



## **Children's Safeguarding and Social Work**

Corporate Parenting Service

Family and friends care policy for looked  
after children

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## 1. Introduction

One of the primary duties local authorities have towards looked after children is ensuring that the child's placement is able to meet their needs and can provide continuity, stability and nurturing relationships within a family environment.

For many looked after children, placement with a family member or friend with whom they already have a connection can ensure better long-term outcomes for the child as it can provide continuity of relationships, environment and family ties and reduce disruption in their lives.

## 2. Scope

This policy refers to ***placement with family and friends carers where the child is looked after by Camden***. For details of family and friends care arrangements where the child is not looked after, please see the division's CIN family and friends care policy. [..\..\Family and friends \(kinship\) care\Family and friends \(Kinship\) care policy CIN.doc](#)

This policy sets out the framework for making decisions on placing children with a family and friends carer and for assessing, monitoring and supporting carers. The policy is relevant to children's social workers, the Family and Friends Care team, the Fostering Service and IROs.

## 3 Legal framework

The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 states that where a child is unable to live with their parents, preference should be given to placement with a family and friends carer as far as this is practical and consistent with their welfare.

During care proceedings, the Courts will require local authorities to provide evidence of what efforts have been made to place the child with a family and friends carer, and it will be an expectation that assessment of such a carer will have been undertaken prior to care proceedings being issued.

Legally, a looked after child can only be placed with an approved foster carer, so it is essential that family members or friends coming forward to be considered as a carer for a looked after child are first assessed as a Camden foster carer.

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However, it is acknowledged that in some cases, children may not be able to remain living at home while this assessment takes place and will need to be placed with the proposed family and friends carer prior to assessment and approval.

In these circumstances, Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Review Regulations 2010 allows Camden to place a looked after child with a family and friends carer who is not approved as a foster carer under if:

- it is thought the placement is the most suitable way to safeguard and promote the child's welfare **and**
- they need to be placed with the carer before the full fostering assessment has been carried out.

Regulation 24 only provides temporary approval for the carer for up to 16 weeks while the fostering assessment is being carried out though there is some provision to extend this period if necessary (see section 7).

Children can only be placed with a family and friends carer under Regulation 24 if a viability assessment has been carried out and the placement authorised by the service manager.

The exception to this is where the child is placed with a family and friends carer in an emergency. In these cases, the viability assessment must be completed and passed to the Family and Friends Care team manager within **5 working days** of the placement beginning.

## 4 Roles and responsibilities

- **Children's social workers** are responsible for identifying potential family and friends carers in the child's network and carrying out viability assessments under Regulation 24.
- **CIN managers** are responsible for authorising a family member or friend to be considered as a potential carer and approving the viability assessment under Regulation 24, on the advice of the Family and Friends Care manager.

- **The Family and Friends Care team** is responsible for assessing family and friends carers as Camden foster carers and monitoring and supporting carers during this assessment up to their approval as foster carers. The service will also provide information and advice to children's social workers on family and friends care.
- **The Fostering, Adoption and Permanence Panel** is responsible for making recommendations to the Agency Decision maker regarding the approval of family and friends carers as Camden foster carers and for granting extensions to a Regulation 24 arrangement where the approval process is likely to exceed 16 weeks.
- **The Agency Decision Maker** (the Director of CSSW) is responsible for making decisions on the approval of family and friends carers as Camden foster carers following the recommendation of the Fostering, Adoption and Permanence Panel.
- **The Fostering Service** is responsible for the supervision, training and support and review of approval of family and friends foster carers following approval.
- **The Resource team** is responsible for helping children's social workers to devise suitable packages of care for Regulation 24 carers and family and friends foster carers that meets the child's needs and supports the carer.

## 5 Deciding on family and friends care

### 5.1 Framework of decision-making

It is Camden's policy that where possible, children will be placed with family and friends carers who have already been assessed by the Fostering Service and approved by Camden's Fostering, Adoption and Permanence Panel to look after the child in advance of the placement commencing.

