

**SERIOUS
ABOUT
SOCIAL WORK**

Supported Lodgings Carers Handbook



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Introduction

This Supported Lodgings handbook is designed to be a reference guide for both new and existing supported lodgings carers. The purpose of the handbook is to provide information and guidance to all our supported lodgings carers on caring issues, it will identify standards of care that are expected and in return what you can expect from us together with other useful information.

The difference between being a foster carer and a supported lodgings carer is that the supported lodgings carers are for young people over the age of 16 only. The role involves a young person living semi- independently with the Supported Lodging carer to enable them to develop the necessary life skills to live independently. The expectation is that when the young person's placement comes to an end the young person can live independently in the private/social housing sector. Supported Lodgings are not regulated within the meaning of the terms of the Care Standards Act 2000 and constitute one of the "other arrangements" for looked-after children and young people outlined in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations and Guidance (March 2010).

Our Vision:

The Essex Children and Families' vision for children in care is to provide a safe, stable and caring environment meeting the needs of all children and young people in care, enabling them to reach their potential and to enhance their life opportunities.

We believe that all children should be cared for by carers who are trauma informed and therapeutically minded. Our vision is to have a 'whole service culture' of therapeutic and trauma informed parenting. This will be achieved through; embedding psychologists and mental health coordinators in fostering teams in each quadrant and ensuring that all training, supervision, support and processes for foster carers, supported lodgings carers and social care staff support our whole service culture.

Aims:

To provide:

- high standards of care in a family environment for all young people placed within the service
- young people with stable placements that allow them to fulfil their potential respecting and promoting their racial, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds
- the opportunity where carers and young person are in agreement and it is agreed to be in the young person's best interest for the young person to stay put in the supported lodgings home until their 21st birthday

- consideration for the gender, sexuality, disability and heritage of young people when considering making placements
- 24-hour support line for supported lodgings carers and young people and buddy system for all newly approved Supported Lodgings carers.
- a partnership approach in providing services to carers, and young people and their families that will include local authorities, health and social care trusts and other agencies
- a service consisting of managers, practitioners and support staff who are appropriately qualified, safeguard checked, registered with their professional regulatory councils, and supported in all area of professional development.
- A commitment to develop and provide ongoing training, learning and development opportunities to all supported lodgings carers.
- Support and care for young people

The Legal Context

The young people placed will be subject to one of the following status : Looked After Section 20, Looked After Section 31, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) , No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) Post 18 young people or a former Looked After Child (Eligible/Relevant).

The key pieces of legislation / guidance:

- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations – Volume 2, Care planning, placement and case review (2014)
- The Children Act 1989
- Working Together to Safeguard Children – (2010)
- The Children Act 2004
- IRO Handbook
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations - Volume 3: Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers (2014) – including The Care Leavers Regulations (England) 2010
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

It is important to note that various other pieces of Legislation and / or Guidance impact upon provision of services to Care Leavers for example, housing and benefits legislation.

Operational Framework:

The Children & Families service is dedicated to the provision of accommodation for young people eligible under Supported Lodging Scheme operating under the relevant legislation/guidance.

The structure of the service delivery sits under the Fostering Service and reports to:

- **Sarah Carter, Head of Permanency, Placements and Sufficiency**
- **Hena Ahmed, Service Manager South**
- **Jaya Jose, Team Manager South Fostering Team.**

The Supported Lodging Scheme is overseen by a Team Manager, Senior Practitioners, and Social Workers. The team is responsible for the ongoing support of supported lodging carers and the stability of placements for young people placed.

Recruitment:

Essex County Council Fostering Service has an effective recruitment process. Recruitment campaigns are undertaken by the team for both fostering and supported Lodgings carers.

Members of the public enquiring about becoming supported lodgings carers scheme can access further information through visiting our website and making an enquiry online, the web address is: essexadoptionandfostering.co.uk/housing-a-young-person.

You can also call our freephone number to make an enquiry and speak to our initial enquiry workers on 0800801530.

This allows an interested enquirer to submit an expression of interest form that is screened and followed up by the recruitment team. A Supported Lodging Carers Handbook Information Pack is provided to potential enquirers. If the initial screening process is successful a social worker from the service will be allocated to progress an Initial Home Visit Assessment. The assessment and recommendations are overseen by the team manager to determine if the enquiry will proceed to be invited to a 3-day preparation training course and thereafter a Form F Assessment.

Essential Information for enquiries;

The supported lodgings carer scheme provides a home to young people who are unable to live with their families. Young people suitable for this scheme are 16 to 18 years old or over 18 staying put.

Initial Home Assessment Visit:

The initial visit is an opportunity to obtain further information on the applicant/s enquiry and to assess the applicant's situation and suitability for further comprehensive assessment. If an applicant/s are to be progressed to a full assessment, consent to statutory checks and references will be sought.

Assessment process:

- Assessing of an applicant/s will be through five main parts:
- Statutory checks
- Personal and employment references
- Form F Assessment- competency- based assessment.
- Skills to Foster Preparation training (optional)
- Presentation of the assessment to the Essex County Council's Fostering and supported Lodgings Panel.

