only become clear after information has been shared and/or there has been discussion with other agencies at a strategy meeting.

If the information about the foster carer's conduct does not require a strategy meeting, a management planning meeting may be arranged to evaluate the level of concern and to determine the foster carer's suitability to continue working with children in this capacity. This would be a "standard of care enquiry".



Standards of Care

Waltham Forest Council are committed to ensuring that we achieve the best outcome for children and young people in our care, seeking to ensure that all our children and young people are safe, happy, healthy and enjoy life. We aim to give them the care and support they need to be resilient and well prepared for adulthood and independence. We aim to provide them with high quality care, support and guidance to ensure they get the opportunities they deserve. To do this we want to ensure that all children are supported to achieve the best broad outcomes possible and maximise their potential to enjoy a life in which they are safe, well, resilient and independent. In achieving this we seek to offer a fostering experience which ensures that the young people are protected from harm and receive high quality care that seeks to support them and repair some of the trauma they may have experienced.

The Primary Legal framework and guidance

The National Minimum Standards Fostering 2011

The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services 2011 (England)

Thresholds

Where a referral or concern about a foster carer's practice does not meet the threshold for a Social Care or Police enquiry (Section 47), a Standards of Care Investigation should be carried out by the Local Authority. The management of the Standards of Care Investigation/Assessment is the responsibility of the Fostering Service and will be overseen by the Fostering Team Manager.

(N.B. Where the concern meets the threshold for a Section 47 investigation, this process will be completed first, but an outcome may also be to progress to a 'Standards of Care Assessment').

The decision about triggering a Standards of Care Assessment will be agreed:

- By the Fostering Team Manager or Head of Service and/or by the Local Authority Designated Officer.

In Waltham Forest a standards of care investigation will be undertaken when there are child protection concerns, but the 'significant harm' threshold is not met. This would be when concerns are expressed in relation to the conduct, attitude or practices of the foster carer; it could include accumulating, worsening 'one off', or continuing low level concerns about day-to-day care.

The Standards of care assessment and Panel process

The Standards of Care Assessment should enable an opportunity to explore the concerns raised in a systemic and non-blaming way and should create opportunities for learning and development. This will initially involve a meeting chaired by a Fostering Manager and will usually include a minute taker, supervising social worker and if you want independent support from the Fostering Network. Your supervising social worker may make a referral for this should you feel like you would benefit from this.

The discussions held in the Standards of care Meeting will form part of the Assessment.

The Standards of Care Assessment will also:

- Consider any previous concerns about practice.
- Be inclusive of the views of others including the Child in Care, other household members, the Childcare Social Worker and other professionals.
- Consider any relevant reports including the Form F and Annual Review Reports. The Supervising Social Worker should provide a chronology for the purposes of the meeting.
- The strengths of the Foster Carer/s.
- The minutes of the meeting will be distributed to all parties and agreed with clear actions and timescales identified.

The Supervising Social Worker should also enable the Foster Carer/s opportunity for further discussions and reflections following the meeting. The Supervising Social Worker will then produce a report for panel in consultation with all parties and make a recommendation about approval with a consideration given about whether the Foster Carer can continue to foster and/or how the Service can support the continued development of the Foster Carer by offering specific training, having additional focused supervision sessions or receiving support from a Foster Carer mentor. The report should also reflect any organisational learning.

Whistleblowing

Waltham Forest strives to provide the highest quality of service. The protection of service users from abuse of any kind is therefore, a responsibility shared by all staff and carers. Waltham Forest recognises that users of all our services may make representation about the care practices of individual staff and/or care systems on a regular basis. There will be challenges to practices and decisions which we make and service users will not always be confident that their representations will be responded to positively, or that the care they receive will not be diminished because of making a complaint. Staff should take every

opportunity to reassure users that their concerns are our concerns and that every effort will be made to resolve them.

Definition of a “Whistle-blower”

A person who reveals information based on knowledge which is calculated to call attention to negligence, abuses or danger that affects individuals.

What is whistleblowing at work?

Staff and carers have the right and individual responsibility to raise any matters of concerns regarding poor practice at work. Staff and carers are responsible for the welfare and safety for those they care for on the agency and Local Authority’s behalf and this comes above and before feelings of loyalty towards colleagues or family members. It is a means whereby staff and carers have an immediate opportunity to express their concerns regarding poor practice at work at the highest level should they wish to do so.

Foster carers are encouraged to act if they have reasonable suspicion of serious poor practice or have been informed about serious poor practice. Foster carers should be reassured that they will be supported if they ‘whistle blow’. Support will be provided by the fostering service and is designed to ensure that the identity of the whistle blower remains confidential.

Carers are recommended to “whistle blow” to their supervising social worker, who in turn must bring the matter to the attention of the appropriate line manager.

If the concern focuses on the supervising social worker, the carer(s) should contact the fostering team manager or the manager responsible for fostering in Waltham Forest.

Recording

All foster carers are required to keep and maintain comprehensive up to date records relating to each child or young person in their care. If there is more than one child placed with a foster carer, a separate record must be kept for each child. This will help contribute to making plans about the child or young person and it may also be helpful for the child later in life when they want to understand more about their childhood.

Any records relating to a child in care are classed as personal data by the ‘Data Protection Act 1998’. The Data Protection Act 1998 came into force in March 2000 and covers access to any records kept in any format. The Act increases the rights of the public to have access

to any records that may be held on them. For this reason, it is important that foster carers ensure the records are kept secure.

Recording should be completed on the templates provided or sent securely via the internet. This can be in form of an email using programs such as Mimecast or emailing documents with a password.

Recording information is a vital part of the role of a foster carer. Keeping accurate and detailed records of a child in their placement can:

- Contribute to the child or young person's care plan.
- Help foster carers review their practice.
- Contribute to a child or young person's life story work.
- Assist in evidencing the progress of the placement over time and give a picture of the child's pattern of behaviour.
- Provide an accurate record of behaviours, events, or incidents; and
- Reduce the risk to the foster carer and their family of an allegation or a complaint, while the child is in care or retrospectively.

What to record

Foster carers should be consistent when recording information and should record positive as well as negative events, developments, and situations. Your personal reflections on these events should be noted separately and discussed with your supervising social worker.

Examples of information that should be recorded on the child's daily records are:

- Any significant milestones in development, e.g., first word, first day at school, what the child has done well.
- Key information which provides an understanding of the child's everyday life (for example: what is the child's demeanour; what have they liked today or this week; what did they laugh at or like on TV).
- Details of any work undertaken by the foster carer on life-story work, understanding of cultural and identity issues or work agreed with the child's social worker or the supervising social worker.
- Details of family time and any other form of contact such as letters, cards, telephone calls, etc.

Details of any visit or contact made by the department or other professionals and by the foster carer in relation to the child.

- Details of any specific incident, events, or changes of circumstances in your household.
- Any concerns that the child raises and what the foster carer did in relation to this; • Comments the child or young person makes that give the foster carer concern (exact words should be recorded).

- Details of any theft or damages caused by the child or young person (both inside and outside of the home); and
- Details of any disclosures or allegations.

Incidents

Foster Carers must report and record any incidents, significant illnesses, hospital visits to A & E, minor accidents within the home (such as a fall from a bicycle) immediately. A notification form must be completed and given to the member of the Fostering team. If in doubt, call us for advice. Foster Carers should ensure that the incident is reported to both the child's social worker and a member of the fostering team. Such experiences can be distressing, and carers may need to talk to their Supervising Social Worker, another carer or a family member or friend.

Foster Carers must always report incidents to the child's social worker, both for their own protection and find new ways to prevent it happening again.

Bullying

Bullying is any behaviour which is perceived by the targeted individual or any other person, as intending to hurt, intimidate, frighten, harm or exclude. It is usually persistent and an abuse of power, leaving the targeted individual feeling defenceless.

If as a carer you think that the child or young person you are looking after is being bullied or a bully to others you must report this to the social worker and your supervising social worker.

Bullying can be:

- Emotional: being unfriendly, excluding, tormenting (e.g. hiding books, threatening gestures).
- Physical: pushing, kicking, hitting, punching or any use of violence.
- Racist: racial taunts, graffiti, gestures.
- Sexual: unwanted physical contact or sexually abusive comments Homophobic: because of or focussing on the issue of sexuality
- Verbal: name-calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, teasing.
- Cyber: All areas of internet, such as email and internet chat room misuse, mobile threats by text messaging and calls, misuse of associated technology, i.e. camera and video facilities.

