

Frequency of statutory visits to looked after children in stable long-term homes

When there has been a sustained period of stability within a long-term care arrangement consideration can be given to the frequency of statutory looked after child visits.

The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, Volume 2: care planning, placement and case review (June 2015) states '*Unless paragraphs 3.236 to 3.238 below apply, the child should be visited within one week of the start of the child's first placement and within one week of the start of any subsequent placement [regulation 28(2)(a)]. Thereafter, the child must be visited at intervals of not more than six weeks for the first year of any placement [regulation 28(2)(b)]. Visits during subsequent years must also take place at intervals of not more than six weeks [regulation 28(2)(c)(ii)] unless the placement has been formally agreed as a permanent placement which is intended to last until the child is 18; in those circumstances, the intervals between visits in the second and subsequent years of placement must not be longer than three months [regulation 28(2)(c)(i)].*

'3.234 Where the child is placed in a long-term foster placement, the child should be visited within one week of the start of the placement. Thereafter, the child must be visited at intervals of not more than six weeks for the first year of the placement [regulation 28(2)(b)]. Visits during subsequent years must take place at intervals of not more than six months, where the child, being of sufficient age and understanding, has agreed to be visited at this minimum frequency [regulation 28 (3A)]'

'3.235 However, the frequency of visits should always be determined by the circumstances of the case and the authority must arrange a visit whenever reasonably requested by a child or foster carer regardless of the status of the placement.'

The social worker will require their team manager's approval before making a request for a reduction in the frequency of statutory visits to a looked after child, to the allocated IRO to be considered at the next Looked After Child Review meeting. The Service Manager must be informed of the proposed change.

The following criteria will need to be met, before consideration will be given to reducing the frequency of statutory visits to a looked after child:

- The child or young person has been living with their carers for at least two years and is benefiting from the stability this has provided.
- That the child or young person wants less frequent statutory visits.
- That the IRO has visited and discussed the proposal with the child or young person, and it is clear that the child or young person is able to communicate their wishes about the frequency of statutory visits.
- That they are over 10 years of age.
- If they are under 10 years of age, they have been living with their carers for 2 or more years.
- That they have good school attendance confirmed by Virtual School, a good PEP and good school engagement.
- That the network around the child or young person is in support of less frequent statutory visits.
- If the young person is above the age of 16, they have been notified that post 18, they will be seen by their Personal Advisor on an 8 weekly basis, irrespective of timescales for their Looked After Child visits.

All relevant parties within the child or young person's network should agree to the new proposed frequency – for up to 6 monthly intervals between statutory looked after visits.

Where there is also a younger sibling living with the same carers and this is also considered a long-term arrangement that has been in place for over two years, individual consideration should be given to extending this request to cover the young sibling too based on their needs. His/her views must also be sought and considered.

If the reduction in frequency is agreed by all at the Looked After Review Meeting, the IRO will record this in the Outcomes and Minutes of the meeting. A Management Oversight note will be recorded on the child's record to confirm the ratification of reducing the frequency of statutory visits (up to maximum of 6 month between visits) by the Team Manager.

The social worker should thereafter update the summary on the front page of ICS for child/young person where it clearly states the agreement frequency of statutory visits to the child.

This arrangement can be reviewed and changed at any time to undertake more frequent statutory visits if circumstances for the child or carer change.

Please see flow-chart on the next page :-

Flowchart for frequency of statutory visits in stable long-term homes

