

**SERIOUS  
ABOUT  
SOCIAL WORK**

# Procedural Guidance for Supporting Foster Carers

Document last updated: February 2019  
Document review due: February 2022

# Supporting Foster Carers

## About this document

|                  |                                                                                   |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Title            | <b>Procedural Guidance for Supporting Foster Carers</b>                           |
| Purpose          | <b>To ensure that foster carers in Essex are being appropriately supported</b>    |
| Updated by       | <b>Rosemarie Cronin, Training, Development and Compliance Advisor (Fostering)</b> |
| Approved by      | <b>Jenny Boyd, Director of Local Delivery</b>                                     |
| Date             | <b>February 2019</b>                                                              |
| Version number   | <b>5</b>                                                                          |
| Status           |                                                                                   |
| Review frequency | <b>Three-yearly</b>                                                               |
| Next review date | <b>February 2022</b>                                                              |

## Version Control

| <b>Date Issued:</b> | <b>Version</b> | <b>Summary of Changes</b>                                                                                   | <b>Created by</b> |
|---------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| December 2015       | 4              | Updated information regarding the out of hours support for foster carers                                    | Rosemarie Cronin  |
| December 2015       | 4              | Update information regarding therapeutic support                                                            | Rosemarie Cronin  |
| December 2015       | 4              | Updated some terminology in line with other policies                                                        | Rosemarie Cronin  |
| January 2016        | 4              | Updated roles of SSW and SW to include facilitation and attendance at the Placement Planning Meeting        | Rosemarie Cronin  |
| January 2019        | 5              | Updated information regarding Clinical Psychologists and Mental health Co-ordinators in each fostering team | Rosemarie Cronin  |
| January 2019        | 5              | Updated information regarding support for carers who are subject to an allegation                           | Rosemarie Cronin  |
| January 2019        | 5              | Updated information regarding the out of hours support line for foster carers                               | Rosemarie Cronin  |
| February 2019       | 5              | Clarification regarding chairing of Placement Stability Meetings                                            | Rosemarie Cronin  |

# Table of Contents

| <b>Section</b>                                        | <b>Page(s)</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Introduction and Legal Framework                      | 5              |
| Essex Fostering Service Policy and Procedures         | 7              |
| • Supervising Social Worker                           | 7              |
| • Child or Young Person's Social Worker               | 8              |
| • Placement Stability Meetings                        | 9              |
| • Out of Hours Support                                | 9              |
| • Support for carers who are subject to an allegation | 9              |
| • Support from other foster carers                    | 9              |
| • Sons and Daughter of Foster Care Support            | 10             |
| • Essex Foster Care Association                       | 10             |
| • Fostering Network                                   | 10             |
| • Therapeutic Support                                 | 10             |
| • Divisional Based Intervention Teams (D-BIT)         | 10             |
| • Training for Foster Carers                          | 11             |
| • Foster Care Breaks                                  | 11             |
| • Annual Household Review of Approval                 | 11             |

## **Introduction and Legal Framework**

Foster carers are a key part of the team working with looked after children. It is crucial that carers have a good understanding of their role and are fully supported in it. This is integral within the fostering legislation and the fostering service are committed to ensuring that foster carers are supported appropriately and in a way that is helpful to them and to their families. To undertake the fostering role successfully, it is essential that the foster carers' contribution to improving the outcomes for the children and young people that they look after are appropriately recognised within the service and by all those who are working with the child or young person.

### **The Fostering Regulations (2011) state:**

“17.—(1) The fostering service provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them.

(2) The fostering service provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that foster parents are familiar with, and act in accordance with the policies established in accordance with regulations 12(1) and 13(1) and (3).

(3) The fostering service provider must ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations.”

### **The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011) Standard 21 states:**

21.1) The fostering service supports their foster carers to ensure they provide foster children with care that reasonably meets those children's needs, takes the children's wishes and feelings into account, actively promotes individual care and supports the children's safety, health, enjoyment, education and preparation for the future.