More examples of bullying are:

- Being ignored or made to feel not good enough.
- Removal of belongings – bags, clothing, personal items, money, sweets, food, homework etc.
- Inappropriate teasing / Ridicule – people laughing at your hair or your clothes or the way you look.
- Use of physical size to intimidate.
- Gang pressure – chicken run, car crime, drugs, smoking, shop lifting.
- Discrimination – race, culture, disability, gender, sexuality, age, appearance etc.
- Subtle – a look, expression, usually intended to intimidate or frighten.
- Taking advantage – “My sweets for your watch”.
- Using technology to bully, e.g. Facebook, the internet, mobile phones and text messages, etc.
- Sexual abuse / prostitution / pimping.

Signs of Bullying

A child or young person might not tell anybody that they are being bullied. Foster carers need to be aware of this and look out for signs that may indicate bullying although they may also indicate that the child or young person is unhappy for other reasons:

- They become withdrawn or their behaviour at home becomes more challenging.
- They seem unhappy and not keen to go to school.
- They are less confident and sometimes tearful.
- They argue more with their siblings.

Reports from the teacher may indicate they are concentrating less in class.

They are not invited to any birthday parties or social gatherings.

They have stopped talking about school and their friends.

- They keep losing things or come home with torn clothing and unexplained injuries

Why People Bully

There may be many reasons why people bully and there are some groups of children or young people who may be at a higher risk of being bullied than others e.g. those with special educational needs and disabilities, young carers, black and minority ethnic groups, those who are or are thought to be lesbian, gay or bisexual and children who are looked after.

People bully for lots of different reasons. Some of these may be:

- They may be scared.
 - There are family problems.
 - They have seen others bully.
 - They are being bullied themselves.
 - They feel out of control.
 - They are being abused.
 - It is seen as a way of surviving.
 - They feel insecure and unimportant.
 - To gain acceptance.
 - Issues related to racism.
 - Not liking themselves very much / wanting others to feel as bad as they do.
 - To belong to a gang or group.
 - They are taking out their own anger on others.
 - They don't understand how bad the targeted individuals feel.
 - They have no friends and feel lonely.
- They are selfish and always want to get their own way.
- A cry for help / attention.
- Not being listened to.
- To fund a habit, addiction

Reporting Bullying

If the bullying is taking place in school the carers and the child or young person's social worker must work closely with the school and where appropriate liaise with any anti-bullying strategic lead within the school. The Virtual School lead will also be able to advise and support if bullying takes place within the fostering household (e.g. another child who is in the same home or a child of the foster carer), the carers should discuss this with the supervising social worker and with the social worker of any of the children or young people involved.

The foster carer must record any disclosure of being bullied or being a bull and inform their supervising social worker and the child or young person's social worker immediately or the next working day? If in doubt call the duty or out of hours support .Serious incidents also need to be recorded as an incident.is there a separate incident form

For minor incidents it may be appropriate for the child's social worker to speak with the child and then identify who is the most appropriate person to speak to the perpetrator with a view to preventing re-occurrence. Within the placement, this may well be the foster carer.

Where the situation appears more serious, consideration should be given to whether the child is suffering from or likely to suffer significant harm. In these cases, the Local Safeguarding Children Board Safeguarding Procedures must be followed and if necessary, a Strategy Meeting should be considered

For each incident of bullying an action plan must be implemented, which addresses the individual circumstances of the bullying, any additional support required for the target and any additional work for the perpetrator.

In cases of serious incidents, the child's social worker, the supervising social worker and their team managers should decide if it is safe for the fostering home to continue as it is and whether immediate changes are required to safeguard the welfare of the child and any other children who may be at risk.

Your supervising social worker and the child social worker can help you if the child in home is being bullied or is the bully.

Helping a Child Who Is Being Bullied

Bullying has been compared to a form of brainwashing, with the victims ending up believing that somehow, they deserve to be bullied. Victims feel vulnerable and powerless. Their self-esteem may have been considerably damaged, especially if the bullying has been going

on for some time, and you need to build up their self-confidence with plenty of praise and affection. Here are some suggestions:

- Keep telling the child that you care about them very much and that you are on their side.
- Reassure them that the bullying is not their fault.
- Explain that reacting to bullies by crying or becoming upset only encourages them. Victims should try not to react to the bullies' taunts. If bullies can't goad the victim into a response, they'll get bored.
- Practise assertiveness techniques with the child; practise saying 'No' very firmly and walking away from a bully. It is hard for the bully to go on bullying if the victim doesn't get upset and just walks away.
- Help the child think up simple responses to the bully's most frequent taunts. Responses don't have to be brilliantly witty or funny, but victims say that it helps to have a reply prepared,
- Explore ways to minimise opportunities for bullying: i.e. don't take valuable possessions to school, don't be the last person in the changing room, don't linger alone in corridors. Stay with a group even if they are not friends – there is safety in numbers.
- If the bully threatens them to get money or possessions, tell them that they should give up whatever it is the bully wants. Keeping safe is more important than keeping possessions.
- Make time to sit down and talk to the child – encourage them to tell you how they feel; discuss their ideas and feelings.
- Praise them whenever they accomplish something or whenever they behave well.
- Make opportunities for them to do well; for example, let them help with tasks around the house – praise them when they carry them out.
- Give them responsibilities – this helps to make them feel valued and important.
- Help them make a 'feel good' poster: find a happy photograph of the child and stick it in the centre of a piece of paper. Around it write down some of the pleasant things which different people have said about them, together with reminders of the successes they've had. Put it somewhere they can see it every day.

- Sometimes victims become withdrawn – help them develop social skills: invite other children round (don't invite more than one at a time at first otherwise they might 'gang up' on a meek, quiet child) and arrange outings.
- Encourage the child to join groups and activities local to you where they can make new friends.
- Try not to let them sit around moping – they need diversions. Encourage them to develop a hobby or a sport
- Encourage them to do something they are particularly good at - this will help their self-confidence

What to Do If You Care For a Bully

If you think that the child you care is responsible for bullying:

- Try and stay calm.
- Try not to become angry and defensive.
- Ask exactly what the child has been doing.
- Ask if they have behaved like this before.
- Talk to teachers, playground supervisors, other parents - the more you can find out about what has been going on, the easier it will be to work out why your child has been bullying and what can be done about it.

How You Can Help a Child or Young Person Who is Bullying

- See if he or she has any ideas about why they bully and what they think might help them stop
- Reassure the child or young person that you still care about them – it's their behaviour you don't like but you will work with them to help change this
- Find out if there is something which is troubling him or her and try to sort it out
- Work out a way for the child to make amends for the bullying
 - Set up some sort of reward for good behaviour
- Set limits, stop any show of aggression immediately and help the child find other, non-aggressive ways of reacting.

- If they bully when faced with certain situations, help them work out and practise alternative ways of behaving.
- Explain that getting away from a situation where they can feel that they are losing their temper, or things are getting out of hand, is not weakness. It is a sensible way of ensuring that the situation doesn't get worse.
- Teach the difference between assertive and aggressive behaviour.
- Praise when they do things well. Create opportunities for them to shine.
- Talk to the school staff. Explain that the child in your care is making an effort to change his or her behaviour. Ask what ideas they have to help. It might be helpful for you and the child to talk to an educational psychologist.
- Talk to the staff about setting realistic goals for them - don't expect too much too soon.
- Think about rewarding him or her when they achieve one of these set goals. Ask if the school can provide a room where the children could go if they feel they need time to 'cool off'.
- Other children may deliberately provoke a bully, especially if they think the bully is trying to reform. Explain to the child in your care that they may be taunted and provoked but that they should try not to respond aggressively. The child should walk quickly away if they think someone is trying to pick a fight.
- Carers and other adults can help by controlling their own aggression and by making it clear that violence is always unacceptable

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is when one person or a group of people try to threaten or embarrass someone else using a mobile phone or the internet. Cyberbullying is just as harmful as bullying in the real world. As foster carers you need to be aware of the issues around this particularly with the use of social networking sites where young people may put on personal information without considering the implications of this and then find it is used against them. Part of your role is also to help children and young people protect themselves and to ensure that they are not bullying others. It is easy for young people to get caught up with others in passing information on without thinking about what they are doing

Safe Use of Information and Communication Technology

Computers, the internet, gaming machines and mobile phones are highly attractive to young people. They are essential for keeping in touch with friends, for fun and for obtaining information. Communication technology now forms a normal part of young person's everyday life.