Criteria for prospective applicants are as follows:

- Carers must have a spare bedroom available for a young person for the duration of their placement.
- Carers must have not committed harm of offence against a child/ young person or an offence that could pose risk to a child/ young person
- Carers must not have a child (of their own) who is subject to a child protection plan or currently looked after by Essex County Council or another local authority.
- Applicants must be over 21 years of age.

Stability for a young person is a primary factor for young people and as such the Children & Young People's Placement Service requires that:

- Prospective applicants should have financial security.
- Prospective applicants should be living in stable accommodation.

Time available to support and guide a young person through to independence.

Essex does not accept applicants from Essex County Council Councillors. Applications from Essex children and families service workers will be considered but may not proceed if there is potential for significant areas of conflict.

Statutory checks

Relevant Safeguarding Checks will be required, and all applicants must give their written consent to checks being undertaken with a wide range of agencies and individuals; including other local authorities, police, former employers, previous partners, and members of their extended family.

Consent

Individual carers must sign the Consent to Checks form, Medical Consent to Checks Letter and Notes on Patients' Rights to consent to checks being made with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), the Local Authority, Health Visitors, General Practitioners and schools (where supported lodgings carers have children in school) and any other relevant parties.

Local Authority check

A local authority check must be undertaken in each local authority area that an applicant has lived in the previous ten years

Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS)

DBS and local authority checks must also be carried out on all members of the household on assessment and thereafter 3 yearly. DBS Checks must be carried out on supported lodgings carers' own children who are aged 18 or over if they live in the home. All young people who will remain in a supported lodgings placement after their 18th birthday, and where young people under 18 are placed, or will be placed, must have a DBS check. The check should be instigated when the young person reaches the age of 17 and 9 months. Evidence verifying identity of each individual must be seen i.e. birth certificate, passport or driving licence as per Disclosure and Barring Service Checks guidance.

Where a Disclosure and Barring Service Check produces a trace, the allocated social worker will undertake a risk assessment that is signed off by the service manager and Head of Service.

Medical

Applicants will be asked to discuss their health at an early stage in the assessment and the assessing social worker must highlight that Essex promote anti-smoking as part of physical well-being of young people. Any health concerns must be raised in a preliminary discussion with the applicant's General Practitioner or Consultant and applicants must be told if the General Practitioner or Consultant's view is that the concerns may preclude approval. The assessor will write to your GP to ascertain if there are any health issues that could prevent you from caring for a young person age 16-18. We reserve the

right to seek specialist consultant reports and to ask our Medical Advisor to review your medical information if necessary. Medicals will be updated 3 yearly.

Personal and employment references

All applicants will be required to give a minimum of 3 personal referees one of which will need to be a family member. Personal referees must be able to comment on the potential carers capacity to look after a young person and must be willing to be interviewed by the assessing social worker. These people must have known the applicants for at least three years. In exceptional circumstances less than three years will be acceptable with the Team Manager's approval. The assessing social worker must write to the referees for a written reference using the Personal Reference Letter/Form.

The assessing social worker must obtain an employer's reference where an applicant works, on the employers official headed paper.

Social media checks must be undertaken on applicants as part of the assessment

In most cases where prospective supported lodgings carer's have children from a previous relationship, assessing social workers should seek a reference from previous partners and/or adult children as part of the assessment process. If this is not possible, or the applicant has a good reason why they do not want this (i.e. an abusive relationship) a reference must be sought from someone who knew the supported lodgings carer as a couple.

Form F Assessment:

A Form F competency-based assessment will be undertaken by a qualified assessing social worker. The Form F competency-based assessment involves the use of the following forms:

- Form F (Fostering England) 2014
- Competencies
- Pet Assessment
- Specific Child Viability Assessment (if applicable)
- Interviews with adult children living elsewhere (if applicable)
- Interviews with ex-partners (if applicable)
- Interviews with children living within the household (if applicable)
- Parenting capacity

The purpose of the assessment is to gain evidence of the applicant's competencies to become a supported lodgings carer. Once a positive initial visit report has been signed off the Form F Assessment commences and is expected to be completed within a 22-week period. Emphasis must be given to independent observations and evidence of information that the applicant(s) put forward. This could include testimonials from a range of sources in addition to direct observation of their interaction with young people.

The assessment must be undertaken over a series of approximately 6 planned visits. If further visits are required, this will be discussed with the applicant/s and their assessing social worker. There must be at least one session individually with each applicant, and any children of the household, where appropriate, given their age and understanding.

Health & Safety

As part of the assessment, an inspection of the property must be undertaken to complete the Health & Safety check. Health and Safety checks are updated yearly.

All Supported lodgings carers must have in place appropriate buildings and contents insurance cover.

All Supported lodgings carers must obtain an electrical safety inspection certificate for the hard-wired system of the accommodation. This is required every five years with the report produced on the recognised form. The inspection must be carried out by an authorised competent person who is a member of a scheme approved by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister e.g. NICEIC or ECA.

