Practice Guidance for Parent and Child Fostering Arrangments

**FINAL**

**Approved by PLT**

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# About this document

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| **Title** | **Practice Guidance for Parent and Child Fostering Arrangements** |
| **Purpose** | **To outline the principles, practice guidance and role expectations when children and their parent(s) are living with foster carers**  |
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## Introduction

Sometimes Surrey Children’s Services needs to assess whether a parent can safeguard and promote the welfare of their child. Often the court will request such an assessment during Care Proceedings. Whilst some assessments take place in residential family settings, in other cases it is preferrable for the child and their parent(s) to live with foster carers for the purposes of assessment.

This Parent and Child Fostering Practice Guidance has been designed and written to ensure that action taken by Surrey Children’s Service complies with legislation, national policy and guidance. It aims to ensure that all foster carers, including those approved as friends and family foster carers, supervising social workers, parents and children's social workers have the same understanding about the tasks they are required to undertake, and the legal basis for doing so.

A parent and child fostering arrangement will only usually be entered into following:

* A pre-birth assessment; or
* Children's Safeguarding Conference which recommends a parent and child placement; or
* At the direction of the Court during Care Proceedings.

In exceptional circumstances, where the processes above has not been adhered to, a clear plan, with timescales, must be agreed at the Pre-Placement Meeting for the completion of the relevant assessments. In all cases, there should be sufficient information available before the child and parent moves to the foster carer to ensure that safe care can be provided.

If there is not an “assessment” element required by the foster carer within the parent and child arrangement, this guidance does not apply.

## Under What Circumstances does a parent and child arrangement apply?

There are three scenarios that apply to parent and child fostering, with different implications for the foster carer, parent and child, depending on the regulations that apply.

2.1 Parent Looked After, Child Looked After

Where the parent is under 18 and is looked after by the Local Authority and the child is also looked after by the Local Authority, each will be subject to all the requirements of the:

* Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010;
* The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011.

The foster carer therefore has duties to care for both the parent and the child.

2.2 Parent Looked After, Child not Looked After

When a Looked After Child is an expectant parent or becomes a parent, in accordance with SSCP procedures a Child and Family Assessment will be undertaken in respect of their child to consider their capacity to meet the child’s needs. An outcome of that assessment may be that further assessment is required in a parent and child foster home, the duration of this will need to be considered according to the individual circumstances of the parent and child.

In this scenario, the parent is the looked after child and the requirements of the 2010 Care Planning Regulations and the Fostering Regulations apply only to the parent. The child is not looked after and the foster carer will not be acting in their capacity as a foster carer under the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 in respect of the child. It is especially important in this scenario that the pre-placement meeting sets out clearly the role of the foster carer in supervising and supporting care for the child with the consent of the parent.

2.3 Parent not Looked After, Child Looked After

In this situation the parent could be either under or over the age of 18, and only the child will be subject to all the requirements of the 2010 Care Planning and 2011 Fostering Regulations. The regulations in relation to placement with parents will not apply, and the parent will be considered as part to the fostering household. In this situation the parent, if under 18, may have been assessed and may have/have not been identified as a child in need in their own right. If the child has been accommodated under S20 the parent will still hold parental responsibility and respective roles and delegated authority must be clarified when the arrangements are being made

Where the child is subject to either an Interim Care Order or a Care Order, Parental Responsibility is shared, and the Local Authority will need to negotiate with the parent (s) the most appropriate arrangements for exercising their respective parental responsibilities. These arrangements must be discussed, agreed and recorded at the pre placement or placement planning meeting if held separately.

## Pre-placement and Placement Planning Meetings

The Pre-Placement Meeting is essential. Failure to hold this meeting prior to the parent and child moving into the home could result in delay in the plan, or a poor placement outcome. In the instances of an expectant parent requiring the support of a P&C arrangement, A pre-birth assessment is expected to have been completed before the parent and baby move into the fostering household, except under extraordinary circumstances such as where the pregnancy has been concealed. In these cases and all others, where a placement is required immediately a Child and Family Assessment should be completed before the parent and baby/child move in.

At the Pre-Placement Meeting the social worker will outline the objectives of the parent and child arrangement and timescales for assessment, visits and review meetings must be agreed. It is important that the parent is aware of these arrangements and the expectations of them.

It is vital that the foster carers receive all information available from the child's social worker in relation to both the parent and the child prior to the arrangement commencing in order to ensure they have a full understanding of the needs of both the parent and the child and are able to provide safe care. If the parent is over the age of 18 this will include a PNC check.