Foster carers have an important role to play in helping and encouraging young people to access the benefits of communication technology in the safest way. Foster carers do not require extensive knowledge and experience of communication technology to be able to help. Everyday parenting skills can be very useful, for example, sharing an active interest, supervision and developing the young persons' ability to keep safe. However, there are basic computer awareness courses available for adults and as foster carers you may wish to access these to enable you to feel more confident around the computer. There is also training provided as part of the fostering training programme and it will be important to participate in this.

The world of technology is changing fast and for the most up to date information it is best to access reliable websites. However, there is also a chapter in the Safer Caring book – a new approach (published by Fostering Network) which is all about 'safer caring in a digital world' and covers a wide range of issues relating to digital media. In addition to this Fostering Network published a book in 2013. It is called "Fostering in a Digital World – a common sense Guide". It is a useful guide and covers all sorts of areas from understanding Facebook and twitter to keeping safe online, cyberbullying, sexting. It recognises all the positives of the digital world and how this is very much a way of life for children and young people today who move from the real world to the virtual world as part of their daily routine.

Another useful resource is CEOP (Child Exploitation Online Protection) and the Think you know website (see websites below). However it may also be useful to know that you can access some of the media material and resources which can be useful for carers and young people via www.youtube.co.uk

Fostering Network also have an information sheet regarding Social Networking and Facebook. You can access this from the member's areas of the Fostering Network Website on www.fostering.net

Children need to be taught from an early age how to use technology in a safe way and as foster carers it is important that you talk to the children and young people about staying safe and about the risks involved.

Safe – Staying safe involves being careful and not giving out your name, address, mobile phone number, photograph or school name to people online.

Meeting – Some people you have contacted in cyberspace can be dangerous. Only do so with your parent or carer's permission and when they can be present.

Accepting – E-mails or opening files from people you don't really know or trust could get you into trouble - they may contain viruses or dangerous messages.

Remember – Someone online may be lying and not who they say they are. Stick to public areas in chat rooms and if you feel uncomfortable simply get out.

Tell – your parent or carer if someone or something makes you feel uncomfortable or worried.

Some very useful websites are:

www.getsafeonline.org www.thinkuknow.co.uk www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre
www.childnet-int.org www.dangerspot.co.uk/chat.htm

These websites include information for children and young people of different age groups as well as advice for parents and carers. On some you can also ask them to send you up to date information so you can try and stay ahead of the game! There is information on the websites regarding use of the internet, chat rooms, mobile phones, gaming and the television. They will give tips on staying safe and also provide advice as to parental controls that you may be able to set up.

Missing children and young people

Sometimes children or young people go missing from the foster home and there may be several reasons why this may happen. Children who are looked after may be more vulnerable and put themselves more at risk than other young people.

As foster carers you should be prepared for this event and know what to do should you find yourself in this position. It is also important for foster carers to work with children and young people to try and prevent this from happening. As part of the Placement Planning Meeting, it is important to get as much information as possible regarding friends and family networks that the child or young person has, if they do go missing at least these people are likely to be a good starting point in checking where the young person might be. There is a protocol regarding children and young people who are missing from care which is available on the Safeguarding children's board website.

As a foster carer you are responsible for monitoring the child or young person's whereabouts and assessing their safety as. If you are not clear about a child or young person's whereabouts or if the child or young person does not return home at an expected time, then you should seek immediate advice from your supervising social worker or the child's social worker.

Return Interview

If a child or young person has been missing on their return they should be offered a return interview. This is an important part of the process in ensuring that young people can speak to somebody other than their Social Worker about going missing. These are conducted by the Missing Outreach Team who are part of the MASH team.

This will provide an opportunity to uncover additional information that can help protect the child from the risk of going missing again, from risks they may have been exposed to while missing, or from risk factors in their home (pull/push factors).

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Drugs, Alcohol and Smoking

Drugs

Foster carer can be cautious about having a child or young person live with them that takes drugs. It is important that you equip yourself with all the training on offer for this, but importantly don't think that you need to know everything! If a child or young person is known to take drugs, this should be included as part of the risk assessment and individual safer caring plan and it is important that you ask for support from the child's social worker and supervising social worker.

Some possible indicators of drug use:

- Changes in mood.
- Loss of appetite or increased appetite.
- Sleepiness or seemingly drowsy.
- Possible not telling the truth.
- Lack of money or unexplained belongings going missing.
- Unusual stains, smells or marks on clothes on the body, clothes or other places.

For further information about drug use please go to:

[Frank - New Psychoactive Substances Frank](#)

[- Drugs A-Z.](#)

[Frank regarding drugs and the law.](#)

Alcohol

Children and young people may choose to drink alcohol and therefore it is important that children and young people are educated and able to have open conversations with their foster carers about this. Even if you have particular beliefs about alcohol, from not drinking due to religious beliefs or personal values through to considering alcohol to be normal part of socialising, it will be important that keep opportunities for discussions around alcohol open and be mindful of your language around this issue in an aim to ensure you don't hinder opportunities for open and healthy discussion.

If you suspect a child or young person you are caring for has been drinking, then please discuss this with your child's social worker and supervising social worker. Further to this however if you think a child or young person is drunk:

- Offer no alcoholic fluids.
- Monitor them on a regular basis, especially during the nighttime and when they are sleeping.
- Contact health professionals for advice GP, 101 and take to hospital if necessary.

Further to prioritising their immediate health, you should also:

- Record any incidents where the child or young person has been drinking.
- Ensure that this behaviour is included as part of the child or young person's risk assessment and individual safer caring plan.
- Make sure that as part of your family home health and safety plan alcohol is discussed and any alcohol locked away.

It is important that as foster carers that you role model sensible drinking and are mindful that children and young people may have had previous negative experiences with alcohol which could be triggering.

The Legal Stuff

[GOV.UK website](https://www.gov.uk).

Smoking

As with alcohol, it is important that as foster carers you role model for children and young people attitudes around smoking. Some children that come and live with you may already have started smoking and for these children and young people and for those who haven't

been tempted yet, foster carers should be actively discouraging this behaviour. Further advice can be sought from the GP and NHS Direct.

Foster carers should never buy smoking products for children and young people.

Children under the age of 5 should not be placed with foster carers who smoke or vape.

It is illegal for children and young people under the age of 18 to be sold cigarettes, tobacco, e-cigarettes or electronic cigarettes.

Health and Wellbeing

For reliable and up to date health information and for finding health services locally in Waltham Forest go to www.nhs.uk.

As a foster carer you should receive basic essential information prior to placement, identifying any health issues and the name of the child's current doctor, this should be further discussed at the Settling In Meeting. You should also be given information regarding which immunisations the child or young person may have and any medication they may be taking or require.

Unfortunately, it is not always possible to obtain full information; sometimes the information is not available or parents are too anxious and confused to provide it at this time. However, if this is the case, you should ask the child's social worker for further details as soon as possible as it is important for the child's medical care to have this information recorded.

Foster carers should also receive a copy of the child's Personal Child Health Record (often called the red book). This is a way of keeping track of the child's progress. If you do not get a copy of this discuss it with the health visitor as although the information is not duplicated it may be possible to get another copy and add information that is known and then as the foster carer you can continue to keep this up to date. It is important that the red book is presented at any health appointments for the child or young person and kept up to date by the health professional, you or the child themselves as they become older. As the child becomes older and more independent, they should be encouraged to keep the red book themselves as it provides their health history and contributes to their life story. The decision for the child to hold the red book would be taken with the agreement of the review to avoid any chance it will be destroyed or lost.

Every child or young person in care in Waltham Forest will be offered a health assessment. The first assessment should be completed within 28 days and thereafter every 6 months if the child is under 5 years old and annually for children aged 5 and over.

Gang Affiliation

Otherwise known as Peer violence, criminal activity and Child Sexual Exploitation.