All supported lodgings carers must obtain a gas safety check certificate (CP12) issued by a Gas Safe Registered Engineer annually.

Withdrawal from Assessment

A decision to cease an assessment can be made based on:

- An applicant withdraws from the assessment process.

Information not shared by an applicant during the initial visit or commencement of the assessment regarding an adult in the household who has been convicted or cautioned for offence against a child/young person.

- Any information collected during the assessment that raises a concern about the applicants' suitability to be a supported lodging provider.

Skills to Foster training

Applicants are offered to attend pre-approval Skills to Foster training course before an assessment is presented to Panel, although the carer is not expected to undertake the fostering role this training will enable the Prospective carer to develop their skills and understanding to look after a child in care. The training is run over 3 consecutive days, Supported Lodgings carers will also undertake 2 mandatory courses for Wrap training and First Aid training that can be accessed through the Councils e-learn electronic on-line site that applicants and approved supported lodging carers can access.

Presentation of the assessment to the Essex County Council's Fostering and Supported lodging Panel

Membership of the Panel will consist of a minimum of five people from the following

Pool of registered panel members;

- Independent Fostering Panel - Chair
- Councillor – Elected Member
- Independent Member – Foster Carer
- Independent Member - Education
- 2 x Independent Members & Health Fostering Panel Advisor
- Qualified social Work staff from Children and Families Service
- Fostering Panel Advisor

The Essex Fostering and supported lodging Panel considers approval of:

1. New supported lodging carer's Form F Assessments.
2. Recommendations that supported lodgings carer/s should be de-registered where there have been concerns about the standards of care

The Essex Fostering and supported lodging Panel recommends the terms of approval of the supported lodgings carer/s:

- Type of Supported Lodgings to be provided
- Age of young people; 16 to 18 years
- Gender of young person
- Number of young people to a maximum of 3*.

The Agency Decision Maker will determine the approval of supported lodging carers, revision to any approval and termination of approval, taking into account recommendations and advice from the panel.

*The Children's Act 1989 sets the 'usual supported lodgings carer limit' to three young people under 18 years, unless the young people are siblings to each other. In certain circumstances, the Supported Lodgings Carer's Scheme may consider placing young people outside the usual supported lodgings limit if a fourth bedroom is available on the grounds of exemption ratified by the Service manager. This is considered on a case by case basis and be planned in advance.

Applicants can complain if they wish to challenge a recommendation or decision to the Head of Permanency, Placements and Sufficiency.

The assessment report must follow the BAAF standard format as follows:

- An application and report to become a supported lodgings carer.
- Reports will be shared with applicants to ensure factual accuracy. If requested applicants may have a copy of the report excluding third party information.
- The assessment report must be signed by the applicant/s, the assessing social worker and the Team Manager.
- The report, references and checks form the papers to be presented at the Fostering and supported Lodgings Panel.

Conduct of Panel

The Essex Fostering and Supported Lodgings Panel is appointed by Children's Social Care to make recommendations on:

- Whether, on the basis of reports presented to Panel, applicants demonstrate that they meet the competencies to become supported lodgings carers and therefore should be approved.
- Where recommending approval, the number, age range and gender of children to be placed will be identified, subject to the usual supported lodgings limit of three placements, unless the young people are all siblings to each other
- The category of approval (specific young people or general approval)
- Termination of approval where the standard of care is unsatisfactory.

In the event that Panel cannot agree on their recommendation, either unanimously, or by a majority, the rationale for both recommending approval and non-approval will be set out in the Panel minutes and a recommendation of non-approval will be passed to the Agency Decision Maker.

Applicants attendance at Panel

Potential Supported lodgings carers are invited to attend Panel where they are seeking approval. Where there has been an allegation or serious complaint against a supported lodgings carer, or where the Service is recommending de-registration (against the Supported lodgings carers wishes) the provider must be invited to attend Panel.

All Essex Fostering and Supported Lodgings Panel members are expected to undertake safe recruitment and safeguarding training which is provided on-line.

Recommendations and decision making

The Agency Decision Maker (Head of Permanency, Placements & Sufficiency) will notify the supported lodgings applicant of their decision within seven working days of the Panel. Once approved, the supported lodgings carer must be asked to sign the Supported Lodgings Contract Agreement. If a supported lodgings applicant wishes to appeal against the decision, they have the right to make a complaint to the Agency Decision Maker (Head of Permanency, Placements & Sufficiency) within twenty-eight days of receiving written notice of the decision.

The prospective supported lodgings carer must be informed in writing as soon as possible what the final decision is, and the reasons for making it.

Daily Care

Supported lodging carers will offer advice and support for young people placed aligned to the young person pathway plan and provide them with support in managing their weekly personal allowance for all their living costs; food shopping, laundry, budgeting for personal item such as clothing, activities, travel expenses, engaging with education, or further education vocation and /or employment . Young people are not expected to fund other living costs e.g. utilities bills, accommodation costs as this is covered in the supported lodging carers weekly fee of £250.00. A placement planning meeting will set out the expectations and arrangements for each young person and carer.