Given the time it takes to assess foster carers, it is essential that social workers are aware of those children who may not be able to remain at home and identify and assess potential family and friends carers as early as possible, using Family Group Conferences to aid this process. This way, the child's placement can be better planned.

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Potential family and friends carers must be identified as part of pre-proceedings work where care proceedings are being considered and should be discussed at legal planning meetings. Advice should be sought from the Family and Friends Care team particularly around any possible bars to a potential family and friends carer being approved as a foster carer in advance of any arrangement being authorised.

### **5.2 Pre-assessment questionnaire**

The pre-assessment questionnaire has been devised to help potential family and friends carers explore the possible impact on themselves and their family of looking after the child so that they can make an informed decision about putting themselves forward for assessment as a foster carer. The questionnaire is available at: <..\Assessment scales and questionnaires\Family and friends care self assessment questionnaire.docx>

The questionnaire can also help social workers to decide whether or not to pursue assessment of the individual as a family and friends carer and identify earlier those potential carers who are unlikely to be approved as a Camden foster carer. The Family and Friends Care team may also consider using the tool to help select the best candidate for family and friends care where more than one individual has come forward to be considered.

The questionnaire should be used as early as possible in the process of identifying potential family and friends carers, including prior to any Family Group Conference. Further information on using the questionnaire can be found in the family and friends care assessment practice guidance.

<..\Assessment\Family and friends assessments practice guidance.docx>

### **5.3 Family Group Conferences**

Family Group Conferences should always be offered to a family who are considering family and friends care arrangements for a looked after child and should also be used (where necessary) throughout the placement to assist in the planning and review processes.

Family Group conferences must be held;

- when accommodation is requested or proposed
- when a decision is made to commence pre-proceedings steps under the PLO
- when long-term plans are being considered as part of permanency for the child.

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Because a Family Group Conference may support CSSW plans for the child's future care by identifying a possible family and friends carer, it is very important that the conference is held as soon as it becomes apparent that the child will need alternative accommodation.

Social workers should refer to the division's Family Group Conference policy for further details. [..\Family Group Conferences \(FGC\)](#)

## 6 Regulation 24 placements

### 6.1 Viability assessment

A viability assessment must be completed prior to a looked after child being placed with a family and friends carer who is being temporarily approved under Regulation 24. Social workers should record the assessment on the viability assessment template available on MOSAIC.

Social workers should refer to the practice guidance on assessment of family and friends carers for further information on carrying out assessments on the suitability of family and friends carers.

Although the family and friends carer will be further assessed as a Camden foster carer, social workers will still need to gather enough information to ensure that CSSW is satisfied that the placement can safeguard and promote the child's welfare. If there are any concerns or not enough information is available, the placement should not go ahead.

It is vital that the assessment of carers who are unlikely to be approved as a Camden foster carer or arrangements that may prove unsuitable for the child are recognised as early as possible and not progressed.

For this reason, Regulation 24 placements will not be able to go ahead where:

- the carer does not have a safe, secure place to live. ie. the carer lives in temporary accommodation, is a squatter, or has no legal right to remain in the UK etc;
- the accommodation is not suitable as it does not offer enough space or will not meet the child's needs;
- the carer or an adult member of the household has convictions or cautions for specific criminal offences against children that will exclude the household from being considered for fostering;

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- the carer or a member of the household refuses to consent to police and network checks;
- the carer's GP reports that their health may seriously impact on their ability to care for the child;
- concerns are raised by any agency about the household which suggests the child's safety and welfare may not be safeguarded in the placement.

### 6.2 Authorising Regulation 24 placements

Team managers are responsible for authorising any plan to accommodate a child and will authorise the viability assessment. However all Regulation 24 placements must be authorised by the service manager following advice from the Family and Friends Care service manager, who will advise on:

- whether or not the proposed family and friends carer is likely to be formally approved as a Camden foster carer **and**
- whether the arrangements will endure and will meet the child's needs.

