



Handbook for Bracknell Forest Carers



A-Z of INFORMATION FOR FOSTER CARERS

Contents

A-Z of INFORMATION FOR FOSTER CARERS.....	2
BABY SITTING.....	3
BACK-UP CARERS.....	3
BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT	4
BIRTH CERTIFICATE.....	5
CCTV IN FOSTER HOMES	5
CHANGE IN CIRCUMSTANCES	7
CLOTHES.....	7
COMPLAINTS	8
CONTACT	10
DELEGATED RESPONSIBILITY.....	12
DISABILITIES.....	12
EQUIPMENT.....	13
FAMILY.....	13
FOSTERING 4 BRACKNELL ASSOCIATION.....	14
FOSTERING NETWORK.....	14
HEALTH & SAFETY	15
HEALTH OF CHILDREN IN CARE.....	18
HOLIDAYS	22
INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY	22
INDEPENDENT VISITORS	23
INSPECTIONS.....	23
INSURANCE.....	24
LIFTING	26
MENTORING	27
MONEY MATTERS.....	27
OVERNIGHT STAYS.....	29
PASSPORTS29	
PETS	30
POCKET MONEY AND SAVINGS.....	31
PRIVATE FOSTERING.....	32
PUBLICITY AND YOUR FOSTER CHILD	32
PUPIL PREMIUM PLUS	33
RECORDS	34
REFER A FRIEND SCHEME	36
RESPIRE AND DAY CARE.....	36
SiLSiP.....	38
SMOKING AND e CIGARETTES.....	39
SLEEPOVERS.....	40
SOCIAL WORKERS.....	41
SUPPORT.....	44
TRAINING.....	45
TRAINING, SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS for FOSTER CARE ..	45

BABY SITTING

Babysitters should be 18 years old or older, known to and agreed by the foster carer under the delegated authority process.

People who provide day care or overnight care as a regular arrangement should be assessed either under delegated authority or as named relief carers for your foster child and this should include a DBS check.

The baby sitter / temporary carer must have details of your whereabouts and know how to contact you. Other telephone numbers which may be needed in an emergency e.g. if the child becomes unwell, should also be left with the sitter.

The fostering allowance includes babysitting costs.

Talk to your supervising social worker if you have any worries or doubts about your baby sitting arrangements.

BACK-UP CARERS

Bracknell foster carers are encouraged to have a back-up carer. It can be your friend, neighbour or relative, who lives near you and will know your foster child through regular family contact. Back-up carers may be used for baby/child sitting to enable you to attend meetings and activities such as the following:

- Training and recruitment
- Helping with preparation groups
- Helping with policy development
- Attending planning/review meetings
- Attending foster care support groups and social events
- In absolute emergencies i.e. hospital treatment is needed

With the exception of emergencies, the use of back-up carers needs to be agreed in advance with your supervising social worker. The aim is to enable you to attend the meetings and events that you need and would like to attend.

The Department must be kept informed of any changes or incidents, for example you must tell us when you plan to use your back-up carer. In the event of emergency use, you should notify us as soon as possible afterwards.

In exceptional circumstances your back-up carer may care for a child for one or two overnights. If you plan to use your back-up carer for longer than this, e.g. to go on holiday for a couple of weeks, then the carer will need to be assessed under the Fostering Regulations and go through the Foster Panel process for approval. In these situations your back-up carer is paid the foster care allowance instead of you.

Usually we ask you to find back-up carers from your own network. Back-up carers are people who are interested in supporting you as foster carers. This could be a relative or friend whom you have known for at least two years, are able to trust, who you would be happy to care for your own children.

Requirements

- Your back-up carer will need to complete an application form and have the relevant checks i.e. DBS and Local authority checks
- Your back-up carer will need to be visited by the supervising social worker and issues such as confidentiality, sanctions and dealing with emergencies fully explained. A document on these issues will be left with the back-up carer. The supervising social worker will ensure that the back-up carer's home is suitable for foster children.
- Your carer will need to show that they understand the role required of them and that they would meet the needs of the child in care.
- Your back-up carer will permit the Local Authority to visit at any time when the child is in placement. If a period of planned regular relief care is envisaged then the supervising social worker will visit as needed. This will be agreed at the Planning meeting for the child. Occasionally a social worker will make an unannounced visit.
- The information on the child and family must be kept confidential.
- Your back-up carer must allow contact with the child's family as agreed by the Local Authority / Courts.

The back-up carer will be paid the current Bracknell Forest rate for your back-up care provision. However, if back-up carers are used for baby-sitting, it is expected that this is paid by you from your fostering allowance.

BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT

Children and young people in care will often have experienced neglect, abuse and trauma all of which will have a significant impact on their behaviour. The children and young people placed with foster carers are likely to display a variety of challenging behaviours which foster carers will be expected to manage.

Support is provided in managing challenging behaviour both through training and supervision. Wherever possible carers will be provided with information about how the child/young person's behaviour has been managed in the past. The Family Placement Team has a policy on behaviour management which is available from your supervising social worker. Foster carers should be particularly aware they are never to use any form of corporal punishment. You will be expected to agree, in writing, that you will not administer corporal punishment as part of your Foster Carer Agreement.

All issues relating to behaviour management should be clearly recorded as part of your daily and monthly recording requirements.

Whilst all foster carers will have their own set of house rules which children and young people will be expected to know and adhere to, it is important to remember that any behaviour management strategies you use should be tailored to meet the individual needs of the children and young people in placement and must be discussed with both their social worker and your supervising social worker.

Further information regarding the training and support provided in managing children and young people's behaviour can be sought via your supervising social worker.

BIRTH CERTIFICATE

This is an important document belonging to the child. The social worker will usually have a copy on the child's file.

CCTV IN FOSTER HOMES

Introduction

We live in a data-driven world and the use of CCTV systems can feel both protective and intrusive. Whilst the use of CCTV could be a way of providing an additional protection to vulnerable children and young people, it can also have adverse implications for their privacy and dignity, particularly if filming is proposed to include bedroom areas.

Legislative and Regulatory issues

Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 state that 'no child placed with a foster parent is subject to any measure of control, restraint or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable'. Given that the use of CCTV in foster homes will usually give rise to "continuous supervision" of a child/young person, CCTV should not be used to monitor the behaviour or actions of children or young people in the home. Adults who work with and look after the young person in care need to offer care, patience, presence and hope and none of these can be replaced or implemented via 24/7 surveillance.

The use of CCTV, in your own your property, was exempt from the Data Protection Act 1998 and, this continues to be so under The General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) 2018 and Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018. Use of CCTV does not require anybody else's permission to fit the cameras if you own your home but, if you rent, you will need written permission from the landlord or owner of the property before installing it. The Information Commissioners Office, the UK's independent body set up to uphold information rights, in their guidance on 'Using CCTV on your property'* state that regardless of whether a person's CCTV system is exempt that it is used in a

responsible way to protect the privacy of others. The guiding principle throughout the deployment of CCTV equipment should be checking at each stage 'that its use is necessary and not disproportionate'.

Aim of Policy

To provide clear information to foster carers regarding the use of CCTV's to support and enable them to provide safe, stimulating and nurturing homes for children and young people.

Purpose

To clarify Bracknell Forest's expectations and to provide explicit guidance regarding surveillance systems to those foster carers who are considering using recording devices to monitor somebody's wellbeing in their own homes.

Policy

Bracknell Forest expects their Foster carers to promote positive behaviour in children and young people through the care they provide, and to help to manage negative behaviour through building positive relationships rather than relying on punishment, restraint and/or surveillance.

The use CCTV would be a measure of control considered excessive or unreasonable where there are other less intrusive behaviour management options available e.g.

- Discuss home rules with children and young people from the start of the placement
- Recognise and reward good behaviour
- Avoid reactive strategies and promote a nurturing approach to behaviour management (i.e. active listening, humour, relocating from one room to another etc)
- Observe children and young people to try and identify triggers, patterns, causes for undesirable behaviour and work with the child about their behaviour in a constructive manner
- Always stay calm and let them know that you are there and you care

If a child or young person's welfare requires invasive video surveillance, then it should be considered whether fostering is the right type of placement for them.

CCTV or similar surveillance systems must not be sited in foster carer's home without discussion. Carers who are worried about a child in their home, should first raise these concerns with their Supervising Social Worker, child's Social Worker and Life Chances Team Manager. These professionals will explore the concerns and consider alternative options, if necessary, (for example light motions sensors or alarms.).

If a foster carer felt that there was an exceptional reason for using CCTV, or other video surveillance, within the home they will be required to make a request to the professionals outlining these exceptional circumstances.

If permission is granted a written agreement addressing where the cameras are positioned, why they are in use and when, who is responsible for the camera(s) and what happens to the footage in terms of storage and retention of images will be required.

The decision must be shared with parents, or person holding parental responsibility and, if age appropriate, with the child or young person, and their consent to the use of video equipment obtained.

Baby monitors are a listening device. They are used to check a young baby's welfare when an adult is not in the same room, for example, if a baby is sleeping during the day. Baby monitors should not be used as a form of supervision for babies and children.

