

WORCESTERSHIRE
CHILDREN FIRST
Fostering



WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU UNDERGO A FAMILY, FRIENDS OR CONNECTED PERSONS ASSESSMENT



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
LEGAL BACKGROUND	4
FAMILY, FRIENDS OR CONNECTED PERSONS ASSESSMENTS	5
BEING A FAMILY, FRIENDS OR CONNECTED PERSONS FOSTER CARER COMES WITH SUPPORT AND ALSO SOME REQUIREMENTS	9
SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDERS (SGO) AND WORCESTERSHIRE CHILDREN FIRST SGO FINANCIAL SUPPORT POLICY	13
OTHER PROFESSIONALS YOU WILL BE WORKING WITH	14
SUPPORTING PARENTS AND BIRTH FAMILY CONTACT	15
HOW WE WILL SEEK CHILDREN'S VIEWS ON THEIR LIVED EXPERIENCES WITH YOU AS A FAMILY, FRIENDS OR CONNECTED PERSONS FOSTER CARER	15
HOW WE WILL SEEK YOUR VIEW ON THE EXPERIENCES OF BEING A FAMILY, FRIENDS OR CONNECTED PERSONS FOSTER CARER FOR WCFE	16
ALLEGATION MADE AGAINST FOSTER CARER - PROCESS	16
SONS AND DAUGHTERS AND OTHER HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS	17
OTHER SOURCES OF SUPPORT	18





INTRODUCTION

We recognise that being asked to undergo a family, friends or connected persons assessment can be a worrying time for you and might come at a time that your family is experiencing challenging times. This booklet is aimed to help with understanding the legal context, the assessment process and how you will be supported during the journey as well as what you can expect from Worcestershire Children First Fostering (WCFF).

Family, friends and connected people that look after a child who is not their son or daughter are also known as kinship carers.

LEGAL BACKGROUND

When there are serious concerns about the way that a child or children are being looked after by their parents Worcestershire Children First work with those parents to see if they can change the way they look after their children. When concerns do not improve with support, parents are sometimes told that care proceedings need to take place. Care proceedings are what happen when a local authority goes to court and asks a Judge if a child can be taken into care.

A Judge can make several decisions as an outcome of care proceedings, and it is not possible for us to predict the outcome as the final decision will always be made by the Court. However, some of the possible outcomes are:

- The child/ren could be returned/remain living with either of their parents.
- The child/ren could live permanently with a member of the extended family.
- The child/ren could live permanently in long term foster care with a Local Authority Foster Carer.
- The child/ren could be adopted by a person unknown to the family.

If it is decided a child can't remain or return to their parent's care the court may make an interim care order or a full care order and that child becomes looked after with the Local Authority holding parental responsibility for them.

One of the key principles of the 1989 Children's Act is that children or young people should be enabled to live within their birth families unless this is not considered safe, so at the final hearing the Court will usually consider the different options in the following order:

- Should the child/ren live with either of the parents? If the answer is no, then
- Should the child/ren live with anyone else in the family? If no, then
- Should the child/ren be placed in for adoption? If no, then
- Should the child/ren stay in a long-term foster placement?



FAMILY, FRIENDS OR CONNECTED PERSONS ASSESSMENTS

If the court decides a child or children can't remain in their parent's care then the court next looks to see if anyone within their family or already connected to them in another way, can step in and take on their care.

To make that important decision the court and social workers making plans for children need to know more about the family and friends who may be willing to look after the child and social workers in the WCVF kinship team are asked to carry out assessments looking at this.

Viability Assessments

A viability assessment is a short initial consideration how you as family members or connected people would care for the child, how you would meet their needs, keep them safe and support them to grow up happy and settled in your care.

Sometimes several viability assessments are carried out on different family members for the same child or children, we will carry out up to a maximum of three viability assessments on maternal family and three on paternal family. This means there may be more than one with an outcome recommending further assessment. In those circumstances, social workers in partnership with the child's family wherever possible, decide which family member or connected person should go on to have a family, friends or connected persons assessment with the others being asked to support that person or act as a contingency plan if the ongoing assessment raises unexpected difficulties or concerns.

Family, Friends or Connected Persons Assessments

When a viability assessment is positive about how you may be able to care for a child, a recommendation is made for a family, friends or connected persons assessment to take place. This is a more detailed assessment, covering many of the same areas as the viability assessment, but in more depth, over a period of between 8 and 16 weeks of social work visits. We are also required to complete some statutory checks as part of the assessment, for instance a police check, a medical assessment and reference checks are required, sometimes these include checks with ex partners and adult children of the person being considered. We know this can feel daunting and a bit intrusive at times, so our social workers will do their best to keep you informed and support you through the process.

