

Parent and Child Foster Care Placements Policy

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1. Parent and Child Foster Care Placements Policy

The Parent and Child Foster Care Placements Policy has been designed and written to ensure that action taken by Norfolk County Council Children's Services is in line with legislation, national policy and guidance. It aims to ensure that all foster carers, supervising social workers, parents and childrens' social workers have the same understanding about the placement tasks they are required to undertake, and the legal basis for doing so.

This policy should be implemented 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 required assessments have not been completed, a clear plan, with timescales, must be agreed at the pre-placement meeting for the completion of the assessment.

Parent and child foster care is an exceptional arrangement, usually for very young babies and their parents. The maximum age for a child within such a placement would normally be 4 years (i.e. not beyond school age).

2. Legal Context

There are four legal scenarios that apply to parent and child fostering, with different implications 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** <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/959/contents/made> and **The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011** <http://legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2011/581/made>.

2.2 *Parent Looked After, Child not Looked After*

During Care Proceedings it could be that the child of a parent under the age of 18 is placed with them, in a foster placement, under the **Care Planning, Placements and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (Placement of child in care with parent)**. The requirements of the 2010 Care Planning Regulations and the 2011 Fostering Regulations will apply only to 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 of child in care with parent will not apply, and the parent will be considered as part of the fostering household. In this situation the parent, if under 18, will have been assessed but not identified as a child in need in their own right.

3. Pre-placement planning guidance

- 3.1** The pre-placement meeting and contract are essential tasks to be completed prior to any placement. (See 4.1 and 4.2) Failure to do so could result in delay in making a placement, or a poor placement outcome. A pre-birth assessment is expected in all cases, except where the pregnancy has been concealed or only identified at a late stage. In these cases, where a placement is required in an emergency, a social work assessment should be completed as soon as is practicable.
- 3.2** A placement should be agreed for a maximum of 12 weeks, plus 2 weeks of outreach support. A review at 7 weeks is a requirement of all placements, as this will prevent drift and enhance decision making. An extension to the placement timescale can only be agreed, by a senior manager, if there is an identified need for continued parenting work or assessment.
- 3.3** The Supervising Service recognises the duty to foster carers and parents to ensure that the best help and support is provided from the outset. Establishing a clear contract clarifies roles and responsibilities to the placement for all parties involved.
- 3.4** All placements will have an assessment component. The prime aim of any placement should be to assess the safe parenting capability of the parent. Where the parent is also a Looked after Child, realistic timescales for independent living should form part of the assessment and planning.
- 3.5** However, parent and child foster care placements should not be treated as the only means of assessment or training in parenting skills. The foster carer will be informing the assessment, which is the responsibility of the child's social worker.
- 3.6** For a Parent and Child placement to successfully meet its objectives there must be multi-agency working and assessment. The child's social worker will take the lead in negotiating with other agencies to ensure that every placement is fully supported (e.g. adult social care, mental health, learning disability, health visiting, family centre and midwife).
- 3.7** Where the child is in placement and subject to either an ICO 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 meeting.
- 3.8** At the pre-placement meeting a clear statement as to the objectives of the placement and the timescale for assessment must be provided by the social worker. Those involved in the meeting must agree how progress towards meeting the objectives will be tracked, and how success will be measured and what will be the plan should the assessment need ending prematurely, or the outcome of the assessment be that the child cannot move back into the community safely with the parent. This must be made clear to the parent and they should be given the opportunity to have legal advice (available for free through the pre-proceedings process or if the matter is before the Court).

