

Placement with Connected Persons Policy

RELEVANT GUIDANCE

Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (DfE)

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1. Introduction

A Connected Person can be a relative, friend or any other person with a prior connection with a child/young person who is looked after by the local authority. This includes grandparents, aunts and uncles, adult siblings, other adult family members friends, or someone who has known the child in a professional capacity such as a teacher or youth worker.

When a prospective Connected Person has been identified as being in a position to care for a child who is in the care of Central Bedfordshire Council, they must be approved as a foster carer for that child. A Family Group Conference is a useful way to identify prospective connected person carers. The assessment and approval process for Connected Persons is the same as for any other non-related foster carer; other than the timescales for the assessment when a child is already placed.

2. Situations Where these Procedures do not apply

These procedures do not apply where a child under 16 years) goes to live with a relative or friend and this is a private arrangement between the parent/person with Parental Responsibility and carer. ~If this placement continues for 28 days the child may come within the definition of a Privately Fostered child, in which case the local authority's duties in relation to the placement are set out in the Private Fostering Procedures.

3. Planned Placements

Wherever possible, full approval as a connected person foster carer should be made before the child is placed with them. However, if full approval cannot be gained in the child's timeframe then the child may only be placed following a temporary assessment and temporary approval (see Section 4, Placements in Exceptional and Unforeseen Circumstances).

The child/young person's wishes and feelings about any proposed placement should be sought and taken into account. If at all possible, the child/young person should be given an opportunity to visit the family/friend carer being assessed as a connected person foster carer before any decision to place the child with them is finalized.

Arrangements to assess the prospective connected person for a planned placement must be agreed by the Practice Manager responsible for the child and the Independent Reviewing Officer consulted.

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The **Initial Viability Assessment** should be completed by the child's social worker (to evidence it has been agreed that the assessment should go ahead) and along with the completed referral form (BIC240) should be emailed to the Fostering Team via the Fostering Management Mailbox (fosteringmanagement@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk) to request a Full fostering assessment.

The Fostering Team cannot accept multiple referrals for the same child. The child's social worker must undertake viability assessments to determine which Connected Person has the greatest potential to meet both the child's needs and satisfy the fostering standards. A consultation with the Fostering Assessment Team Manager or a joint one of visit with the child's social worker and a fostering social worker could be agreed to facilitate this.

The Fostering Team will then initiate the completion and processing of enhanced disclosure forms (**DBS** checks) on all persons in the Connected Person's home aged 18 years or over as well as the multi-agency statutory checks). The **Full Fostering Approval assessment** is completed by the fostering social worker.

4. Placements in Exceptional and Unforeseen Circumstances

Whenever possible the full fostering assessment and approval of a Connected Person as a foster carer to the child must take place before placement.

However, in exceptional and unforeseen circumstances, when an immediate placement of a child with a Connected Person is necessary, before the full assessment can be done, it is possible under regulation 23(1) of the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations – Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review for the local authority to grant temporary approval for the Connected Person to be the child's foster carer.

If the threshold to accommodate has been met and the Local Authority have been involved in the arrangements for the child to be cared for by a relative or friend this is a Connected Person arrangement and requires Temporary Approval prior to the child being placed.

If the Local Authority has not been involved in the arrangements and the Assessment under S17 Children Act 1989, this is not a connected Person arrangement and requires no further involvement

This temporary approval can last for up to 16 weeks and in highly exceptional cases be extended by a further 8 weeks. During this time all the work necessary to complete the Full Fostering Approval assessment to determine suitability to be the child's foster carer establish full approval must take place.

It is the child's social worker's responsibility to start the assessment by completing

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the Initial viability and gaining signed authorisation from the relevant Team Manager prior to the child being placed.

When seeking temporary approval, the child's social worker must make every effort to ensure that the Connected Person:

- Is likely to meet the standards for foster carers in all aspects (apart from accommodation and literacy where there is some discretion. They should also take into account that the approval will be for a specific child known to the Connected Person rather than other children who are not connected to them;
- Is likely to meet the higher standard in relation to safer care

Matters to be taken into account when assessing the suitability of a Connected Person to care for the child are:

- a. The nature and quality of any existing relationship with the child;
- b. Their capacity to care for children and, in particular in relation to the child (or children concerned, to provide for his/her physical needs and appropriate medical and dental care; to protect the child adequately from harm or danger including where relevant an initial risk assessment of any pets, together with the environment in which the pet is kept; in relation to the child's age and development stage, to promote his/her learning and development; to provide a stable family environment which will promote secure attachments for the child, including promoting positive contact with parents and other connected persons, unless this is not consistent with the child's welfare;
- c. State of health (physical, emotional and mental), and medical history including current or past issues of domestic violence, substance misuse or mental health problems.
- d. Family relationships and the composition of the household, including the identity of all other members of the household, their age and the nature of any relationship with the connected person and each other including any sexual relationship; any relationship with the parents; any relationship between the child and other members of the household; other adults (not members of the household) likely to have regular contact with the child; any current or previous domestic violence between members of the household, including the connected person;

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- e. Their family history, including their childhood and upbringing and the strengths and difficulties of their parents or others who cared for them; their relationship with parents and siblings and each other; educational achievement and any learning difficulty/disability; chronology of significant life events; particulars of other relatives and their relationships with the child and the connected person;
- f. any criminal offences of which they have been convicted or in respect of which they have been cautioned.;
- g. Past and present employment and other sources of income;
- h. Nature of the neighbourhood and resources available in the community to support the child and

The child's wishes and feelings (subject to age and understanding) must be ascertained and recorded and wherever possible, an opportunity must be provided for the child to visit the home before the decision is finalised.

The views of parents/ those with Parental Responsibility must also be obtained.

The proposed carer should be given information about the assessment process which will follow if the placement is to last longer than 16 weeks, including the need for Disclosure and Barring Service checks and other agency enquiries on all members of the household aged 16 and over, as well as interviews with referees, adult children and ex-partners, which will be part of any such fostering assessment.

After visiting the home if the child's social workers is in any doubt as to the suitability of the placement, s/he should consult the Fostering team manager for advice before the placement is agreed by the Childcare Team Manager.

Where the placement appears suitable and is approved by the Childcare Team Manager a written Placement Agreement should be completed by the child's social worker with the proposed carer.

The prospective carers need to be made aware that any approval is only temporary and does not imply continued approval beyond the 16 (sixteen) weeks.

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The child's social worker should arrange for a family meeting as soon as possible after the placement begins in order to assess the support available to the prospective carer and clarify the child's long-term Care Plan.

The Initial Viability Assessment signed by the relevant Childcare Team Manager should be immediately emailed to the Fostering Management Mailbox (fosteringmanagement@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk to request a Full Fostering Approval assessment.

The Nominated Senior Officer for agreeing the temporary approval of a child's placement with a Connected Person is the relevant Head of Service in the Area with responsibility for managing the child's case.

If you wish to consult with a Fostering Team Manager, please contact the relevant team on 030 300 8181.

The Immediate Placement Agreement must be signed by the Connected Person being given temporary Approval and Child's Social Worker when the child is placed and sent to the Fostering Team Manager to be placed on the Child and Connected Persons Mosaic case file.

Once temporary approval for up to 16 weeks has been authorized, the Fostering Team Manager will allocate for a full fostering assessment to be completed and book a Fostering Panel date. The Fostering Team will initiate an enhanced Disclosure form (DBS Check) on all persons in the home who are 18 years or over, along with the multi-agency statutory checks.

The child's social worker to inform the IRO and update the Care Plan /Pathway Plan.

The Placement Planning Meeting should be completed within the statutory 5 days from the date the child is placed.

If the assessment fails to meet the deadline for approval at foster panel within 16 weeks of placement or the decision is deferred pending further work, an extension period of up to 8 weeks can be granted.

The Authorisation for Continued Approval (Appendix B: Initial Connected Person Assessment – Extension) should be presented to the fostering panel. The panel minutes and recommendation should be sent to the Agency Decision Maker for a decision.

Authorisation for Continued Approval (Appendix B: Initial Connected Person Assessment – Extension) is only intended to be used in exceptional circumstances.

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Refusal of extension will lead to the child being moved from the placement immediately.

If the child's temporary placement with the connected person has exceeded the maximum 24 weeks without decision for full approval, the child's social worker completes Placements Outside of Regulations Form and submits to the relevant Head of Service for agreement.

The Head of Service must give permission for the child to remain in an unregulated placement and record the reasons why this would be in the child's best interest.

At the end of the set time period, if the connected person has not been approved as a foster carer, then the child/young person must be moved from the placement.

During the time the child is placed with a Connected Person under temporary approval, the child must be visited by a social worker at least once a week prior to their initial statutory Child In Care Review and following this no less than every 4 weeks. The fostering social worker will undertake statutory supervision with the Connected Person Foster Carer.

