



**Children's Safeguarding and
Social Work**

Camden Fostering Service

Supervision and support of foster carers

1 Introduction

Regulation 17 of the Fostering Regulations 2011 states that Fostering Services must provide foster carers with whatever help and support they need in order to meet the needs of the child in placement. The level and quality of on-going support to foster carers is important in order to ensure that they remain able to meet the required standards of fostering competencies and provide good quality care for Looked After Children. A key part of this support role is carried out by the foster carer's allocated supervising social worker.

Good support is also vital in retaining foster carers by helping them to cope with the stress of fostering; research shows that the most cited reason for leaving fostering is a lack of support from Fostering services. Providing suitable support to foster carers who are dealing with children's difficult behaviours can also avoid placement breakdown.

This policy is guided by National Minimum Standards 20 and 21, and aims to ensure that supervising social workers are able to provide supervision, support, information and advice as well as training and development opportunities to foster carers so that they are able to carry out their caring role and improve outcomes for Looked After Children.

2 Allocation of supervising social workers

It is Camden's policy that all approved foster carers have an allocated, named supervising social worker to work closely with the foster carer in order to monitor their performance and provide all necessary support and advice. All supervising social workers should be suitably qualified social workers and have relevant child care experience.

Once a foster carer has been approved by the Agency Decision Maker, the manager should allocate a supervising social worker to the foster carer and record this in the Approved Foster Carer Visit episode on MOSAIC.

When considering allocation, the manager should take into account the caseloads held by supervising social workers, and ensure that each worker holds the same number of cases representing a wide range of carers, for example newly-approved and established carers, long-term and Family link carers.

The manager may also take into account any area of expertise of a particular worker, and may match foster carers to a supervising social worker with a similar cultural background where this is appropriate and possible.

When a social worker has been assigned to supervise a foster carer, they should read through the foster carer's file, particularly the Form F assessment report, to try to find out as much information about the foster carer's strengths and weaknesses and any areas of concern that may need to be explored or requiring extra advice, support or training.

The supervising social worker should also take into account any special needs of the foster carer, for example whether an interpreter needs to be present during the visit to facilitate communication.

Family and friends foster carers should be supervised by a social worker from the specialist family and friends care team to ensure that they receive relevant support around the specific issues faced by these carers.

3 Role of the supervising social worker

Supervising social workers are responsible for:

- providing supervision through regular visits
- providing information, advice and support at supervision sessions so that the foster carer is able to meet the child's identified needs
- ensuring the foster carer understands and can comply with the foster care agreement, placement agreement and other relevant Camden policies
- ensuring the foster carer has received all relevant information about the child and that a placement agreement meeting has taken place
- ensuring support for the foster carer's family
- providing a link with the child's social worker and other professionals and specialists who are working with the child
- seeking and recording the views of the child in the foster placement at alternate visits
- advocating for the foster carer within the child's professional network
- monitoring and feeding back on the foster carer's performance in relation to meeting the child's needs and ensuring good outcomes

- helping the foster carer to develop their skills and expertise by identifying suitable training and support groups and ensuring they have an up to date training profile
- Completing the CWDC workbook with the foster carer
- ensuring the foster carer receives regular payments and any equipment or other resources needed to care for the child
- negotiating breaks for the carer with the Fostering Service
- supporting the foster carer in the event of any complaints or allegations
- undertaking an annual review of the foster carer.

Supervising social workers need to build a good relationship with the foster carers they supervise that is based on openness and honesty. Supervising social workers need to be accessible and responsive to foster carer's needs and support their caring role.

Foster carers are an important resource and part of the team around the child that is delivering corporate parenting, and support needs to be tailored to suit the needs and circumstances of the individual carer.

Newly qualified foster carers will require support to prepare them for placement, whereas more experienced foster carers may require support to deal with circumstances arising from difficult placements. Lone carers may require help in managing their support network, and carers who work may need help in balancing work commitments with their caring role.

Foster carers should be clear as to their role and responsibilities and those of the supervising social worker from the outset. Supervising social workers should ensure that foster carers are aware of the standards and expectations required of them and what they may expect from the Fostering Service in terms of support.