- 3.9** Following the placement the foster carer will be able to provide further support via an outreach support programme within the parent's home for up to 2 weeks. This arrangement will only be put in place following a placement planning meeting and the completion and signing of the placement contract.
- 3.10** Where the parent is also Looked After various scenarios could apply. If the parenting assessment concludes that the parent is able to safely parent the child then the aims and timescales of the placement must be renegotiated to include clear criteria for moving on into independent living, or to another form of supported arrangement, not involving fostering. Should, however, the parent be assessed as unable to safely parent, then by the direction of the Court, or with the agreement of the parent, the child should be moved to a different placement. This may also involve a change of placement for the parent if the placement is designated only as a parent and child placement.
- 3.11** If the parent and child placement is subject to Care Proceedings, the child's social worker must complete relevant tasks in relation to the Placement of Child in Care with Parent procedures.
- 3.12** It is the responsibility of all professionals working with the child and the parent to consider any known or potential risks to the foster carer and/or their family from the parent(s), members of the child's family, or others. This information must feed into the risk assessment completed by the child's social worker. No foster carer or member of the fostering household should knowingly be placed in a position of risk as a consequence of providing a parent and child placement.

4. Role of the Foster Carer

- 4.1** The foster carer(s) will be expected to offer guidance and assistance to the parent in managing the care tasks for the baby. This may include direct instruction or modelling, it may include responding to questions, or it may include practical support such as accompanying the parent to parent/baby groups, health visiting clinic, shopping etc. The placement should provide a safe and friendly environment to provide supervision and support to the parent, to improve and consolidate parenting skills.
- 4.2** The foster carer will be expected to show the parent how any technical appliances work so that they are able to use cooking and cleaning facilities appropriately. If the placement progresses positively it must be expected that the parent demonstrates less reliance on the carers support.
- 4.3** The foster carer should promote and support the key attachment between child and parent.
- 4.4** The foster carer will be expected to keep one daily record noting observations of the parent's ability to respond to their baby's needs, manage the routine, and manage the practical tasks of washing, ironing, shopping, budgeting etc. These observations will inform any parenting programme or assessment that has been agreed. The foster carers 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.
- 4.5** The foster carer will agree to provide 24 hr support when required, transport parent and baby when appropriate, and as agreed.
- 4.6** The foster carer will baby-sit for one evening a week (subject to negotiation) provided that 24 hrs notice is given.
- 4.7** The foster carer will provide a fully furnished bedroom complete with bed, cot, and cot linen and ensure the parent has use of a sitting room with home entertainment.
- 4.8** The foster carer will provide a working together in our home agreement outlining routines and household rules. A safe caring plan in relation to the individual parent and child in placement should be agreed and signed by the social worker, supervising social worker, parent and the foster carer.
- 4.9** The foster carer will be expected to periodically check on the care and safety of the child in placement, and therefore must have access to the child at all times whilst in the home environment.
- 4.10** The foster carer should intervene if the level of risk to the child from a parent would be detrimental to their welfare.
- 4.11** The foster carer will always seek medical advice or treatment for any fall or injury that a child has sustained. A report of any injury should be made to the child's social worker and supervising social worker as soon as possible.

- 4.12** The foster carer will respect and give recognition to the importance of a parent and child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language, gender, sexuality and disability.
- 4.13** The foster carer will attend the pre-placement meeting, reviews, core group meetings, planning meetings, child protection conferences and any other meetings required.
- 4.14** Foster carers will receive full information including any specific expectations and advice of any relevant court timetable prior to placement from the child's social worker in relation to both the parent and the child. If the information has not been received the carer must inform the supervising social worker 2 days before the placement commences. If a placement is made on an emergency basis the foster carer should expect to receive relevant information within 5 days.
- 4.15** The foster carer will liaise with child's social worker, health visitor and supervising social worker and any other professionals involved.
- 4.16** Should the placement be terminated because of a decision made by the authority relating to a serious breach of the contract, so that the wellbeing of the child is compromised or because the parent has left the placement without the agreement of the authority, the child may be moved to a child only placement. If the matter is in pre-proceedings or in proceedings urgent legal advice needs to be sought before the proposed move to ensure any required court approval of a care plan change is obtained first.
- 4.17** Although the progress of the placement will be reviewed according to the schedule set out in the contract, the child will also be subject to the LAC review mechanism (when applicable) according to the statutory schedule, as will the parent if also looked after. The foster carer will remain subject to the foster care review mechanism.
- 4.18** Foster carers offering parent and child placements may do so alongside existing long-term placements. When carers are holding a vacancy a new placement can be considered in consultation with all those involved in the existing placement, but careful matching is paramount.
- 4.19** It is not appropriate for a foster carer to take fostering leave during a parent and child placement, and no respite will be granted until after the first 10 weeks, unless this is as a result of an emergency or has been pre-arranged.
- 4.20** Foster carers who have mother and baby placements cannot go on the out of hour's rota.
- 4.21** Where the parent is a Looked After Child, the foster carers will support the parent in relation to education, home tuition and legal appointments, and provide transport and childcare if necessary.