It is known that as young people approach adolescence their peers become their greatest influence; young people associate with their peers and will spend much of their identify forming years wanting to be with other young people who are like-minded. This is usually a positive and healthy stage of child development however, some of these influences can be negative and may lead to peer violence, sexual and criminal activities whether the young person wishes to take part or not and lead to that young person being exploited. An example of this is known as **Child Sexual Exploitation**. Children may have previously exchanged sex for rewards, gifts, drugs, accommodation and money. Some children maintain this lifestyle whilst continuing to be cared for by the authority. Such situations must be reported by the carers to the supervising social worker and the child's social worker to decide on the actions that should be taken.

Another example could be the child's involvement in criminal activity is the use of children in county lines; this is when young people incur 'debts' which they have to repay and are coerced into selling illegal substances. This is still another form of exploitation. As with any other type of abuse allegation, a child who has been exploited should be listened to carefully, the allegation recorded and reported to his or her Social Worker. An investigation will then be initiated. The foster carer is advised to look out for changes in the child's behaviour in older children this could be:

- Withdrawn and overtly compliant behaviour.
- Depression and suicidal behaviour.
- Self-mutilation/ self-harming
- Running away.
- Unexplained gifts or sums of money
- School refusal and truancy.
- Drug and alcohol abuse.
- A sudden change in normal behaviour patterns or sexual awareness.
- Knowledge in advance of what would be expected at the child's age and level of development.

Foster Carers must be alert to such behaviours and should do all they can to create a relationship with the child that encourages them to be open and demonstrates they will be supported to guide them away from such lifestyles.

Where there is any suspicion that a child is at risk of negative peer influences or exploitation it should be addressed in the child's Placement and Care Plan, together with devising ways to help the child find an alternative lifestyle. The foster carer, the Supervising Social Worker and the child's Social Worker are to formulate a plan to address the concerns and this is to include:

- Who should talk to the child?
- Who else needs to be notified?
- Whether any immediate action is needed to safeguard the child.
- A calm, reasoned, approach is called for
- A Safer Caring Individual Agreement is to be completed

Other services involved in keeping the child safe and addressing any criminal activity could be youth offending/ probation services. These services will also be part of the care planning and risk assessing for the child in your care. The child may also be subject to additional restrictions on where they can go and who they can associate with, these restrictions are referred to as licence conditions and are usually created through the youth court and/ or probation service.

Sometimes, in order to manage the risk, a young person may have to be moved to a place of safety, this could be out of the home borough and away from those with negative influences can reach them. As their main carer, you may be tasked with helping to monitor who is contact with the young person and knowing their whereabouts. Referring to the children missing from home advice in this handbook will be helpful.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

Sexual exploitation is a form of sexual abuse that affects thousands of children and young people every year in the UK, when young people under 18 receive 'something' (food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) in exchange for performing, and/or others performing on them, sexual activities. It can happen to any young person from any background and affects boys and young men as well as girls and young women.

CSE can occur using technology without the child's immediate recognition, for example the persuasion to post sexual images on the internet/mobile phones with no immediate payment or gain. In all cases those exploiting the child/young person have power over them by virtue of their age, gender, intellect, physical strength and /or economic or other resources.

There are 3 important and recognisable elements of child sexual exploitation:

- Children are ‘groomed’ and there is power, and control held by the perpetrator/s.
- An ‘exchange’ (such as gift, food, money, drugs etc.) is present, this could be to a third party and not always to the child themselves.
- Sexual acts or the exchange of sexual images is present.

If you have concerns about a child, you are caring for talk to the social worker or supervising social worker as a matter of urgency. Alternatively, if you have concerns about any child in Waltham Forest call the Out of Hours Service and EDT. If the child is at immediate risk report child sexual exploitation to the police by dialling 101. If you or a young person you care about is in immediate danger, dial 999.

Money Matters

Basic principles of the payment scheme

Basic weekly allowances are payable to all mainstream foster carers and include an element to cover specific costs such as school excursions.

A travel allowance can be claimed individually by all carers - see page 15. The Carer's Progression Scheme (CPS) reflects a three-tiered approach and incorporates payments to all foster carers including Mainstream, Connected Carers, and Concurrent or Fostering to Adopt Carers. It recognises carer's skills, experience and learning and development in caring for children and young people with more complex needs. See page 7 for payment levels.

It enables carers, should they wish to do so, and should they have the necessary skills and competencies, to progress and develop the skills to care for children with complex needs. This is based on proven experience within fostering with a range of children and young people with differing needs, successful completion of the training support and development standards as well as attending core and additional training. The payment scheme is designed to establish fair, equitable and transparent

financial arrangements across the Borough. It is designed to make sure that foster carers and social work staff are clear about the payments to be made.

The Carer's Progression Scheme is reviewed on an annual basis and any recommendations for amendments will be consulted on with carers, Councillors and staff.

Payment of allowances

We wish to make sure that, wherever possible, payments are made direct into the carer's bank or building society account. This will save unnecessary administration costs. Carers are paid using the Bankers Automated Clearing System (BACS). Allowances are paid weekly (or 4 weekly if that is the preference of the foster carer) and cover the period from Saturday to Friday. They can be drawn on Friday mornings.

1) Foster care allowance rates

The payments exceed those set out in *National Minimum Allowance Rates for Fostering*. They are payable to every foster carer approved by LBWF.

Age group	Daily rate 2023/2024	Weekly rate 2023/2024
0-4	£26.00	£182
5-8	£29.00	£203
9-10	£29.00	£203
11-12	£40.57	£284
13-16	£40.57	£284
16+	£44.29	£310

These rates are free from income tax, as long as they do not exceed your qualifying amount. To check this download the help sheet from HM revenue and Customs [here](#).

2) What the weekly payments cover

These payments are designed to cover the **full** cost of caring for the young person in placement. They exceed national minimum rates.

They incorporate all costs for:

- food
- clothing – initial, replacement due to wear and out-growing; and uniform
- pocket money and savings
- personal and household expenditure
- equipment, including damage/replacements
- special outings
- dental and optical needs
- activities – including clubs and hobbies
- school activities – including trips, holidays and associated equipment
- telephone expenses.

Carers should keep receipts for all clothing. There is a minimum clothing list at the back of this document which shows the minimum expectation when a child moves from one placement to another after six months of being looked after.

It is important that children in care are provided with appropriate, well-fitting clothing. It is the fostering Supervising Social Worker and carer's responsibility to make sure that a clothing list is completed at the start and end of every placement. If, when a child moves to a new carer after six months, it is found the clothing is not adequate, then the previous carer will be expected to reimburse the costs of the shortfall.

These full weekly rates will be paid pro rata for emergency placements, and for short term and longer-term placements, to make sure that other disruption costs are covered, such as extra laundry involved in caring for a succession of children on a short-term basis. Any part of a day that a child is in placement is paid at a full day's allowance. Where a child in foster care receives respite from another carer, both carers receive a full day's allowance for part days.

In the case of Staying Put arrangements, young people in placement will be in receipt of their own allowance or benefits from which they are expected to support their own daily living needs.

Carers Progression Scheme

The Carers Progression Scheme (CPS) continues to recognise carers' skills, experience, professional learning and development. It aims to ensure that children with the most complex needs are placed with carers whose experience and competencies can meet those needs. Details of the scheme are published separately and include the criteria for approving progression. Details of the CPS and the competencies required for each Tier level can be provided by your Supervising Social Worker. These payments are made to foster carers approved under Regulation 27 Fostering Regulations 2011.

The three Tiers for the scheme: -

Each Foster Carer/Staying Put Carer must make sure that they take advice from their local tax office about their employment status and tax position.

Grade	0-4 years	5-8 years	9-10 years	11-12 years ¹	13-16 years	16+
Tier 1	164	164	164	164	164	164
Tier 2	186	186	186	186	186	186
Tier 3	209	209	209	209	209	209

The principles of the Carers Progression Scheme:

A. The Carers Progression Scheme was originally based on National Recommendations outlined in **Care Matters** and reflects a transparent three tier approach. All carers will

receive the age-related fostering allowance and also a payment for skills appropriate to their competency level for each placement.

