



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

Assessment of family and friends  
(Kinship) carers; practice guidance

## 1 Introduction

- Assessment of alternative carers is a key part of ensuring the safety and welfare of looked after children. Camden has a rigorous process for assessing and approving foster carers in order to ensure only those who are suitable to foster and have the necessary skills to meet the needs of looked after children are approved.
- However, it is recognised that the assessment of family and friends carers needs to have a different focus that acknowledges the key differences between family and friends carers and stranger carers. The mainstream assessment MOSAICs focussed on unknown foster carers and is not always suitable to the assessment of family and friends carers as they;
  - have a different motivation for caring for the child based on family loyalty and their own relationship with the child;
  - do not see themselves as part of the child's professional network, but more as part of the child's social network;
  - face very different issues than stranger foster carers due to their close relationship with the birth parents;
  - do not always understand the context of the fostering assessment, finding it too formal and intrusive.
- This practice guidance sets out the key assessments to be used when assessing family and friends carers at the various stages of consideration and approval. The process is based on 3 levels in order to help social workers explore the viability of potential family and friends carers, gradually ruling out unsuitable candidates and progressing suitable candidates to the next level of assessment.
- Information gathered at each assessment level should be included in the following level of assessment so that a better picture of suitability of the family and friends carer can be built up throughout the process.
- When working with potential family and friends carers, social workers and managers need to ensure that they deal sensitively with any arising issues; unlike assessments for stranger foster carers, family and friends carers are likely to be involved in the process on a more emotional level and in some cases, their approval may be the only opportunity for the family to ensure the child stays within their family and friends group.

- It is essential that potential family and friends carers are empowered to engage with the assessment process and that they are given an opportunity to discuss difficulties in an open and honest way. Where a decision is made not to progress their assessment, the reasons for this should be explained to them in a face to face meeting.

## 2 Pre-assessment questionnaire

- The pre-assessment questionnaire has been designed for use by social workers when instigating a discussion with prospective family and friends carers about the possible impact on themselves and their family of caring for the child, particularly if the arrangements are likely to be permanent.
- The questionnaire should enable the following outcomes:
  - Prospective family and friends carers can make informed decisions about whether or not they wish to be assessed as a carer for the child and can recognise possible areas of difficulty that may arise during placement.
  - Children's social workers can identify areas of support that the carer will need in order to maintain the placement and meet the child's needs and also to identify early any proposed arrangements that are not in the child's best interests.
  - Social workers can carry out a preliminary assessment of several potential carers identified by a family during a Family Group Conference to decide on which individual is will be the most suitable candidate for full assessment.
- The questionnaire should be given to family and friends who are considering coming forward to be assessed as a family and friends carer as soon as that person has been identified by the social worker. The potential family and friends carer should be asked to complete the questionnaire independently but with the social worker providing support and explanation where necessary.

## 3 Viability assessment for a Regulation 24 care arrangement

### 3.1 Structure of assessment

- Regulation 24 of the care planning regulations states that a child can be placed with a connected person (a family member or friend) if it is thought this is the best plan for the child and that:

- the accommodation offered by the carer is suitable;
  - the carer's household is suitable;
  - the care arrangements are able to meet the child's needs and safeguard and promote their welfare;
  - it is likely that the carer will be approved as a foster carer.
- In general the child should have an existing relationship with the family and friends carer, but this is not essential. If the child is to live with a carer who is not well known to them, the social worker should ascertain the child's views on the placement and ensure that there are proper introductions to help the child settle.
  - The following matters must be taken into account during assessment of the family and friends carer:
    - the nature and quality of the relationship between the child and the carer;
    - the carer's capacity to look after the child, meet their needs and keep them safe;
    - the carer's state of health, including their physical and mental health,
    - family relationships within and the composition of the carer's household;
    - any current or historical issues of domestic violence, substance misuse or mental health problems within the household;
    - family history, including childhood and upbringing, significant life events, education and relationships;
    - details of any criminal offences for which the carer or household member has a conviction or caution;
    - their employment and income history;
    - details of their neighbourhood.

### **3.2 Carrying out the assessment**

Viability assessments should be recorded on the viability assessment record available on MOSAIC. As part of the assessment, social workers must carry out the following:

- The views of parents should be obtained and depending on their age and understanding, the child's wishes and feelings on the proposed placement should be ascertained.
- The social worker should ascertain the quality of the relationship between the child and the carer, the amount of involvement the carer has in the child's life and the level of care and commitment they are able to offer the child. The views of household members on the proposed placement should also be obtained.