Supervising social workers should go through the terms of the foster care agreement with the foster carer at the first supervision meeting to ensure that they fully understand and are able to comply.

Supervision should be a two-way process based on an open discussion of issues, allowing foster carers to state their views. Where there are any disagreements, these should be noted in the record of the visit.

Supervising social workers and foster carers should also be aware that the needs of the child are paramount, and that the welfare of the child will be their primary concern even though they do not hold direct case responsibility.

Most supervisory and support work will take place during scheduled visits to the foster carer, but the supervising social worker should be available for the foster carer to contact in the event of any emergency during office hours.

4 Visits

4.1 Frequency

Supervising social workers should visit foster carers at least once a month to 6 weeks depending on need, but visits may be more frequent if requested by the foster carer. An unannounced visit should also take place on an annual basis (see section 4.5).

On allocation, the social worker should contact the foster carer as soon as possible to introduce themselves and arrange the first visit. It is recommended that visits are scheduled as far in advance as possible.

If a supervising social worker or a foster carer needs to cancel a visit, they should give notice of this as soon as possible and re-schedule the meeting to be held within a week. Reasons for cancelling the visit and the date of the re-scheduled visit should be recorded on MOSAIC.

Supervising social workers and foster carers may sometimes decide there is a need to meet more frequently because of problems or concerns arising from a particular placement or because the foster carer is struggling with their role and responsibilities and is failing to meet standards.

This should be discussed between them and brought to the attention of the supervisor or manager. A strategy should be agreed on for increasing support including frequency of visits. This should be notified to the foster carer and recorded on MOSAIC.

4.2 Purpose

Supervisory visits provide an opportunity for supervising social workers and foster carers to meet to discuss any issues or difficulties arising either from the fostering role or a specific placement, and to plan for any actions needed to enhance the foster carer's ability to carry out the fostering task and care for the child.

Supervisory visits should enable the supervising social worker to carry out the following tasks:

- monitoring the foster carer's performance against fostering competencies and the service standards of care
- ensuring the foster carer has a full understanding of their role and that they are compliant with the foster care agreement, any placement agreement and all other relevant Camden policies
- providing information and advice on any issues arising from the care of the child or changes to legislation or policy
- looking at the foster carer's training and development needs
- looking at the foster carer's levels of support and the impact of fostering on their family
- reviewing the foster carers safe caring policy
- looking at any practical help and support, for example payments, equipment or breaks from caring
- seeing the child in order to monitor them in the home environment and seek their views of the foster placement.

Any work undertaken during supervision sessions, such as discussion of issues and action points agreed should be used by supervising social workers as evidence of work undertaken for the purposes of the foster carer's annual review.

4.3 Areas for discussion

It is recommended that at the first visit, supervising social workers and foster carers agree an agenda to be used at each visit to ensure that all matters are discussed. It is good practice for the supervising social worker to plan the visit and to have a checklist of areas for discussion as agreed with the foster carer.

The first visit should also be used to agree whether anyone from the foster carer's family or support network needs to be present during the supervision session.

Items that may be included on the agenda are:

4.3.1 Issues regarding the foster carer's family

- changes to household composition or foster carer's circumstances and whether this requires re-assessment
- any health and safety or safe caring issues
- any planned family holidays and issues regarding passports for LAC
- any problems relating to the impact of fostering on the family.

4.3.2 Issues regarding placements

- whether foster carers have received adequate information about the child
- review of delegated authority decisions and whether these support the foster carer in looking after the child
- a discussion of how the child is progressing in the placement
- a discussion of the child's needs, including their cultural, linguistic or religious needs, any issues or difficulties arising from those needs and how to deal with them to ensure the needs are met
- an update on any issues around health, education or contact
- whether any further help, advice or resources are required from other professionals or agencies in order to meet the child's needs
- a discussion on any sanctions or behaviour management techniques used by the foster carer since the last visit
- a discussion of any unauthorised absences by the child from the fostering household since the last visit
- any accidents or serious illnesses the child may have had since the last visit
- any difficulties or concerns in implementing the child's care plan.

