**Kent Fostering - Supervision and Support for Short Break Carers**

**Policy**

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**Kent Fostering Policy – Supervision and Support for Short Break carers**

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**Definition of Short Break carers**

Kent County Council define our Short Break (SB) foster carers to be those carers who provide Short Breaks to Children in Need (CHIN), provide regular respite to Child in Care (CIC) and who cover annual leave for other foster carers with children who are open to a Disabled Children or Young People’s Team.

**Regulations and Guidance**

National Minimum Standards (2011) suggest the frequency of home visits by a fostering social worker (FSW) to a *‘short break foster carers should be proportionate to the amount of care provided’*.

KCC policy for registered foster carers is a supervision visit every 4 - 6 weeks (unless there are difficulties) for a child placed with a carer for 52 weeks of the year (i.e. a minimum of 9 visits per year) plus one unannounced visit per year.

This policy sets out to agree *‘proportionate’* visiting for Fostering Social Workers, for a child placed with a carer for Short Breaks. The normal allocation of Short Breaks would total 3 ½ weeks per year (i.e. 24 nights a year being the normal initial allocation for SB). The current visiting pattern of supervision, means that there are times when Fostering Social workers visit the short break carers and there have not had any children in their care since the previous visit.

In respect of the Local Authority’s responsibility to see a CHIN child in a SB placement (i.e. the child’s social worker) The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations. Volume 2: care planning, placement and case review (June 2015) states:-

*‘Visits where regulation 48 applies*

*6.27) Visits to children in short breaks in accordance with regulation 48 are less frequent than for children who are looked after continuously. This recognises the fact that children go home after a short period in placement to their parents who are nearly always best able to see whether the placement is meeting their child’s needs or not.*

*6.28) Visits to a child by the representative of the placing authority must take place at regular intervals, to be agreed with the child’s IRO and the child’s parents, and recorded in the child’s short break care plan before the start of the placement. The visitor should usually be a qualified social worker and in every case should be a person with the skills and experience to communicate effectively with the child and fulfil the functions of the visit. The first visit must take place within three months of the first placement day or as soon as practicable thereafter. Subsequent visits should be at intervals of no more than six months. The visit is an important opportunity for a representative of the authority to ensure that the placement is meeting the child’s needs.’*

**Context of service provided**

CHIN children are often viewed as *‘different’* from CIC children as they still reside with their birth family who are perceived as a protective factor.  At the same time we are also mindful that these birth families are placed under additional pressures due to their child’s disability and that these children may require additional opportunities due to their disability, hence the offer of Short Breaks.

CIC children, with agreed Regular Respite, could be considered as being provided with a greater protective factor in light of the multi-agency monitoring and review they receive through being in foster care. At the same time we would again be mindful of the vulnerabilities of their foster family and themselves in light of the pressures experienced through managing disability.

This presents a need for us to have a balanced and reasonable approach to monitoring and review, whilst remaining alert to safeguarding.

**Current picture**

Kent Fostering have 27 foster carers who are registered only for Short Breaks

9 SB carers support only 1 child, 8 of these children have 24 nights and 1 has 36 nights

5 SB carers support 2 children, in total offering a total of night’s form 28 to 50

7 SB carers support 3 children, in total offering a total of night’s form 26 to 115

3 SB foster carers support 4 or more children

3 SB foster carers are newly approved and being matched to children

**Supervision**

It is proposed that supervision visits to SB foster carers be changed to 8-10 weekly visits (i.e. minimum of 6 visits per year) for all SB carers who have fewer than 3 children over the year period or who are offering less than 60 nights per year. This would achieve “*proportionate” ’*visiting and support a more flexible visiting pattern and result in an increase in the amount of times the fostering social worker is able to visit the SB home whilst the child is there.There would continue to be an unannounced visit every year.

Kent Fostering could increase these visits if a Short Break Carer took on the care of further children or increased the allocation of nights.

**Support and training**

As a service we will increase the amount of training and support group/workshop opportunities we offer to SB foster carers, which reflects that fact that these carers often work full time and which is able to consider some of the specific issues faced by SB foster carers.

There would be an expectation for SB foster carers to attend 75% of the support group/workshop opportunities provided for them.

**Working alongside partner agencies**

Alongside this the service will seek to establish and maintain closer working relationships between the Fostering Service and the Disability Children’s & Young People’s Teams in order to recognise our shared responsibility to these children through a shared approach to processes of safeguarding, monitoring and review.

This is supported through joint workshop and training opportunities offered by the Children’s Social Care Services Fostering Service to Children and Young People’s Disability social workers and Occupational Therapists.