Savings

Young people are to be encouraged to save money from their personal allowance. Whilst this cannot be enforced encouragement should be given by their supported lodging carer as part of their independence preparation to save money for when the Young person leaves care to have the funds to make any essential household purchases.

Staying Put

Young people subject to approval from their social workers can be considered for staying put arrangements post their 18th birthday. Where it is likely that a placement will continue after a young person's 18th birthday, a post 18 placement meeting should take place to consider all aspects of the arrangement and include:

- The young person
- The young person's social worker
- The supported lodgings carer/s
- The supported lodgings carers supervising social worker
- The Essex benefits adviser

Those young people not agreed under staying put arrangements will be referred by their case holding team to Post 18 Gateway Housing Accommodation or other options available which their Social worker will have details.

Young people who remain in placement post 18 will be required to enter into a written contract whereby they agree not to enter into any financial or credit agreements whilst living at the Supported lodgings carers address.

- Supported lodgings carers who provide placements for young people who were formally Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, and, following their 18th birthday have no recourse to public funds will continue to receive the pre-18 supported lodgings payment rate.
- Supported lodgings carers who provide placements to young people attending higher education courses are paid at the rates set out in the Leaving Care Finance Policy.
- The rate paid to supported lodgings carers who support other young people will be set by the Local Housing Allowance rate for their district/borough council area plus a contribution from the young person.

Post Eighteen Transitions - Supported Lodgings

In circumstances where a young person remains living with the Supported lodgings carer after their 18th birthday the arrangement becomes a private one, between the provider and young person.

A Benefit Adviser from Children and Families service is available to advise with setting up the arrangement.

Supporting, Supervising and visits

Supported lodging carer have an allocated supervising social worker (SSW). The supervising social worker is responsible for ensuring that the supported lodgings carer/s is supported to meet the needs of young people in placement. Formal supervision at the carers home will take place monthly for the first 3 months of any new placement then 3 monthly (although additional visits can be negotiated between the carer and the SSW).

The Supervision visits will be recorded and signed by both parties, the supported lodgings carers keeping a copy with the original remaining on the supported lodgings carer's file. The visits are to discuss placements and look at the supported lodgings carer's training and support needs. The Service requires supported lodgings carers to keep a diary or log of significant events for any young person placed under the age of 18 years and these will be collected by the SSW regularly.

The carers supervising social worker (or duty SSW) will be available by telephone for help and advice during office hours. For after office hours a supported lodging carer can seek support via either the Foster Carer's and Supported Lodging Carer's Support Line Service or the Essex Emergency Duty Service.

All newly approved supported lodgings carers are linked with an experienced supported lodgings 'buddy' who can be contacted for support, advice and assistance. Supported lodgings carers may get together more informally in groups or, on a one to one basis to offer mutual support.

Unannounced visits to carers homes may take place in consultation with the childcare social work team and team manager where considered necessary.

The young person will be seen at home by their own social worker as per the young person's pathway plan.

A yearly review discussion meeting will take place to check all parties are happy with the approval.

Support from a relevant Mental Health co-ordinator can be accessed for the supported lodging carer or the young person in placement, as required.

Review process

Every supported lodging carer must have an annual review which is undertaken by an independent SW and endorsed by the Service Manager. This will incorporate checking their DBS check and medical check are up to date (these are renewed every three years). Supported lodgings carers must be informed of the date of their review meeting well in advance. The review meeting must involve the social worker who is undertaking the review and should involve the supported lodgings supervising social worker. Feedback should be sought from the Young person, their social worker and independent reviewing officer. The first annual review will be presented to Panel.

Supported lodgings carers' own children/young people will always be included in the annual review and their views sought. If they have any specific support or training needs, these will be acknowledged, and every effort made to find a way of meeting these needs. Supported lodgings carers' children/young people can also have access to the supported lodgings carer's supervising social worker at other times if they request it. Children and young people of supported lodgings carers may also have access to the support groups and other events run by the Fostering Service for children and young people of foster carers.

Training

The Supported Lodgings carer's supervising social worker will be responsible for discussing training needs with supported lodgings carers and their families. Supported lodging carers will have access to all fostering training opportunities that are available as identified/agreed in supervision and will be expected to attend identified training in order to meet the needs of young people in their care.

Supported lodgings carer will be invited to attend a yearly Supported Lodging forum/development day and other events organised by the Fostering team.

Training portfolios

Supported Lodging Carers should keep a record of all training completed.

Payment

The Supported Lodging Carers Scheme is not a guaranteed fee-based scheme and applicants should not rely on this as a sole source of income.

Supported Lodging carers receive a fee of £250.00 per week for each young person 16 -18 years old.