4.3.3 Issues relating to the foster care role

- discussion and feedback on the foster carer's standards of care and ability to meet fostering competencies
- a discussion on the foster carer's training and development needs and agreement on what further training is required
- whether the foster carer requires additional professional support, advice or resources to help them in caring for the child
- a discussion about how the foster carer records and stores information about the child in a safe manner in order to ensure confidentiality and evidence that the foster carer is reporting daily in the log book on each child in the placement

- any practical or financial issues
- any requests for respite or breaks from caring and who may provide care for the child during this period.

4.4 Recording visits

All supervisory visits should be recorded on the record of supervisory visit form in the Approved Foster Carer Visit episode on MOSAIC. The record should be sent to the manager or senior via the task for authorisation.

The manager or senior should authorise the visit and this will generate the next scheduled visit on MOSAIC.

4.5 Unannounced visits

An unannounced visit should be made to the fostering household once a year in line with the Fostering Regulations, but should also be made whenever there are concerns about the child's safety or welfare or the foster carer's ability to care for the child. Foster carers should be made aware that an unannounced visit may be made at anytime.

The purpose of unannounced visits is to ensure that:

- the foster carer is providing a high standard of care
- the home environment is safe and suitable
- the child is safe and well.

The visit should be planned for a time when it is likely that the fostering household is at home. As part of the visit, the supervising social worker should take the opportunity to check the following:

- health and safety issues in the home
- the child's bedroom and other communal parts of the home
- whether the foster carer provides age appropriate toys and books and engages in age appropriate activities with the child
- whether the foster carer leaves the child in someone else's care
- any visitors to the home who are not part of the foster carer's support network
- whether anyone is smoking in the home.

If the carer is not at home, the supervising social worker should check what arrangements have been made for the care of the child and obtain details of the person with whom the child has been left.

Unannounced visits should be recorded on the record of supervisory visits form but should state clearly that the visit was unannounced. The form should be passed to the manager or senior for comment and authorisation via the task on MOSAIC.

Where there are concerns arising from an unannounced visit, the supervising social worker and the manager or senior should meet to discuss these and decide what action needs to be taken.

5 Joint working with the child's social worker

Supervising social workers should work closely with the child's social worker to ensure that services to the child are integrated and that the foster carer is able to carry out their role effectively.

The purpose of joint working should be to ensure that the placement is meeting the child's needs and that the care they are receiving is supporting the care plan and enables the child to achieve good outcomes.

When allocated to supervise a foster carer or when an allocated foster carer has a child placed with them, the supervising social worker should make contact with the LAC social worker to discuss how to put joint working into practice. This should cover:

- sharing any relevant information about the child, the foster carer and the placement
- attending any meetings relating to the child and the placement, including placement agreement meetings, statutory reviews, disruption meetings and child protection case conferences
- arranging joint visits
- planning any work required to implement the care plan
- making decisions about the suitability of the placement.

5.1 Joint visits

Supervising social workers should arrange to visit the foster placement with the child's social worker at least once between each statutory review or as agreed at the child's statutory review meeting where there is a need to increase the frequency of joint visits due to circumstances arising from the placement.

The supervising social worker should also inform the foster carer of the dates and explain the purpose of the visit.

The purpose of the joint visit is to discuss the implementation of the child's care plan with the foster carer and ensure that agreed actions are being carried out. The visit should also focus on whether the standard of care provided is meeting the child's identified needs and helping them to achieve good outcomes.

The visit should look at what progress has been made regarding desired outcomes and what further action may be needed by the foster carer to fully implement:

- the child's care plan
- the child's health plan
- the child's Personal Education Plan
- agreed contact arrangements
- where applicable, any work to prepare the child for permanence or independence.

5.2 Meeting the child's needs

A key element of supervision of foster carers is ensuring that they are able to meet the child's identified needs so that they have the opportunity to achieve the following good outcomes:

- being health
- staying safe
- enjoying and achieving
- making a positive contribution
- achieving economic wellbeing

The supervising social worker should work with the child's social worker to ensure that the foster carer is able to meet the child's needs and provide evidence of how each of the outcomes will be achieved through implementation of the care plan.

This is particularly important in terms of the foster carer's annual review as supervising social workers need to be able to show how the foster carer is working towards the 5 outcomes under the "Caring for Children" fostering competency in the annual review report.