CHANGE IN CIRCUMSTANCES

You are required to inform us (usually through your supervising social worker or the child's social worker) as soon as possible should there be any change in your family circumstances e.g. change or loss of job, illness, someone else coming to live in your home, pregnancy, separation etc. We need to consider, with you, the possible impact of the change for any child in placement or your capacity to foster either in the short or longer term. Significant changes in circumstances may need to be reassessed and referred to the Foster Panel for review.

CLOTHES

If children are placed with you on a short term basis, it is hoped that children will bring their own clothing with them, wherever possible. If it has not been possible to obtain their clothing and toys when they left home, ask the worker to pursue this for you.

If children arrive with little or no spare clothing, you will need to discuss an initial clothing grant with your supervising social worker at the time of placement, particularly for placements that are intended to be for longer than a few days or weeks. You will also need to discuss a clothing grant when a child starts a new school, as badged items will be covered.

Any clothing bought for a child should be considered as theirs and they should usually keep it if they leave your home.

For short term placements where a clothing allowance is given, children may only be with you for a short time. It is important to be sensitive about the possible impact on a child and their family when a child returns to them with clothing, hairstyles and items they may not be able to afford to provide themselves. Therefore it is essential that wherever possible parents are involved in decisions about clothing etc.

Where the plan for a child is to remain with you on a longer term basis, an initial clothing allowance may be considered to cover the cost of providing clothing that the child is going to need. You may feel that one or two personal items may give them the pleasure of ownership and perhaps make them feel similarly treated to other members of the family.

Receipts are required for any clothing grants agreed, and it is advisable to retain receipts for any clothing purchased over the previous 1-12 months in the event of any queries, e.g. while children are subject to care proceedings.

COMPLAINTS

In trying to meet the needs of children and families not able to live together, it is inevitable that disagreements and conflicts will occasionally arise. You might wish to complain yourself or, alternatively, other people may have a concern or criticism about you and the care you offer.

A complaint can be made about any service which the law says must be provided or could be provided by the Children, Young People & Learning Department. We are legally required to have a complaints procedure in place. It is designed to be positive and to make sure that the staff in the Children, Young People & Learning Department listens to the views of people who use our services. As this is a move nationally towards giving members of the public more rights to comment on services they use, this may affect foster carers through the Departmental complaints procedure.

Foster carers may complain on their own behalf or on behalf of a child. In such cases this procedure will be followed. All issues are taken seriously and we try to resolve them to your satisfaction.

Training is available for foster carers about the complaints procedures, so please ask for details. The procedures refer to the Berkshire Local Safeguarding Children Board's Child Protection Procedures, which are available on line:

<http://proceduresonline.com/berks/>

Although we have adjusted the language very slightly, much of this section has been taken from Departmental documents and will have more formal language. If you do not understand parts of it, please ask.

Complaints from or about Foster Carers

It is important to note that foster carers are not employees of the Department. Procedures relating to the conduct and management of employees do not apply. The agreement between the Department and foster carer is formalised within the overall Foster Care Agreement, which should be in place for all carers registered by Bracknell. The Agreement specifies the carer's duties in looking after the child and working with the service and the duty of the service to support them. Additionally, the Department and carer agree a Placement Plan concerning the placement of an individual child which will set out those duties as they apply in particular cases.

Scope

Within the complaints procedure, complaints may be received by the Department from or about foster carers. These may be from individuals complaining on their own behalf or on behalf of a child, or a child may complain in their own right.

Informal Resolution

In all cases every effort must be made to resolve the complaint informally, through discussion and negotiation, with an appreciation of the complainant's concerns being shown by officers. Officers must always consider how the complainant's concerns can/may be met through existing operational procedures and their desired outcomes achieved, without recourse to the formal complaints procedure.

It is important for meetings to take place directly between the complainant, foster carer and key staff in order that the difficulties can be discussed and possible solutions reached. Staff should always seek guidance from their line managers about how this may be achieved. Written records should always be kept about what actions are taken and what discussions have taken place whilst attempts are made to resolve the complaint informally.

Acknowledgment and Information to the Carer

The complaint should be acknowledged by the person who receives it within three days and referred to the Family Placement Team Manager.

The Supervising Social Worker and the child's Social Worker should then arrange to discuss the nature of the complaint with the complainant.

Complaints from Children

Where the complaint is about the foster carer's conduct, permission should be sought from the complainant for the nature of the complaint to be shared with the foster carer. The status of the foster carer as an agent for the Department in caring for an individual child(ren) should be explained to them. The only exception to this is when child protection issues make this inadvisable because it may compromise an investigation. If the nature of the complaint relates to an allegation against a foster carer or the conduct of a foster carer, the procedure for dealing with allegations and/or monitoring the conduct of foster carers must be followed as set out in Section 4 of the Fostering Service Policy and Procedure. (This policy and procedure is contained in Section 1 of the handbook)

Child Protection and Complaints Procedures

It is sometimes difficult to separate out which procedures are to be followed. For example, a complaint from a foster child or carer may bring to light a serious allegation which needs further action under the Child Protection Procedures. Furthermore, a complaint by a foster carer may indicate concerns relating to members of staff which may need to be referred to managers for investigation. It is the primary duty of the service is to promote the welfare of the child. If there is uncertainty about which procedure takes priority there should be discussion with the Head of Service (Looked After Children) and where appropriate the Complaints Manager to determine how to proceed. If action is being taken under the Child Protection Procedures, or if a foster carer review following an allegation is taking place, it may be necessary to advise the complainant that there are priority actions to be taken to protect the child before their complaint can be dealt with.

The Statutory Complaints Procedure

Where it is not possible for a complaint to be resolved informally to the satisfaction of the complainant they must be made aware of their rights to make a formal complaint. The Head of Service (Looked After Children) will then discuss the matter with the Complaints Manager. It is important at this stage to clarify with the Complaints Manager whether the complainant is a “qualifying individual”, eligible to use the statutory complaints procedure. The Statutory Complaints Procedure may then be used.

The Statutory Complaints Procedure is published on the Department’s public website.

CONTACT

Local authorities have a legal duty to promote contact between children who are Looked After, their parents, relatives and other people who are important to the child. Expectations on promoting contact are also outlined in Section 10 of the Fostering Minimum Standards. Foster carers have a responsibility to promote contact, and the Local Authority has a duty to ensure that carers are in the best position to make contact as safe and enjoyable as possible for the child. Foster carers are usually expected to provide transport to contact.

The child’s social worker is required to provide foster carers with the necessary information about contact including any assessment of risk for those involved. The needs, wishes and feelings of the children are also central to planning contact. The child’s social worker coordinates contact, including frequency, location and the supervision required.

Contact is particularly important for children and young people who are at risk of losing their sense of identity with specific aspects of their cultural heritage. Children with dual heritage or who may be placed with carers who are not a

cultural match, need to maintain their links with their family, friends and community so that their cultural history is encouraged and valued.

Children may ask to have contact with relatives or friends they may have lost touch with prior to being Looked After. This is often an expression of loss for children and positive steps should be taken to re-establish these relationships if it is appropriate for the child. Contact does not have to be face to face and can take the form of phone calls, exchanging letters or emails, photographs or cards from holidays or special occasions.

Experienced foster carers will know that contact can have its difficulties. In some circumstances it may be clear that contact will not benefit children or could be damaging depending on the risks involved. The courts have the power to restrict contact if they decide it is not in the child's best interests. Contact can also cause distress for children, and foster carers are often the people who have to deal with this when a child feels confused or disappointed. This can be emotionally difficult for foster carers who feel frustrated that the family is letting the child down, but, there are many possible reasons parents and family members find contact stressful.

They may feel guilty or angry that their children are being looked after in foster care. Children are often placed in an emergency when the family is experiencing overwhelming problems and loss of control in their lives.

Parents may also feel they have failed their children, which can affect their motivation and reliability. These feelings may lead to parents behaving in ways which appear inappropriate during contact. They may be very emotional, give their children unrealistic messages or promise gifts.

Dealing with the difficulties this can cause for the child can be hard to manage, but understanding the parents' experience can help to make sense of the situation for the child as well as the family. The Placement Planning meeting, involving the carers and parents, can help parents with their fears and clarify how arrangements can work best for the child.

Foster carers can also make invaluable contributions to the plans for children by recording the behaviour of children in relation to contact. This may identify patterns which can contribute to decision making. It is also important that contact is discussed in formal supervision with the carer's supervising social worker so that issues can be shared and hopefully resolved. When it is considered safe and appropriate, it can be beneficial for the carer to facilitate contact either in the carer's home or at an agreed venue. This can increase the child's sense of security, when the people who are important to the child are comfortable with each other, and can be less threatening for parents and other family members.

DELEGATED RESPONSIBILITY

Parental Responsibility for children in foster care is held by the birth mother, usually the birth father, and sometimes another adult in the family. If the child is the subject of a Care Order the Local Authority will also share Parental Responsibility.

In practical terms, day to day decisions about the child's care are given to (delegated to) the foster carer with whom the child is living. This is discussed at the Placement Planning meeting where specific issues are agreed. Carers can be delegated to agree to such things as school outings, 'sleep-overs' and attending health appointments without the parents.

Not all day to day activities can be delegated, for example applying for passports, authorising holidays abroad and other significant issues will need to be done through the child's social worker. If in doubt, please speak to your supervising social worker.