21.2) The fostering service ensures foster carers understand the nature and level of support which will be provided to them by the fostering service.

21.3) There is an effective out of hours advice and support service for foster carers.

21.4) Peer support, foster care associations and/or self-help groups for foster carers are encouraged and supported.

21.5) Foster carers are provided with breaks from caring as appropriate. These are planned to take account of the needs of any children placed.

21.6) All foster carers have access to adequate social work and other professional support, information and advice, to enable them to provide consistent, high quality care to the child. This includes assistance with dealing with relevant services, such as health and education. Consideration is given to any help or support needed by the sons and daughters of foster carers.

21.7) The role of the supervising social worker is clear both to the worker and the foster carer.

21.8) Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. The frequency of meetings for short break foster carers should be proportionate to the amount of care provided. Foster carers' files include records of supervisory meetings.

21.9) The supervising social worker ensures each foster carer he or she supervises is informed in writing of, and accepts, understands and operates within, all Regulations and standards and with policies and guidance agreed by the fostering service.

21.10) On approval, foster carers are given information, either a handbook or electronic resources, which cover policies, procedures (including with regard to allegations), guidance, financial information, legal information and insurance details. This information is updated regularly.

21.11 Current and prospective foster carers are able to make a complaint about any aspect of the service which affects them directly. Records are kept of representations and complaints, how they are dealt with, the outcome and any action taken. These records are reviewed regularly so that the service's practice is improved where necessary.

21.12) There is a good system of communication between the fostering service social workers and the child's social worker. The fostering service social workers understand the role of the child's social worker and work effectively with them.

### **The Fostering Guidance 2011 states:**

5.64 Given the central role that foster carers play, as members of a wider team, in helping to safeguard vulnerable children and promoting good outcomes for them, it is essential that all foster carers receive high quality supervision and support. Regulation 17 requires the fostering service to provide foster carers with such training, advice, information and support (including support outside office hours), as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them (standards 20 and 21).

5.65 Support which is effective in helping foster carers to meet the needs of children in placement includes practical, financial and emotional support, as well as training and the provision of information. The fostering service should provide support groups for foster carers and encourage participation in these, as well as in foster care associations and peer mentoring.

5.55 The service should have a policy setting out the way in which it supports foster carers by providing practical support such as additional support within the home or breaks from caring to enable placements to continue.

5.67 Every foster carer should be allocated an appropriately qualified social worker from the fostering service (the supervising social worker) who is responsible for overseeing the support they receive. It is the supervising social worker's role to supervise the foster carer's work, to ensure that they are meeting the child's needs, and to offer support and a framework to assess

the foster carer's performance and develop their skills. They must make regular visits to the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year.

5.68 The fostering service should also provide support to the sons and daughters of foster carers and other people living in the foster carer's household who play an important part in supporting children in placement.

5.69 Foster carers must be provided with comprehensive information about the policies and procedures of the fostering service, including those relating to the handling of allegations, and about the support which will be offered to them in their role.

5.70 Foster carers should be supported to maintain an ongoing training and development portfolio which demonstrates how they are meeting the skills required of them. The foster carer must be able to evidence the Children's Workforce Development Council's Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care, within the timescales specified in standard 20. Fostering couples may evidence the Standards in one workbook.

5.71. It is essential that all foster carers are given clear information about the criteria for making financial payments to them, including allowances, fees and other expenses. Allowances must be sufficient to cover the full cost of caring for each child placed with them, and must be reviewed annually. The Government has put in place a National Minimum Fostering Allowance (adjusted annually) which is the very minimum that should be provided to a foster carer for each child placed. Criteria for calculating allowances must apply equally to all foster carers, whether or not they are related to the child or the placement is long or short term (standard 28).

5.72. The Government has published a good practice guide to foster carer payments systems which gives helpful guidance about financial support to foster carers.