- If the carer is not well known to the child, social workers will need to look at what resources should be put in place to help the development of the relationship, including the child visiting the proposed placement.
- The social worker should obtain information about the composition of the household, and meet all those living at the address and adults who regularly visit in order to assess the quality of family relationships and to obtain consent to network checks.
- Adult members of the household and others who regularly visit should be asked to sign their consent to checks on the declaration form available on MOSAIC and informed that refusal to do so may jeopardise the placement.
- The social worker should check that the carer's home provides suitable accommodation that will meet the child's needs (see below).

### 3.3 Checks on Regulation 24 carers and their household

- Carers and other adults who live in the household or are regular visitors **must** consent to checks being taken out. Responses to checks must be in writing and kept in the confidential section of the MOSAIC record.
- All requests to agencies for information should be in writing, enclosing a copy of the individual's written consent. Responses must also be in writing.

#### ***Police checks***

- If the child is to remain with the Regulation 24 carer after 16 weeks, full DBS checks on carers and members of their household aged 16 and over will be carried out by the family and friends social worker as part of the fostering assessment.
- However, in order to ensure the child's safety in the placement for the 16 week duration of the Regulation 24 placement, social workers should carry out a police check on carers and household members over the age of 16 and regular visitors before the child is placed. Please refer to the police checks policy for further details.

[police-checks.pdf](#)

***Local authority checks***

Social workers should check the records of the social services department where the carer lives in order to ascertain whether the carer and their family are known and obtain any relevant information about involvement with their family, particularly regarding any child protection concerns involving the carer and their family.

***GP***

The carer's GP must be contacted to obtain information on the state of their health and whether any health issues are likely to impact on their ability to care for the child. A full health assessment will be obtained by the assessing social worker as part of the fostering assessment.

***Health visitor***

If the carer has children under the age of 5, the social worker should contact the health visitor for information on the family.

**3.4 Suitability of the home**

The carer's home should be visited in order to assess the suitability of the physical environment in meeting the child's needs. The visit may identify additional resources that can be provided to help this, for example safety equipment.

Social workers need to check that the following basic standards are met:

- The home should be warm, adequately furnished, and free from any avoidable hazards.
- The accommodation should provide enough space for all who live there.
- Sleeping arrangements should afford some private space so that all children have their own bed and children over 3 have either their own bedroom or adequate space in a shared room.
- The home, in particular the kitchen, should reach a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene.
- Safety issues such as garden ponds need to be addressed depending on the child's age. Carers may need advice on purchasing some safety equipment, for example, stair gates.

- Consideration should be given to any issues arising from the carer's pets and whether these might pose a risk to the child.

## 4 Assessment of family and friends foster carers

### 4.1 Structure and content of assessment

- Assessment for family and friends foster carers will follow the same structure as for stranger foster carers, being based on the matters listed in Schedule 3 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and will involve:
  - an initial visit to the carer's home by the assessing social worker to check their eligibility to foster, their motivation and the quality of their relationship with the child and the suitability of their accommodation;
  - carers attending a specialist preparation group for family and friends carers;
  - DBS and other checks and searches being carried out;
  - a home study assessment focussing on the competencies, skills and standards required for the fostering task.
- However, the assessment will differ from mainstream fostering applications to take account of the existing relationship between the child and the proposed carer and the fact that they are being assessed to look after and meet the needs of a specific child, rather than all children.
- Carers will be expected to work towards meeting the fostering competencies, including the skills needed to foster and the standards required of Camden foster carers. Assessments should be recorded on the SGO/family and friends care report.
- Assessments should balance any potential weaknesses of the carer against the benefits to the child of remaining within their family network and should include details of what support carers will need to help make the placement successful and ensure they can meet the child's needs.
- Assessments should be carried out in a collaborative manner that allows the carer an opportunity to reflect on their position and explore issues while practitioners are able to make an analysis of their suitability to care for the child.
- Research shows that the most important factor influencing successful outcomes for family and friends placements is parenting capacity. Carers must demonstrate an ability to meet the child's needs, and their own experience of parenting and being

parented, and the reflections they have on these will be crucial in indicating an understanding of parenting issues.