Full family, friends or connected persons assessments can lead to different forms of permanent care with family members.

Special Guardianship Orders

For some children and young people permanence or becoming settled may be achieved through the court making the child the subject of a Special Guardianship Order (SGO), either through a Private Law Application or as the outcome of Care Proceedings. The person in whose favour the Special Guardianship Order is made has parental responsibility to the exclusion of others with parental responsibility except another Special Guardian and is responsible for ensuring the child is safe and their care needs are met.

SGOs are normally only made when an arrangement has been tried and tested, so the court can be confident the carers can meet the child's needs without the support and supervision of children's services and social workers.

Children who are Looked After

For other children, particularly when the arrangement is new, being settled, comes from living with family and friends under the legal status of a Looked After Child and in those circumstances their carers must be approved foster carers. You will be notified in writing following the half way point of your assessment if we are considering you for a possible fostering arrangement and we will seek your agreement to continue. If you do not agree with the assessment outcome/recommendation, from that point, you can still request that fostering panel considers your case.

A child may become looked after in a number of different ways:

- a. because the Local Authority has been granted Parental Responsibility via an Interim Care Order or Care Order
- b. because the Local Authority has agreed with the person with Parental Responsibility, usually a parent, that it is in the child's best interest to become Looked After
- c. because the child has been remanded to the care of the Local Authority by the Youth Court in respect of criminal charges.

Children should only become or remain Looked After when it is necessary to ensure that they are safe, and their needs are being met. When children are looked after and placed with family and friends this should be regularly reviewed and consideration given to whether an SGO would be appropriate. It is important to ensure that children and their families are not experiencing an unnecessary level of involvement from social workers and support to them can be provided under an SGO.

Temporarily Approved Foster Carers

Occasionally a child or children can become looked after in an emergency to ensure their safety under a part of the Care Planning Regulations 2010 known as Reg 24. When this is necessary, Worcestershire Children First (WCF) has a responsibility, wherever possible, to decide for the child to live with a member of their family. This means in exceptional circumstances, a child may be placed, as an immediate placement, with a relative, friend or connected person who has not yet been approved as a foster carer at fostering panel. These carers become temporarily approved foster carers while assessments and panel consideration can take place. Please see more details about fostering panel below.

Fostering Panel

Fostering panel is a group of individuals who consider people as foster carers after reading their family, friends or connected persons assessment completed by the fostering social worker. Panel members may be professionals from health, education and social care, but they also include people like care leavers, other foster carers and kinship carers. You and your assessing social worker, along with the social worker for the child or children will be part of the meeting and panel members may want to ask you some questions. Panel members will consider all the information and make a recommendation about someone's suitability to care for a child as a foster carer. This recommendation then goes to an individual known as the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who makes a final decision about approval as a family, friends or connected persons foster carer. You can read more on assessment and approval in our policy.

Assessment and Approval of Kinship Carers

www.worcestershire.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/11565/64256_



Family and Friends assessment can feel a complicated path, especially when you find yourself in this position unexpectedly. The process map below may be useful

1

The Local Authority become aware that there are serious concerns about the way that a child or children are being looked after by their parents. Worcestershire Children First social workers work with those parents to see if they can change the way they look after their children.

2

When concerns do not improve with support the Children's Team ask each birth parent if they would like to identify up to 3 family members or friends who want to be considered as alternative carers for their child/children through a viability assessment.

3

Viability Assessment is completed by a social worker with the family member and a recommendation is made about suitability for further assessment.

4

Kinship team undertake a full family, friends or connected persons assessment, the outcome can be to recommend suitability for a fostering arrangement, a special guardianship arrangement or a child arrangements order. We will confirm in writing following the half way point of your assessment if we are considering you for a possible fostering arrangement. If you do not agree with the assessment outcome, from that point, you can still request that fostering panel considers your case. The recommendation made by the fostering social worker as the outcome of your assessment can also be challenged as part of any ongoing care proceeding for the child or children assessment.

5

Fostering Panel consideration for fostering arrangements

6

Agency Decision Maker for fostering arrangements

7

The Children's Social Work team decide the child's care plan

8

For cases in care proceedings the Court agree an order. If you don't agree with your assessment outcome, it can be challenged through the court process.