Essex County Council will ensure that all supported lodgings carers receive appropriate remuneration for undertaking the supported lodgings task – mileage and parking can be claimed if supporting a Young person to attend an appointment as agreed with the SSW or young persons allocated worker. If an item is not covered in the supported lodgings guidelines, a discussion will take place between the Fostering Team Manager responsible for Supported Lodging and the young person’s team manager to provide an appropriate response.

Holidays/respice

Supported Lodgings Carer’s are supported by either family members, friends or other Supported Lodging carers in their own agreed network. Supported lodgings carers are expected to identify a holiday cover provider who can provide cover when the supported lodgings carer is on holiday or away overnight. Supported Lodging Carers should provide details of the person providing cover and the arrangements they have made for the young person to the SSW. The holiday cover carer will be DBS checked.

Arrangements for the temporary alternative care (temporary overnight stays away from the supported lodgings placement) of young people looked after, or regular contact with family members, friends etc, must be discussed and agreed with parents and young people at the initial Placement Planning Meeting and subsequent Placement Agreement/Placement Plan Meetings, and reviewed at Statutory Reviews.

There is no holiday or respice funding entitlement.

Advocacy

Essex County Council funds individual membership of Fostering Network for all approved supported lodgings carer’s which, amongst other services, provides access to independent advice and advocacy.

Allegations

In the event that a supported lodgings carer is the subject of a child protection allegation against them, they are advised of their right to access the Fostering Network for support.

Child Protection and Safeguarding Concerns:

In the event of a child protection concern or standard of care concern being reported. The Service Manager for the Quadrant Fostering Service will consider the appropriate form of action. It is important to note all concerns are shared with the Essex LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) Service.

The paramount consideration will be given to the current young people placed and whether the concerns are sufficient to seek alternative accommodation until the matter is fully investigated. Where a Young person is moved due to a carer being suspended following an allegation the Supported lodging carer will continue to receive the fee until a decision is made regarding continued approval (Max 6 months).

Supported Lodging Carers will be offered a referral for the Fostering Network by the service whilst the concerns are investigated. Their supervising social worker will continue to offer them ongoing support during this process.

When a concern or allegation is received these will be considered in-line with the SET procedures.

Investigation:

Unless the matter is being investigated by the police, a Standards of Care Investigation will be undertaken by a supervising social worker in the service and their recommendation/s will be reviewed by the Service Manager.

If the recommendation endorses a decision for investigation as a result of an allegation of abuse against a supported lodgings carer, the supported lodgings carers' review will take place immediately after the conclusion of the investigation. If the outcome of the investigation is for the termination of approval of the Supported Lodgings carer this will be presented to the Essex Fostering and Supported Lodgings Panel for recommendation to the ADM

There may also be some occasions when the concerns are not considered serious enough to warrant a formal investigation. This decision would be made after the initial consultation with the Essex LADO and the LADO's advice followed.

Change of Circumstances

A supported lodgings carers' review following a change of circumstances will be referred to the Agency Decision maker. Any request to change approval numbers will be referred to the agency decision maker to authorise.

Exemptions over the usual limit of 3 young people can be granted by the team manager if the exemption is for under one month. If the exemption is required for longer than 1 month the exemption will need to be agreed by the Service manager.

The supported lodgings supervising social worker will complete the Exemption Request form for approval. Exemptions will be tracked, and reminders issued where they appear to have exceeded their approved timescales.

The implications of this must be shared with all parties, including the young person's social worker.

Equality & Diversity

The Service aims to provide culturally sensitive services, and to ensure that all people are treated with equal respect and receive equal access to services. The Supported Lodgings Service operates within Essex County Council's Equal Opportunities Policy.

All training carried out by the Fostering Service workers will reflect anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice and any expressed discrimination will be challenged. Anti-discriminatory practice features in preparation, assessment, training and ongoing support of supported lodgings carers. Supported lodgings carers will be expected to develop the skills to identify and challenge discriminatory practice where it exists.

Supported lodgings carers' and Service User Involvement

- a. The views of young people placed in supported lodgings are sought through feedback throughout the placement and annually for the household review.
- b. Written feedback is requested from the young person's social workers/personal adviser as part of the supported lodgings carer's annual household review and at the end of the placement.

- c. The information gathered is used to influence service planning and improvement and to assist with the development of supported lodgings carer training

Recording and Access to Records

All recording on Mosaic should be made using the case note tab and documents to be uploaded in attachments with a case note signpost.

Case records will include:

A case summary

- The Panel approval letter, giving notice of approval;
- Supported Lodgings Agreement;
- Copies of reviews, notifications of outcomes of reviews, exemptions etc;
- Copy of the original assessment presented to Panel together with any other reports submitted to Panel;
- Any recommendations made by the Panel;
- Where the approval is for a specific young person or general placements;
- Any specific requirements that were attached to the approval.

