

Family and Friends Fostering (also referred to as Connected Persons Fostering).

Policy and Procedures Including Reg 24 Procedures

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1 Purpose

The preferred option for every child who cannot live with their parents is to grow up in the care of their family or with an adult with whom they have an existing significant relationship.

The purpose of this document is to provide policy and procedural guidance to staff in relation to the placement of children with their relatives and friends. This document should be read in conjunction with the following related department policies found on CSC Policy Library DORIS or requested from the family Placement Team:

Children Young People & Learning Permanency Strategy

Permanency Planning Procedures

Bracknell Forest Fostering Service Policy and Procedure.

Private Fostering Procedures

Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Policy and Procedure

Family Group Conference Policy and Procedure

It highlights the key principles underpinning the policy, the assessment, planning and decision making process and support services that should be available to the children and their carers.

The responsible manager for this policy and implementation rests with the Chief Officer for Children's Social Care

2 Scope

For the purpose of this policy Family and Friends Care (also referred to as Connected Person's Fostering) is defined as the full time nurturing and protection of children, living apart from their birth families, by their relatives, friends and people with whom they may have a significant connection.

It is important to note that where a child cannot be cared for by their parent(s) the family may make their own arrangements to care for the child within the family and friends network. The Local Authority does not have a duty to be involved in any such informal family and friends care arrangements unless it appears to the authority that services may

be necessary to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child or children or young person up to the age of 18 years.

Arrangements may also be made by parents for children to be cared for by friends or relatives who are not 'close' relatives. If these arrangements are to last longer than 28 days they come within the Private Fostering regulations.

'Family and Friends care' (or Connected Person's Fostering) is used to describe all arrangements where the Local Authority is involved in placing a child in need and where assessments have been made that the child needs to become Looked After. Placements may be made at the request and agreement of the parent, in which case the child is 'accommodated' or through a Court process where the child is made the subject of an order and is placed in 'care'. In both these circumstances the child or young person becomes 'Looked After'

3 Policy

Children have a right to a family life and are entitled to live within their families unless this is not consistent with their welfare.

- If young people cannot remain at home, placement with relatives or friends should be explored before other forms of placement are considered, thus promoting a sense of continuity, stability and permanence.
- If young people have to live apart from their family of origin, both they and their parents should be given adequate information, support and advice. They should be helped to consider alternatives and contribute to the making of an informed choice about the most appropriate form of care.
- Keeping children as close as possible to their family and social culture reduces the likelihood of placement breakdown, reduces the anxiety in children of having to live with strangers in an unfamiliar environment and often results in better outcomes for the child.
- Continuity of relationships is important. Attachments should be respected, sustained and developed. Parents should be expected and enabled to retain their responsibilities and remain closely involved as is consistent with their child's welfare, even if the child cannot live at home temporarily or permanently.
- A change of home, caregiver, social worker or school almost always carries some risk to a child's development and welfare. A child's age, sex, health, personality,

race, culture and life experiences are all relevant to any consideration of needs and vulnerability and have to be taken into account when planning or providing help.

- The options for a child to live with a relative or friend should be rigorously and fully explored before consideration is given to admitting a child to public care and services made available to family members.
- Processes for assessing, approving and supporting Family and Friends carers should be as rigorous as arrangements made for assessing and approving non-related carers.
- Children's welfare is best promoted when the authority is able to work in partnership with parents and other relevant agencies. All care plans should take account of parents and children's views.

4 Legal and Policy Framework

All local authorities have a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children living within their area and to promote the upbringing of such children by their families. The way in which they fulfil this duty is by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's assessed needs

Reference

Children Act 1989

The Children Act 1989 and associated regulation and guidance

Human Rights Act 1998

Children Act 2004

Children and Young Person's Act 2008

Public Law Outline, Ministry of Justice, 2008

Fostering Regulations 2011

Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010

5 Private or Informal Family and Friends Arrangements

Where a child cannot be cared for within his or her immediate family, the family may make their own arrangements within their own network. Young people over the age of 16 may elect to go to live with relatives, with or without their parents consent.

In most respects the primary responsibility for any private placement resides with the parent. This is absolutely the case where the child is placed at the parent's own initiative in circumstances where the local authority has no statutory duty to support and monitor the placement.