DISABILITIES

Children are regarded as children first, whether or not they have a disability. The range of disabilities is broad; it includes physical disability, sensory impairment (for example a child who cannot see or hear very well) and learning disability. Some children have more than one disability. The extent of disability can also vary from very mild to profound. A disability stays with a child, unlike an illness when recovery is possible.

Children with disabilities may need foster placements for a variety of reasons. There may be family problems that are not connected to the disability. Sometimes a 'short break' placement is needed to give the child and his/her parents a regular break; or a child may need the benefits of family life as an alternative to residential care.

Caring for a child with a disability can demand special qualities in foster carers; a lot of patience may be needed, and sometimes a willingness to provide more physical care than most children require. There may be frequent contact with doctors, nurses, occupational therapists and others. Altogether the demands on the foster carer in terms of time and energy are likely to be great.

There are plenty of possible rewards to be found in caring for a child with a disability. When a foster carer knows the child well, small signs of progress can be very significant, especially when they are the result of hard work by the foster carer. Helping to improve a child's quality of life can be fun and there can be a good team spirit when a foster carer works together with the child's parents and other professionals.

Each child with a disability will receive specific services and support to help him/her to maximise his/her potential and to lead as full a life as possible, including appropriate equipment and, where necessary and appropriate, adaptation of the carer's home and/or vehicle.

If the child is profoundly disabled he or she may require lifting. Please read the section about 'Lifting' in this A-Z for guidance. Foster carers who look after children with disabilities often build up specialised knowledge and skills as well as good relationships with care professionals in the Health and Education Departments.

EQUIPMENT

Most foster carers will already have the basic equipment needed to care for the age range of children they are approved for, such as bed, cot, push chair, stair gate etc. However, if you do not have suitable equipment for a specific placement, e.g. a sibling group or a child with special needs, please discuss this with your supervising social worker or contact the duty worker. We can arrange a loan of equipment from another foster carer, or purchase new equipment if needed. If you take equipment on loan, or it is purchased, you are expected to return it at such time as you no longer need it or cease fostering. The items remain the property of the Department, to be used by other foster carers. Please note the agreement of the team manager is needed before any equipment is purchased.

Your supervising social worker or other members of the team will be able to help you find information and guidance to help you prepare for or actually look after children from different racial, cultural and religious origins from your own, and children with special needs.

FAMILY

In foster care there are two families that are particularly important - your family and the child's family.

Your family:

There is growing awareness of the effects fostering can have on foster carers' own children. Children and young people can themselves make positive contributions to a child's experience of being looked after in foster care. However, it is important to remember that fostering can have an impact on your own children and that at times they may need extra support, encouragement and reassurance because of it.

We are always ready to look at ways to acknowledge the involvement of foster carer's children. One of the ways we do this is by providing everyone who lives in the household with the same free access to the Council's leisure

facilities as provided to looked after children. Where there are sufficient numbers we will run groups for children and young people and invite all the household to most of the social activities to minimise any sense of inequality that can sometimes arise.

We also want to raise awareness generally about the issue by encouraging discussion in adult foster carer support groups and through training. Caring for a foster child will affect your family and it takes time for everyone to adjust to someone new living with them. Your own children may be jealous. Be aware that this may happen and when you have to give one child more time and attention than another, try to help the other child to understand why and to remember to give him/her some extra time as well.

Remember not to neglect other adult members of your family too - you are all important and need to support each other.

Try not to introduce the child to too many aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins and friends early on; give him or her time to know you a little before getting to know other members of your family, and encourage your own children to help with this.

The Child's Family: See section on "Contact".

FOSTERING 4 BRACKNELL ASSOCIATION

Fostering 4 Bracknell Association is the local association for Bracknell's foster carers. There are regular meetings to discuss issues as well as social events throughout the year.

The association can also provide support to individual carers and a place to share any issues. They also support the Family Placement Team at recruitment and training events.

There is an Annual General Meeting to elect Officers to the posts of Chair Person, Treasurer and Secretary.

The Association can be contacted by email on f.4.ba@hotmail.com or ask your supervising social worker for the contact details of the Officers.

FOSTERING NETWORK

Fostering Network is a charity working throughout the United Kingdom to promote and improve the quality of the foster care service. In Bracknell Forest we value the work of Fostering Network and consult with colleagues regularly about new projects we are working on, or specific queries we may have in relation to the Regulations and Standards for foster care.

Bracknell Forest foster carers will become members of Fostering Network once they are approved. The subscription is paid by the Family Placement Team for as long as the carers remain registered and approved with Bracknell Forest Children's Social Care. This means that you should regularly receive "Foster Care" magazine, Foster Care Finance updates and new leaflets produced by Fostering Network.

The Fostering Network provides members with free legal advice and assistance in certain circumstances.

HEALTH & SAFETY

The Department follows the Fostering Network's recommendations about safety in the home of a person who is applying to look after other people's children. There are specific questions contained in a 'Health and Safety Checklist' that you need to think about when young children are to be placed. They are discussed prior to your approval as carers and regularly checked out during placement.

Health and safety is largely a matter of common sense and practical organisation but it is important to be aware of safety issues, especially when caring for very young children or children with learning delays or difficulties. Being aware of risks is most important. Children coming into your care will not be used to your home at first and issues about safety may come up for you and for them. Also, they are not likely to have had clear boundaries about safety in the past and may not be aware of "common danger" in the way that your own children may be.

The following information on safety inside and outdoors is provided as guidance.

Safety and young children in your care

FIXED NURSERY TYPE FIREGUARDS should be used in any room where there is a fire or heater in use. When not in use, the appliance should be disconnected. For open fires, please use a spark guard as well. All portable heaters should be of British Standard Institute approved design and with a safety device.

STAIRS should be enclosed or fitted with banisters. The space between vertical banisters should not be more than 4", horizontal banisters should not be more than 4" apart. Horizontal banisters offering footholds should be covered. A sheet of clear plastic or hardboard cut to size and screwed over the horizontal banisters is an effective safety device. Please note that horizontal banisters no longer comply with building regulations, although they may be present in properties built before the new regulations came into force.

STAIRGATES should be used where appropriate. A child should not be able to gain unsupervised access to a kitchen whilst cooking is in progress. Homemade gates and barriers can be effective. British Standards are:

The top of the gate should be at least 2'5" (76 cm) from the floor. Any bars should be between 2" – 3" (6cm – 8.5cm) apart. There should be no footholds to help a child climb over. (A piece of hardboard of the correct size that slides between runners is a quick, efficient barrier).

WINDOWS upstairs should be made secure to prevent accidental opening, but to permit limited ventilation if required. Make sure keys are kept safely at hand in case of fire.

DANGEROUS liquids, powders, medicines, alcohol, aerosols, matches, sharp knives must all be out of reach of the children. Safety catches for cupboards and drawers are widely available (Mothercare and Boots).

ALWAYS LOCK MEDICINES OUT OF SIGHT. See also "Medication Safety" under 'Medical Matters' in this A – Z.

DOORS fitted with glass must have safety glass or be covered with protective plastic film. A transfer placed on patio doors will remind children where the door is.

ELECTRIC SOCKETS at a low level should be fitted with a plastic cover when not in use. It is best to avoid coloured or patterned socket covers, which may attract children.

BALCONY DOORS must be secured.

BATHROOMS should not have any electrical equipment other than a pull cord switch.

In General

Be careful of trailing tablecloths, dangling blind cords and HOT DRINKS. Please do not leave glass or other breakables, mirrors, etc where children may fall on them. Always remember that your own safety is as important as the children's. An accident to yourself could cause considerable difficulty and could frighten the children.

Ensure that you talk to children about evacuation plans and what they should do if there is a fire or other reason to get out of the home.

Outdoor safety for under 5's

The outdoor play area should be securely fenced and gated – children in your care must not be able to leave unsupervised. Minimum height of fences should be at least one metre.

Sheds and garages should be secured, especially when used to store weed killers, pesticides, paraffin etc., as well as tools and garden equipment. Foster carers should take care to protect children from the hazards of a green

house. Sandpits should be covered. Ponds must be covered with rigid mesh. Water butts should be covered. Swimming pools should be fenced and secured. Children should be supervised when using a paddling pool. Foster carers' should make sure that their dogs have not fouled the area. All children in cars should be secured in an appropriate car seat/booster seat.

Smoke Alarms and Carbon Monoxide Alarms

You need to be aware of the need for fire safety; one in nine deaths in the home is of a child under five.

At least one smoke alarm should be fitted to the ceiling on each floor level in your home

The best place for a smoke alarm is where you can easily hear them, ideally in hallways and landings;

Smoke alarms should be properly maintained - test your alarms weekly and replace the battery every year, unless a 10 year battery is fitted.

Carbon Monoxide Alarms

Carbon Monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas that is produced when any fossil fuel such as gas, coal, oil or wood is burnt without enough oxygen. You can't see it, smell it or taste it so you don't know when it is present.

A build-up of Carbon Monoxide can be extremely dangerous and can cause a variety of symptoms, or even death. **Foster carers must ensure that all heating and cooking appliances are serviced regularly and a CO detector is fitted in the foster home.**

HEALTH OF CHILDREN IN CARE

Roles and Responsibilities

All professional working with children and young people have a duty to promote their physical and mental health and wellbeing.