If it is decided that the placement cannot go ahead, the social worker and their manager should meet with the proposed family and friends carer to explain the reasons for this, and a record of the meeting noted in the case notes of the child's MOSAIC record. The social worker will be responsible for making alternative care arrangements for the child.

### 6.3 Placing the child

Once the placement has been authorised, the social worker should:

- convene a placement agreement meeting involving the carer, the child and the parents (where appropriate) and make arrangements for the child to be taken to the placement;
- complete the *placement Agreement Plan* and *Delegated Authority Checklist* and ensure a copy of these are given to the family and friends carer;
- notify the Family and Friends Care service about the placement, advising them as to whether or not it is likely that the placement will continue after 16 weeks;



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- notify the child's professional network about the family and friends care arrangements; where the child is placed in another borough, a formal notification of the placement should be made by the Business Support Officer;
- schedule weekly visits to the placement via the MOSAIC visits screen;
- ensure the carer signs the *Regulation 24 agreement* (available on MOSAIC) and that the document is uploaded onto the child's MOSAIC record.

All Regulation 24 carers who are caring for a looked after child **must** sign the agreement **before the child is placed**, and it is the responsibility of the allocated social worker to ensure that the agreement is discussed with carers so that they are fully aware of their responsibilities to CSSW and agree to abide by its terms.

### 6.4 Child's status under Regulation 24

Children placed with family and friends carers under Regulation 24 are subject to all statutory CLA care planning and review processes.

- Carers should be given copies of the child's current *care plan* and *placement agreement plan* and notified of arrangements for health assessments and reviews.
- The child's social worker must visit the child in the placement once every week for the duration of the Regulation 24 arrangements or until the status of the placement changes, for example when the carer is approved as a foster carer.
- The child's social worker is responsible for completing all CLA records within the required timescale, and ensuring that the CLA workflow is completed on the child's MOSAIC record.
- A date for the first statutory child care review must be set up with the IRO as soon as the start date of the placement is known.

### 6.5 Role of the Family and Friends Care team

The Family and Friends Care team should be notified of all family and friends care arrangements under Regulation 24 as soon as it is known that a placement may be made so that the team can:

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- provide information and advice on family and friends care
- advise on the suitability of potential family and friends carers and the likelihood of them being approved as Camden foster carers
- begin the fostering assessment
- track the Regulation 24 placement to ensure that statutory timescales are met for approval
- provide support for the family and friends carer.

### **6.6 Support for Regulation 24 carers**

Social workers should be aware that Regulation 24 carers are likely to be more emotionally involved in the care of the child due to their on-going relationship with the child and the birth parent. They may also face hostility from the birth parent and other family members because of their caring role. For this reason, they may need extra support from CSSW, particularly around contact.

All Regulation 24 carers should have an allocated supervising social worker from the Family and Friends Care team who is the social worker carrying out the fostering assessment. Support should also be provided by the child's social worker where appropriate.

The kinship social worker should visit the carer to provide advice and support and details of any support plan should be written down as an agreement between the social worker and the carer. The plan should cover:

- Frequency and purpose of visits: Visits should be recorded in the same manner as supervisory visits to approved foster carers. The visits may also afford the kinship social worker an opportunity to observe the carer's abilities with a view to deciding whether any proposed assessment of the carer as an approved foster carer is likely to succeed.
- Areas of concern requiring practical help or support and what support will be provided.
- Details of any equipment to be provided: The Fostering service is responsible for providing any equipment that the carers may need to enable them to meet the specific needs of the child. This should be facilitated by the kinship social worker.
- Details of any training for the carer: all training available to foster carers are open to family and friends carers but carers must attend the 1 day preparation group if they wish to be assessed as a foster carer.

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Regulation 24 carers should be given the same information as that provided to Camden foster carers, including information on practical issues such as overnight stays and contact as they are sometimes unsure about the legal implications of many situations that arise when caring for a looked after child.