5.73. Fees are in addition to allowances and may be paid by fostering services to reflect the expertise and the nature of the tasks undertaken by a range of foster carers. Where fees are paid by a fostering service these must be payable to those on their register of foster carers who meet the criteria set out for the scheme, including short and long term carers and family and friends carers.

When consulted children and young people said that they wanted foster families to be supported to look after them. Within the Essex Corporate Parenting Pledge it states that Essex will do their best to support foster families so that they can provide children and young people with a safe and settled place to live.

## **Essex Fostering Service Guidance and Procedures**

The fostering legislation which came into force in April 2011 makes it very clear that foster carers must receive all the support and supervision they need in order to care properly for the children and young people who are placed with them. This includes support from other professionals as well as the appropriate information and advice, including assistance to deal with other agencies.

### **Supervising Social Worker (SSW)**

1. All fostering households are allocated a supervising social worker who will undertake regular supervision in line with the supervision agreement.

2. The role of the supervising social worker is to
  - To ensure that the foster carer is able to meet the child's needs
  - To provide emotional and practical support to the foster carers and their children
  - Work with the foster carers to consider their future developmental needs and training requirements. This includes the completion of the Personal Development Plan
  - Support the carers at other meetings e.g. children's statutory reviews, PEP's and so on
  - Ensure that the foster carer has all the relevant information regarding children and young people who are placed with them
  - Help facilitate and be present at the Placement Planning Meeting
3. Supervision should happen at a minimum of 6 times a year. This can be more frequent if requested, and may be appropriate, for example, when a child or young person is first placed or if there are particular issues regarding the children or young people in placement.
4. Supervision records should be kept of all supervision visits. Carers will be given a copy of this record and the SSW should record that the carers have received this copy and agree with the record or note any areas of disagreement.
5. Where there is more than one carer in the household the second carer should be seen as frequently as possible but at a minimum of twice a year.
6. The children of foster carers should also be seen on a regular basis. Depending on their age and understanding carers children should be seen separate to the foster carers.
7. Supervising social workers should also be available for phone support between supervision visits.
8. Supervising social workers should provide foster carers with a contact telephone number for themselves as well as other key telephone numbers e.g. out of hours support.
9. Supervising social workers are responsible for ensuring that there is a minimum of one unannounced visit completed every year.

### Child or Young Person's Social Worker

1. The child or young person's social worker is responsible for the child's care plan and should:
  - Ensure that the foster carer has all the information they need to care for the child, this should be updated if additional information becomes known
  - Provide the foster carer with a copy of the care plan
  - Provide advice and assistance to help the foster carer to meet the child or young person's needs in accordance with the care plan
  - Be present for Personal Education Plan Meetings with the school
  - Visit the child or young person on a regular basis in line with the Care Planning Regulations (2010)
  - Attend and complete reports for the child or young person's statutory reviews
  - Help facilitate and be present at the Placement Planning Meeting



2. When the social worker visits the child or young person in the foster home they should see them alone. However, the social worker should also make sure that they speak to the foster carer on a regular basis as well.
3. The social worker should provide the foster carer with a contact telephone number so that the carer can contact them between visits.

### Placement Stability Meetings

Foster carers who may need additional help or support to manage a placement can request a Placement Stability Meeting. This would be a meeting which is arranged via the social work team where the child or young person is allocated. The aim of the meeting is for the relevant people to discuss the challenging areas and decide on strategies of how these could be managed which may include additional support to be provided to the foster carer. Placement Stability Meetings should usually be chaired by the team manager in the child care team

### Out of Hours Support

An out of hours telephone support service for foster carers is provided by the fostering service. This covers periods for when the office is not open usually so after 5.30pm until 9am during the week and over the weekends and bank holidays. This rota is covered by staff in the fostering service who usually cover a week at the time. The rota is provided to foster carers with all the appropriate telephone numbers on.

### Support for carers who are subject to an allegation

If a foster carer is subject to an allegation, independent support is provided by Fostering Network.