Where Children's Social Care is involved with the child or family it is important to be clear about who is responsible for the decision about the care of the child and the role of the local authority.

5.1 Family Group Conference

Involving parents, family and others significant to the child is essential in making plans and decisions about children's care. One way in which the local authority may facilitate the family to make suitable arrangements for the care of children is through a Family Group Conference (FGC).

Family Group Conferences are meetings facilitated by an independent person (a FGC Co-ordinator) whose role is to help family members come together to devise a suitable plan to care for the child from within the family.

See Family Group Conference Policy on CSC Policy library on DORIS or request a copy from Family Placement Team Manager

Family Group Conferences should always be offered to the family before a decision is made about an arrangement involving a Family and Friends carer.

Consideration must always be given to holding a Family Group Conference:

- When it proposed that a child be accommodated by the local authority
- When a decision is made to initiate care proceedings

5.2 Children in need

A Child in Need is defined in Section 17(10) of the Children Act 1989 as a child who is disabled or who is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision of services by the local authority.

The child's social worker, from the duty or childcare team, is responsible for completing an assessment of the child's needs, taking into account the views and wishes of the child, the parent and any other significant adult in the child's life. Following this assessment, if services are required a Child in Need plan will be drawn up and a package of support will be identified.

Support could be given through advice, involvement of other support services, practical assistance, the provision of a one off payment, or in some circumstances ongoing financial support for a time. Carers will be expected to apply for all relevant benefits available to them for the care of the child and parents to contribute where appropriate.

5.3 Private Fostering

Private Fostering is an arrangement made between the person who holds Parental Responsibility for a child and someone who agrees to care for the child.

If this arrangement is to last for longer than 28 days in one continuous period, the private foster carer, and/or the person with legal parental responsibility for the child, has a duty to inform the Local Authority of the arrangements for the child.

Financial arrangements for the care of the child are made between the person with parental responsibility for the child and the carers. However, the child and his/her carers have the same right as any other family in the community to be assessed for help, including financial help, under Section 17 (Children Act 1989).

Once informed of the private fostering arrangements for the child, the Local Authority has a duty to satisfy itself that the welfare of the child is being satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted. A social worker from the relevant childcare team will be allocated to visit the child and maintain regular contact with the child, the carer and the parent.

A social worker from the Family Placement Team will undertake an assessment of the private foster carer and household, including statutory checks. This assessment is presented to the Foster Care Panel for comment. The Head of Service for Looked After Children confirms the suitability of the arrangement to meet the need of the child or if there are significant concerns will decide on further action to be taken to secure the welfare of the child.

See also Bracknell Forest Private Fostering: Policy, Procedures & Practice Guidance at <http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/private-fostering-policy.pdf> .This policy sets out the duties of private foster carers and the Children’s Services under the Private Fostering Regulations (2005).

6 Family and Friends Care and Looked After children

Where a child becomes Looked After, the authority is responsible wherever possible to make arrangements for the child to live with a member of the family network who is approved as a foster carer (section 22 Children Act 1989). .

A ‘family and friends carer’ means an individual who is a relative, friend or other person connected with the child. A person in this last category may be someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity such as a childminder, a teacher or a youth worker although these are not exclusive categories. Such people would not all fit the term ‘relative or friend’ but nevertheless may be the best people with whom to place a child because of this pre-existing connection. Bracknell Forest refers to these carers as formal Family and Friends carers.

The process for assessment and approval of family and friends who apply to be foster carers for a specific Looked After child is the same as for any other foster carers except that the timescales for assessment are different where a child is already in the placement - see next section.

It is important for any prospective family and friends carer to understand the implications of becoming an approved foster carer. The process is lengthy and comprehensive enquiries are made of the carer’s background, motivation and ability to meet this child’s needs, along with checks with the police, other agencies and a medical report.

The prospective carer also needs to be informed about the level of support that they would be provided were they to be approved as foster carers, including monthly visits from a supervising social worker, training and financial allowances. For details of support available see Procedures Appendix 2

A viability assessment will be carried out by the child’s team at the start of the process, and wherever possible, a member of the family placement team will accompany the child’s

social worker to assist with the assessment and provide information and answer any queries.

