



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Practice Guidance on Viability Assessments
and Assessments for SGO's and Connected
Carers**

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Practice Guidance on Assessments for Viability, SGO's and Connected Carers

Good Practice Requirements

The Fostering Team Manager will be informed and invited to all Legal Planning Meetings (LPM). This will ensure that planning for future work can be undertaken, and existing cases/assessments tracked regarding timescales.

Where, under Pre-Proceedings (PP) or Public Law Outline (PLO) a Family Network Meeting should be convened. The purpose is to advise on the process of assessment and for those wishing to be assessed as potential carers.

Joint Legal Team (JLT) are to send copies of all Court Orders to the Fostering Social Worker and the Fostering Team Manager, where assessments from fostering are required.

Where the Court Order lacks clarity on the type of assessment required, the Local Authority will not assume that it is a full SGO/Fostering Assessment. Instead at the request of the Fostering Team Manager, legal will communicate with all parties subject to proceedings to seek clarity and/or seek to amend the Order accordingly.

Viability and SGO/Connected Carer Fostering Assessments will be undertaken by the Fostering Team, in collaboration with the Childs Social Worker. At times when the Fostering Team is at full capacity only Court Ordered Assessments will be prioritised for allocation. During these times any Viability Assessments that are not Court Ordered will be completed by the child's Social Worker, but they will seek advice and guidance from a Fostering Social Worker as and when required.

The Fostering Team is responsible for the SGO Support Plan, with oversight from the Child's Social Worker. The SGO Support Plan will continue to be signed off by the Fostering Team Manager and Head of Service for Corporate Parenting, Care and Transition.

Process for Viability Assessments

Ideally a conversation will have taken place at the LPM, so the Fostering Team Manager can manage the allocation of incoming assessments under PP or PLO.

The children's Social Worker will complete a Pre-Screening Tool (*appendix 1*) and discuss with their manager the strengths/concerns prior to deciding whether the applicant is suitable for a Viability Assessment. A signed copy of this Pre-Screening Tool will be sent to the Fostering Team Manager. Then the child's Social Worker will complete the referral of potential carers

for a Viability Assessment on the adult's file. This activity step will need to be sent to the Family Placement Service in Mosaic for allocation.

The Fostering Team Manager will allocate the assessment and record team and worker in the relationship screen, the child's Social Worker will be informed by email who the new allocated Fostering Social Worker is.

It is expected as standard, that at least one joint assessment visit with the fostering and child's Social Worker will take place in all viability assessments.

The child's Social Worker MUST communicate with the Fostering Social Worker; to discuss the case detail and agree joint assessment session dates/times, ensuring timely completion and adherence to the Court Timescale before any work on the assessment commences. If basic checks are required at the Viability Assessment stage, it is the Child's Social Worker who will complete PNC and Local Authority Checks.

If Viability Assessments are ordered whilst in Court and without prior notice, then the child's Social Worker must communicate with the Fostering Team Manager in negotiating and agreeing the timescale for completion. There is also an expectation that JLT will directly send any orders to the Family Placements Team Manager.

Following the completion of all Viability Assessments a professionals meeting should be held within 5 working days between the Child's Social Work Team, Family Placements Team and where appropriate the allocated Solicitor for the case. The Purpose of this meeting is to discuss strengths/concerns in the assessment and to consider whether a full assessment is to commence. Details of the type of assessment and court timescales should be agreed at this meeting.

Process for Regulation 24 Placements/Connected Carers Fostering Assessments

Regulations 24 of the 2010 Care Planning Regulations set out arrangements for the temporary approval of a connected person as a foster carer in exceptional circumstances for up to 16 weeks to allow an immediate placement and sufficient time for a foster carer approval process to be undertaken.

The social worker placing the child will need to create the 'Decision to Seek Accommodation' or 'Permanent Change in Placement' step on Mosaic, and trigger the (Family and Friends) Emergency Placement Request (Regulations 24 of the 2010 Care Planning Regulations).

Where this arrangement is planned, the Child's Social Worker will inform the Fostering Team Manager in order to allocate a Fostering Social Worker to undertake a joint Regulation 24 (Viability Assessment) visit, to assess the suitability of the carer to care in the short-term for the child.

The Fostering Social Worker will provide a written summary of their part of the assessment to the Child's Social Worker to be included in the (Family and Friends) Emergency Placement Request (Regulations 24 of the 2010 Care Planning Regulations).

It is the Child's Social Worker who will complete PNC and Local Authority Checks at this stage.

All Regulation 24 (emergency) family and friends/connected persons placements must be presented to the ADM for agreement of this status of placement. The child's Social Worker should also ensure that the Emergency Placement Agreement is signed by the prospective carers ahead of the child being placed in their care.

Once this has been agreed, the child's Social Worker will make a referral to the Fostering Team Manager for a full assessment (in these cases we are able to progress to a full assessment, as the Regulation 24 assesses the viability of the placement).

To care for a child in care, relatives, friends, or other connected persons must be approved as foster carers under the 2011 Fostering Service Regulations, or temporarily approved as foster carers under the 2010 Care Planning Placement and Review Regulations.

All foster carers, including those who have been temporarily approved, must also enter into a foster care agreement. The child's social worker will arrange a Placement Planning meeting within 7 days of the child being placed with the carers, which also includes covering delegated authority. The Fostering Social Worker will also attend this meeting to support the carers.

Once the family and friends foster carer assessment is completed, the assessing social worker will present this to the Fostering Panel for recommendation. The child's social worker and the carers are also expected to attend this Panel. The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) will make a decision as to whether they can approve these carers within 7 working days upon receiving the Fostering Panels minutes.