The placement planning paperwork, detailing routines and delegated authority will either be completed at the pre placement meeting or within 5 days of the parent and child moving into the foster home. All involved should receive a copy of the paperwork for their records.

A parent and child arrangement should be agreed for a maximum of 20 weeks. Joint visits between the child’s social worker, supervising social worker, foster carer and parent should be held regularly and reviews held at 4, 8, 12, 16 and 20 weeks chaired either by the social worker, dependent on experience, or the Team Manager, during this time to prevent drift and assist communication and decision making. An extension beyond 20 weeks to the arrangement can only be agreed, by a senior manager (Assistant Director) for both the child and the fostering Service and after consultation with all involved.

All parent and child arrangements will have an assessment element and all parent and child foster carers will be expected to attend relevant training for the role in addition to all mandatory training relevant for all foster carers. The prime aim of any Parent and Child fostering arrangements should be to assess the safe parenting capability of the parent. In some instances, the foster carer may be required to provide reports and/or statements to the Family Court.

Parent and child fostering arrangements should not be treated as the only means of assessment or training in parenting skills. The social worker remains responsible for the assessment of parenting skills, *supported and informed* by the foster carer.

The child's social worker will take the lead in ensuring all necessary agencies are involved in supporting the family (e.g. adult social care, mental health services, learning disability services, health visiting team etc), with the foster carer supporting and enabling communication. Where the parent of the child is also under 18, it is important that both the social worker for the parent and child are clear about their respective roles and who is progressing which actions. This should be confirmed at the pre placement/placement planning meetings, both practitioners should also receive joint supervision for the duration of involvement with the parent and child.

## Role of the Foster Carer

The foster carer(s) role is vast and they will be expected to offer guidance, assistance and teaching to the parent in managing the care of their child. They are also providing nurture and care to the parent. The overall aim is to enable parents to care for their child wherever possible. This may include practical support such as accompanying the parent to parent/baby groups, health visiting clinic, shopping, teaching them to play etc. or emotional support, modelling how to respond to the child when they are distressed. They will also be expected to respond to the parents’ emotional needs when they are upset or need additional support. The foster carer may provide direct instruction or modelling, and will encourage positive, open communication. The foster home should be a safe and friendly environment to provide supervision and support to the parent, to improve and consolidate their parenting skills.

The foster carer will support the parent to learn how to provide their child with a healthy diet and environment to live in as well as how to meet their emotional and physical needs safely. As the arrangement progresses, the foster carer should start to relinquish some of the oversight with regards to these roles and the parent will demonstrate less reliance on the carers support. These steps will be monitored and agreed by the social worker and supervising social worker.

The foster carer will keep daily records noting observations of the parent's ability to respond to the child’s needs and all areas of parenting (responsiveness to child’s needs, ability to meet child’s practical and emotional needs). These observations will inform any parenting programme or assessment that has been agreed. The foster carer will be expected to be open and honest about the parent's strengths and difficulties when recording their observations and the parent must be given the opportunity to read and comment on these observations. It may be helpful to arrange a weekly session to go through these observations so there are no surprises to the parent. Some parents may need additional support to understand what is being recorded, especially if English is not a first language or if they have identified literacy or learning needs.

Foster carers will provide the level of support and supervision required as agreed in the pre placement or placement planning meetings. The foster carer will also provide transport to the parent and child necessary for family time, education and appointments as agreed in the pre placement or placement planning meetings.

Foster carers will provide a clean, tidy, fully furnished bedroom complete with bed, cot, and cot/bed linen. Foster carers will make available and provide full use of toys and equipment for both inside and outside the home. Foster carers will make all communal areas within the home available to the parent and also provide an area for the parent to prepare the child’s meals in the kitchen, in addition to some storage space within the kitchen area. How meal-times are managed within the family home must be discussed within the pre-placement meeting to ensure agreement is reached to reduce the risk of disharmony at a later date.

Foster carers will inform the parent of any household rules and routines and of the safer caring policy when they move into the home. The Supervising Social Worker will complete a Safer Care Risk assessment with the foster carer and parent within the first 5 days which will cover safe sleeping arrangements as set out by SSCP/Lullaby Trust.

The nature of the arrangement means that the foster carer will have a high level of supervision of the child and parent during their time in the foster home – the level of which should be discussed and agreed at the pre-placement meeting.