If the viability assessment concludes that a full assessment of the potential carers should go ahead, this assessment is completed by a social worker from the Family Placement Team. The assessment report format used will be either the CoramBAAF Connected Persons form or, if the child is subject to care proceedings, the Special Guardianship Assessment form. (See SGO Policy and Procedure on CSC Policy Library DORIS) Both forms encourage the prospective carer and the child to contribute their own views to the assessment and are a means of ensuring that consideration is given to the complex issues that can arise in these arrangements.

The child's social worker is responsible for the completion of the sections related to the child, and the family placement worker for the sections related to the prospective carer.

The completed assessment is presented to the Foster Panel for consideration (unless the court grants a Special Guardianship Order to the carers prior to the scheduled panel). Both the child's social worker and the family placement worker should attend this Panel. The prospective carer is encouraged to attend the Panel meeting but this is not a requirement. The Foster Panel recommendation is considered by the Agency Decision Maker, who is the Chief Officer, Children's Social Care and she/he makes the final decision.

7 Immediate placement of a child with a Family and Friends Carer in an emergency under Regulation 24 of Care Planning and Placement Regulations 2010

If there is a clearly assessed need for the placement of a child with a relative or 'connected person' in an emergency and the requirements of the 2011 Fostering Regulations cannot be fulfilled before placement, the 2010 Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (Regulations 24 and 25) set out the arrangements for the temporary approval of a connected person.

A viability assessment will be completed by the child's social worker, accompanied by a member of the Family Placement Team where possible. This assessment includes police checks on all adults in the household and requires the social worker to see where the child will sleep. Provided the viability assessment is approved by the nominated officer (see below) the carers will be immediately temporarily approved as local authority foster carers

for a period not exceeding 16 weeks. (This time period has been set to allow sufficient time for the foster carer assessment and approval process to be undertaken, including any Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks required.). See Appendix 2

This placement must be approved by the nominated officer prior to placement of the child. In Bracknell Forest the nominated officer is the Head of Service, Looked After Children or in their absence another Head of Service within Children's Social Care. The child's wishes and feelings about the proposed placement and the parents must form part of the assessment and inform the decision making process.

The viability assessment must include assessment of the suitability of the connected person, taking into account the matters listed within schedule 4 of the 2010 Regulations, including the suitability of the proposed accommodation, and all other persons aged 18 and over who are members of the household in which it is proposed that the child will live, taking into account the requirements of the care planning procedure.

See Appendix 3 for a copy of the Regulation 24 Viability Assessment form.

Where a child becomes Looked After and is placed with family or friends carers the child's social worker must visit at a minimum of weekly until the first statutory review then a minimum of four weekly until full approval through the Foster Panel.

On each visit the child should be seen and spoken with alone having regard to their age and understanding.

Where, as the result of a visit the social worker's assessment is that the child's welfare is not adequately safeguarded and promoted by the placement, the social worker must report the matter to the Team Manager and a looked after child review must be arranged immediately.

7.1 Placements extending beyond 16 weeks

There will be some circumstances which require a further extension of the temporary approval, which falls under the 2010 regulations. This provision is to be used only exceptionally and where there are clearly identified reasons the full assessment process cannot be completed, such as unavoidable delays in obtaining statutory checks.

These circumstances are:

- Where the approval process has taken longer than anticipated (and in these circumstances the temporary approval may be extended for a further 8 weeks);

or

- Where the Family and Friends carer has not been approved following the assessment process and seeks a review of the decision through the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (and in those circumstances the temporary approval will continue until the outcome of the review is known).

For the full assessment and approval process for family and friends, both long term and immediate placements, see Appendix 2

8 Long Term Legal Options

8.1 Special guardianship orders

In circumstances where a Family and Friends Carer is caring for a child on a long-term, or permanent basis, the optimum way of offering that child security could be for his/her carers to apply for a Child Arrangements Order or a Special Guardianship Order, so that the day-to-day parental responsibilities that the carers take on for the child would be legally protected and defined by the legal order.

Special Guardianship offers a further option for children needing permanent care outside their birth family. It can offer greater security without absolute legal severance from the birth parents as in adoption. As Special Guardians, family and friends will have parental responsibility for the child which, while it is still shared with the parents, can be exercised with greater autonomy on day-to-day matters than where there is a Child Arrangements Order.