In conjunction with the children's Social Workers, Foster Carers must make sure that Looked After Children and Young People placed with you are registered with a GP and see a dentist regularly, as well as having support including special equipment required for any particular health needs.

It is the responsibility of the child/young person's Social Worker to ensure that all information about a child's health condition is obtained and passed on to foster carers so that they are aware of known health conditions and can take appropriate measures to ensure the safety of the child. Foster carers will receive a summary of any health concerns identified from the Social Worker following the Looked After Child's Initial Health Assessment.

Foster carers have a responsibility to seek medical advice and gather information to enable them to promote the child's health and wellbeing.

Why Looked After Children have greater Health Needs

Looked After Children are known to have greater health needs than other children. Their early experiences are often in families affected by alcohol, substance misuse and/or domestic violence. Many have experienced abuse and neglect. As well as the emotional and behavioural difficulties these children may have, they often miss out on routine health screens, have incomplete immunisations or unfinished treatment by specialist health professionals.

Feelings of loss and abandonment may make the child very anxious, fearing further rejection and uncertainty. This can make the child want to control what is happening around them. They may have little regard for rules, be bossy or provocative. They may be prone to unpredictable outbursts and disruptive behaviour.

These children need calm environments and clear boundaries and routines. It's also a good idea to give them advance notice of upcoming changes.

Specialist Nurse for Looked After Children

The Specialist Nurse for Looked After Children is a Registered Nurse with further specialist qualifications and training. They are experienced in the health issues and difficulties which can affect children in care. The Specialist Nurses are responsible for coordinating the health care for all children in care within their locality and also provide support, advice and training to Foster Carers, Social Workers and the Leaving Care Service. The Specialist Nurse also works closely with Health Visitors, School Nurses and other health

professionals, to ensure that the health needs of children in care are prioritised. They have a wide range of contacts within the NHS, who they are able to call on if more specific help or advice is needed.

It is their job to work both strategically, to put into place services to address the needs of this group of children, and also to work closely with Social Workers and Foster Carers. The Specialist Nurse will undertake some health assessments herself or organise other health professionals to do this. You can contact the Specialist Nurse for Bracknell Forest via your Supervising Social Worker.

The Health Assessment

All children new to care require their statutory Initial Health Assessment which provides an in-depth overview of general health, emotional wellbeing, development, past health problems and future care.

The Looked After Children's Health Team will arrange the Initial Health Assessment upon receipt of a referral from Children's Social Care. The Initial Health Assessment is a legal requirement and should be completed within 20 working days of the child becoming Looked After. The Assessment will be carried out by a qualified Health Professional. You will need to accompany the child or young person to the Health Assessment appointment, along with the child's Social Worker.

After the Health Assessment you will receive a copy of the Summary and Recommendations from the Social Worker which gives details of identified needs and who will be responsible for seeing these needs are met and a date for this to be achieved.

Please let your Supervising Social Worker or the Specialist Nurse for Looked After Children know when the child has immunisations or appointments with health professionals so the child's records can be updated.

Review health assessments can be done by the Specialist Nurse for Looked After Children, Health Visitor or School Nurse. For children under five, further health assessments will be done 6 monthly. For children aged five and over these are carried out annually.

The Health Assessment is a holistic assessment of the child's physical and emotional health and well-being. The Health Assessment is an assessment that all Looked After Children are entitled to and which is beneficial to them in ensuring all their health needs are met.

What carers can do to help

Foster Carers need to know what 'health care' means for the physical, mental, emotional and sexual health of children and young people placed within their care. They need to have an understanding of children and young people's health and hygiene needs, including allergies and infections control

procedures. They need to have an understanding of first aid and know how to access emergency medical treatment and know what procedures to follow in relation to medication and health care procedures including what consent is required.

Here are some examples of how you can meet a child or young person's health needs -

Ensure any Looked After child placed with you is registered with a GP Surgery as soon as possible.

The foster carer should apply for full registration within 1 week of a child being placed with them. They should ensure that the GP Surgery understands that the child is in care and that they should request the records from the previous GP via the fast track system. The GP is always sent a copy of the Health Assessment by the Looked After Children's Health Team, including Summary and Recommendations after each assessment.

Ensure that any Looked After Child placed with you is registered with a Dentist and attends for an initial routine dental check as soon as possible (if required/appropriate) and continues to do so six monthly or as advised.

All children should be registered with a dentist from aged 3 years and attending dental appointments. Children aged 2 and above should accompany the carer and family's dental appointments to become accustomed to the procedures.

Ensure that any Looked After Child placed with you attends for a routine vision check (if required/appropriate) and continues to do so annually or as advised.

Children aged 5 years and over should routinely have an annual vision test unless advised otherwise by an orthoptist or optician. Concerns regarding vision for any age may need a referral to an orthoptist.

Ensure that any Looked After Child placed with you has all immunisations as per the routine immunisation schedule.

Foster carers should refer to the delegated authority checklist to see what has been delegated to them. In most cases foster carers are expected to organise non-emergency health appointments, such as dentists and opticians, with the permission of the person with parental responsibility. If the child requires emergency treatment, foster carers should make the necessary arrangements and then contact the child's Social Worker (or out of hours the Emergency Response Team). If the treatment is urgent the attending doctors will generally treat the child first and then afterwards deal with the issue of consent. It is good practice for foster carers to record any medication the child is taking whether it is prescribed by the child's GP or not. When a child arrives at a foster carer's home for the first time they should find out from the child's Social Worker if the child is taking any medication, what it is, when it is taken and how often and if the child suffers from any allergies.

NB: Carers should contact their Specialist Nurse for Looked After Children or their Supervising Social Worker if they experience any difficulties in registering a child with a GP or dentist.

Your role as a Carer is essential in ensuring good health for the children in your care. You can:

- Accurately record all medicines, doctor and health appointments, and any treatments the child may have
- Provide a healthy home that encourages and supports healthy eating and exercise
- Help the child make the most of school, hobbies, sport and arts
- Understand the need for children to feel worthwhile and good about themselves
- Support children by giving them information, answering questions and helping them to understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle
- Help them to have contact with their parents as agreed in their plans
- Foster carers should encourage children to lead healthy lifestyles and to take part in positive activities which contribute to physical and mental health

Consent to Medical Treatment

As a foster carer you do not have the right to consent to medical treatment for the child in your care. This can only be done by the Social Worker or birth parent, depending on the child's legal status. This will be discussed in the Initial Placement Planning Meeting. You should always check with your Supervising Social Worker to ensure you understand exactly what you are authorised to do.

Young people aged 16 and over can make their own decisions about treatment and sharing of their health information, providing they fully understand the consequences of their decision. In some circumstances younger children have the same rights.

Promoting Health

You cannot assume the child in your care will have been taught any of the basics of health such as brushing their teeth or washing properly. They may need help with all aspects of living healthily. Your Health Visitor or School

Nurse will always help with any of these aspects of health promotion, or contact the Specialist Nurse.

If you feel unsure about answering questions or talking about puberty or sexual health please ask for help.

HOLIDAYS

Holidays/Outings in the UK

It is expected that any child/young person placed with foster carers will be treated as a member of the carer's family and will be included in family holidays. In some circumstances permission is required before a child/young person can be away from the foster carer's address overnight, even if they are accompanied by the foster carers. This could include school trips. Therefore before you make any arrangements, you should contact your supervising social worker to discuss your plans.

Holidays Abroad

If foster carers are thinking of taking a holiday abroad with a foster child, you will need to give the child's social worker plenty of notice. The particular legal status of the child/young person can have an effect on whether it is possible for them to leave the country. There may also be other reasons a holiday abroad might not be in the best interest of the young person.

If it is possible for the young person to leave the country, obtaining a passport can be a lengthy process, as can obtaining the permissions and agreements required by the law. Therefore please make sure that you inform the child's social worker in plenty of time in order to avoid any disappointment.

Payment for children's passports is included in the Child's Allowance paid to foster carers. A letter of delegated consent will also be needed when taking a foster child outside of the U.K. Do not be put off by this list of apparent difficulties. Many carers and the children placed with them have wonderful foreign holidays, but like most holidays, make sure you make your arrangements in plenty of time.

INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY

Foster carers often advocate on behalf of a child or young person in an informal way. For example, explaining to the school or social worker how a child is feeling and what they would like to change. However, sometimes when the different adults in their lives (parents, carers and social workers) disagree or when children and young people need support to share their views and express their feelings, meeting with an Independent Advocate can be a helpful way to support them. Independent Advocates do not work for

Bracknell Forest Council. They will make sure young people get their views across and their voice heard. An Independent Advocate can support a young person at a Looked After Children Review meeting, Personal Education Plan meeting, to make a complaint if they are unhappy about their care or any meeting where they need support to have their say.

If you think your foster child is in need of support through Independent Advocacy, please contact the child's Social Worker or your Supervising Social, and they can make a referral. Alternatively, you can contact the Child Participation Development Officer on 01344 351 546.