- i) Tier 1 includes newly approved Mainstream and Specific Carers within the first year of fostering, Tier 1 foster carers will be required to complete their Training, Support & Development workbook within the first year, (or 18 months for Family and Friends (Connected Persons) Foster Carers).
- ii) Tier 2 includes all Mainstream carers who have been approved as a Foster Carer for at least one year and have met all the requirements of the scheme to progress to this level. This includes availability to care for children with a varying range of needs that come into local Authority care.
- iii) Tier 3 includes all Mainstream carers who have been approved as a Foster Carer for at least three years and have met all the requirements of the scheme to progress to this level.

B. Progression will be determined by:

- i) Carers demonstrating that they have completed their Training, Support and Development Standards workbook within their first year of approval and met the competencies for their Tier and that they are undertaking to work at a higher level.
- ii) The successful completion of training as set out in the Carers Personal Development Plan. New carers will need to complete Core Training before they move to Tier 2. All carers will need to evidence that they have completed 28 hours of learning each year.
- iii) All foster carers are required to regularly attend Foster Carer Support Groups as a way of receiving and giving support, learning about fostering and contributing to the development of the Fostering Service. Foster Carers are expected to evidence a minimum of 50% attendance for each household each year.
- iv) Achieving 75% of time with a placement - providing the service can offer suitable placements.
- v) Achieving a positive review, including feedback from children's Social Workers, children, and birth parents.

C. Progression will be discussed and agreed at each carer's annual review.

D. Where a carer wishes to retain their current level and has been unable to demonstrate certain competencies, an Action Plan will be agreed between the carer, their Supervising Social Worker and the Advanced Practitioner/Team Manager and reviewed within six months. This will be referred to the Head of Service, Placements, Corporate Parenting, to agree. Where there is a dispute, this can be referred to the Adoption and Fostering Panel.

Additional fee payments

There are additional fee rates for children and young people with specific and additional needs. These are:

Parent and child placement	Fee relevant to Tier achieved and age allowance for child and parent
Children with additional needs – Medical, disability etc.	Relevant tier fee plus a further 50% of achieved tier.
Specialist Rate	£545 plus allowance
Staying put (18yrs+ placement)	£316

The **Specialist rate** will be paid to carers caring for a child that would otherwise be placed in a therapeutic/residential placement. These carers will have progressed through the Tiers and demonstrated continued learning, development, and experience beyond this. They have the skills and support to accept the placement.

The rate for **children with additional needs** is paid on a case-by-case basis when the Carer and Supervising Social Worker can evidence that the needs of the child exceed what is expected of a child of that age in Local Authority care. The needs will significantly impact upon the daily routine of the foster carer and will require additional expenditure, such as regular visits to hospital for medical appointments. Examples of this would be children with significant health needs such as oxygen dependency, seizures etc. There is a requirement that the carer makes an application for disability living allowance for that child where they meet the criteria for eligibility.

The **Staying Put** rate is a flat rate that includes the allowance and the fee.

Housing Benefits

In April 2013 new housing benefit rules came into force in England, Wales, and Scotland as part of the reform of the welfare system. On 12 March the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) announced some last-minute changes in housing benefit reform, whereby one bedroom for fostered children is to be exempt from the so-called "bedroom tax". However, foster carers who foster two or three children will still be penalised.

While these changes in housing benefit reform do address the concerns of many foster carers, the DWP has since clarified that the changes will only cover one bedroom used for a child in foster care. This means that those who have two or three bedrooms for fostered children are not exempt and will have to apply to the discretionary housing fund for support with their housing costs.

Following advice from LBWF Revenue and Benefit Managers, LBWF Fostering Service recommend that all foster carers who claim housing benefit and face a reduction in their allowance through having been assessed as under-occupying their property [welfare reform April 2013], inform their district housing benefit office that they are LBWF Council Foster Carers, and would like to apply for the Housing Benefit Discretionary Fund.

Budgeting

As in any ordinary household, Foster Carers/DYPAS Carers will be expected to budget so that they can save money from the weekly allowance and use it as necessary during the year for expenses such as school trips or replacing household items no longer fit for use through wear and tear.

Travel costs

These can now be claimed as an allowance payment within set guidance. S

Pocket money

The weekly rate includes money for a young person to have pocket money. We believe it is unhelpful to be too rigid about levels of pocket money but offer the following guidelines.

Levels need to relate to what is comparable in the young person's own family, to what is given to the carer's own children, and to what the young person can expect to receive when he or she leaves the placement.

Age group	Suggested minimum allowance
0-8	£5
9-12	£10
13-16	£15
16 plus	To be negotiated through the Young People's Pathway Plan.

These are minimum figures, and it is recommended that carers create incentives by supplementing the weekly allowance with rewards for jobs done and good behaviour, and with extra for special events.

Emergency payments

Placements made in an emergency can be disruptive and, by their nature, can mean that carers need to provide for children immediately, before their weekly payment arrives. Foster Carers who agree to be available on the EDT list will be paid £50 per week to be available to accept emergency placements. Where any placement is made, payment for each child will commence from the first date of placement.

In cases where children or young people arrive in an emergency with no clothing, or inadequate clothing, a payment of up to £100.00 for each child can be made if agreed in advance by Head of Service, Placements & Resources.

This payment is to provide for the immediate needs of the child and does not, for example, include the purchase of school uniform.

An additional payment for the purchase of school uniform can be requested via the child's Social Worker in circumstances where a move has necessitated a change of school, or where the child arrives without a school uniform.

Where they are made, these emergency payments are additional to the regular weekly payments.

The child's Social Worker, the carers' Supervising Social Worker and the carer should draw up a list of items to be purchased and the carer should keep the receipts.

Festival and Birthday allowances

These payments are intended to cover the costs of gifts, entertainment and incidental expenses. Payments are made two weeks in advance, to allow carers to buy gifts; if a child moves placement within those two weeks either the gifts or the allowance will transfer to the new placement.

These allowances are paid at an age-related flat rate and triggered automatically on the relevant date by the Payments software.

Age Band	Amount
0-4	£161
5-10	£183
11-16	£253
16+	£276

Holiday allowances

Holiday opportunities for children and young people in care should be made available and discussed with the child's Social Worker and fostering Supervising Social Worker and agreed as part of the Care Plan.

Rates of Holiday allowance are set out below

Age Band	Amount
0-4	£321
5-10	£365
11-16	£508
16+	£551

For example, where children accompany foster carers on holiday the carer will receive the holiday allowance. The holiday allowance will also be paid to carers taking holidays which are at home and day trips.

Occasionally in respect of older teenagers and their individual circumstances, for example, when they are clearly stating they do not want to go on holiday or for day trips with their foster carer, consideration can be given to funding activities/days out for the young person as an alternative.

If the Foster Carer is not providing a holiday or day trips, the holiday allowance may be used to pay for a holiday experience elsewhere. For example, a school trip abroad or residential holiday. Holiday allowances are not applicable in situations where the child is visiting or staying over with relatives or friends of the carer.

Insurance for Foster Carers

Fostering Network can recommend insurance cover, legal advice and legal expenses to foster carers who have taken up the offer of individual membership, courtesy of LBWF. Please refer direct to the Fostering Network for full details of this cover at www.fostering.net/resources/publications/insurance-and-foster-care. Please be advised that foster carers are responsible for paying the cost of their insurance cover. Foster carers are responsible for maintaining their buildings and contents insurance cover at a level which will cover fostering. Payments for damage because of fostering can only be made in exceptional circumstances where the household insurance cannot cover the damage.

Equipment

The Fostering Support Team has a small budget to make discretionary payments and consideration will be given to assisting carers when:

- Carers need specific furniture or equipment to care for a child with special needs
- Carers are being approved to take siblings and may need to buy bunk beds
- Carers are being approved to take babies and need equipment such as a cot
- Significant additional furniture needs to be bought on approval, or where there is a change of approval
- Equipment is needed to meet Health and Safety standards. Please ask your fostering Supervising Social Worker for more details.

Savings

Looked After Children are disadvantaged in many ways. Apart from their earlier experiences, those that remain in care will leave care with only statutory support. Savings play a very important part in ensuring that a Care leaver has money set aside which can support them in their transition to adulthood and independent living. London Borough Waltham Forest requires that every foster carer (or organisation providing care for Looked After Children) will set aside £10 per week as savings for the Looked After Child or Young Person.