BEING A FAMILY, FRIENDS OR CONNECTED PERSONS FOSTER CARER COMES WITH SUPPORT AND ALSO SOME REQUIREMENTS

Training offer and expectations

We want to support family members and friends who are having a family, friends or connected persons assessment to develop their knowledge and understanding of the needs of the child and also about becoming a foster carer.

We run kinship preparation training over five sessions of three hours each, either online in Teams meetings or face to face. This not only covers the needs of the child or children you may be caring for, but it also looks at the court process, working with social workers and the requirements of becoming a foster carer.

Family members undergoing the family, friends or connected persons assessment are expected to complete the following online training courses during the assessment period:

- Emergency First Aid
- Safeguarding
- Safer Caring
- Understanding Behaviour and Attachment
- Valuing Difference

Approved foster carers, are expected to complete further training on an ongoing basis. This includes their Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS) portfolio within the required timescale of 18 months post approval. Your fostering social worker can support you with this and we also run workshops to make this easier for you.

WCFF has an extensive training programme for foster carers. This includes both mandatory courses which all foster carers must complete and developmental courses which support carers to further develop their skills and knowledge in caring for looked after children.

Support and Supervision

If you become a temporarily approved foster carer in an emergency or a fully approved foster carer considered at fostering panel, you will have an allocated fostering social worker who will offer you ongoing support and supervision. Your fostering social worker may or may not be the same social worker who carried out your family, friends or connected persons assessment.

Support Visits - Your fostering social worker will have face to face contact with you monthly unless otherwise agreed between you and the kinship fostering team manager. Usual face to face contact will normally be a home visit but may on occasion be at a child's review or another meeting where the fostering social worker can discuss with you any support needs for you or the child.

Formal Supervision – All WCCFF foster carers will have more detailed supervision at least quarterly. This focusses on how you can meet the child or children's needs. Where foster carers are a couple, it is important both members are available to meet with the social worker at least twice a year, but we can be reasonably flexible about the day and or time of these visits to accommodate any working commitments. Your fostering social worker will also carry out at least one unannounced visit to your home a year. You can read more about supervision and support of foster carers in our policy.

Supervision policy

www.worcestershire.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/11564/64256_post_

Foster Carer Recording

All foster carers are required to complete records in the form of weekly written recording on the child or children in their care and these are shared with social workers. The child may request to view these records when they reach adulthood, and they can provide a valuable record of the child's life as well as being useful for identifying patterns of behaviour and needs.

Please see WCCFF Guidance for Foster carers on recording for more information

WCCFF Guidance for Foster carers on recording

www.worcestershire.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/11561/64256_guidance_for_foster_carers_on_recording_v01.pdf

Financial support

As a fully approved foster carer you will receive a fostering allowance and a fostering fee. If you are a temporarily approved foster carer (Reg 24) you will receive a fostering allowance and once fully approved at fostering panel you will also receive a fostering fee. All fees and allowances are paid fortnightly in arrears direct to your bank. There are other allowances that can be claimed to help with setup up costs.



Foster Care Allowance (FCA)

Once approved you will receive a fostering allowance from WCFF to enable you to look after the child or children placed with you, this also applies to temporarily approved foster carers under Reg 24. The amount varies according to the age of the child and is in line with the National Minimum Fostering Allowance which is set by the Government each year. This is a “maintenance” allowance and should be used to cover the cost of caring for the child placed e.g., food, clothing, leisure activities, personal allowance contribution to household costs, day to day mileage or travel costs. For more information please see the financial support to foster carers policy.

Financial support

www.worcestershire.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/11567/64256_financial_support_to_foster_carers_v0

Fostering Fee

Once carers have been considered at fostering panel and are fully approved, in addition to the foster carer allowance, WCFF pay foster carers a fee element in recognition of the work they do. WCFF has a payment for fees scheme which pays a weekly fee per child to foster carers, including family and friend foster carers, who have a child or children placed with them; this is paid on one of four levels. The criteria that foster carers must meet for each of the fee levels is set out in WCFF Payment for Skills policy.