INDEPENDENT VISITORS

An Independent Visitor is someone who is not part of Bracknell Forest Council and is not a social worker or foster carer. Independent Visitors are volunteers, who visit the young person regularly. They are someone the child or young person can talk to, have fun with and someone who can offer young people help and support. They are matched to a young person with similar likes and dislikes so they get on. Young people can ask for an Independent Visitor at any time if you they think it would be good for them. Young people can be referred by their Social Worker, and then there will probably be a wait whilst we find the right volunteer. To find out more contact the Child Participation Development Officer on 01344 351 546.

INSPECTIONS

Children's services, including the fostering service, are inspected by Ofsted every three years. The Inspection reviews the fostering services' performance against the Fostering Service National Minimum Standards, Fostering Service Regulations 2002 and The Fostering Services (Amendment) Regulations 2009.

Foster carers are often asked to give their views about the service and may be asked to participate in an interview with an inspector. It is important to remember that the fostering service is being reviewed, not the foster carer.

INSURANCE

As foster carers you need to let your insurance company/ies know that you act as foster carers for the Department.

You need to notify:

- House (Contents) Insurers
- House (Building) Insurers
- Car Insurers (cars need to have fully comprehensive insurance)

Foster carers should initially approach their own insurers when making a claim. If your own insurance company refuses to cover any accidents/damage caused by a fostered child, please ask for this to be confirmed in writing. The written confirmation should be given to your supervising social worker who will approach the Council's Insurance section.

All foster carers' home contents are covered under the council's insurance. All claims are subject to a £250 excess.

Please note that all claims to the Council's Insurance section must be made through the Family Placement Team. The main areas of your insurance protection will be car, house contents and building.

Household Insurance

- You need to notify the company providing your household insurance that you act as foster carers for the Council.
- You need to make sure that the insurance cover you have in place meets your needs.
- You need to check the details of your insurance cover about damage, loss or theft of property.

Example of a letter to your Insurance Company:

*Dear Sirs,
Re Policy Number:*

I am/we are foster carer(s) for Bracknell Forest Borough Council Children's Social Care Department. As well as our own family we will have children living in our home whose ages will range from to

We would be grateful for acknowledgement of this letter and confirmation that for the purpose of insurance, any children we are looking after in our home within the provisions of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 are regarded as members of our family. Also, please confirm that the public and personal liability clause of our policy includes foster children.

Yours faithfully

When you are approved as a carer, it is essential that you ensure that you have adequate household building, contents and vehicle insurance cover and that you notify your insurance company of the tasks you will be undertaking. You must tell them of any particular difficulties associated with someone living with you, such as severe disability. If insurance companies are not given full information, any claim could be refused on the grounds that they were not made fully aware of all the circumstances relating to your household.

Therefore, we would strongly advise all carers to seek professional guidance about insurance cover, and check personal accident insurance and cover for legal expenses, as well as building, contents and vehicle insurance.

If you own your property, you need to inform the insurers of the building that you act as foster carers for the Department.

If you are a tenant of the property, you need to notify the landlord in writing that you act as foster carers and to ask that this information is available to their insurers.

If you are subsequently charged with an offence you will need further legal assistance. You may be able to claim Legal Aid. If you are an individual member of Fostering Network their leaflet advises that legal expenses for criminal prosecutions will only be paid on a not guilty plea and if the solicitor acting for you feels that you have a good case. In those situations, claims would be paid even if a finding of guilty is made.

Please refer to The Fostering Network's guidance:
<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/being-foster-carer/home-insurance-foster-carers>

Motor Insurance and Car Safety

As foster carers you often need to transport children in your car – as part of daily living and sometimes to attend meetings or to visit family.

It is essential that any children are transported safely and that the legal requirements for the driver and the vehicle are met.

If you drive children in your care or arrange for another to do so on your behalf, you need to be sure that the driver has:

- A full driving licence
- Comprehensive insurance
- An MOT Certificate (if appropriate)

You need to advise the company with which you have car insurance, in writing, that you are foster carers. They may require you to have business cover i.e., class 1 business use. Third party cover is a minimum legal requirement. We would strongly advise you to have fully comprehensive cover

in place so that any accidental or deliberate damage to your vehicle is covered.

If a friend or relative transports a child for whom you are responsible, you need to be confident that they meet all legal requirements, including appropriate insurance cover.

LIFTING

If you are looking after a child with disabilities, his or her physical needs may be such that you and other members of your family are regularly involved in lifting the child. Training about lifting and handling safely is available and can be arranged for you.

The same basic guidance applies whether lifting children, furniture or heavy objects

- Do not attempt to lift anything you are not physically capable of.
- Wherever possible lift together with another person.
- Stand with your feet apart to give you a firm base and keep your back straight.
- Bend your hips and knees to reach the child, so that you are using your strong muscles to lift, and not your back.
- Hold the child close to you, use a firm but comfortable grip, using your whole hand, and not just finger tips.
- Keep your back straight, do not "twist".
- Avoid unnecessary lifting.

Points to Remember:

- Keep yourself fit.
- Wear loose clothing and flat, safe shoes.
- Remove high heels or ill-fitting shoes.
- Remove watches and jewellery that might scratch.
- Prepare the area in which you are lifting.
- Clear away furniture and mats that may be in the way.
- Check you have enough space.
- Before the lifting, decide who is to lead the lift, count into the lift to ensure everyone moves together.
- Choose the right method of lifting.
- Assess how much the child can do for themselves - do they need to be lifted?
- Explain to the child what you want them to do and what you will do:
 - check brakes and remove or turn back foot plates of wheelchairs;
 - check the height of the furniture; if necessary do two small lifts;
 - never rush lifting, go at the child's speed not yours.
- In the event of a child falling:
 - reassure the child and calm them down;

- do not rush to get them to their feet - once on the floor they are safe and cannot fall again;
- if the child is hurt you may need to seek medical advice;
- always let the child's social worker know if a child is injured, however slightly;
- keep a written record of what happened.

MENTORING

Bracknell Forest Council offers new foster carers a mentor. Mentors are experienced foster carers themselves so they understand how daunting and uncertain it can feel as you go through the assessment process, panel and then when you get your first placements.

Having a mentor can help you:

- With your queries around the assessment process and going to panel
- Early placements and challenging situations. As a carer your first placement can be a steep learning curve – a mentor can help you understand how to settle a new child/young person in to your home
- Understand what is expected of you as foster carer for local authority, school and medical meetings
- To learn what support is available and how to access it
- Provide support and guidance for new and challenging situations
- Be somebody you can share thoughts and concerns with, who understands what you are going through and won't judge you
- Keep motivated and remind you of the great job you are doing!

MONEY MATTERS

Fostering Allowances

These are reviewed annually and information is sent out to foster carers each year which sets out the current rates and what is included in the allowances.

Subscriptions to Fostering Network

In Bracknell Forest we pay the annual subscriptions for foster carers to belong to Fostering Network. This means that you will be provided with membership which includes online access to information about money matters, including details about Income Tax and State Benefits.

Child Benefit

Child Benefit is not payable for children looked after by the Local Authority. For more information about benefits in general see Fostering Network's

'Finances' or ask for details from your supervising social worker or Family Placement Team.

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/finances>

School meals

Children Looked After are not entitled to free school meals, so provision is the responsibility of the foster carer.

Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

Sometimes referred to as DLA – this is a tax-free benefit for children and adults who need help with personal care or have walking difficulties because they are physically or mentally disabled or need constant supervision to keep themselves or others safe.

Foster carers can be eligible to claim this allowance on behalf of a child or young person who meets the criteria.

If the child you are looking after has a high level of care needed for his/her age, you may want to talk about this allowance with your supervising social worker or the child's social worker.

A successful claim does not affect the amount of foster placement allowance payable.

Income Tax

Foster carers are treated as self-employed for tax purposes. There is a specific tax scheme foster carers can use called qualifying care relief. The scheme calculates a tax threshold unique to the fostering household which determines if a foster carer has to pay any tax from their fostering.

Anyone who is self-employed must register to pay Class 2 National Insurance Contributions. If a foster carer's taxable profit from self-employment is nil or below £5,965 (2016-17) they automatically qualify for the Small Profit Threshold (SPT) and will be exempt from paying the contributions.

The individual circumstances of the foster carer will determine if this is the best option for them or whether they have to make other arrangements to maintain their national insurance record.

The Fostering Network provides helpful information and guidance on tax and national insurance.

For more information refer to:

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/finances/tax-and-national-insurance>

Alternatively, you can find the most up to date information at HM Revenue and Customs website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/tax-credits-forms-notes-worksheets-and-checklists>

OVERNIGHT STAYS

Children in care should as far as possible be allowed overnight stays in the same way as their peers. Only where there are exceptional reasons should the permission of the local authority be required or restrictions placed on overnight stays. In such cases, the restriction should be clearly stated in the child's care plan. Wherever practicable the child should be consulted and their views and feelings taken into account in reaching the decision. The restriction and the reasons for it should be explained to the child. Restrictions should be reviewed regularly to ensure that they remain relevant.

There is no statutory duty for DBS checks to be carried out on adults in a private household where a child may stay overnight. DBS checks should not normally be sought as a precondition of an overnight stay.

Decisions on overnight stays should in most circumstances be delegated to foster carers, and arrangements for such decisions written into the Placement Plan.