The case record must also contain:

- A record of each placement made with the supported lodgings carer, including the name, age, ethnicity, religion and sex of each young person placed, the dates on which each placement began and terminated and the circumstances of the termination;
- The information obtained in relation to the assessment, approval, review or termination of approval of the supported lodgings carer;

All files in respect of applicants who are not approved as Supported lodgings carers, or who withdraw their application prior to approval will contain as a minimum:

- All information obtained in connection with the assessment;
- Any reports submitted to the Essex Fostering and Supported Lodgings Panel and any recommendations made by the Panel;
- Any notices given that Essex County Council is mindful not to approve or has not approved the application;
- Any representations received in respect of the above notifications;
- A closing summary.

The Service has a responsibility to maintain accurate records on all supported lodgings carers and to ensure that information is shared with carer wherever possible. There is a statutory requirement to retain files for 10 years following closure. However, in accordance with Essex County Council policy, the practice is to retain records for 75 years. Supported lodgings carers have a right to access their records as per Essex County Council's Subject Access Request guidance. Supported lodgings carers are to keep a logbook for each young person who is placed with them in which to record significant issues, events and contacts. Depending on the seriousness of an incident, this should be reported immediately to the Fostering Service

When young people leave a placement, the young person's information is transferred back to their social worker. Should an internal transfer of placement occur from one provider to another, the information on the young person is transferred to the new provider. All supported lodgings carers' files must, as a minimum, have a detailed chronological list of all young people placed with them.

Boundaries and Confidentiality

Young people will often give gifts, such as chocolates to carers and to refuse these may be considered rejecting. The SSW should be informed of any gifts given to carers. Gifts should only be given to young people by carers within the parameters of the leaving care finance policy and must be recorded.

Under no circumstances should Supported lodgings carers loan money to young people in their care or guarantee any loan arrangement.

Carers should maintain confidentiality regarding all aspects of the young person's situation and circumstances with anyone outside of the professional network for that YP. Information about current or previously placed young people should never be exchanged with other young people. Young people may enquire about other young people that carers have supported in the past and this opportunity should be used to ensure individual young people are made aware that information is confidential to that young person.

In situations where carers have concerns about any aspect of confidentiality or the need to share information, they must always contact their supervising social worker and the young person's social worker for clarity.

Young people must be made aware of the limits to confidentiality when they move to a supported lodgings placement at the placement planning meeting. Young people must be aware that carers have

a duty to share information where it is assessed that the young person is at risk, or the young person is putting others at risk.

Preparation for Independence

The primary task of the supported lodgings carer is to assist the young person to develop practical, emotional, relationship, resilience and financial skills to achieve a successful transition from care to independent living. Within the context of living within the same household, this would include practical tasks such as learning how to shop, cook, budget, laundry, etc.

In addition to the emphasis on preparation for independence, carers should support young people to identify and take part in leisure, volunteering, education, training and employment and other activities and opportunities aimed at improving young people's self-esteem, confidence and economic well-being.

Supported lodgings carers may be required to transport young people to appointments where they are unable to do so independently – there is no requirement to transport young people to school/college or contact. Any arrangements to transport young people must be negotiated with the Young person's social worker.

Health and development

When young people first move to a Supported Lodgings Placement, carers should ensure young people are registered with a:

1. Doctor
2. Dentist,
3. Optician.

In addition, carers should ensure young people are aware of the location of the nearest:

1. Accident and emergency unit;
2. NHS walk-in health centre;
3. Sexual health facility/clinic;
4. Alcohol, drug and substance misuse service;
5. Services related to mental health and emotional well-being.

Supported lodgings carer's have access to the designated nurse for children looked after and care leavers. The designated nurse will provide advice on a full range of health issues, supporting access to specialist medical advice.

Supported Lodgings - 'Notifiable' Events

Supported lodgings carers should have a list of key Essex County Council staff who they should contact if a 'notifiable event' occurs, the list must cover contacts during working hours, evenings and nights and weekends and public holidays. A list of notifiable events is attached as an appendix to this document and will be discussed with the Supported Lodging provider/

Supported lodgings carers – Personal Information

Supported Lodgings carers personal information may be more widely available to young people and as such carers need to be extremely sensitive regarding their personal information and details.

Supported lodgings carers should be particularly careful with personal details such as banking and financial information, health information and any other information that they would not wish young people to have access to. Carers should consider safe storage of personal and sensitive information. Additionally, supported lodgings carers need to consider what personal information, about their history and circumstances, they share with a young person.

Supported lodgings carers should always discuss personal disclosure issues and reasons for the disclosure, in advance of the disclosure, with their supervising social worker.

Social Media

Supported lodgings carers must be extremely careful regarding the use of social networking sites in regard to their own information and the use of sites such as 'Face book'. Where young people develop positive links with extended family members, friends and neighbours of supported lodgings carers, carers should ensure those having contact with young people comply with 'safe caring' and are aware of personal disclosure, confidentiality and keeping sensitive information safe. Carers should consider safe storage of personal and sensitive information.

Making a placement

The Children and Young People's Placement Team will work to try to match young people to an appropriate and suitable supported lodgings placement. Matching criteria include housing authority

local connection, cultural needs, gender issues, racial needs, ability and disability, health, education, training and employment needs.