Permanency Plan for the child is Special Guardianship Order (SGO)

With Local Authority Involvement Section 20 and the child has been placed with a relative or friend (Connected Persons) with a permanency plan for Special Guardianship Order (SGO).

Placements must follow Regulation 24 process to ensure the placement is regulated prior to an SGO being granted. Follow and complete full Regulation 24 process where a child is in placement. Assessment completed jointly by fostering social worker and child's social worker. Fostering social worker is the lead and provides supervision to the placement.

Submission of the court report for the SGO remains the responsibility of the child's social worker. Regardless of the timescale for completion of the SGO a full Connected Person Full Approval assessment should continue to be completed to ensure placement remains regulated.

5. The Assessment of Connected Persons as Family and Friend Foster Carer

Assessments of Connected Persons as family and friend foster carers (the full assessment) must be carried out by a social worker from the Fostering Team. The child's social worker will need to ensure they have undertaken a risk assessment and identified the child's specific needs and that this information is forwarded to the assessing social worker who will assess the connected person's ability to meet those needs as a family/friend foster carer.

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Once the assessment has been completed the Full Assessment will be presented jointly by the child's social worker and fostering social worker to the Fostering Panel to consider the carer's approval. The Agency Decision Maker makes a decision on Fostering Full Approvals (on the basis of recommendations of the Fostering Panel).

If the Connected Person Foster Carer is approved the child can then be placed in a planned way. The Placement Planning meeting should be undertaken prior to the child being placed.

If the Decision Maker's decision is not to approve the relative or friend as a Connected Person Foster Carer representation can be made back to the Fostering Panel or the Independent Review Mechanism who will make a further recommendation prior to the Agency Decision Maker making a final decision.

Appendices

Appendix A: Eligibility Criteria for Family and Friends carers and other People connected to a 'looked after child'

The qualities and abilities that make a good carer

1. Long term commitment to the child and ability to put their welfare first, even when it conflicts with loyalty/concern for the birth parents.
2. Understanding and acceptance of the real reasons which led to the child's removal from the parents' care;
3. Ability to protect the child from further harm;
4. Ability to deal with the strain of changing family roles;
5. Sufficient support network;
6. Sufficient time and space to devote to everyone in the family;
7. Capacity to offer warm, stimulating care;
8. Capacity to understand, adapt to and meet the child's changing needs;
9. Ability to promote the child's educational and health needs;
10. Commitment to helping the child develop an understanding of their history and promote a positive identity, including their ethnic and cultural identity;

11. Capacity to be realistic about the possible problems and special needs which the child may present;
12. Commitment to using training and professional support;
13. Ability to work with professionals and to seek out and accept help.

What makes family and friends carers unsuitable?

1. **Health** – where medical and/or psychiatric history and current state of health give serious cause for concern about the prospective carer's future health prospects;
2. **Age** – where the medical opinion is that the carer may not survive all the years of the child's dependence or retain sufficient energy and vigour to meet the child's needs until independence;
3. **Drug/alcohol problems** – if the carer has a drug or alcohol dependence that is likely to affect your ability to offer safe care;
4. **Criminal record of prospective carer and adults in the household** - Certain types of offences will automatically bar the offender from caring for a child i.e. any conviction for an offence against a child under Schedule 1 of the Criminal Justice Act. Other offences will need to be discussed in detail to establish if they may impact on the care of the child. Any conviction for an offence involving violence will be of particular concern;
5. **Housing** – where the current accommodation is temporary, overcrowded and/or poorly maintained and there are no realistic prospects for re-housing within near future.
6. **Finance** – where the family is in debt to the point that it cannot manage its finances, is in danger of losing the home due to arrears or would be wholly dependent on the fostering allowance to support the family;
7. **Work/lifestyle** – where the prospective carer's work responsibilities and/or leisure pursuits severely limit the time available for childcare;
8. **Family Composition** – where the needs of other children and/or dependent adults in the household/network are likely to conflict with the needs of the child to be placed;
9. **Parenting concerns** – where there have been serious difficulties in how the prospective carers parented their own children, particularly a history of abuse or neglect;

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10. **Understanding children's needs** – inability to demonstrate an understanding of children's development and needs;
11. **Meeting needs of a specific child** – Unwillingness or inability to understand or meet the identified educational, medical or emotional needs of the child, including for those who may require a high level of specialist care;
12. **Protecting the child** – Unwillingness or inability to protect the child from abusive parents and enforce restrictions on contact with birth parents;
13. **Working together** – Lack of co-operation with social services and other professional services.