## **4.2 Specific considerations for family and friends assessments**

### ***Issues relating to the assessment***

- Unlike stranger foster carers who have some control over when they choose to be assessed, family and friends carers are likely to have been approached to look after the child in response to an emergency and have little control over the timing of assessments.
- This means they will not be as well informed about the process and may feel unready. Social workers will need to make sure they receive as much information as possible so that they fully understand what the assessment and approval process involves and how the assessment will be conducted.
- Assessing social workers should be mindful of the power imbalance between family and friends carers and CSFH; the carer may not have chosen to come forward as a stranger foster carer will have done, and there may be a tendency to view them in the context of the presenting problems of the birth parents, ie: as coming from a “problem” family.

### ***Family relationships***

- Social workers should recognise that family and friends carers are likely to face more complex issues than stranger foster carers, because of the dynamics of their relationship with the birth parents and so may require increased support.
- Carers may face a high degree of hostility from birth parents and other family members and may be blamed for the child being “in care”. It is also possible that not all members of the carer’s household agree with the proposed care arrangements.
- Social workers should also consider the possibility that family loyalties may lead to the carer being unable to safeguard and promote the child’s welfare adequately. Social workers will need to help carers explore their feelings and how the care arrangements are likely to impact on family relationships but this will need to be done in a sensitive manner.



- Carers may feel a sense of loyalty to the birth parent, who may be their child or sibling, and may be deeply affected by the problems the birth parent faces, such as mental health or substance misuse or even facing bereavement. Their relationship with the child may also change when they begin a parenting role.
- In particular, social workers should look closely at contact arrangements and whether the carer is the best person to manage contacts, given that this could be a major source of conflict and stress, and consider alternative methods of managing contact where appropriate.
- For example, carers may not be able to accept court-ordered contact arrangements and may allow damaging contact between the child and birth parents to continue. Alternatively, they may be unable to manage high levels of conflict during contact and this will impact on the child's wellbeing.

### ***Accommodation***

- The accommodation offered by family and friends carers needs to be of a similar standard required from all potential foster carers and will need to meet standard 10 of the National Minimum Standards.
- The assessing social worker will need to carry out a health and safety assessment to ensure the property provides a suitable physical environment, that there is enough space for everyone living in the household and that the child will have some privacy.
- Although it is Camden's policy that children over 3 should have their own bedroom and should only share a bedroom in limited situations, this policy can be relaxed for family and friends care arrangements if the child is happy to share a bedroom with cousins or siblings and has adequate space.
- Assessing social workers should be mindful that family and friends carers are likely to become overcrowded as a result of looking after the child on relatively short notice. If this is the case, the assessment should look at what can be done in the future to improve the situation, including any contact with Camden's housing department on potential re-housing.

### ***Carer's health***

- The health of the carer is likely to be one of the most important factors in assessing their parenting capacity. Family and friends carers tend to be older and in poorer health than stranger foster carers and their lifestyle may impact on their health.

- It is important that any issues arising from the health assessment are discussed with Camden's medical advisor to get a view on what impact the carer's health will have on parenting capacity in the present and future. Social workers will also have to look at the capacity of the wider family to either assist with or take over the care of the child in the event the carer is unable to meet the child's needs in the future.

### ***Location of placement***

- Family members who come forward to care for a looked after child may not live locally and some may live at a distance to the child's home. Decisions on whether a child should move away from Camden should look at the benefits of children living with family members against the loss of familiar surroundings.
- Also important will be the age of the child and how they feel about moving. Younger children may be happy to move but older children may resent losing contact with peers from whom they may derive a high level of support. For some children, moving away from their home area where they are at risk of abuse or becoming involved in crime may be a positive aspect of the care arrangements.

### ***Criminal convictions***

- Family and friends carers can be considered as Camden foster carers even where they would normally be debarred because of a conviction or caution for the offences specified in Schedule 4 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.
- However, the Fostering and Permanence Panel and Agency Decision maker must be satisfied that the placement remains the right placement for the child and that their welfare can be properly safeguarded and promoted.

### **4.3 Regulation 24 carers**

- In some cases, the child may already be placed with the carer under Regulation 24. ***These carers must be assessed and approved within 16 weeks of the temporary approval if the placement is to continue. Therefore it is essential that the assessment is begun as soon as the child is placed.***
- Any difficulties in completing the assessment within this timeframe must be discussed with the Family, Friends and Fostering manager so that arrangements can be made to apply for an extension of time from the Fostering and Permanence Panel if needed.

- It is recommended that the assessing social worker uses the opportunity afforded by Regulation 24 placements to observe the child's interactions with the carer as part of the assessment within the home environment and that they are invited to the child's statutory CLA reviews to report on progress.