

Connected Carers Guidance

1. Introduction

This guidance covers the immediate placement of a looked after child with a Connected Person i.e. where the carers are not already approved as foster carers. As with any placement, the Authority must be satisfied that the placement is the most suitable means to safeguard and promote the child's welfare, but specifically that it is necessary for the child to be placed with the Connected Person **before** their suitability to be a foster carer has been fully assessed in accordance with the Fostering Regulations. These provisions are to be used only in exceptional circumstances and where there are clearly defined reasons why a full foster carer assessment cannot be undertaken before a placement is made. There is a risk that if a child is placed before the full assessment/approval of the carer they may not be approved at the end of the process resulting in a further move for the child.

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

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

The guidance sets out the checks that need to be made before such a placement can be made. An initial viability assessment of the suitability of the arrangements is undertaken by the child's social worker and approved by the Group Manager and if the placement is authorised and intended to last longer than 16 weeks, a full fostering assessment is undertaken by the Family and Friends Team and signed off by the ADM.

This guidance does not apply where a child (under 16 years) goes to live with a relative or friend and this is a private arrangement between the parent/person with Parental Responsibility and carer. If such a placement continues for 28 days or more the child may come within the definition of a Privately Fostered child, in which case the local authority's duties in relation to the placement are set out in the ***Private Fostering Guidance***.

2. Approval of Immediate Placements

Before any placement with a Connected Person who is not already approved as a foster carer is made, the approval of the Fostering ADM is required.

Any such approval can only be given for 16 weeks from the date of the placement. During that period, a full fostering assessment must be carried out and further approval sought. (It is either a Special Guardianship or a Connected Person assessment that is undertaken)

The child's social worker will initially assess the suitability of a Connected Person, using the viability, seeking advice from the Family and Friends Team as required. The assessment must consider:

- The nature and quality of any existing relationship with the child;

- Their capacity to care for children and, in particular in relation to the child (or children) concerned, to provide for his/her physical needs and appropriate medical and dental care; to protect the child adequately from harm or danger including from any person who presents a risk of harm to the child; to ensure that the accommodation and home environment is suitable including where relevant an initial risk assessment of any pets, together with the environment in which the pet is kept; in relation to the child's age and developmental stage, to promote his/her learning and development; to provide a stable family environment which will promote secure attachments for the child, including promoting positive contact with parents and other connected persons, unless this is not consistent with the child's welfare;
- State of health (physical, emotional and mental), and medical history including current or past issues of domestic violence, substance misuse or mental health problems;
- Family relationships and the composition of the household, including the identity of all other members of the household, their age and the nature of any relationship with the connected person and each other including any sexual relationship; any relationship with the parents; any relationship between the child and other members of the household; other adults (not members of the household) likely to have regular contact with the child; any current or previous domestic violence between members of the household, including the connected person;
- Their family history, including their childhood and upbringing, and the strengths and difficulties of their parents or others who cared for them; their relationship with parents and siblings and each other; educational achievement and any learning difficulty/disability; chronology of significant life events; particulars of other relatives and their relationships with the child and the connected person;
- PNC checks to identify any criminal offences of which they have been convicted or in respect of which they have been cautioned;
- Local authority checks to ascertain any previous/current social care involvement;
- Past and present employment and other sources of income;
- Nature of the neighbourhood and resources available in the community to support the child and the Connected Person.

The home must be visited by the social worker as part of the assessment of the suitability of arrangements.

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

The views of parents/ those with Parental Responsibility must also be taken into account.

The proposed carer should be given information about the implications of ultimately becoming the child's foster carer and the assessment process which will follow if the placement is to last longer than 16 weeks. This includes the requirement for Disclosure and Barring Service checks and other agency enquiries on all members of the household aged 16 and over, as well as interviews with referees, adult children and ex-partners, and other aspects of the fostering assessment.

Where the social worker is in any doubt as to the suitability of the placement, they should consult the Family and Friends duty team for advice before submitting the viability assessment for approval. The Group Manager for the social worker signs off the viability assessment and the ADM signs off the Regulation 24.

Where the placement appears suitable and is approved by the Fostering ADM to ensure notification must be notified for the allocation of a worker to undertake the full fostering assessment. At this point a supervising social worker from the Fostering Team is also allocated and fostering payment commence.

The prospective carers must be made aware that any approval is only temporary and does not imply future approval as a foster carer. A letter template for carers when approved as Regulation 24 carers will be issued.

Where approval is not given, the child (if already placed) will have a planned move, unless there are safeguarding concerns.

The placement may only continue beyond the initial sixteen-week periods if the carer is approved as a foster carer or in exceptional circumstances where the temporary approval is extended. This would be through Regulation 25.

This temporary approval can be extended for a further period of up to 8 weeks (if it is likely to expire before the assessment is completed) or until the outcome of an Independent Review (if the outcome of the assessment is that the Connected Person is not approved and seeks a review of the decision). there also has to be consideration as to whether the placement with the connected person is still the most appropriate placement available. The IRO must also be informed.

A decision to extend the temporary approval can only be made by the Agency Decision Maker (Fostering) on the recommendation of the Fostering Panel. The request for extension must be presented to Panel **before** the expiry of the initial 16-week period.

As the Connected Person will be temporarily approved as a foster carer, they will be required to sign a foster care agreement. A Connected Person approved under these regulations will be entitled to the same support and services (including training, allocation of a supervising social worker and allowances) as a foster carer.