Payment for Skills Policy

www.worcestershire.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/11569/64256_payment_for_skills_v01.pdf

Payment Arrangements

The FCA and the fee is paid fortnightly in arrears. Fees and allowances are reviewed annually and information on the fees and age related FCA will be sent to carers at the beginning of each financial year. Foster carers receive payment through the BACS system, which allows for transfer of the payment directly into the recipient's bank account. A mandate to set up payment through BACS is available from the finance department. Foster carers will receive an electronic fortnightly remittance slip which will set out the payment they are receiving. Foster carers should retain this to assist with their tax returns at the end of the financial year. It can take around 3 weeks to set up regular payments, but in exceptional circumstances, we can provide limited emergency financial support while regular payments are put in place. This is something you will need to discuss with your fostering social worker.

In addition to the FCA you will have membership with Foster Talk who will be able to advise you on tax exemptions and benefit eligibility/impact on benefits.

Other Allowances

In addition to FCA and the fostering fee, other payments are available to support you care of the child or children, these include:

Setting up costs at the start of the arrangement, birthday and festival allowance to help with presents and expenses, family holiday expenses, some carer car mileage for family time, specialist health appointments and school runs when school is over three miles away.

More information about Financial Support to Foster Carers can be found in the policy.

Financial Support to Foster Carers

www.worcestershire.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/11567/64256_financial_support_to_foster_carers_v01.pdf

SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDERS (SGO) AND WORCESTERSHIRE CHILDREN FIRST SGO FINANCIAL SUPPORT POLICY

Special Guardianship is one of the primary routes to permanency for a child. It can offer a child the security, safety and stability they need and deserve, supporting children to remain with their extended family and friends rather than growing up in foster care. We aim to give children and young people the best placements and wherever possible for children to return to or remain with their own family.

A Special Guardianship Order places a child or young person with someone permanently and gives this person (the Special Guardian) parental responsibility for the child. This Order lasts until the child is 18 and shares the legal responsibility for the child with the child's birth parents, allowing the Special Guardian to make day-to-day decisions about the child's care including where they live and go to school.

If the child was previously looked after, prior to the making of a Special Guardianship Order, they will no longer be the responsibility of the local authority. Special Guardians will have a Support Plan and Financial Support is available to most Special Guardians. The Special Guardianship Order Financial Support policy sets out the parameters of financial support for Special Guardianship Carers. A copy of the SGO Financial Support Policy can be requested.



OTHER PROFESSIONALS YOU WILL BE WORKING WITH INCLUDE

The Fostering Social Worker (FSW)

The fostering social worker (FSW) is responsible for fostering and supporting the foster carer, and their household. The FSW will visit you at least monthly and undertake supervision every 12 weeks, in addition to weekly telephone calls when needed. The FSW is responsible for supporting you in your role as a family and friends foster carer to ensure you work to and meet the Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards.

The Child or Young Person's Social Worker

The child or young person's social worker is responsible for the individual Care Plan for the particular child or young person. They will need to work closely with the child or young person placed with you as well as with you as the foster carer.

The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

The IRO is responsible for reviewing the Care Plan for each child or young person who is looked after. No significant change to the care plan can be made unless it has been considered first at a statutory Child Looked After (CLA) Review, unless this is not reasonably practicable. The IRO will chair the statutory review for the child or young person. As foster carers, you should be given the name of the IRO for the child or young person you are looking after. Although the social worker should inform the IRO of such changes, as the foster carer you are also able to contact the IRO direct if you have any concerns or you consider that actions are not being undertaken when they should be.



SUPPORTING PARENTS AND BIRTH FAMILY CONTACT

WCFF recognise how important it is for children and young people to maintain family links with parents and wider family members. As family, friends or connected persons foster carers you will be supported, if needed, to facilitate, encourage and supervise family time contact in line with the child's care plan.

There are times when individual circumstances and levels of risk mean it is not appropriate for foster carers to supervise family time, in such cases we will arrange for family time to be supervised by our Contact Team.

HOW WE WILL SEEK CHILDREN'S VIEWS ON THEIR LIVED EXPERIENCES WITH YOU AS A FAMILY, FRIENDS OR CONNECTED PERSONS FOSTER CARER

Listening and responding to the voices of the child placed with WCFF is central to all we do, and we encourage feedback and participation from children and young people in a variety of ways.

We meet with young people who are part of a local forum for children who are Looked After to enable sharing of views and feedback from children and young people. We also have encouraged children and young people in both kinship and mainstream WCFF placements to form an engagement and advisory group on specific issues or projects.

We carry out an annual survey to collect children and young people's views and feedback to help us improve our service.

Our social workers spend time with all the children and young people placed with our foster carers on a regular basis. They do this to get to know those children as individuals, listen to their wishes and feelings and to gain a sense of that child or children's lived experience on a day-to-day basis.