DBS checks should however be carried out on adults in a household if the child is to stay frequently or regularly, or if the child is to stay for a prolonged period.

Foster carers should ensure that they have contact details for the household in which the child is staying. They should also make contact with the household beforehand as a parent might, to confirm arrangements and ensure that a child staying overnight has the foster carer's contact details.

If the child is to attend an organised camp, e.g. school, guides, scouts etc, written permission from the parents should normally be sought through the child's social worker.

PASSPORTS

If you require a passport for a child in your care you should always consult the child's social worker.

Permission for the child to travel abroad may need to be obtained from the child's birth parents, Children's Social Care or the Court. Make sure that you raise the issue in plenty of time.

Depending on the individual circumstances of the children or young people in your care their passport may be kept either by their parents, social worker or by you.

PETS

Your pets can help children settle when they move into your family. Sometimes children feel safe with a dog or cat that does not answer back and may like to talk to them and tell them things. Equally, children may feel jealous of pets, resenting their place in the family and can behave spitefully towards them, sometimes when no one is looking.

It is important to remember that children's experiences of animals may be very different from those of your own children and family. They may have seen animals teased and abused and may think that this is an acceptable way to treat them.

Please do not leave children you are looking after in a room alone with a dog or cat, even for a short while. No matter how docile and relaxed your trusted family pet may be, he/she may naturally respond angrily to a sudden action from a child which hurts or shocks the animal. Please do not risk this. For us, the child would have to come first, whatever the circumstances, if he or she were hurt. We would then need to talk with you about safe care and future arrangements.

We will have talked with you about your pets during your assessment as foster carers and during the completion of the Health and Safety Checklist, which is reviewed annually. Please let us know of changes in their health or temperament that may affect the care of a child.

In terms of health issues for young children, please make sure that they are not allowed to play in areas of the garden used by pets for toileting. Young children can pick up serious infections from pets' mess, and this is something we would all want to avoid.

Dogs

Whilst most dogs make good companions, some are prohibited as pets by the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 (amended 2014). Your supervising social worker will be able to advise you about this in relation to fostering.

The safety of a child should be paramount. It is the responsibility of the dog owner to demonstrate the dog's ability to cope with children and that he/she (the owner) has a responsible attitude and a good understanding of the issues involved.

It is important to know whether the dog has lived with children, still lives with children or has any experience of children. Was this experience positive?

Size of the dog could be important, especially where vulnerable children are involved. However, much will depend on the particular dog's temperament

and the way in which they are managed in the home. Foster carers must supervise both the child and dog at all times, to ensure the child's safety.

Cats

Cats should be kept separate from children if they are at all aggressive, bad tempered or likely to harm the child. Particular care should be taken to prevent cats using prams, pushchairs or cots as beds. Cats should be regularly dewormed and treated for fleas.

Small caged animals

Small caged animals such as mice, hamsters, guinea pigs, rabbits and caged birds provide a great deal of interest to young children. However, children should only be allowed to handle these animals under adult supervision and cages should be kept clean and should not be positioned where they can be pulled over by a child. Again, caged animals should be protected against vermin infestation.

Aquarium fish present no particular dangers to children but the glass should be considered as a hazard alongside all other household glass.

Other animals, which may be kept by foster carers, should be considered on an individual basis during the assessment process and annually under the Health and Safety check.

General

Are your pets:

Kept in a hygienic condition?

Wormed regularly?

Used to children?

Well disciplined?

Is the pet food kept out of the reach of small children?

POCKET MONEY AND SAVINGS

Pocket Money

A payment of pocket money must be made to each child and allowance for this has been made in the allowance paid to foster carers for each child. The amount will be at the discretion of the Foster Carer after discussion with the supervising social worker and the child's social worker. Foster Carers should take into account factors such as:-

- Amounts paid to friends and peers
- The general family patterns
- The child's own capacity to accept responsibility

- Encouragement to save towards planned expenditure

Young people should not use their own pocket money to fund activities which can reasonably be expected to be paid from the fostering allowances. Pocket money should cover individual items such as sweets, magazines, CDs etc. or be saved towards a special item.

The Fostering Network's Advice and Mediation workers suggest each child having their pocket money written into their placement plans as some children who are from low income families may not have received pocket money in the past, and may not receive it when they return to their birth families. The Fostering Network used to provide a breakdown of the allowance including rates for pocket money but have ceased to do this as they feel that the allowance should be spent according to the individual needs of the child and not just the age of the child.

Where young people in foster care have left school and are in receipt of either a wage or receiving benefits, an agreement should be reached at the beginning of the placement as to whether pocket money should be paid. When a young person is not in receipt of any income or benefit they should receive pocket money.

Savings

It is expected that where a child or young person has been living with their foster carer for six months or more, or is in a long-term foster placement, that foster carers will open a savings account for the child and save a weekly amount to encourage young people to manage money, and to ensure that when they leave care they have some savings. The minimum amount saved is suggested as £5 per week for a younger child and £10 for an older child. If the child moves placement, the savings account will be transferred with the child.

PRIVATE FOSTERING

Children in foster care are being looked after by the Children, Young People and Learning Department of Bracknell Forest. Some parents may choose to make arrangements privately for their children to be looked after e.g. students from abroad who are staying and studying in this country, or a child attending a local academy such as football or the arts. An arrangement is Private Fostering when a child or young person is under 16 years of age and stays with the carers for more than 28 days. Parents and carers have a duty to notify the Local Authority if a child is or is going to be privately fostered.

There are separate Regulations that govern Private Fostering. Please consult your supervising social worker before considering privately fostering, as the arrangements are very different.

PUBLICITY AND YOUR FOSTER CHILD

When considering any publicity that your foster children may receive, either in the press or elsewhere, it is important to remember that the wishes and

feelings of their parents need to be considered and the consent of those with parental responsibility obtained.

If they have achieved something, like being in a winning sports team, it is quite proper in most cases that they receive appropriate publicity, along with their friends. This applies to any group activity which they are taking part in and which receives publicity. An example of this would be if there were to be a newspaper feature article on their school. Such publicity would not, of course, identify them as being 'in care' or fostered. There would generally be no reason to shield them from such publicity unless, of course, there were exceptional circumstances in their background, which made this inadvisable e.g. that parents have not been informed of their whereabouts.

If the press, radio or TV (etc) contact you directly about your foster child or any publicity which identifies foster children as being 'in care', you should always refer to the child's social worker. If there is likely to be major publicity over several days (for example if a child is missing from a foster home) the Press and Information Officer for Bracknell Forest Council and senior staff of the department will be co-ordinating enquiries. You should never make comments to the media about foster children unless specifically authorised by a member of the Children, Young People and Learning Department. You are also advised to consult your supervising social worker before making any statement to the media which relates to your work with the Department as a foster carer.

PUPIL PREMIUM PLUS

Pupil Premium Plus (PP+) for children in care is a government grant funded on a yearly basis to help raise the attainment of disadvantaged **pupils** and closing the gap with their peers.

What can the money be spent on?

The Pupil Premium Plus will only be provided if clear outcomes and costed actions are outlined in the ePEP. The focus is on the following areas:

- Academic achievement and progress – clear outcomes and actions.
- Wider achievement – in an area in which the child is gifted and talented.
- Attendance.
- Inclusion – by reducing internal and external exclusion.
- Resilience training, social skills and therapeutic work.
- Transition into the next key stage and/or a new learning provider.

The PEP meeting is where the pupil premium spends and viability will be discussed. These will then be recorded on the child's ePEP.

Circumstances in which Pupil Premium will not be provided

- Pupil Premium Plus will not be used to double fund or replace funding which should already have been allocated to the school to support the child and specifically to fund services that should be provided via an EHCP.

- Social and leisure activities – carers receive an allowance which should cover these costs.
- School trips can be considered but only where the total cost of the trip is more than £500. Any balance above this amount can be partially subsidised by the Pupil Premium – any planned use should then be discussed and recorded as part of the child's ePEP linked to clear targets.
- The interventions put in place do not require funding.
- The outcomes and actions do not sufficiently match the assessed needs of the child.

RECORDS

Records are kept in respect of every foster carer as well as for each child. All departmental records will contain confidential information and accordingly are kept secure.

The child (as appropriate), the parents (if it is assessed as in the child's interests), and a Children's Guardian or CAFCASS Officer may see a child's record.

A Children's Guardian may see a foster carer's record in so far as it applies to the placement of that particular child.

Access to Personal Files

Since 1989 anyone has a statutory right of access to their personal files. This followed the enactment of the Access to Personal Files Act 1987 and the Access to Personal Files (Social Services & Housing) Regulations 1989 as well as the Data Protection Act 1998.

The Department is required to keep records of all its foster carers and the Arrangements for Placement of Children (General) Regulations 1991 lay down what those records shall contain). These are:

1. Assessment reports
2. Approved Notices
3. Copies of foster carer review reports
4. Letters terminating approval

However, not everyone has an automatic right of access to everything that is in their files. All adoption records, for example, are governed by separate legislation. Other situations where access would be denied have to do with the possibility, for example, of serious harm to the applicant or someone else resulting from it, or where a third party has supplied information on a confidential basis.