5. Responsibility of the Parent(s)

- 5.1** Parent(s) will be expected to care for their child at all times (getting up, bathing, feeding, changing under supervision from carer until it is agreed it is no longer necessary).
- 5.2** 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 a child for bed it is their responsibility to check on the child throughout the evening and during the night as required.
- 5.3** 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.
- 5.4** Parent(s) will be expected to shop, budget and cook for self and child and attend to all washing and ironing. One of the placement aims will be for the parent to achieve greater independence and skill in these areas. The parent may be required to make a financial contribution to their living expenses in the placement, subject to their individual circumstances.
- 5.5** It is the parent's responsibility to maintain any existing accommodation while they are in the placement. The parent may need to access advice, support and evidence to ensure they are receiving their full benefit entitlement, including Housing Benefit.
- 5.6** Parent(s) will keep their room tidy and leave the kitchen, bathroom and any other communal areas in a tidy, clean condition after use.
- 5.7** Personal clothing and belongings must be kept in the parent's own room. The foster carer cannot be responsible for property or articles that are lost or damaged.
- 5.8** Parents will contribute to the wellbeing of everyone in the foster carer's home and in public by demonstrating non-aggressive, non-threatening behaviours.
- 5.9** If agreed in the contract the foster carer will offer babysitting one evening per week; the parent(s) will provide 24hrs notice for any such request.
- 5.10** Foster carer may make random room checks to ensure safety of parent and child, and therefore all bedroom doors must be kept unlocked.
- 5.11** Daily written evidence based reports will be shared by the foster carer with the parent to highlight and encourage further discussion. These reports will be signed by both parties and may be used in Court Proceedings. The reports will be shared with the child's social worker and the supervising social worker each week.
- 5.12** If there are any differences of opinion on issues which affect the child's health and/or development, these should be discussed and recorded. However, the parent will need to accept the final decision from the foster carer who will endeavour to contact the health visitor and/or social worker at the first opportunity.

- 5.13** The parent will contribute to and adhere to the safe caring plan. This plan can be reviewed at any point by the parent, foster carer, social worker and supervising social worker.
- 5.14** 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 baby.
- 5.15** If there are other children in the household the parent in placement must not provide any practical or supervisory care to them.
- 5.16** No alcohol should be kept by the parent in the carer's home.
- 5.17** Misuse of any substances is not permitted in the foster carer's home including illegal substances. However, it is recognised some parents may be supported in a parent and child placement whilst the parent is supervised by a treatment programme for drug or alcohol misuse.
- 5.18** The parent should inform the foster carer and child's social worker of any appointments, and check if childcare cover is required.
- 5.19** The parents' circumstances and history are strictly confidential to the named foster carers.
- 5.20** Parents over the age of 18 will be DBS enhanced checked and/or Police National Computer checked and the results will be fed into the pre-placement risk assessment.

6. Role of the Supervising Social Worker (SSW)

- 6.1** All parent and child foster carers offering this specialist service must be fully supported by a designated and experienced supervising social worker who will offer 4 weekly support and supervision.
- 6.2** Any known or potential risks to foster carers and family 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 placement.
- 6.3** The SSW is to ensure full parent and child information is passed on by the child's social worker to the foster carer prior to the placement commencing. If this is not the case, then SSW should inform the social worker(s) for the baby and/or parent who will, in discussion with their manager(s), make a decision if the placement goes ahead or is delayed.
- 6.4** The SSW will be responsible for monitoring/supporting/supervising/ inspecting the management of the placement.
- 6.5** The SSW will visit in the first week of placement and thereafter to provide supervision and support, as well as weekly phone contacts.
- 6.6** The SSW will read and sign off all daily record sheets and report any issues that are appropriate. The SSW will discuss with the carer the recorded observation to ensure objectivity remains. The foster carer will be advised of their responsibility for recording and their role as a witness of fact if the matter is in or potentially subject to proceedings
- 6.7** The SSW is to liaise with parent and child's social workers to update on placements.
- 6.8** The SSW will inform foster carers of any annual leave of one week plus.
- 6.9** The SSW will check with foster carers that they have researched/accessed groups or courses available (if appropriate) for the parent and baby in the local area.