Emergency situations

Where, for example during a s47 investigation, it is required that a child lives away from parents to ensure their immediate safety, the social worker should invite parents to identify a suitable carer, normally someone well known to the child. Within this discussion, wider family and friends should be explored.

Where the child has an unexplained injury, wider family would not normally be considered as potential carers at this early stage.

If a potential carer is identified and there is insufficient time to undertake the complete assessment outlined above, the social worker can seek Service Lead authorisation to place the child based upon completion of the Viability Assessment. This is the proforma used for all Regulation 24 placements and in an emergency, as a minimum, sections 1-5 must be completed. This includes:

- Details of the child, family situation and reason for the placement
- Details of the carer and their home and their motivation to assist;
- Understanding the nature and quality of any existing relationship between the proposed carer and the child and, where age-appropriate, the child's view of the proposal;
- Satisfaction that the carer would safeguard the child, particularly in relation to the risks identified in the s47 investigation;
- PNC checks to identify any criminal offences of which the carer(s) have been convicted or in respect of which they have been cautioned;
- Local authority checks to ascertain any previous/current social care involvement;
- A home visit to assess the suitability of arrangements.

A Written Agreement must be drawn up outlining any specific requirements but also making it explicit that this is a temporary arrangement and that the Regulation 24 assessment has **not** yet been completed.

The child becomes accommodated (s20, Children Act 1989) at the point the placement is made and the usual CLA paperwork, including parental consent to accommodation, must be completed.

The child must be visited on the day after the placement is made.

This temporary arrangement must only last for **up to three** working days, within which time the Regulation 24 Assessment proforma **must** be completed in full and approval sought, as above. The assessment form must now be comprehensive, including additional detail to sections completed to secure emergency approval.

Unless the child is to return home immediately, presentation at the next permanency planning meeting must be booked to progress care planning.

3. The placement

On the placement of the child, the child's social worker will ensure the child's Care Plan is given to the carer. A Placement Planning Meeting will be held to draw up the Placement Information Record. This should be before the placement starts, or within five working days of the start.

The Placement Finding Team by way of a change report will update Mosaic with the details of the placement.

Notification of the placement will also be sent to the Designated Nurse for CLA, the education service, the relevant local Children's Services (if the placement is in the area of a different local authority) and the child's GP.

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

The child's social worker must also notify the allocated Independent Reviewing Officer or, if it is the first placement, the Independent Reviewing Service of the placement. This will trigger the appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer and the setting up of a Looked After Review. *all done through the change report.

These notifications must be made in writing, advising of the placement decision and the name and address of the person with whom the child is to be placed. (This is all on the change report)

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

It will be necessary for the foster carer or the child's social worker to ensure the child is registered with a GP, Dentist and Optician, either retaining practices known to him or her (which is preferable) or in the area where they are placed.

In relation to a first Looked After placement the Designated Nurse for LAC will contact the social worker and carer to arrange a Health Assessment which must be undertaken within 20 days- see ***Health Assessment Guidance***

The social worker must also contact the Virtual School, the child's current school or, where the child does not have a school place, the relevant education officer, with a view to the completion of a Personal Education Plan within 20 days of admission and, thereafter, termly. ***See Education of a Child Looked After / Previously looked After Guidance***

For any new placement, every effort should be made to enable the child to remain at the same school unless this would be detrimental to his or her wellbeing.

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

4. Assessment and Approval of Connected Carers as Foster Carers

If the plan is for the placement to last longer than 16 weeks, the fostering assessment process should commence as soon as possible after the placement is made and the child's social worker should make a referral to the Family and Friends Team immediately so that a social worker can be allocated for this purpose. The referral is made as part of the ADM sign off of the request for Regulation 24 placement.

Before deciding whether to extend the approval and confirm the carer as a foster carer, the Local Authority must consider if the placement is still the most appropriate placement available, and it must be considered by the Fostering Panel before the above approval is given. The IRO must also be informed. A decision to extend the temporary approval must be approved by the Agency Decision Maker (Fostering).

The allocated assessing social worker will immediately arrange for a slot to be booked on the Fostering Panel within 16 weeks for the assessment to be considered.

The assessing social worker will check proof of identity from the proposed carers and arrange for the carers and members of the household aged 16 and over to complete applications for Disclosure and Barring Service checks and consent to other agency checks.

The signed consent form and Disclosure and Barring Service forms will be passed to the Capita who undertake the checks set out in ***Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers Procedure, Checks and References***.

The allocated worker will explain the assessment process to the carers and provide them with written information.

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

5. Ending the Placement

When the placement ends, the child's social worker must update Mosaic and complete a change report so that payments to the carer will cease and appropriate notifications made to those notified when the placement was made.

All written information on the child, which the carer holds, should be returned to the child's social worker.

In appropriate cases, the carer should be asked to complete an end of placement report and provide information and materials such as photographs and mementoes for the child's life story.

Children and young people must, when they leave the home, be helped to understand the reasons and be supported with the transition — including where they are returning home and or progressing to independence.

The carers should normally be encouraged and supported to maintain links with children who leave their care. Where appropriate, consideration may be given to holding a Disruption Meeting in which case the procedure set out in ***Placement Planning and Disruption Meetings guidance*** should be followed.

Related Guidance:

[Children Act 1989: Family and Friends Care](#): Statutory guidance for local authorities about family and friends providing care for children who cannot live with their parents.

[Family Rights Group, Initial Family and Friends Care Assessment](#): A good practice guide that outlines what a viability assessment for family and friend carers should look like, what social workers should consider and how to undertake international assessments.

[Schedule 3, Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010](#)

Review / Contacts / References	
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