In addition, the following will be considered:

- Current and predicted future needs of the young person
- The young person's experiences to date
- Nature of the young person's attachments
- The young person's behaviours, responses to particular situations, their likes and fears, hobbies and activities
- Information that will assist the carers to understand the day to day needs of the young person.

Social workers will arrange wherever possible at least one introductory meeting between the young person and the supported lodgings carer. This meeting should take place in the supported lodgings carer's home and should be arranged by the young person's social worker. The introductory meeting should also be used to discuss the 'Supported Lodgings Placement Plan' that sets out the expectations and arrangements for both young person and supported lodgings carer in terms of 'house rules'.

The Placement Agreement/Placement Plan Meeting should be used to finalise the 'Supported Lodgings Placement Agreement' and review the safer carer plan and must take place within five working days of the young person moving to the placement. This meeting will be arranged by the young person's social worker

Notice timescales:

All placement endings should be done in a planned way that enables a young person to move with the appropriate support and should be with the agreement of the carer, the young person and the young persons' social worker.

Change of approval from foster care to Supported lodgings carers

As the role of the supported lodgings carer is different from that of foster carer, a new assessment may need to be considered, particularly where carers were registered for much younger children, or where the assessment was undertaken several years previously. The Team Manager should make this decision.

The Fostering Team Manager will make a decision regarding presenting the foster carer's assessment directly to the ADM to approve.

Prior to a foster carer being transferred to a supported lodgings carer, a transfer meeting should take place to exchange information, which should be used as part of the Change of Circumstances report. Following the transfer from foster carer to supported lodgings carer, a review/transfer meeting should take place to ensure all information and supervision files are transferred to the supported Lodgings Service.

De-registration

Uncontested de-registrations

Where the Supported lodgings carers wishes to resign or agrees with the supported lodgings reviewing social worker's recommendation to de-register, they must be asked to formally tender their resignation in writing to the Team Manager. Where a carer wishes to resign 28 days' notice will be required.

A case closure Form must be completed and returned for the file. The formal termination of approval letter must be recorded on the supported lodgings carer's file and the file closed.

The Head of Permanency, Placements & Sufficiency must be informed and sent a copy of the Termination of Approval Form. The de-registration must be entered on MOSAIC by the SSW.

Contested de-registrations

All cases where the recommendation to de-register is contested by the carers must be referred to Panel for a recommendation to the ADM, supported lodgings carers must be invited to attend and can bring someone to the panel for support purposes only.

Supported lodgings carers must also be formally advised that Panel has the power to recommend de-registration in these circumstances and that it is in the supported lodgings carer's interest to attend to put their view directly to Panel. Supported lodgings carer's do have the right to provide any additional written information in regard to their termination of approval. This would need to be submitted to fostering and supported lodgings panel no later than 5 working days before the panel date.

If the carers wish to appeal, they should use the Complaints process for Children and Families. This would then be considered by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) within 28 days. The panel process for deregistration would continue regardless of any complaints submitted. The ADM must consider if they refer the carer to the Disclosure and Barring service where there has been an allegation of abuse.

[New partners joining Supported lodgings carer households](#)

The supported lodgings carer Agreement requires all supported lodgings carers to notify the Fostering Service in writing without delay of any change in the composition of their household (Regulation 28(5)(b) and Schedule 5 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002).

Any new household members over the age of 18 years must undertake an enhanced DBS check immediately.

Where the new household member is a partner, the following must apply:

- Immediate DBS check;
- The new partner must be informed that there will be an expectation that they will attend training in the same way that any other new supported lodgings carer would be required to do.
- A new assessment of the couple must commence. Supported lodgings carers are not approved as individuals if within a partnership/couple;
- It may be possible to use background information already collected and on file, but it is important that new relationships within the household are explored thoroughly in the assessment, with evidence of checks and competence recorded;
- The couple must be assessed using the standard Form F competencies assessment and presented to the Fostering and Supported Lodging Panel for joint approval;
- All relevant references must be undertaken on the couple, with personal references concentrating on referees who know the applicants as a couple.

Where the new partner refuses to attend the supported lodgings training sessions, or will not engage in a thorough assessment, consideration must be given to the best interests of any young person in placement. If it is felt that their interests would not be served by a change of placement, an interim assessment must be presented to the ADM in the usual way until those young person/people have moved on, at which time the couple would be de-registered.

In circumstances where the new partner is also an Essex County Council approved foster carer or supported lodgings carer, either, individually or with another partner, a review of their approval must be undertaken within 6 months of joining the household. The review should concentrate on the new partnership and should consider carefully the new relationships created within the reconstituted household.

Consideration should be given to the new approval and any effect on any child (children)/young person (people) already in placement. Review assessments will be considered by the Supported Lodging Service manager who will decide the approval.

Young Person's support and Reviews

Each young person under 18 years old who is looked after placed in supported lodgings should have a statutory review within 28 days of becoming looked after, then within a further three months and every six months after that. These are minimum requirements and consideration must be given to bringing forward the date of a review where a young person moves into a new placement.