Foster carers will intervene and take whatever steps they deem to be appropriate if they are concerned for the safety and welfare of the child at any time. This will be recorded in writing and shared with the child’s social worker and supervising social worker at the earliest opportunity.

It is expected that the carer will engage with all necessary meetings to monitor the arrangement and progress of the parent and child, including visits carried out by social workers, Looked After reviews, child protection conferences etc, as would be expected of any foster carer. Foster carers may need to provide evidence to the court. Wherever possible this will be through provision of records daily observations, but from time to time a Court Statement may be directed. The foster carer will have support of the Council’s legal team if this is required.

Foster carers are expected to adhere to strict principles around confidentiality. Parents should feel reassured that no discussions will take place between family members and friends of the foster carers about the circumstances for the parent or their child.

Foster carers will respect and give recognition to the importance of a parent and child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language, gender, sexuality and disability.

## Role of the Parent(s)

Parent(s) will be expected to care for their child at all times (getting up, bathing, feeding, changing) under supervision from the foster carer until it is agreed by the network that it is no longer necessary. It is noted that some parents are not able to do this immediately and may need several weeks to build confidence in their care to be able to take responsibility of caring for their child.

Parent(s) will be expected to manage the day and bedtime routine, which fits in with the foster carer's household. When the parent is settling their child for bed it is their responsibility to check on the child throughout the evening and during the night as required, unless it has been agreed within the pre-placement meeting that the child will sleep in the foster carers’ room and be cared for through the night by the foster carer.

Parent(s) will be expected to demonstrate their competence in attending to all their child's physical needs as well as interacting positively with their child.

Parent(s) will be expected to meet the needs of themselves and their child in regards to personal hygiene, shopping, cooking, laundry, cleaning, organising appointments and budgeting. The foster carer will supervise and support with these aspects initially but it would be expected that over the course of the arrangement the parent will achieve greater independence in all these areas.

The parent will be responsible for keeping their room tidy and leave communal areas of the home in a tidy, clean condition after use.

Personal clothing and belongings must be kept in parent's own room. The foster carer cannot be responsible for property or articles that are lost or damaged.

Parents will contribute to the wellbeing of everyone in the foster carers' home and in public by demonstrating respectful verbal and physical behaviours at all times.

Parents are able to request up to 5 hours per week of babysitting from the foster carer but this is to be discussed and agreed firstly with foster carer and then with the child’s social. . It is expected that the parent will give at least 24 hours notice of when they would like to use this time, ideally this will be discussed at the pre-placement meeting. Exceptions to prior agreement to include, unexpected illness, appointments and exceptional circumstances. If the parent wishes to go over this allotted period of 5 hours, agreement will need to be gained from the social worker and the foster carer giving at least 24 hours notice.

The foster carer may make random room checks to ensure the safety of the parent and child and therefore all bedroom doors must be kept unlocked. It would be expected that unless there is concern or risk, safer care arrangements are adhered to in regards to knocking on bedroom doors prior to entering.

If there are any differences of opinion on how the child is cared for these should be discussed and recorded. However, where the child is Looked After and therefore subject to all the requirements of the 2010 Care Planning and 2011 Fostering Regulations, the parent will need to accept the final decision from the foster carer who will ensure the issue is discussed with the social worker at the next meeting.

Smoking is not permitted inside the foster carer's home. If a parent smokes it must be in the designated outside area. On returning to the home, the parent must wash their hands before contact with their child and are advised to change outer clothes.

If there are other children in the household the parent in placement must not provide any practical or supervisory care.

No alcohol should be kept by the parent in the carer's home. Prescribed medication must be kept securely and the foster carer will provide secure storage as required.

No involvement with any illegal substances is permitted in the foster carer's home..

Parents should inform the foster carer and child's social worker of any appointments, and check if childcare cover is required.

Parents over the age of 18 will be expected to support the application of a Disclosure and Barring Service Check completed by the fostering service in line with the fostering regulations. A PNC should be sought before the parent moves into the foster home by the children’s social work team to allow for careful matching and awareness of any safeguarding concerns. The Disclosure and Barring Service Check should then be discussed and initiated at the pre-placement meeting where the parent / social worker will be asked of any police involvement and convictions.

## Role of the Supervising Social Worker (SSW)

All Parent and Child foster carers will be supported and supervised by an allocated supervising social worker who will offer a minimum of 4-6 weekly supervisory visits.

Any known or potential risks to foster carers and household members from members of the child's family or others must be assessed. No foster carer or member of the fostering household should knowingly be placed at risk as a consequence of providing a home and care.