7. Role of the Child's Social Worker

- 7.1** The child's social worker should visit the placement every 2 weeks and make regular phone/email contact in addition to the SSW's contact with the carer. During these visits social workers should discuss with the parent(s) and carer **individually** and **together** how the placement is going in relation to the contract, and provide the opportunity to share any concerns or worries. **The frequency of visits and phone calls must be set out in the Placement Plan and discussed at the Placement Planning Meeting.**
- 7.2** The child's social worker should undertake a room check when visiting the placement.
- 7.3** The child's social worker must arrange regular placement reviews following the placement agreement meeting, to include the parent(s), foster carer, child's social worker and supervising social worker. Placement reviews should be structured around the original placement agreement, and the reviewing process should highlight placement progress.
- 7.4** Placement reviews should be arranged at least 4 weekly, and more frequently if necessary, and can be combined with a LAC review. Every review should consider placement exit and future plans for the family.
- 7.5** The child's social worker should check out any arranged appointments and child care cover that needs to be agreed with the carers.
- 7.6** The child's social worker needs to consider the second parent, and attention and scrutiny must be given to the parents' relationships, both of their involvement in the assessment process and future planning.
- 7.7** Should a dispute arise within the placement, the SSW and the 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 the parent, SSW, foster carer and locality team manager.
- 7.8** The child's social worker is responsible for providing advice, assistance and evidence to enable the parent to maintain any pre-existing accommodation during the placement. This could include contacting housing and benefits authorities. If the placement continues past 12 weeks, specialist advice may be required.
- 7.9** To ensure prompt payment to the carers, the child's social worker will co-ordinate with the placement team about the placement start date, the status of the parent, and if the child is subject to Care Proceedings.
- 7.10** The child's social worker must ensure that the carer has all relevant information by the date of the pre-placement planning meeting. However, if the placement is made in an emergency basis, placement information must be supplied within 2 working days.

- 7.11** The child's social worker should inform the parent how to raise a compliment or complaint, which can be found on the Norfolk County Council website.
- 7.12** The child's social workers will inform carers of any arranged annual leave of one week plus.
- 7.13** The child's social worker will carry out any assessment required in respect of the parent, informed by the recorded observation of the carer, in line with Court timetable.

8. Role of the social worker for a parent, who is a Looked After Child

- 8.1** Where the parent is a child, the social worker for that child should visit the placement every four weeks to meet with the parent and the foster carer. The parent's social worker will provide an opportunity for the parent to discuss any issues or worries, and will assist the parent to address them.
- 8.2** The child's social worker, parent's social worker and supervising social worker must work closely together in monitoring and reviewing the placement.
- 8.3** The placement planning meeting is an essential meeting in preparing for a placement for the looked after young person, as well as their child. There should be a separate meeting for the parent and for the child, although this can happen consecutively.
- 8.4** Regard must be given to the parent's contact with their family members, time out (with and without baby), babysitting, household tasks and level of practical support.
- 8.5** A list of daily tasks for parent to complete, in relation to the child, and their own routine, will be used by the carer to support expectations of the parent. This needs to be agreed in the pre-placement planning meeting.

9. Finance

Where the child's parent is under the age of 18, both parent and child will be paid at the basic rate and accreditation fee.

Where the parent is an adult, the foster carer will receive the accreditation fee at age 17. A maintenance allowance will not be paid for the parent, who will be expected to make a financial contribution to their living costs during the placement.