### **6.7 Financial support and payments**

Regulation 24 carers will be paid at the same fostering maintenance rate as all Camden foster carers from the time that a decision is made to place the child with them. The Permanence team will be responsible for the payment of the fostering allowance but initially payment will be made by the relevant CIN or LAC team until the Permanence team have set up the on-going payment.

### **6.8 Termination of Regulation 24 placements**

- Family and friends placements under Regulation 24 may be terminated by CSSW at any time during the placement if it is felt that it is not the most appropriate placement for the child in terms of safeguarding and promoting their welfare or meeting their needs. This would need to be discussed by the social worker and the child's IRO and agreed at the child's statutory CLA review.
- During the course of the fostering assessment of the carer, the assessing social worker in the Family and Friends Care team may raise concerns that the carer is unlikely to be approved as a Camden foster carer. These concerns should be discussed between the Family and Friends Care manager, the team manager and the child's IRO and a decision made regarding the placement.
- Regulation 24 placements must end as soon as the 16 week period has expired or any other period of extension granted by the Fostering, Adoption and Permanence Panel if the carer has not been approved as a Camden foster carer in that timescale (see section 7).
- All Regulation 24 placements will come to an end once the carer has been approved as a Camden foster carer.

## **7. Family and friends foster care**

### **7.1 Framework of assessment**

All family and friends carers who will be caring for a looked after child for more than 16 weeks will need to be approved as a Camden foster carer and will be assessed in the same manner as all prospective foster carers following the Fostering Service assessment policy.

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However, although family and friends carers will generally be expected to meet the eligibility criteria for all Camden foster carers, assessment will focus mainly on the carer's ability to meet the specific needs of the individual child they will be caring for rather than all children. This will be reflected in the assessment process and social workers should refer to the family and friends care assessment practice guidance for more details.

Fostering assessments of family and friends carers will be carried out by social workers based in the Family and Friends Care team. The team **must** be notified in advance of any proposed family and friends care arrangement or any Regulation 24 arrangement so that the case can be allocated and the assessment started.

Whenever a family and friends carer is being considered as a long-term option for a looked after child, social workers should make contact with the team to discuss options, plan possible assessments and obtain advice on family and friends care.

### 7.2 Timescales and extensions

Statutory guidance states that Regulation 24 placements cannot exceed 16 weeks during which time the family and friends carer should have been assessed and approved as a foster carer. Extensions to this time can be approved by the Fostering, Adoption and Permanence Panel under the following circumstances;

- the approval process has taken longer than anticipated; an extension of 8 weeks can be granted if it can be shown that there are exceptional circumstances as to why the approval process could not be completed within 16 weeks;
- The family and friends carers were not approved and they have opted to review the decision via the Independent Review Mechanism; an extension can be granted until the outcome of the review is known.

Family and Friends care social workers should notify the Family and Friends Care manager of any required extensions in order to book into the next available Fostering, Adoption and Permanence Panel meeting and should provide a short report detailing why the extension is needed.

Family and Friends care social workers should note that no further extensions can be granted and if approval has not been obtained within the extension,

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the Regulation 24 placement must be terminated and an alternative placement found for the child.

The Family and Friends Care service manager should track and monitor the progress of fostering assessments for Regulation 24 carers to ensure that:

- statutory time limits on assessment and approval are met
- extensions are requested from the Fostering, Adoption and Permanence Panel in good time
- assessments are being carried out in a timely manner
- placements are not allowed to run over the 16 week period.

### **7.3 Referral to the Fostering, Adoption and Permanence Panel**

The Fostering, Adoption and Permanence Panel's role is to:

- approve the extension of Regulation 24 placements past 16 weeks where a decision on approval has not been made or the carer has applied for review under the Independent Review Mechanism;
- recommend that a family and friends carer or Regulation 24 carer be approved as a Camden foster carer;
- confirm the legal option selected by the family and the child's social worker to secure the child's long-term placement with the carer.