The SSW should ensure full parent and child information is passed on by the child's social worker to the foster carer prior to the arrangement commencing.

To ensure prompt payment to the carers, the supervising social worker will inform Fostering Finance of the placement start date. To avoid overpayments they will ensure notification of the end date, or any changes to the arrangement that affects payment.

The SSW will be responsible for monitoring/supporting/supervising/ the foster home, this will include at least one unannounced visit every 12 months.

The SSW will read all weekly foster carer diaries and respond to any issues that are appropriate. This includes reporting any issues and ensuring records are forwarded to the child’s social worker. The SSW will discuss with the carer the recorded observations to ensure they are of an acceptable quality, support the assessment and clearly identify what is fact and opinion so that objectivity remains.

The SSW will ensure foster carers are supported to access and complete all relevant training and support groups in order to fulfil their role.

The SSW will ensure the foster carer has researched appropriate resources within their local area to support the needs of the parent and child.

The SSW will ensure the carers receive adequate breaks or additional support if needed in order to maintain their role. This may be via an alternative foster carer or a Fostering Support Worker.

## Role of the Child’s Social Worker

The child's social worker must visit the foster home in the first week and thereafter a minimum of every 4 weeks and make weekly phone/email contact. They are expected, in addition to the SSW, to remain in contact with the carer. During these visits social workers should discuss individually and together with parent and carer how the arrangement is going in relation to the agreement, and provide opportunity to share concerns/worries.

The child's social worker should undertake a room check in accordance with statutory requirements.

The child's social worker, in conjunction with the SSW, must arrange and chair regular placement reviews following the placement planning meeting. Placement reviews should be structured around the original placement plan, and the reviewing process should highlight progress and adjust the plans for the level of supervision and independence when appropriate.

Placement reviews should be held at three to four weekly intervals 4, 8, 12, 16 and 20 weeks chaired either by the social worker, dependent on experience, or the Team Manager. Every review should consider placement exit and future plans for the family.

The child's social worker should check out any arranged appointments and childcare cover that needs to be agreed with the carers.

The child's social worker needs to consider the second parent, and attention and scrutiny must be given to the parents’ relationship, both of their involvement in the assessment process and future planning.

Should a dispute arise within the arrangement, the SSW and child's social worker will initially undertake joint visits. If necessary the child's social worker will then arrange a follow up meeting to include parent, SSW and carer and Team Managers if necessary.

The child's social worker will liaise with the parent’s housing provider if relevant and senior management (if necessary) if the placement (and therefore temporary absence from the parent’s main home) is likely to affect the conditions of a tenancy the Housing element of Universal Credit.

The child's social worker must ensure that the carer has all relevant information by the date of the pre-Placement Planning Meeting or Placement Planning Meeting at the latest, and that the Supervising Social Worker has been included within the invite list for all legal planning meetings relevant to the fostering arrangement.

The child's social worker should provide parent(s) with complaints procedures leaflets.

## Finance

Please refer to the Foster Carers Finances document available on Tri-X for greater scope of finances.

Parent & Child foster carers are paid the same fee as all other specialist foster carers. In addition they will receive the equivalent of a weekly child allowance aged 14-17 years for the parent, plus a weekly child allowance relevant to the child’s age (e.g. 0-4 years)

When the foster carer is holding a parent & chid vacancy and is able and available to offer a placement, they will be paid a retainer of the P&C weekly specialist Skill payment for a period of up to 4 weeks, at which time the allowance will stop unless a parent & child arrangement has been identified and plans are being made for the commencement of the arrangement. If the children’s social work team would like to keep the carer available beyond the four week period, they will be asked to fund this arrangement.

Parent and Child foster carers may take 28 days paid annual leave per annum at the specialist skill payment rate (pro rata for part weeks). It is not expected that any leave will be taken during the time a parent and child is living with the carer unless there are exceptional circumstances agreed by the service. The service asks that as much notice as possible is given of leave dates.

All annual leave must be used within the calendar year (pro rata for those joining the scheme). Any unused annual leave cannot be carried over to the following year.

## 8.1 Day Care support

The same principles would apply to the foster carer offering day care as to all other Surrey P&C foster carers with an expectation to carry out the role of the main carer in regards to assessing, teaching, monitoring and reporting.

Payments would be calculated as the child specialist daycare rate for the parent plus the child day care rate for the child.