LBWF are participating in the Junior ISA arrangements which have followed on from the Child Trust Funds set up previously. For most children and young people their Junior ISA Account will be their long-term savings account. All children and young people who have been in care for 12 months or more, on or after 1st June 2014, and who do not have a Child Trust Fund (CTF) will have a Junior ISA set up for them by the Local Authority. This is subject to central regulation by the Government. The Local Authority, the child / young person and their carer /care provider can make additional contributions to this account and

there is an expectation that their savings will be put into this account. The carer should deposit the savings on a regular basis and provide evidence of this to their Supervising Social Worker 6 monthly and to the Independent Reviewing Officer for each child in placement at LAC Reviews.

In addition, Looked After Children and Young People should be encouraged to make short term savings as part of learning to budget. These should be kept separately to the ISA or CTF. These short-term savings can be used and accessed by the young person to purchase things that they wish to save for or to be transferred to the ISA periodically to add to their long term savings.

Transport

Carers can claim all allowable transport costs for journeys over 20 miles per trip associated with the child. It is expected that wherever possible and appropriate, carers will be responsible for the transport of children in placement.

All car and bus journeys made solely on behalf of the foster child must be detailed on the claim form, which is submitted monthly to the child's Social Worker.

Allowable costs include journeys over 20 miles:

- to school or college, (daily round trip)
- to doctors, dentists, hospitals, and other therapeutic clinics
- to make contact with family members and others, as negotiated with carers and detailed in the Care Plan
- in connection with the potential placement of a child.

The Fostering Service expects that carers will involve young people in their care in the normal activities of everyday family life - such as trips to the beach and weekend outings. These are not regarded as being costs associated solely with the child and are not therefore eligible for additional payment.

Carers using their own cars

All the mileage outlined above must be claimed each month on the relevant form, clearly stating the meeting or type of training attended to make sure costs are taken from the correct budget. All claims made outside of a three-month period will need senior management approval before being processed.

The rate for mileage will be at the current London Borough Waltham Forest rate of, **45p per mile**. Special journeys, for example those going out of area, need to be agreed as part of the planning and review process.

It is the carer's responsibility to make sure their vehicle has valid insurance, which includes transporting foster children; MOT and road tax documents, and is in good, safe working order.

Carers using public transport

All bus tickets for a child should be submitted each month. If a carer is accompanying the child on a bus journey, the carer should submit their ticket as well.

A bus pass for the young person should be considered if bus travel would be an appropriate and cost-effective alternative to transport by the carer. The full cost of a bus pass for school or college will be reimbursed. Where there is a delay in issuing a pass, carers will be reimbursed in full on submission of bus tickets for school journeys.

If you use a car and public transport, please claim all costs.

Rear seat belts

At the approval stage, carer's cars must be equipped with rear seat belts. If your vehicle is fitted with anything other than standard manufacturers' belts, please discuss the situation with your fostering Supervising Social Worker.

Child safety restraints

If a child has special needs, for example disabilities, then additional safety restraints appropriate to the child should be provided at the expense of LBWF.

Safety restraints purchased by LBWF remain our property. If the carer stops caring for children with special needs, the child safety restraints must be returned. If removal and return of restraints is impractical, please discuss this matter with the child's Social Worker.

Guidance on child seat and seat belt laws

The law requires all children to be carried in an appropriate child restraint from birth until either they are 135 cm (4' 5") tall or have reached the age of 12. They must then use a seat belt and it would be preferable to use a booster seat until they are 150 cm (5') tall.

Children under three years must use an appropriate child restraint when travelling in the front or rear of a car. They cannot be carried in a car that does not have seat belts, because it will not be possible to fit a child restraint.

Children aged 3–11 years and under 1.35m (4'5") tall must use an appropriate child restraint when travelling in the front seat of a car, and when travelling in the rear of a car if seat belts are fitted.

It is the driver's responsibility to make sure that all children use an appropriate child restraint or wear their seat belt.

Carers are expected to provide suitable child safety seats. If the purchase causes hardship, please discuss the situation with your fostering Supervising Social Worker before any child needing a seat is placed with you.

Carers who use a motorcycle as their means of transport must seek advice and permission from the child's Social Worker and their fostering Supervising Social Worker before transporting any child in placement.

Membership of the Fostering Network

Mainstream, Family and Friends Connected Carers, Parent & Child Assessment Service, and Fostering to adopt carers will be invited to join the Fostering Network post approval at the Adoption and Fostering Panel, paid for by London Borough Waltham Forest. Visit <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/>

Children with special needs

The child's Social Worker should make sure that any relevant disability allowances are claimed. Carers are expected to be able to evidence in their recording log how the allowances are being used to benefit the child.

In situations where special furniture, equipment, or car safety restraints are assessed as being necessary to care for the child, London Borough Waltham Forest should supply these, where they are not provided by the health service.

School meals

Children in foster care are not entitled to free school meals, even if they were receiving them while living at home. Even if Foster Carers are receiving benefits which entitle their own children to free school meals, those for foster children must be paid for from the weekly allowance.

Promoting Family Time 'Contact'

The Local Authority is required to promote and facilitate contact between a child and significant family members whilst they are in care. The child's own wishes and feelings must be considered, having regard to their age and degree of understanding. Foster Carers are key figures in facilitating contact both indirectly through letters and cards, and direct face to face contact or telephone calls.

Family time facilitated by Foster Carers in respect of foster children placed with them

Where the care planning allows and it is in the child's best interest, it is expected that Foster Carers will facilitate up to two contact sessions a week (maximum of two hours each session), in their own home, if appropriate and safe to do.

The child's Social Worker will agree with Foster Carers and their Supervising Social Worker the amount of contact, if any, which can take place in the foster home without undermining ordinary family life and routines. This needs to take into account

- the purpose of contact – is this for assessment or promoting identity.
- the foster child's own needs, likely behaviour and reason for being in care
- the relatives' needs and likely behaviour
- the carer's own family situation, their experience and expected role as facilitators within the contact sessions
- the practicalities of contact taking place in the carers home e.g. space, location, travel, competing needs of other Children in Care and/or carer's own family...etc.

We expect all carers to facilitate sibling contact for children placed with them on an informal /formal basis as required to meet the needs of individual children.

Family time Supervision by formally trained Foster Carers

For carers who have undertaken the Supervising Contact and Recording training through the Intervention Service and who are willing to formally supervise contact, either in their home or at an agreed venue, payments can be made with the agreement of the child's Social Worker. This can include supervised contact both in respect of children placed with them or with other carers.

The payment rate in respect of this formally supervised contact (including recording of the session) will be at the Sessional Contact Supervisor's rate (currently **£12.96 per hour**).

Carers wishing to offer this service need to inform their Supervising Social Worker in the first instance and if agreed will be provided with training in respect of how to formally supervise and record these contact sessions.

Respite

Respite breaks can have a role to:

- maintain a child in their own family environment
- support and maintain complex placements as part of an agreed placement or Care Plan
- assist carers in maintaining placements when emergencies or unforeseen circumstances arise, for example the illness of a carer or member of their family; or the need for a break if the situation in the carer's home becomes critical due to the deterioration of a child's situation.
- allow carers to take a break from the fostering role.

However, the value base of the fostering service is that children should feel as if they are a full part of the family. Therefore, respite arrangements will only be agreed if they are a necessary part of the child's care plan and that arrangements for respite are sensitive to the child's need to have a sense of belonging.

Respite arrangements to support placements

Any such arrangements must be detailed in the child's placement or Care Plan and reviewed and amended regularly as part of the care planning process and agreed with the child's Social Worker and Supervising Social Worker.

The respite carer receives both the weekly allowance for the child, and the appropriate Carers Progression Scheme payment, pro rata including day of arrival and day of departure.

The primary carer loses the weekly allowance for the duration of the respite, but keeps the CPS payment; however, the weekly allowance is paid on day of departure and day of return.

Any existing respite arrangement will be honoured while the current children remain in placement. This will only change if the placement or Care Plan is altered, and respite arrangements are no longer required or occur at a different frequency.

If, for any reason, a respite arrangement is made and then has to be extended due to unforeseen circumstances, for example the unexpected length of illness of a carer or member of their family, then the placement must be reviewed, and consideration given to the future funding of the arrangement.