Cases where there is a request for extension of a Regulation 24 placement should be jointly presented to the panel by the child's social worker and the assessing social worker.

Cases where there is a request for approval of a family and friends foster carer should be presented by the assessing social worker who carried out the fostering assessment.

Cases where there is a request for approval of long-term plans for a child living with a family and friends foster carer that involve applying for legal orders to secure the placement should be presented by the child's social worker.

### **7.5 Approval of family and friends foster carers**

The approval process for family and friends foster carers will be the same as for all Camden foster carers and is set out in the Fostering Service policy

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“Approval and registration of foster carers”. Family and friends foster carers will only be approved to care for the child for whom they have been selected to care. [..\Fostering\Fostering policies and procedures manual](#)

Once approved, carers will have the same status as all Camden foster carers and will be subject to the same policies, procedures and standards of care.

### 8. Options for permanence

Some children in family and friends care arrangements may not be able to return to their parent’s care and may need to stay with their family and friends carer on a long-term basis. Social workers will need to advise carers of their legal options for securing the care arrangements.

Carers will need to seek legal advice on their options, but will be able to apply for either of the following private orders a year after the child has been living with them.

**Child Arrangement Orders** will enable the child to continue to live with the carer and the carers will share parental responsibility for the child with the parents. The order lasts until the child reaches 18 and may be extended to 21 if the child has a disability. Camden may also pay a Residence Order allowance to support the care arrangements.

**Special Guardianship Orders** are aimed at meeting the needs of children for whom adoption is not appropriate but who could benefit from a permanent, legally secure placement. Under the order, guardians share parental responsibility with parents but will have full control over the day to day care arrangements for the child.

The order lasts until the child is 18 years old. Guardians may be able to apply for Special Guardianship support. For further information, please refer to the Special Guardianship policy.

The Family and Friends Care service provides a full assessment service for any family and friends foster carer wishing to apply for a Special Guardianship Order and will also assess special guardians for support under the Special Guardianship support legislation.

CSSW may agree to meet a family and friends carer’s legal costs for applying for an order if this is an agreed aspect of the child’s care plan and will result in the child being discharged from the care system having achieved legal permanence.

### CIN and CLA family and friends care: features and processes

	<b>CIN</b>	<b>CLA</b>
<b>Arrangements for placement</b>	placement is by way of a private agreement between the parents and the carer with no involvement by CSSW. Where CSSW has assessed the child, some limited support may be provided to the child under section 17.	The child is formally placed with the carer under section 20 of the Children Act or under a care order.
<b>Child's status</b>	The child is not looked after but may be assessed as a child in need.	The child is looked after by Camden.
<b>Carer's status</b>	The carer will have no specific status and will not need to be assessed or approved by CSSW.	The carer must be assessed and approved by CSSW either as a Regulation 24 carer or a Camden foster carer (where the placement will continue beyond 16 weeks).
<b>Financial support</b>	Parents remain responsible for the child's upkeep and carers should agree support with them. CSSW will provide limited support only where the child has been assessed as a child in need.	CSSW are responsible for the child's upkeep and will pay a fostering allowance to the carer.
<b>Assessment</b>	The child may be assessed to establish whether they are a child in need.	The child must be assessed to establish their needs and inform their care plan. Emergency placements under Regulation 24 must be assessed as suitable using a viability assessment. For placements exceeding 16 weeks, the carer must be assessed as a Camden foster carer and approved by Camden's Fostering, Adoption and Permanence Panel.
<b>Parental responsibility/ Decisions on child's care</b>	Parents retain parental responsibility and delegate to the carer, with agreement on what decisions the carer may take regarding the child's day to day care.	<b>S20:</b> Parents retain parental responsibility and agree to delegate responsibility for decisions about the child's care to CSSW/carers, <b>Care order:</b> Parental responsibility is shared between the parent and CSSW, with CSSW able to decide on the child's day to day care and delegating responsibility for decisions to the carer.

### Family and friends care flowchart