Special Guardianship Orders may be made in private family proceedings and the local authority may not be a party to any such arrangements. However, a Special Guardianship Order in favour of a relative or foster carer (who was a Family and Friends carer) with whom a child is living may also be an appropriate outcome as part of a permanence plan for a Child in Need or a Looked After child.

Where the child was Looked After immediately prior to the making of the Special Guardianship Order, the local authority has a responsibility to assess the support needs of the child, parents and Special Guardians, including the need for financial support. This can include an assessment for the Adoption Support Fund, which provides for therapeutic services for children who were looked after immediately prior to the making of the Order.

In circumstances where a child is Looked After and is placed with Family and Friends Foster Carers, the plan for the child to achieve permanence through his/her carers applying for a Child Arrangements Order or Special Guardianship Order will be considered through the care planning and reviewing procedures.

The payment of allowances to Special Guardians is discretionary, and eligibility may be determined through the Special Guardianship financial assessment procedure and payment scale. The procedure for the review and management of allowances is set out in the Bracknell Forest Special Guardianship Policy.

8.2 Adoption

Adoption is the process by which all parental rights and responsibilities for a child are permanently transferred to an adoptive parent by a court. As a result the child legally becomes part of the adoptive family.

In some circumstances the child's need for security through permanence may best be met through adoption by the Family or Friends carer with whom they have been living. This option will be considered through the child's care planning reviews.

Post adoption support is available for adoptive families and children throughout childhood.

9 Supporting Contact with Parents

Where a child is defined as a 'child in need' the authority is under a duty to promote contact between the child and his/her family *where it is necessary to do so in order to safeguard and promote his or her welfare*. As part of the support arrangements, it may be identified that specific assistance is required to ensure that any such contact can be managed safely. Information is available about local contact centres and family mediation services, and how to make use of their services.

Where a child is looked after by Bracknell Forest Council the care plan will set out the contact arrangements between the child and their parents, siblings and other significant people and how this will be promoted and supported. See Contact Policy on Policy Library DORIS

10 Complaints and Representations

Family and Friends carers who wish to complain or make representations may do so in the usual way in accordance with the Bracknell Forest complaints procedure.

11 Appendices

11.1 Appendix 1 Definition of a relative

The Children Act definition of a relative applies, as follows:

A relative is someone who is a:

- Grandparent
- Brother or Sister
- Uncle or Aunt

whether by full blood or half blood or by affinity (marriage) or a step parent.

A step-parent is someone who is or has been a party to a marriage in relation to whom the child is a child of the family.

Children Act (Section 10(5)a)

11.2 Appendix 2 Procedures to approve Family and Friends Carers

General

The approval of relatives and friends as foster carers assumes that:

The child's needs have been assessed and authorisation given by the Head of Service for the child to become Looked After.

A care plan has been completed setting out the needs of the child and how they will be met.

The parent(s) have completed and signed the relevant LAC¹ forms in respect of children who are to be accommodated.

Actions required prior to placement

- (a) The Family Placement Social Worker and the Social Worker for the child² visits the potential carer's home prior to the placement and makes enquiries to:
- i) Ascertain the child's relationship to the carer, including details of previous contacts.
 - ii) Ascertain the nature of care and commitment that the carer is offering
 - iii) Identify any potential difficulties
 - iv) Evaluate the suitability of the accommodation.
 - v) Arrange for the applicant(s) to complete an application form for foster carers
 - vi) Obtain written consent to local Police checks, DOH checks, DBS checks and medical references in respect of all person over age 16 within the household
 - vii) Consider the suitability of the carers, taking into account the matters listed within Schedule 4 of 2010 Care planning Regulations
- b) Check with the police to ascertain whether anything is known which suggests that the prospective carer(s) may not be suitable to be entrusted with the child
- c) Check Bracknell Forest's electronic case records (Mosaic) to consider the possible implication of any prior involvement with the prospective carers and members of their household.
- d) Arrange for the child to have a health assessment. (If this cannot be achieved prior to placement, it should take place at the earliest opportunity).
- e) Obtain approval from Head of Service Looked After Children for the placement to proceed.