Our policy is to help those entitled to see their files to do so. Assessment reports are, of course, seen, contributed to and signed by foster carers, as are

reviews and records of the supervisory visits made by the supervising social worker. If it is your wish to have access to your file, then let your Family Placement Social Worker know. The necessary arrangements take some time to organise because written consent has to be given by third parties who may have contributed to the information held on your record.

You need to be aware that information that you give to the Department about a child or family, which is placed on the case file, is accessible to the person it relates to. You may, therefore, wish to check what is being recorded when you provide such information. Children's Guardians may also have access to such information during their appointment as part of Court proceedings.

If you make records as soon as possible after the event, it will help to increase your knowledge of the child placed with you. They can also help you to be more objective about the situation, and help when you look back on a child's stay.

Be clear about the sort of records that you are being asked to keep. In some placements you may be asked to record and observe very frequent contact between the child and his or her parents. In a case like this you may need to use a diary style recording. In other cases you might only need to write something down now and again – in this case it may be useful to keep rough notes, which you can shorten into report style.

Records are useful in child care reviews, court action and case conferences. Simple language, being concise and writing as soon as possible is extremely helpful. It is particularly important that you record any important information the child tells you in his or her own words. Whichever system you use, remember the records are confidential and keep them in a safe place. Your records are part of the Department's files so you need to pass them back when the child leaves, so that the Department does not lose this helpful information.

The child's own record

Children in foster care, particularly those who experience a number of moves, can easily lose a lot of memories and material – unless you take steps to help. You should encourage them to keep a memory box or book, of all sorts of information and keepsakes from that point in time. This might include photographs, drawings, mementoes, footprints, name tags, information on places visited and so on. In this way each child could have lots of material from their time with you and your family.

Some workers and foster carers may want to work on a life book with a child. This may include information about the child's past as well as some of the child's feelings. A book like this remains the property of the child and is discussed more fully in the section about 'Life Books'.

You may want to keep your own mementoes of a child's stay with you, perhaps including them in a book of children you have looked after, which you can talk about with the child.

It is sometimes a good idea to write a letter to a child who is leaving your care, however young. Your letter could tell the child more about what their time with you was like; retell some stories and fond memories of the child's place in your family, wishing the child well for the future. This can be a valuable part of any life story book.

REFER A FRIEND SCHEME

Do you know someone who could be a great foster carer?

All Bracknell Forest foster carers are eligible to participate in a Refer a Friend scheme where carers will receive £250 for referring someone to become a foster carer with the local authority.

Payment will be made if the referred candidate becomes an approved foster carer with Bracknell Forest Council, and upon completion of the following conditions:

£250 is paid to the referrer when the new carers have been approved by Fostering Panel and taken their first foster placement.

Payments are subject to the deduction of tax, NI and non-pensionable contributions.

The Refer a Friend scheme applies when referring someone interested in fostering including respite and short break care with the exception of private fostering and special guardianship. There are no limits to the number of referrals an individual can make.

The referred candidate must quote the referrer's name upon initial enquiry or the foster carer may pass details across ideally by email to fostering@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

The referral will not qualify if the referred candidate is already on our database and we have been in contact with that person in the last six months, or if the referred candidate is currently employed by Bracknell Forest Council.

For full terms and conditions or if you wish to discuss any aspects of the scheme, please contact Sarah Crawforth, Recruitment & Publicity Officer, on sarah.crawforth@bracknell-forest.gov.uk.

RESPITE AND DAY CARE

Respite care

Foster carers are likely to need a break or time to attend meetings and appointments. Generally this care would be provided by a member of the foster carers' support network, and will be discussed as part of your assessment and at the Placement Planning Meeting, when Delegated Authority is discussed. If regular respite is needed, this must be in the child's interests as well as the foster carers.

Respite will be arranged by the Family Placement Team after a discussion with your Supervising Social Worker, and agreement by a Manager. Respite and day care are subject to the availability of carers, and while we will make every effort to assist and hold the respite placement for you, there will be times when emergency placements will need to take precedence. We will then do our best to find an alternative.

We will usually agree to Respite care if:

- Holidays/short breaks are already planned or planning to take place and the child is unable to accompany you. For eg child has no passport, parents are not consenting, child does not wish to go on holiday, holiday already booked and additional place not available.
- Emergencies such as family illness, bereavement.
- Additional needs – If the carers are experiencing particular difficulties, prolonged behaviour issues/intensity of the child's needs – this will be discussed with a Manager and agreed on a discretionary basis.

Bracknell Forest does not provide statutory leave for carers throughout the year; however we will try to accommodate requests for respite where we can, dependent on the reason and the child's situation.

Should a child/young person be in respite for a weekend or longer, the primary carer's allowance and market supplement will cease and be paid to the respite carer.

Day Care

Day care will be arranged when you do not have anyone available in your support network for the following

- Attendance required at a LA meeting
- Attendance required at LA training

The expectation is that you please check with your Supervising Social Worker/Family Placement Duty worker before you commit to any activities which require alternative care for the young person/persons in your care.

Day care will also be considered where carers need additional support with a particular child, and you don't have anyone available in your own support network. An example may be if a child is excluded from school or you need a few hours to 'recharge your batteries' or spend some time with your own child.

The Family Placement Team cannot arrange Day Care for the following:

- Personal business – health appointments/food shopping/car servicing etc.: The foster carer is responsible for arranging this care via their support network or other foster carers. Payment will not be made by the Family Placement team in these circumstances, as the allowance includes babysitting costs.
- Planned activities - Outings/social events/family celebrations etc. – The foster carer is responsible for arranging this care via their support network or other foster carers.

However, if you are struggling with arrangements for any reason, please talk to your Supervising Social Worker.

Payment arrangements for respite and day care are contained in the Allowances Guidance provided to foster carers.

SiLSiP

Bracknell Forest's Children in Care Council is also known as SiLSiP - 'Say it Loud Say it Proud'. We take the participation of children and young people seriously and encourage opportunities where they can share their views about the services they receive so they can influence how we develop and improve them.

SiLSiP was set up in 2008 for children and young people who are looked after to have the opportunity to get together and discuss how Bracknell Forest Council could improve the way it looks after children and young people. All looked after young people, or those who have left care, are invited to join the Children in Care Council. This group represents the views and wishes of Bracknell Forest Looked After children, and presents them to Councillors and Heads of Service so that services can be developed taking the wishes of young people into account. Amongst many projects, SiLSiP have developed resources to support young people, foster carers and social workers. These include "About me" which helps young people and foster carers to share likes and dislikes with each other, goodbye cards for Social Workers, and a booklet giving do's and don'ts about contact with family and friends. They have also created and continue to deliver training called "*Do you know?*" This session

gives carers, staff and other professionals working with young people in care an opportunity to see things from their point of view.

SiLSiP meet every month, usually in the evening. SiLSiP also organises holiday activities for looked after children to give young people an opportunity to meet other children in care, to try activities, build confidence, have a say and have fun.

As Foster Carers you have an important role in participation and we ask you to contribute by encouraging young people to participate in SiLSiP, whether by attending meetings, consultation events, and activities or sharing their views in surveys.

If your foster child is interested in getting involved, or you would like copies of any resources or want to find out dates of the “Do you know?” training then speak to your Supervising Social Worker or get in touch with the Child Participation Development Officer (CPDO) Tel: 01344 351 546.

SMOKING AND e CIGARETTES

There is increasingly strong medical evidence to support the view that smoking and passive smoking have a detrimental effect upon the health of children. Only 15% of the smoke from a cigarette is inhaled by the smoker, the rest goes into the surrounding air and other people breathe it in. Babies and children who cannot avoid smoke where they live and play are particularly at risk. Babies whose parents smoke are much more likely to be taken to hospital with chest problems in their first year of life than non-smokers' children. Children exposed to smoke are more likely to develop breathing problems as adults.

As the effects of passive smoking are potentially more serious for younger children, children under 5 should not be placed within smoking households unless there are other overwhelming reasons for doing so.

Foster carers who smoke are required to ensure that any smoking takes place outside of the immediate family home and well away from foster children where they are not observed by them.

- Foster carers must not smoke in front of children and young people.
- Foster carers must not smoke in their car prior to or whilst transporting foster children.
- All foster carers are also required to ensure that children are not exposed to smoke when visiting friends or relatives of the foster cares or when other smokers visit their homes

Carers are expected to discourage smoking by looked after children, to ensure that they do not provide cigarettes or tobacco and to seek advice from their supervising social worker on how their use of tobacco may be reduced. Arrangements for discouraging children from smoking should be discussed at placement planning meetings and looked after children reviews.

Electronic Cigarettes

It is the view of the Fostering service that until more is known about the longer term effects of electronic cigarettes, that these devices will be classed in the same manner as conventional cigarettes. (This includes zero-nicotine devices). The requirements in relation to smoking will therefore apply to users of electronic cigarettes.

Help and Support

Foster carers who have any queries about the above, or if they or a child in placement needs support to reduce or stop smoking, should discuss this with their supervising social worker, who will signpost them to the relevant health service advice and discuss methods by which they can assist the young person in their care.

SLEEPOVERS

One- off stays with friends, eg birthday parties, sleepovers and to promote friendships

Children in care need to be able to enjoy sleepovers with friends without the need for permission to be sought from the local authority unless there are specific reasons for this.