Copies of minutes should be made available to supported lodgings carers. These meetings are used to look at the needs of the young person and to ensure that the placement is still meeting those needs. If any extra support is needed, this should also be discussed.

The social worker for the young person should visit the young person once in the first week of placement, and then at intervals of six weeks during the first six months of placement, and thereafter visit at intervals of not more than three months. There should be a mutual exchange of information between the young person's social worker and the supported lodgings carer throughout the placement.

Young people's overnight stays.

Young people's views and (depending upon the age of the young person) where possible their parents' views must be sought in relation to overnight stays. Overnight stays including the extent to which supported lodgings carers may give agreement for these to occur, without further permission needs to be agreed with the relevant parent and the young person's social worker as part of the placement planning meeting.

Supported lodgings carers must be made aware and provided with a copy of the Essex County Council - Children Missing from Care Policy and Protocol'. Supported lodgings carers must be clear about the 'Children Missing from Care Policy and Procedures and when to instigate a 'Child Missing Report'.

In reaching a decision concerning the extent of the enquiry's consideration must be given to:

- The need to safeguard and promote the young person's welfare;
- The need to give consideration to the wishes of the young person, as appropriate to their age and understanding;
- The need to obtain the parents' views with regard to their ongoing parental consent, particularly in respect of young people accommodated under Section 20;
- The need for young people approaching and beyond the age of 16 to increasingly make decisions for themselves, taking into consideration the risks these may pose;
- Consideration of the length of the proposed stay.

In some circumstances, where it is clear that relatives or friends will be substantially involved with young people, then it may be more appropriate to approve them as Supported lodgings carers in their own right.

The age, gender, health and circumstances of the proposed temporary supported lodgings carer must be taken into account in assessing the suitability of the arrangements.

Babysitters

Young people placed in supported lodgings placements should not act as babysitters or child minders.

Appropriate adult

If a young person in the supported lodgings placement is arrested the Police may ask the supported lodgings carer to attend the Police Station while the young person is interviewed. The supported lodgings carer should not undertake this, unless, they have had specific training under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act.

It is always preferable to suggest that the young person's parents, a Youth Justice Worker or Solicitor are present if the supported lodgings carer is not confident or trained in this area of work.

Complaints and compliments

Supported lodgings carers and young people living in supported lodgings have a right to make a complaint or express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the service they receive.

Details of how to make a complaint can be found at Essex.gov.uk via the compliance and complaints team.

Essex County Council also have an advocacy service for children in care or care leavers – this is provided by Rethink, Saxon House, 27 Duke Street, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 1HT 0300 7900 559 – essexadvocacy@rethink.org

Insurance Cover

Supported lodgings carers should ensure they inform their insurance provider (buildings, contents and car insurance) that they are providing supported lodgings. Supported lodgings carers should ensure they have appropriate insurance cover. Supported Lodgings carers will be covered by ECC's Public Liability Insurance.

Transport and Motor Vehicle Insurance

Supported lodgings providers who transport young people must ensure they have:

- A valid driving licence.
- A valid MOT certificate.
- A valid road vehicle tax.
- Valid comprehensive business motor vehicle insurance cover.

Tenancy and Mortgage Issues

Supported lodgings carers should advise their landlord, or mortgage provider that they are providing supported lodgings placements to young people between the ages of 16 & 17 (18 plus). Failure to disclose this information may have an impact on the supported lodgings carer's tenancy status, or on their mortgage agreement.

Safe caring guidelines

Essex County Council requires safe caring guidelines to be provided, based on a written policy, for each supported lodging provider, in consultation with the provider and everyone else in the household. These guidelines must be cleared with each young person's social worker and be explained clearly and appropriately to the young person.

Assessing Supported Lodgings Social Workers should ensure that guidelines are produced during the assessment process. Assessing Supported Lodgings Social Workers should ensure that all members of the household are involved in this process and agreement is reached on the final guidelines.

Review of guidelines

Safe caring guidelines will need to be revised as the circumstances of the supported lodgings household change.

This should be done immediately if there are significant changes such as someone joining the household, or the carers move to a new house. In such cases the revised guidelines will need to be cleared with the Social Worker of any child/young person in placement.

The guidelines should also be considered at the point of every young person's Placement Agreement/Placement Plan or Placement Agreement/Placement Plan Review to ensure they remain up to date and appropriate.

Guidance on preventing and responding to bullying

Essex County Council Supported Lodging Services seeks to ensure that supported lodgings providers are aware of the particular vulnerability of Children Looked After and their susceptibility to bullying, and put in place procedures to recognise, record and address any instance of bullying.

Missing Policies and Procedures

The nature of the supported lodgings provider role is likely to mean that providers have a higher degree of contact with a young person and are more aware of their whereabouts. However, supported lodgings providers should also follow ECC guidance, verify a young person's location and confirm their welfare, and liaise with the young person's social worker/supervising social worker where there are any concerns regarding a young person's circumstances or whereabouts