Respite to allow carers to take a break from the fostering role

Carers can request up to a maximum of two weeks per year per fostering household (not per placement). The main carer will receive the respective CPS fee in respect of any child in placement at the time minus the weekly allowance payment. The respite carer will receive the respective weekly allowance plus the progression scheme payment in respect of any child in placement. Respite requests exceeding two weeks will not be paid.

Overpayments to foster carers

Overpayments are reclaimable by LBWF.

Overpayments should normally be repaid in full immediately. However it may be possible, in exceptional circumstances, to recover the overpayment by instalments at the discretion of the Head of Service, Placements, Corporate Parenting.

Carers have a responsibility to notify their SSW in the event of an over or underpayment, especially if it has not been rectified within two weeks. Foster Carers and Staying Put Carers can do this by contacting the fostering or payments team.

Carers subject to allegations

If a carer is subject to an allegation that necessitates the removal of the child to allow an investigation, the carer will be entitled to eight weeks payment of the CPS fee in place from the date of the child's removal.

The weekly allowance payment will cease on the day that the child is removed. If the investigation is not completed within eight weeks, it is at the discretion of the Head of Service, Placements, Corporate parenting, whether any further payment should be made.

If an allegation is made while the carer is between placements, and so not receiving any allowances, no payment will be made.

Carers subject to allegations will be supported by WFFCA and can seek further support through Fostering network.

Training expenses

Fees for carers, who are trained trainers, offering training to others are paid at an hourly rate, and include time taken for preparation. Please make claims for the Skills to Foster courses and the information evenings using the relevant form and clearly state the title of the group or training attended.

Skills to Foster

As an experienced foster carer	£50 (full day)
Attendance for young people	£20 per session

Information Evenings

As an experienced foster carer	£20 per session
Attendance for young people	£15 per session

Young people contributing to Skills to Foster sessions or Information Evenings should be offered a voucher. If this is not acceptable we will pay cash from the Petty Cash account. A cash request needs to be authorised and signed by the Head of Service, Placements, Corporate Parenting, prior to the young person's attendance at the session. This will avoid late payments.

Working with teenagers and care leavers

Working with young people aged 16 and 17

By the time a young person reaches 16 years and 3 months the allocated Social Worker will have completed a reassessment of their needs and written a Pathway Plan.

This assessment will focus on what they need to learn in order to make a successful transition to adult life. The Care Plan will be replaced by the Pathway Plan. It will continue

to be reviewed at least every six months and more frequently if there are significant changes in the young person's life.

The Pathway Plan should be explicit in the details of skills the young person needs to learn and how the young person will learn them. The Foster Carer will be expected to work closely on helping the young person to learn how to cater and cook for themselves. The Foster Carer will be expected to work with the young person to understand how they can manage on a limited budget, and to plan their shopping and spending. The young person will also need to learn practical household skills. In addition to learning these practical skills young people will also need to be helped to develop 'softer skills' like gathering information, time management and resolving conflicts.

The Pathway Plan should contain clear goals for the young person to achieve with detail of how they are to be supported in learning these skills. It is important that our young people are given the opportunity to test out these skills and supported when they are not successful to try again.

In appropriate circumstances the Pathway Plan may be very similar to that of a Staying Put placement for a Care leaver over 18 years old, but it must be understood that where a young person is still legally a child, the placement is a foster placement.

If a young person is working full time, it is expected that they contribute towards their keep. The exact details of the scale of payment and arrangement for paying this money should be discussed with the Social Worker/ Leaving Care Coach (LCC). The carer will receive their full weekly allowance in the normal way.

As part of the process of helping the young person to achieve independence consideration must be given to how their accommodation needs are going to be met after age 18. One option may be to 'Stay Put' –see below. Other options may be to return to the birth family, a move to supported housing or their own accommodation. This will mean that the young person will have to have an interview with the local housing department when they are about 17 years 6 months.

Working with young people over 18

LBWF has a Staying Put Policy available at:

<http://walthamforestchildcare.proceduresonline.com>

This allows young people to remain with their carers beyond their 18th birthday with certain key changes from fostering which are outlined below. It is recognised that many care leavers, like other young people should be able to remain living with their carers if this meets their need to do so and LBWF shares this ambition: The research on Staying Put is showing that many young people only want to extend the time they remain with their Foster Carers by 9 to 18 months, and this is often linked to completing an academic course.

Arrangements for setting up a Staying Put Placement

At the first review of the Pathway Plan, post young person turning 16 years old, it should be discussed whether it is appropriate for a young person to Stay Put after their 18th birthday. Agreement can only be given where a Staying Put arrangement would support a young person's education or training plan or is necessary to support them in developing their independence skills where they have additional vulnerabilities. Getting approval at Resource Panel as early as possible gives the young person and the carer an increased sense of stability and continuity.

Staying Put may be appropriate for a young person because their 18th birthday falls early in the academic year, or they have started a college course which will last until the following July or longer and they will need the stability of their current placement to support them in completing the course. It may be that the young person needs more time to resolve personal problems or more time to increase their confidence in coping on their own. Measures introduced in 2014 have extended the time that a young person can be supported to 21 years where this is supported by their needs as set out in their Pathway Plan. The Care leavers offer extends this to 25 years of age in certain circumstances.

If the Pathway Plan is to be extended, the young person's placement must be agreed between the Foster Carer, the young person's Social Worker/ LCC and the Supervising Social Worker. The Social Worker/LCC must then seek agreement from the Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting and Resources Panel. It must be clear how long the Staying Put period is for and its purpose.

Once a young person reaches 18, they are no longer a Child in Care, and the placement can no longer be classed as a foster placement. The legal basis on which they occupy the property becomes one of an 'excluded licensee' and they are effectively lodging in the carers' home.

If the young person has enduring health and learning issues, they may meet the social care services criteria for Fair Access to Adult Care assessment (FACS) and the arrangements for continuing the placement could come under this scheme. This is likely only to apply to a few young people who are supported by the Transitions Service.

If a carer intends to continue fostering other children, they will remain subject to fostering regulations. If the carer decides not to continue to foster, they will need to resign as a carer. Depending on their, and the young person's plans, a decision will be made about the level of supervision they will receive if they decide to resign as carers. As a minimum it will be expected that DBS checks will be undertaken on any adults who move into the household.

The carer will provide a similar level of care and the young person will be able

to benefit from living in the household and having access to kitchen and laundry facilities.

The Pathway Plan will specify tasks that the carer will undertake to support the young person develop their independent living skills.

The carer will receive a Staying Put allowance of the prevailing rate at the time.

The financial support available to the young person will change as they are no longer a Child in Care, and they will be able to access state benefits where appropriate. They will be able to claim Housing Benefit and the money received will be paid to LBWF and will contribute towards the cost of the placement. The carer will receive their full payment from LBWF by the BACS system.

The young person may be entitled to claim Income Support if they are in non-advanced education or a single parent carer; or Job Seekers Allowance/Employment and Support Allowance if they have a limited capacity to work. From this income, they will be expected to contribute £30 per week toward the cost of their food, heating, and lighting. This money will be paid to the carer. If the young person is working and receiving a wage, they will also be expected to contribute towards their care.

Financial implications for Foster Carers and Staying Put Carers can be found on the Fostering Network website or in the HMRC leaflet ***Staying Put: Arrangements for Care Leavers aged 18 years and above***. The HMRC provides advice on tax and national insurance for hosts and carers. You can download the help sheet at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-put-arrangements-for-care-leaversaged-18-years-and-above>

Visit www.fostering.net/resources/publications/income-tax-and-national-insurance for information from The Fostering Network.

The HUB

Children and care experienced young people are benefitting from a place where they can meet up with one another referred to as the HUB. This is a venue that provide opportunity to get to know one another and to learn independent life skills. The Hub provides a place for young people to cook meals together and enjoy time with one another watching television, play games, compete against one another on the x- box. Facilities is also available for young people to do work on computers doing schoolwork or studies online. This space is a space away from office that young people can call their own.

At the Hub young people get the opportunity to meet with their Leaving Care Coaches, Voice and Influence, Leaving Care champion, DWP and Housing who are supporting them once they have turned 18 years of age and become part of the young adult service.

