**Unannounced Visits to Foster Carers**

Policy Development Officer

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# Introduction and Purpose

Unannounced visits are expected to be undertaken within the fostering household twice a year. The main purpose of these visits is for the supervising social worker to check that the home environment that the child or young person is living in is of a good enough standard and consistent with the rest of the home.

# Legal Context and Framework

National Minimum Standard 21 is about the supervision and support of foster carers. In this it is stated that “Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year.”

This is further reinforced in paragraph 5.67 of the Fostering Guidance (2011) which states “Every foster carer should be allocated an appropriately qualified social worker from the fostering service (the supervising social worker) who is responsible for overseeing the support they receive. It is the supervising social worker’s role to supervise the foster carer’s work, to ensure that they are meeting the child’s needs, and to offer support and a framework to assess the foster carer’s performance and develop their skills. They must make regular visits to the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year.”

Fostering Guidance (2011) paragraph 3.82 states that “The Fostering service must have a written health and safety policy, which should be covered in the assessment and training of foster carers. Foster carers should be supported to ensure that their homes are free of avoidable hazards, in keeping with family life. Every foster home must be visited without appointment by a supervising social worker of the fostering service at least once a year, as a check on the standards of care being provided.

National Minimum Standard (10.5) “The foster home is inspected annually, without appointment, by the fostering service to make sure that it continues to meet the needs of foster children.

# Policy

1. An unannounced visit will be undertaken during the fostering assessment. Where possible this visit will be undertaken by another assessing social worker who is not the allocated worker to the prospective foster carers, and on a day when no other known meeting has been scheduled at the carers home.
2. All supervising social workers will make every effort to complete two unannounced visits within every 12 month period (compliance minimum is one unannounced visit every 12 months) for approved foster carers. Where possible the unannounced visit will be undertaken by another social worker of the fostering service.
3. If the supervising social worker is unexpectedly off work, for an extended period for any reason, the team manager/Practice Supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the unannounced visit is undertaken by an appropriate member of staff to ensure compliance. If leave is planned, the Supervising Social Worker should make arrangements for the unannounced visit to be undertaken before leave or by another Supervising Social Worker during the period of leave.
4. At the unannounced visit all areas of the home should be seen, this includes the garden and any buildings in this area. Consideration should be given to issues of health and safety, and will include the wardrobes of looked after children, cupboards, children’s mattresses, fridges etc.
5. The supervising social worker should be checking that standards are consistent throughout the home e.g. bedrooms for looked after children are of the same standard as other bedrooms within the foster home.
6. If any siblings are sharing a bedroom it should be checked these arrangements are recorded in the children’s individual Safer Care Plans.
7. If neither of the foster carers are at home when the unannounced visit is undertaken then the visit should not be continued, even if other household members are at home. It should be recorded that the visit was attempted but a further unannounced visit will need to be undertaken.
8. If the foster carers are not at home and the looked after child or young person is home the Supervising Social Worker should check what the arrangements are for supervision of the child or young person (e.g. alternative carer is recorded in the delegated authority form/safer care plans, or if there is no alternative carer present or the carer’s information is not recorded in the relevant forms, when the carer is expected home).
9. If it is not possible for the Supervising Social Worker to see all areas of the home and undertake appropriate checks a further unannounced visit should be completed.
10. If the Supervising Social Worker visits and does not get an answer a note should be left for the carer to say the Supervising Social Worker has called and this should be recorded as an unsuccessful unannounced visit on LCS.
11. The Supervising Social Worker should complete the unannounced visit form on LCS. A copy should be given to the foster carer in the next supervision visit and should be recorded that the carer has received this and if there are any areas of disagreement this should be recorded on the unannounced visit form.
12. Any issues arising from the unannounced visit should be addressed at the time of the visit and reinforced at the next supervision session.

# Unannounced Visit Form

**Please note: Health and Safety Risk Assessment and Safer Care Family agreement and Safer Care Individual Plan should be considered as part of this visit.**

**Previous tasks from unannounced form to pull through**

**Carer(s) Details**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Name | Address | Telephone number(s) | Email address | Gender | Date of birth | Age |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Name

Name of visiting Social Worker

Date of visit

Time of visit

Date of previous unannounced visit

Unsuccessful unannounced visit

Household members and others present during visit

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Name | Relationship to carer | Household member | Present |
|  |  |  |  |

**Checklist – Health & Safety**

Tasks identified at the last unannounced visit that required further action

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Task | Person responsible | Due date | Status |
|  |  |  |  |

Are logs sheets up to date and completed in a timely manner?

Yes  No

Please provide details

Is the medication record sheet (if applicable) completed and up to date?

Is First Aid and Medication stored appropriately?

Is confidential information kept locked up in a secure place?

Is the Household Risk Assessment up to date? Have any additional Health and Safety risks been noticed that should form part of future assessments?

Is there evidence of appropriate clothing and belongings?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name | Comments |
|  |  |

Is there evidence of the looked-after child/young person being included in the family?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name | Comments |
|  |  |

*Belongings throughout the home, photographs and pictures.*

Looked-after child/young person’s bedroom

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name | Comments |
|  |  |

*Cleanliness, risks, hazards, personalisation, adequately furnished and decorated, toys/equipment and belongings all in good repair.*

Is any looked after child/young person sharing a bedroom with a sibling? Yes No

Has any risk associated with bedroom sharing, sleeping arrangements and privacy of the child/YP and other family members, been suitably considered in the Safer Caring Family Agreement and Child’s Individual Safer Caring Plan? Yes No

Comments

Carer/s Bedroom. Accommodation, cleanliness, items of concern.

Bedrooms belonging to other household members (seen with consent only)

*Cleanliness, furnishings, suitable décor*.

Kitchen and utility area

*Are items including alcohol, household chemicals stored in accordance with the age and ability of the children and young people placed? Is the kitchen clean and hygienic?*

Communal living areas

Bathrooms/toilets

*Are items stored in accordance with the age of the children and young people placed?*

Other rooms in the home seen

Gardens, grounds and outbuildings, have seasonality risks been considered

Other

Is the pet assessment up to date and is the home/garden clear of excrement?

Was the child/YP person seen alone?

Yes No

Comments, including child or young person’s views, if applicable:

**Details of Visit**

Atmosphere within the home

Comment on the general feeling within the household, including any comments made by any of the children and young people present.

**Foster Carers comments**

Supervising/visiting social worker's analysis

*Overall condition of accommodation including health and safety. Was the situation satisfactory and was there anything unexpected*.

**Further Action and Recommendations – to pull through on LCS**

Any further actions required? Yes No

Tasks identified that require further action

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Task | Person responsible | Due date | Status |
|  |  |  |  |

Recommendations