The authority to approve sleepovers should be delegated by foster carers, and this should be discussed and agreed in the Placement Planning meeting, so that foster carers and children and young people are clear about who makes the decision. The foster carer is then responsible for ensuring this is a safe arrangement, as they would for their own children – ie ensuring they have spoken to the adults concerned and have exchanged contact details. This should be recorded in the daily logs.

For children who are placed permanently with their foster carers, this decision making should be agreed during the matching stage.

There may be instances where the child's social worker should be contacted before the arrangement is agreed, for eg children who are subject to Care Proceedings or are a concern due to absconding, risk behaviours or links to risky networks, and you should be advised of this. If you are unsure, please talk to your Supervising Social Worker so that agreement can be reached and the child or young person is clear about the reasons.

In all cases where the decision is delegated to the foster carer, they *'should exercise the same level of care in making a judgement about the safety of the fostered child/young person, as they do in respect of their own children'* (Fostering Network Guidelines 2002)

SOCIAL WORKERS

Social Workers must have a recognised social work qualification and be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). They have to abide by a code of conduct and the title of social worker is “protected”, meaning that only those with a recognised qualification who are registered with the HCPC are able to use the term ‘Social Worker’.

They may work in different settings: with adults or children, in day centres, family centres, residential units, family placement teams, social worker in hospitals, in voluntary organisations or charities, as Children’s Guardians and so on, but they are all bound by a professional and ethical code of practice for social workers.

Family Placement Social Workers are qualified social workers experienced in working with children and their families who specialise in fostering and adoption work. (In Bracknell, Adoption work is carried out by Adopt Thames Valley on behalf of Bracknell Forest Council). Often the Family Placement Social Worker who worked with you on your assessment as foster carers and presented it to the Fostering Panel will become your supervising social worker but this is not always the case.

Your Supervising Social Worker’s Role:

1. To be involved in the setting-up of a placement, in conjunction with the child’s social worker.
2. To visit or speak to the carer at least once a month while a child is placed with him or her and at least every three months when there is

no placement. The supervising social worker must make at least one unannounced visit per year. During these visits the supervising social worker ensures that the carer is informed of and fully complies with all policies, standards and guidance, including safe caring guidelines agreed by Bracknell Forest Authority. This must include practical issues such as ensuring the bedrooms for the children placed are safe, comfortable and adequately furnished. Bedrooms should be seen regularly and always where new placements are made. Supervising social workers must take responsibility for discussing hygiene issues, including those concerning the care of pets.

3. To allocate specific time to see the main carer's partner and own children living at home.
4. To record each supervisory visit detailing areas covered, with outcomes noted of any issues of concerns raised by either party. The carer should receive a copy of the report of each supervision visit or meeting.
5. To ensure foster carers receive appropriate advice on dietary needs commensurate to the child's age and developmental stage. Family wishes, cultural norms and religious beliefs might need to be taken into account.
6. To advise foster carers when statutory medicals and DBS' are due.
7. To attend Placement Agreement meetings and ensure the LAC agreement form is completed and received by the foster carer, and that Delegated Authority is discussed and agreed. To arrange the provision of necessary equipment.
8. To support the foster carers in carrying out the placement plan, assist in clarification of misunderstandings, difficulties or uncertainties and act as mediator if necessary.
9. To identify and discuss with the foster carers and their children their ongoing training needs and the development of their skills knowledge. A record should be placed on file to include proposals for meeting these needs and a copy given to the carers.
10. To enable the foster carers to participate in support groups and local activities.
11. To arrange the annual review of the foster carer's practice and terms of approval and recommend any changes or amendments to the approval. A routine safety check of the home should be carried out as a matter of course and monitored on the Review form.
12. To attend reviews of children placed with foster carers as appropriate following discussion with the child's social worker and foster carer.

13. To attend Disruption Meetings following the breakdown of a placement and ensure that notes of these meetings are sent to foster carers and also placed on their file.
14. To ensure foster carers are aware of the complaints and representations procedure.
15. To attend case conferences with the foster carer.
16. To assist foster carers to complete the Foster Home Placement form when a child moves and request that the social worker of the child does likewise.

Family Placement Social workers recruit, train, assess and support foster carers. They arrange for the placements of children needing to live with a family from relief care for a day or so, through to adoption, as well as Short Breaks for children with disabilities.

A supervising social worker from the Family Placement Team is identified for every foster carer who is approved by the Authority. This is useful for several reasons. Foster carers, especially short term ones, work with a large number of different social workers so it is important that they have one particular person to whom they can turn for personal help, advice and support. From an Authority's perspective, it is vital to provide efficient, effective and appropriate management of the foster care resource. As foster carers you are significant members of the child care team and your skills and experience in looking after children for us is highly valued.

The Fostering Network sees the role of the supervising social worker as "pro-active, empowering and enabling". He or she aims to develop the skills, knowledge and practice of the foster carers, raise their level of confidence in their abilities and liaise with the child's social worker so that foster carers are used appropriately and sensitively.

The supervising social worker does not have the responsibility for visiting or supervising any individual child in the foster home and supervisory visits by the carer's worker do not replace the visits of the child's social worker because they do not cover the statutory requirements.

However, good communication is vital between the workers and the carer, particularly where the carers are looking after children with different social workers or from another Authority. There should be regular joint visits to the carer. Supervising social workers and the children's social worker should ensure that they share the same understanding of the Local Authority's responsibilities to the carer as set out in the LAC foster care agreement.

It is recommended that meetings between the family, the child's social worker, foster carer and supervising social worker take place at regular intervals during a placement. These meetings should take forward the work identified

in the child's care plan and monitor progress. At the end of a placement it would be useful to have a meeting to review how successful it was.

When a new placement is to be made the social worker of any children already placed will have been informed prior to the placement.

Child's Social Worker

Every Looked After Child will have an allocated social worker from one of the Children's Social Care Teams. The child's social worker is required to visit the child at the foster placement at regular intervals. The frequency of visits will depend on how long the child has been living with you and the reasons the child is being Looked After, their family and / or background. They will be the person responsible for the child's care plan, arranging contact with the child's birth family and organising any meetings about the child. When they visit the child in your home, you should expect to share information about the child and their placement with you with this social worker.

SUPPORT

As foster carers, you are an essential and valued part of a team concerned with the care of children who cannot live with their own families.

Sometimes it can be difficult to balance the demands of being sensitive to the child, helping the child to maintain contact with birth family and friends when this can involve a lot of compromises and disruption to your own family life. As well as meeting the needs of your own children and relatives, you need to work with a wide number of professional people involved in the child's life, from Cub or Brownie leaders, LAC nurses, LAC teachers to solicitors and Children's Guardians. Sometimes social workers and other professionals are not as mindful of this as they should be; do not be afraid to remind us when it is hard to balance the demands of your time, it is better to talk about tensions as they come up.

We hope that the information in this handbook will help you to understand the framework for fostering and that it will give you some advice and guidance, helping you to feel more confident and valued in the important tasks you do.

Support is available from a number of sources:

- your allocated supervising social worker from the Family Placement Team
- the Duty worker in the Family Placement Team
- managers in the Family Placement Team
- the child's social worker
- other foster carers
- local foster carer support groups
- the Fostering Network

We've not forgotten the importance of your own family, friends, Church etc. However, the issue of confidentiality can limit your ability to utilise your usual support network. Whilst your friends and families will inevitably know that you are fostering a child or children, and may be part of their day to day activities, the reasons for the child coming into your care or the details of plans for them have to be kept confidential. Often it is only other foster carers who can truly understand what it is like to foster, and may provide a safe place for you to offload, without being taken further.

TRAINING

Part of the commitment to being a foster carer includes a commitment to training, to develop and enhance your skills. The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services require the authority to provide foster carers with the training and development they need to carry out their role effectively. Each foster carer will have a Personal Development Plan, which sets out how you will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to your needs and experience. This is reviewed annually, as part of your foster carer's annual review.

Bracknell Forest provides a programme of training for the year, which includes the core training all foster carers are required to attend, and foster carers also have access to a range of training through an online training provider. We also have an incentive scheme for foster carers to complete at least 30 hours of training within 12 months of your annual review. This can include individual reading and research provided you document your learning as evidence.

TRAINING, SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS for FOSTER CARE

The Training, Support & Development Standards for Foster Care have been designed to support Foster Carers from approval through their first year of fostering. They provide employers with a framework to guide training and professional development for Foster Carers.

The Standards

- Provide consistency and quality of training for Foster Carers across England.
- Provide access to the most up-to-date information, advice and guidance for Foster Carers
- Allow opportunities for career progression and development by providing underpinning knowledge and skills.
- Improve the status of Foster Carers as trained professionals and a valued part of the children's workforce.

The Standards have been adapted from the CWDC Induction Standards and build on the guidelines set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. They use examples of current good practice and provide a comprehensive framework to guide the training and development of Foster Carers.

All newly approved foster carers are required to complete the TSD Standards in the first year of their approval. Foster carers are expected to take responsibility, in conjunction with the supervising social worker, for producing a portfolio of evidence. Upon completion, the portfolio is signed off by the foster carer's supervising social worker and verified by the Fostering Team Manager. The foster carer will then receive a certificate of completion.