Training and other learning opportunities are offered for young people at the Hub. As mentioned there are cooking facilities and opportunities if needs be to do a quick bundle of washing! Foster carers are encouraged to support young people to attend the HUB.

At the moment the HUB is open Tuesday – Thursdays 09:00 - 17:15. Some Wednesdays there are activity evenings until approx. 20:00.

Parent & Child Fostering

LBWF are keen to develop the availability of Parent & Child foster placements. In these situations, either the parent or child, or both parent and child may be looked after. The primary focus of the foster carer is to ensure that the child is safeguarded. However, this needs to be done alongside developing the parenting skills of the parent and supporting their needs.

In principle, **no other placements** can be taken simultaneously alongside a Parent & Child Assessment Arrangement (in accordance with BAAF Guidance). However, if there are matching considerations, with the agreement of the relevant child's Social Workers, consideration will be given by the Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting for additional placements to be made alongside the Parent & Child placement on a case-by-case basis. Payments for stranger children placed alongside are made in accordance with the basic payments identified elsewhere in this document.

Allowance

	Weekly Rate 2023/24	Daily Rate 2023/24
Parent and single child	The appropriate carers CPS fee plus the age allowance for each child or young person	One seventh of weekly rate any part of any day of placement

<p>One parent and Two children</p>	<p>The appropriate carers CPS fee plus the age allowance for each child or young person</p>	<p>One seventh of weekly rate any part of any day of placement</p>
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The Allowance is paid to the carer. It is expected that the parent meets their child's and their own financial needs independently, where they are in receipt of their own benefits. On the rare occasion, where essentials are required for the infant (and the parent has not made necessary provision) the carer is expected to ensure the needs of the child (only) are met and provisions are paid from the allowance.

There is an expectation that where parents are over 16 years old and either receiving benefits or eligible for benefits, they will maintain full financial responsibility, and provide for their own, and their baby's needs while in placement. This includes food, clothing, and nappies. **Financial arrangements need to be clearly agreed at the pre-placement planning meeting.** No deductions will be made from the foster carer allowances.

Comments and complaints

In the event of disagreement about allowances that cannot be resolved by discussion between the carer, their fostering supervising social worker and the relevant children's team, carers should refer to the LBWF complaints procedure.

Making a Formal Complaint

We always try to provide good quality services, but we know that sometimes we get things wrong. Comments and complaints can help us to get things right. We try to resolve differences as soon as they arise between people.

If people are not happy with the service that they or a member of their family are receiving, or if they have applied for a service and been refused, they have the right to complain. They will normally receive our response within 10 days.

The complaints procedure has three stages:

1. At Stage One the staff or agency providing the service will handle the complaint.
2. If you are not satisfied with the reply that you have received at Stage One it can be escalated to Stage Two. A formal investigation by an investigation officer who does not work for the service will commence.

3. If you are still not satisfied with the Stage Two response it can be escalated again to Stage Three. We will refer your complaint and our response to a review panel comprised of two of our officers - not involved in the complaint - and an independent person who will chair the panel.

You can either write directly or we will be happy to send you the complaints form.

All formal complaints can be registered on the link [here](#):

If you do not feel that your complaint has been dealt with adequately by the complaint's procedure, you can contact **Ofsted**.

Tel **08456 404045** about education, adult skills, or children's services

Tel **08456 404040** about any other aspect. Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Royal Exchange Buildings, St Ann's Square Manchester M2 7LA

Questions or queries

If you have any queries about the foster carer rates, contact your fostering Supervising Social Worker or the Team Manager, Placements and Resources, Corporate Parenting.

Helping Children and Young People to Complain

All children and young people have the right to complain as set out in the Children Act 1989. They should all be given information on their rights and how to complain. They should also be made aware of the standards and range of care they can expect from their placement.

This information is contained in the Children's Guide which all children and young people will be given at the beginning of any home they may have with us.

All young people who wish to make a complaint should be encouraged and supported.

You will find that if a young person has confided in you or a member of your family then you should act as an advocate for them. There are delicate balances to strike here as it is important that the process of making a complaint is seen to be a positive and empowering one for the young person.

You may need to spend some time talking to a young person to allow them to feel confident that they have thought about the situation and want to do something about it because they feel something is not right. You should also include them in the process as much as possible. This could include the young person writing down their complaint and working out what they would like to see as a resolution to it. The process in Waltham Forest for children to make a comment, compliment or complaint is [here](#).

Appendix

Minimum items of clothing

This list has been drawn up by foster carers as a guide to the minimum that should be handed over when a child moves from one placement to another.

An assessment of a child's clothing needs will be included in the placement plan. Carers are required to make a list of all clothing when children arrive, and when they leave. This can then be countersigned as an accurate record by the Fostering Supervising Social Worker. A form is available from your Fostering Team. This will avoid any issues arising at a later date about inadequate clothing.

Wherever possible the continuing contribution of those with parental responsibility should be encouraged. The statutory reviews offer opportunities to address clothing needs and make sure that they are being met appropriately. The clothes should be enough quality and size to last for the next three months. Foster carers are accountable for the money they have received for clothing, and for making sure that when the child moves on, they are adequately and appropriately clothed.

Please keep receipts.

Young people age 16+

- 3 sets of night clothes
- 1 leisure jacket or coat
- 6 pairs of socks or tights
- 6 pairs of knickers or pants
- 3 bras (girls)
- 3 tops (for example t-shirts)
- 3 bottoms (trousers, skirts, shorts)
- 3 jumpers, cardigans, or sweatshirts
- 1 pair of slippers
- 1 dressing gown
- 1 pair of leisure shoes or trainers
- 1 set of sports gear / swimsuit
- 1 holdall or suitcase
- 1 smart outfit (appropriate for job/college interview)
- 1 smart pair of shoes (appropriate for job/college interview)

Secondary school age children

- 3 sets of night clothes
- 1 leisure jacket or coat
- 6 pairs of socks or tights
- 6 pairs of knickers or pants
- 3 bras (girls)

- 3 tops (t-shirts etc)
- 3 bottoms (trousers, skirts, shorts)
- 3 jumpers, cardigans or sweatshirts
- 1 pair of slippers

- 1 dressing gown
- 1 pair of leisure/play shoes or trainers
- 1 pair of wellies
- 1 pair of school shoes
- 1 school coat
- 2 sets of school uniform
- 1 set of sports gear/swimwear
- 1 holdall or suitcase

Primary school age children

- 3 sets of nightclothes
- 1 leisure jacket or coat
- 4 vests
- 6 pull-ups, if needed
- 6 pairs of socks or tights
- 6 pairs of knickers or pants
- bras as needed (girls)
- 3 tops (t-shirts etc)
- 3 bottoms (trousers, skirts, shorts)
- 3 jumpers, cardigans or sweatshirts
- 1 pair of slippers
- 1 dressing gown or sleepsuit
- 1 pair of leisure/play shoes
- 1 pair of wellies
- 1 pair of school shoes
- 1 school coat
- 2 sets of school uniform
- 1 set of sports gear/swimwear
- 1 holdall or suitcase
- 1 hat and pair of gloves

Pre-school age children

- 3 sets of nightclothes
- 1 leisure jacket or coat
- 4 vests
- 6 nappies or pull-ups if needed
- 6 pairs of socks or tights
- 6 pairs of knickers or pants
- 3 tops (t-shirts etc)
- 3 bottoms (trousers, skirts, shorts)

- 3 jumpers, cardigans or sweatshirts
- 1 pair of slippers
- 1 dressing gown or sleep-suit
- 1 pair of leisure/play shoes
- 2 sets of school uniform, if needed
- 1 pair of wellies
- 1 holdall or suitcase
- 1 hat and pair of gloves

Babies – birth to one year

- 3 sets of day clothes
- 3 sets of nightclothes (or baby grows)
- 1 leisure jacket or coat
- 6 vests
- 12 nappies
- 6 pairs of socks or tights
- 3 jumpers, cardigans, or sweatshirts
- 1 dressing gown or sleepsuit
- 1 holdall or suitcase
- 1 hat and pair of gloves
- 1 red book

Everything must fit and be in good condition. When a child or young person moves on, their clothing and items must be placed in suitable sized suitcase/s.