Referrals for support are made on a case by case basis, with the foster carers agreement, by the supervising social worker. An Independent Support worker is then allocated and will make direct contact with the foster carer. They will support the foster carer through telephone calls, emails and home visits. They will offer emotional support and also important practical support, helping the foster carer to understand the process and procedures regarding allegations, attending any review the carer may have to go to, including the fostering panel, and helping with any documentation that needs to be written.

Fostering Network also provides independent legal advice for a carer who is subject to an investigation and has an advice line that can be contacted.

### Support from other foster carers

It is recognised by the fostering service that not all foster carers find support groups to be the most helpful means of support. However, support groups are held in all of the four quadrant areas and foster carers are encouraged to attend these where possible.

There are often invited speakers to support groups so this provides carers with important information and structured support time as well as the more informal aspects of the groups.

Foster carers are also encouraged to buddy up with other foster carers. This can happen naturally through pre-existing relationships or relationships that grow from carers meeting at support groups or training courses. However, supervising social workers can also link new foster carers up with more experienced carers as an additional support which can be very helpful as foster carers start their fostering career and take on their first placement.

### Sons and Daughters of Foster Carers Support

The sons and daughters of foster carers have an opportunity to meet with other foster carers' children as part of the Skills to Foster Children's Group. This provides an opportunity to share information with the children of prospective foster carers and also the opportunity for them to ask their own questions and share any concerns they may have with other children of foster carers who have had some fostering experience.

Support Groups are also held for the sons and daughters of foster carers to enable them to have a chance to share their experiences with others and get support from other young people who are also fostering.

The carer-to-carer support scheme also offers counselling with qualified counsellors for sons and daughters with emotional issues.

### Essex Foster Care Association

The Essex Foster Care Association is an independent charitable trust run by foster carers. They provide support to all Essex County Council foster carers who provide care for looked after children and have regular members meetings. They can also help to resolve specific issues for individual foster carers.

### Fostering Network

All foster carers in Essex are provided with membership to the Fostering Network.

### Therapeutic Support

Each quadrant fostering team has their own Mental Health Co-ordinator who will be able to offer support and advice to foster carers as well as provide training.

The fostering service is also employing a Clinical Psychologist in each team. This will be happening in a phased way with the first one being employed early in 2019.

Foster carers can access the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service (EWMHS), by phoning 0300 300 1600 or email a referral to [NELFT-EWMHS.referrals@nhs.net](mailto:NELFT-EWMHS.referrals@nhs.net) Foster carers who wish to access this service for their child/young person will need to consult with the child's social worker in the first instance. The referral will be screened by a specialist EWMHS health professional.

### Divisional Based Intervention Teams (D-BIT)

D-BIT is a service for children, young people and their birth, kin, adopter and/or foster carer families where the young person is aged between 8-17 years. They predominantly work with

children and young people identified by Children and Families' staff as *on the edge of care*, arising from breakdown of family relationships and those at risk of custody.

D-BIT provides a brief solution focused intervention providing a sequence of approximately 12 sessions with families which are tailored to their needs.

D-BIT has extended its services to support foster carers and work with young people in foster care.

### Training for Foster Carers

There is a comprehensive list of training available for foster carers in Essex. This includes online training and distance learning training which can be completed within the foster home.

Face to face training is available in all localities. This is an opportunity for carers to enhance their learning as well as share experiences and get to know other foster carers.

Workshops are also provided to help carers with the completion of their Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards induction workbooks.

### Foster Carer Breaks

It is recognised that fostering is demanding for foster carers and their families. Essex foster carers are entitled to 28 days break entitlement a year. It is expected that these are planned breaks and should fit in around the needs of the children or young people in placement.

### Annual Household Review of Approval

Foster carer reviews should be held a minimum of every 12 months but are usually held at 11 monthly intervals. They can be more frequent if required. The review is chaired by an independent reviewing officer for fostering and should be attended by both the adult foster carers in the family as well as the supervising social worker. The children of foster carers can also be involved with these directly or indirectly by contributing their written feedback.