6 Other support

6.1 Out of hours support

Foster carers are likely to experience emergency situations in the evenings and at weekends when the main office is shut. Supervising social workers should make them aware of the role of Camden's Emergency Duty Team and how to make referrals to the team out of office hours.

It is important especially that foster carers report any unauthorised absence from placements overnight or at weekends to the team in line with the Camden Safeguarding Children Partnership missing children protocol.

[..\Missing children\CSCB missing protocol 2020.doc](#)

A link to the EDT team's referral protocol is below, and it is recommended that a copy is provided to all foster carers on approval.

[..\Joint working protocols with EDT, YOS, DCT etc\EDT handover protocol 2017.doc](#)

As foster carers are members of the Fostering Network, they may also use their Fosterline.

6.2 Support groups and peer support

Support groups provide an opportunity for foster carers to meet with their peers in order to share experiences and knowledge and offer support. Supervising social workers should encourage foster carers to join these groups wherever possible.

Foster carers may join the following support groups:

- the Fostering Service's own support group
- the Camden Association of Foster Carers
- the Fostering Network
- the North London Fostering Consortium.

All groups provide support and enable foster carers to discuss any issues affecting them and offer carers a chance to discuss issues with senior managers who are responsible for the Fostering Service.

Support groups can also provide a forum for professionals from specialist services to deliver presentations to foster carers about their work and how they can support foster carers in their caring role.

The Fostering Service also offers a mentoring programme that matches newly-approved foster carers with more experienced carers who are able to provide advice and guidance around the fostering task based on their own experiences of fostering for Camden.

This should be arranged by the supervising social worker and the Fostering manager, who will identify an appropriate foster care mentor and arrange financial support where necessary.

6.3 Support from the professional network

The supervising social worker has a specific responsibility for enabling foster carers to link with all professionals working with the child, and they should work with the child's social worker to facilitate access to other resources needed to meet the child's needs.

The child's social worker should always ensure that all members of the child's professional network are aware of the placement and have the foster carer's details.

The child's social worker will generally be responsible for ensuring that the child is in receipt of universal and specialist services, and should involve the foster carer in any arrangements to secure services.

6.4 Short breaks from caring

Occasionally, foster carers may request a short break from caring either for a weekend or longer if they are planning a holiday. Respite can be offered by a carer's nominated back up carer or another Camden foster carer who is known to the child.

Supervising social workers need to be involved in making any arrangements, and a meeting held to discuss any issues that may arise. The child's social worker should be invited to this meeting in order to give their views.

For breaks that are longer than a weekend, nominated carers will be subject to a backup assessment and an unannounced visit to the back-up carers will be carried out during the respite period.

Details of any short break arrangements must be recorded on the child's and the foster carer's MOSAIC record.

6.5 Support for placements at risk of breakdown

Camden's policy is to maintain LAC in stable placements where they are able to develop good attachments and positive relationships with foster carers who are able to carry out the corporate parenting role and advocate for the child. Placement stability is a key factor in enabling LAC to achieve good outcomes and Camden aims to ensure that placement moves are kept to a minimum and only endorsed by a statutory review where this is in the child's interest.

To avoid placement breakdown, LAC social workers and supervising social workers will work with foster carers to look at issues and identify any support and services that can strengthen the placement. In some cases, the child's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) may convene a risk of breakdown planning meeting to facilitate this.

Further details can be found in the division's LAC policy on placements. [..\..\Looked after children\Core LAC policies and procedures\Section 10 Placements policy.docx](#)

6.6 Provision of information

Supervising social workers will ensure that foster carers have access to all Camden's policies relating to fostering, looked after children and child protection, as well as contact details for the Fostering Service, LAC service and other relevant agencies.

LAC social workers will ensure that foster carers have copies of relevant care planning documents such as care plans, placement plan agreements, copies of relevant court orders and parent-held records such as health records, appointments, passports etc.

7 Training

Foster carers are expected to continue their professional development and attend any training courses identified with their supervising social worker as part of their learning and development plan. Training needs and opportunities may be identified during supervision or as part of the long term discussion on personal development which is discussed annually within the review process.