The whole process has to be completed within 16 weeks of a child being placed. If there are significant reasons why this period of time needs to be extended, the assessing social worker can request an extension of a further 8 weeks to complete the work, under Regulation 25. This must be sought within the 16 weeks of a child being placed and should only be applied for under exceptional circumstances.

The prospective carers will be paid a fostering allowance for the child in placement following ADM agreement of the Regulation 24.

If approved by the ADM, then the child's social worker will support the carer to seek either a Child Arrangement Order (CAO) or a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) if appropriate. The carer will remain a family and friends/connected persons foster carer until the Order is granted. If this is the case the assessing Fostering Social Worker will remain involved to support and supervise the carers until any orders are granted.

Should the prospective carers remain as a family and friends foster carers as part of the permanence plan for the child, the case will be transferred to the Support and Development sub-team for a Supervising Social Worker (SSW).

SGO/Connected Carers Fostering Assessments

The Family Placements Team will **not** assume that a full SGO/Connected Fostering Assessment is required following a Viability Assessment without clear instructions from JLT or the Child's Social Work Team. Any delay in notifying the Fostering Team will lead to delay in filing the full assessment.

Once instructed to commence, the Fostering Social Worker will trigger the Mosaic workflow to generate either the SGO or Connected Carers Fostering Assessment on the adult's file.

The full assessment will usually be completed by the Fostering Social Worker who completed the Viability Assessment, if for any reason this is not the case, the Fostering Team Manager will re-allocate the assessment to another Fostering Social Worker and record team and worker in the relationship screen on Mosaic, the child's Social Worker will be notified of any changes via email.

Once allocated, the Fostering Social Worker will require a copy of the Order and note timescales as requested by the Court, ideally when pre-empted or tracked through a legal planning meeting. These will have been negotiated and agreed before attendance at Court.

A discussion/meeting **MUST** take place between the children's allocated Social Worker and the Fostering Social Worker before any work commences on the assessment.

The purpose of the discussion/meeting should be to discuss the following.

- case detail, focussing on any specific issues that need to be addressed within the assessment.
- plan when/who will undertake the relevant parts of the assessment to ensure completion within the required timescales.

- dates and times for joint assessment visits confirmed - It is expected as standard that in all SGO/Full Assessments, a minimum of two joint assessment sessions will take place with the Child's and Fostering Social Worker.
- sharing relevant historic/current assessments and reports e.g., chronologies, parenting assessment, psychological assessments etc

Good practice guidance would suggest that a full assessment should be completed within a 12-week timescale.

The worker undertaking the full fostering assessment will ensure that they obtain all relevant full checks (DBS, Medical) and paperwork in relation to the carer (e.g., Application Form, Written Agreement, etc.), which should be initiated at the start of the assessment process to avoid drift and delay.

Appendix 1 - Viability Assessment Pre-Screening Tool

Pre-screening Tools (prior to referral for viability assessments)

Allocated child's social worker to go through the questions below, prior to deciding the applicant is suitable for a viability assessment.

Once pre-screening tool is completed, SW will discuss with their manager the strengths/concerns and decide whether or not the applicants should go through to viability assessment.

A copy of this tool is to be sent to FPT with referral for VA and placed on the applicant's case file. The legal rep would need to be notified of the decision and rationale.

Child/ren's name:	
Applicants Name, address and Contact details:	
Relationship to child/ren:	
Social Worker completing pre-screening tool:	
Date pre-screening tool completed:	
Viability Assessment completion/Filing date:	

1. The applicant(s) needs to be aware that they are being asked to complete an in-depth assessment to be considered as a potential alternative carer for the child, for long term care only and until the child turns 18 years old. Have you discussed this and what is the applicants view?
2. The applicant(s) needs to be aware that they are assessed within the National Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards (these can be found on the gov.uk website). Have you discussed this and what is the applicants view?
3. The applicant(s) needs to be aware that, if married, living with their partner at the same address or intend to live together or for their partner to have a role in caring

<p>for the children, then this is a JOINT application and both applicants MUST be assessed. Have you discussed this and what is the applicants view?</p>
<p>4. The applicant(s) needs to be aware that, children over the age of 3 will need their own bedroom. Have you discussed this and what is the applicants view? Do they have the space to care for the child/ren?</p>
<p>5. The applicant(s) needs to be aware that if the size of their home is not considered suitable to care for the child long term, they will be asked to consider moving and whether this is a realistic option for them. If they do need to move, then support will be provided by the Local Authority which will be set out in the care plan or the SGO support plan. Have you discussed this and what is the applicants view?</p>
<p>6. The applicant(s) will need to be flexible and available during working hours to complete the full assessment over a period of hours/weeks. Have you discussed this and what is the applicants view?</p>
<p>7. Do the applicants have any prior criminal history? Specifically, for crimes against children? (NB: - A DBS criminal record check will be undertaken on all applicants). Have you discussed this and what is the applicants view?</p>
<p>8. Are the applicants currently open to Children's Services or have they previously been known?</p>
<p>9. Have the applicants had their own children removed from their care for any period?</p>
<p>10. Are there any other adults living in the home? If so, will they consent to checks etc. Please provide details of other adults in the household.</p>
<p>11. Do the applicants support the Local Authority's position and understand the concerns raised by the Local Authority? Have you discussed this and what is the applicants view?</p>

Social Workers Recommendation:

Managers Comment:

Signatures:

Social worker:

Date:.....

Manager:

Date:.....