



# **Children's Safeguarding and Family Help**

## **Corporate Parenting Service**

Becoming looked after: practice guidance for social workers

## Becoming looked after

### 1 Introduction

This document sets out the procedures to be followed when a child becomes looked after. The document needs to be read together with the *Decision to look after* policy. [Decision to Look After](#)

The document sets out Camden's approach to the use of section 20 accommodation and includes procedures for children who are accommodated in an emergency.

### 2 How and when children can become looked after

The term "looked after" refers to all children who are provided with accommodation by a local authority under the Children Act 1989. Local authorities have a duty to provide accommodation where:

- no-one has parental responsibility for the young person **or**
- they are lost/abandoned **or**
- the person caring for them is temporarily unable to provide suitable care and accommodation for them **or**
- the young person's welfare will be seriously prejudiced if not accommodated.

Children can become looked after in the following ways:

- Children can be accommodation under section 20 with the agreement of their parents.
- Young people aged 16 or 17 who are deemed homeless can request and agree to being accommodated.
- Children can become looked after by virtue of an interim or full care order.
- Children can become temporarily looked after if they are subject to emergency protection order (EPO) or have been taken into police protection and are provided with accommodation as a result.
- Young people can become looked after if they are remanded into local authority care or youth detention accommodation by the criminal court.
- Children are provided with accommodation as a respite care package for more than 17 days and the total number of days exceeds 75 days in a year.

### 3 Camden's policy on voluntary accommodation under section 20

- Camden is aware that voluntary accommodation under section 20 has a role in supporting families during difficult episodes which could assist children remaining with their family in the long-term.
- Camden believes that voluntary accommodation under section 20 is a suitable option where the preferred permanence plan for the child, for example reunification or family and friends care, is likely to be achieved in a reasonable timescale and the voluntary nature of the arrangement will support and enhance partnership working with parents leading to better outcomes for the child.
- Cases where section 20 may be a more suitable alternative to care proceedings are:
  - where parents are unable to care for their child temporarily
  - where a young person's relationship with parents has broken down and accommodation is being provided as a respite whilst mediation is on-going
  - where parents agree for a kinship carer to look after the child for a specified period
  - cases involving unaccompanied asylum seeking children
  - cases involving disabled children where the child is in a residential placement and there is a shared care arrangement.
- In more complex cases section 20 may be used to accommodate children for a reasonable period of time but care proceedings should be issued as soon as possible. Examples are cases where:
  - securing stability for the child is likely to involve alternative care arrangements that may take time to achieve
  - parallel planning may be required to secure the best permanence option
  - there are difficulties working in partnership with parents.
- Where there are plans to remove a new born child from the care of parents care it is advisable that this is only done under a court order and proceedings should be issued immediately. This should be discussed in advance with the parents, and Legal Proceedings and Case Progression Service Manager and the agreed course of action must be approved by the Care Pathways Panel.
- Where the parents are unwilling and unable to provide or arrange accommodation for the child then the child should be accommodated. The social worker should aim to obtain the parents' agreement to the child being accommodated but if that is not possible at the time the child is accommodated, then accommodation under section 20 can still be pursued as long as the social worker believes that the parents are not

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able to adequately care for the child. In such a scenario there should be a referral to the Care Pathways Panel in order to consider whether care proceedings should be issued as soon as possible.

- In cases where the Care Pathways Panel approves the continued use of accommodation under section 20, the care plans must be regularly reviewed and carefully scrutinised by the IRO at each CLA review in order to avoid drift and delay and ensure that the child's permanence plan is being pursued in a timely manner.

## 4 Children accommodated in an emergency

Where a child is accommodated in an emergency, including accommodation following a Police Protection Order, there will be a period of 72 hours to decide on whether they should remain accommodated or return home, and during this time the following should happen:

- Where appropriate, for example in cases involving older children where there are difficulties in their relationship with parents, an immediate referral should be made to the mediation service and a mediator allocated.
- An interim FGC should be held to help the family plan for rehabilitation or explore family and friends care arrangements.
- The IRO service manager should appoint an IRO who will oversee planning for the child, including any planned return home.
- The CIN Head of Service may agree to an extension of the 72 hour period if further work needs to be carried out.
- The case should be flagged on MOSAIC.