8.2 Allowance Breakdown for Parent/Child/Foster Carer

The weekly fostering allowance is to be used by the carer to cover all but the most exceptional costs of fostering, including the costs directly associated in providing care for the child i.e. buying food, clothing, contributing towards housing costs, utility bills etc.

To explain this in a way that relates specifically for parent and child, the specialist skill payments you are paid is yours to keep.

The money that must be spent directly on the child (and a parent under 18 who is also Looked After) could be used for toys, clothes, toiletries, mobile phone credit, any classes like swimming etc. Deducting this from the allowance you have for the child, you have the remainder to spend on equipment for your household, food, heating, lighting, water, travel (up to 20 miles per day) additional clothing if needed, maintaining your car, wear and tear to your home, etc.

Where parents are over 18 it is suggested that you have in the region of £80 per week to spend on them which could be used for classes (Zumba, yoga etc), travel, clothing, pampering activities like haircuts/nails, etc. This leaves the remainder for heating, food, travel, trips out, maintaining your car, wear and tear on your home, etc.

You can save any excess which is not spent, and this can go with the parent/child when they move on.

You might also use some of the parent and/or child’s allowance for activities that your family are taking part in; for example if you are all going out to the farm for the day and then for a meal, and it ends up costing £40 a head, we would not expect the parent to spend this out of their own money, but you could use some of the allowance for it.

Where parents are in receipt of benefits they should be paying for the child’s food, nappies etc. This will be agreed at the Pre Placement or Placement Planning meeting or at a review meeting, as benefits can take several weeks to come through and may sometimes be adjusted. During the time until parent’s benefits start being paid, it would be expected that carers fund items from the fostering allowance as detailed previously.

Once parents are receiving benefits the weekly allowance for the child should be saved and used towards setting up the parent in their new home, for example, they will need to buy their own cots, stair gates etc. If the child has been looked after for over a year they will likely have a Junior ISA. You could make additional payments to this Junior ISA in this instance – please discuss with your supervising social worker, the child’s social worker and IRO. If the Junior ISA has not yet been set up, please discuss with the child’s social worker and the parent how money should be saved.

A festival allowance (equivalent to 1 weeks age related allowance) is paid to the carer for the child (and parent if under 18) to cover the cost of presents and celebration activities. Buying enough presents for a child to use up the allowance can prove difficult when a parent is living with you, so feel free to discuss with your supervising social worker how this allowance is to be spent. It might be that the majority of it is saved, or it is used to purchase an expensive item such as a car seat.

## Ending the arrangement

If the parenting assessment concludes that the parent is able to safely meet the needs of their child, plans and timescales must be negotiated for supporting the parent to move on to independent living, or to another arrangement not involving fostering. The parent, social worker, foster carer and supervising social worker should be involved in these discussions to ensure timescales are suitable and expectations around care in the interim period are understood and agreed.

Following the end of the Parent and child arrangement, the foster carer *may* agree to provide further support via outreach support within the parent's home for up to **3 weeks.** This arrangement will only be put in place following a further meeting between the child’s social worker, the SSW, the carer and parent to outline the role of the carer during this time. The carer will be paid the Specialist Fee element relevant to that of a P&C carer for this three week period only. Any mileage accrued in this role of over 20 miles a day will be reimbursed at the normal mileage rate.

Should the parent be assessed as unable to safely meet the needs of their child, by the direction of the Court, or with the agreement of the parent, the parent will be asked to leave the home and should do so as soon as practically possible. A meeting will be held to agree how this interim period will be managed within the home.

With agreement of the carer, social worker and supervising social worker, the child may remain in the foster home.

If the parent is a Looked After Child, they may stay in the foster home until an alternative suitable home is identified. The carer will take over full care for the child, or the child may be moved to a different foster carer. This decision will be made by the Local Authority in consultation with the foster carer, parent and the Independent Reviewing Officer with any oversight of the family court that is required.

The full specialist skills fee will be paid all the time both the parent and child remain in the foster home.

When the parent leaves the foster home the carer will receive the appropriate general fostering age related allowance, a level 3 skills payment *and* a specific allowance for up to 6 weeks, after which time the specific allowance payment will cease and general fostering allowances will be paid.

Should the placement be terminated due to a serious breach of this guidance, or because the parent has left the home without the agreement of the authority, leaving the child with the carers, payments as described in the paragraph above will be initiated once it is determined by the Local authority that the parent will not be returning to the foster home. Until this time, the full specialist skill fee will be paid.