There is a WCFF Children and Young People's newsletter that is sent to all our households. Children in our placements were involved in the planning and development stages of setting this up and since it was launched in early 2022, they have also been the main contributors for the newsletter contents with articles on their interests and sporting activities, as well as sharing artwork and recipes they enjoy cooking.

HOW WE WILL SEEK YOUR VIEW ON THE EXPERIENCES OF BEING A FAMILY, FRIENDS OR CONNECTED PERSONS FOSTER CARER FOR WCFF

Your feedback as adults and carers within our service is also very important to us. Your allocated fostering social worker will talk to you about your views as part of regular support and supervision meetings. You will also be asked for feedback on how you have found your fostering role and working with WCFF as part of an annual carer review.

Our regular quality assurance checks include themed audits that focus in depth on our service to individual families. You may be contacted as part of these to be asked for your experience of working with us.

ALLEGATION MADE AGAINST FOSTER CARER - PROCESS

An allegation is an accusation that someone has caused harm to a child by physical, sexual or emotional abuse. Anyone in a foster family may be accused of harming a child, including the foster carer's own children. An allegation may be made by the child, or by someone acting on their behalf, such as a birth parent, or teacher. WCFF has a duty to investigate 'allegations of harm' as well as look into allegations of poor standards of care (sometimes referred to as a complaint). Although this is a necessary process, it can put the accused foster carer and their family under considerable emotional strain.

WCFF will continue to provide you with advice and support during the investigation process. Often, your fostering social worker will continue to be the best person to support you as they will already have a relationship with you. However, contact with your social worker may change particularly if they are involved in investigating the allegation. For this reason, WCFF will provide you with details of a service who can provide you with independent support and advice at what is often a difficult time. For more information about the process for managing allegations against foster carers, please read WCFF Safeguarding Policy.

Safeguarding Policy

www.worcestershire.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/11588/64256_safeguarding_policy_v01.pdf



SONS AND DAUGHTERS AND OTHER HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS

WCFF recognises the important contribution that your own children and other household members make to the child or children that joins your family. Their views will be included where possible as part of your family, friends or connected persons assessment. Before we think about a child or children joining your household, we try to think about the impact that may have on other children already living there and how we can support them.

During your supervision as a foster carer, the fostering social worker will discuss the well-being of all members of the household and if there are any concerns how these can be addressed and what support needs to be put in place. This may include the fostering social worker doing some direct work with a household member. Fostering social workers will meet with members of the household as part of the foster carer's review and may seek their views at other times as appropriate.

WCFF will celebrate the contribution of your own children including organising events during the annual national sons and daughters' month and ensure that they get the recognition they deserve.



OTHER SOURCES OF SUPPORT

WCFF Buddy Foster Carers

We can link you up with a Buddy Foster Carer during the assessment stage or at any time after approval when the need arises. Our Buddy Foster Carers are experienced family and friends carers who have undergone similar experiences to those that you may be experiencing as new foster carers.

WCFF SMILE Groups

Are face to face support group for friends and family foster carers. Online SMILE groups are also held for our family and friends foster carers that live out of county. They are an opportunity to meet other foster carers in similar situations, to share experiences, make friends and support each other.

WCFF - Facebook Foster Carer Group

We have a private WCFF Facebook Group you can request to join

www.facebook.com/groups/1005238786171778

Kinship Carers UK -

www.kinshipcarersuk.com

“Kinship Carers UK is a national charity that supports and advises family and friends’ carers often called Kinship Carers or Connected Carers that are thinking of taking on the role of parenting someone else’s child.”



Family Rights Group

www.frg.org.uk

“The Family Rights Group promotes policies and practices that keep children safe within their family and strengthen the family and community networks of those children who cannot live at home.”

Kinship - The Kinship Care Charity

www.kinship.org.uk

Kinship is a leading kinship care charity in England and Wales. “For all kinship carers – the grandparents and siblings, the aunts, uncles, and family friends who step up to raise children when their parents can’t.”

FosterTalk Membership

www.fostertalk.org

We pay for foster carers annual membership of FosterTalk, for Special Guardians we pay for the first three years membership.

Please note that all the policies that are referred to in this leaflet can be found in the Foster Carer Handbook on the WCFF website

www.worcestershire.gov.uk/info/20929/foster_and_kinship_carers_zone/2103/foster_and_kinship_carers_important_documents

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