¹ Looked After Children

² Allocation of these tasks will depend on the particular circumstances of the case and how the placement was identified.

- f) Arrange a placement agreement meeting between the parent(s), young person (where relevant) and the carer(s) to complete the Placement Information Record and clarify other details of the day-to-day arrangements and arrangements for introductions.

Action required immediately following the child's placement

Child's social work team:

- a) Notify other relevant BFC departments or other agency professionals of the child's placement. This must include written notification of the relevant health and education services. (Standard letter available)
- b) Record the details of the child's admission to local authority care on the electronic case record.
- c) Notify the Independent Reviewing Officer of the child's placement.
- d) Visit the placement and see the child weekly for the four-week period of immediate placement under Regulation 24, up to the child's first statutory review.
- e) Notify the family placement team manager that the placement has been made under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 and forward a copy of the completed and signed viability assessment form.

Upon receipt of this notification, the Family Placement Team Manager will:

- f) Arrange for the carer to receive weekly payments of fostering allowance.
- g) Allocate a family placement social worker to undertake the following:
 - Provide supervising support to the placement
 - Begin full assessment of suitability under Regulation 24, of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 using the BAAF Connected Persons assessment forms (or Special Guardianship assessment form where applicable), including statutory DBS and agency checks, medical references and referee reports.

Action required if the child's placement is expected to be beyond sixteen weeks

- (a) Child's social worker and family placement assessing social worker fully complete the relevant Family and Friends /SGO assessment forms in respect of the child and the carers.
- (b) Child's social worker and family placement social worker submit the following documents to the fostering panel within the sixteen week period:
 - Completed Family and Friends /SGO assessment forms, including:
 - Reason for the child's proposed placement,
 - Full personal details and history of the child and proposed carers,

- Full assessment of the carer(s) parenting experience and capacity and their ability to meet the specific child's needs in the short/medium and long term,
- Particulars of all household members,
- Details of the accommodation,
- Racial, religious and other cultural matters,
- The outcome of any previous assessment to care for a child as a foster carer, adopter or registered childminder or provider of day care, and details of any previous approval or refusal of such an application relating to him or any other member of his household,
- Alternatives to placement with applicants, including details of searches/enquiries
- Parents views on the proposed placement,
- Child/Young person's views on the proposed placement,
- Anticipated need for post placement support,
- Conclusion and Recommendations.
- Copies of medical reports from the agency medical adviser,
- Details of enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service criminal conviction checks for carers, other household members over 16 years and persons with whom the child will have regular contact (advice should be taken from the Team Manager regarding this),
- Details of all police, DOH and agency checks, including school reports and all other relevant information from agencies and schools/employers who know the family and/or child,
- Record of interviews with referees.

(a) Child's social worker and family placement worker present the above reports to the fostering panel for approval. The carers will also be offered the opportunity to attend the fostering panel.

(c) Fostering panel recommends approval of the applicant(s) under Regulation 26 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 or otherwise and the agency decision maker then determines the outcome of the assessment.

Accountability

- Accountability for the decision to look after a child rests with the Head of Service
- Responsibility for authorising and approving the child's placements for a maximum of sixteen weeks rests with the Head of Service for Looked After Children.
- As with any other placement the responsible authority must be satisfied that the placement is the most suitable means to safeguard and promote the child's welfare. Whenever a child is placed before the full approval of the carer as a local authority foster carer, there is a possibility that the connected person may not be approved at the end of the assessment

process. The risk of a child being moved from a placement in which s/he has become settled must be minimised by careful consideration of the appropriateness of a placement at the point of initial viability assessment.

- The period of temporary approval may be extended for a further eight weeks where the approval process has taken longer than anticipated, but this provision is to be used only exceptionally and where there are clearly identified reasons the full assessment process cannot be completed, such as unavoidable delays in obtaining statutory checks.
- Accountability for ensuring that reports are submitted to the fostering panel within sixteen weeks of placement is held jointly between the child's team and family placement team managers. Children's team managers should ensure that their staff complete reports on the child within this timescale. The family placement team manager is responsible for ensuring that the assessment of the carer(s) is completed in advance of this 16 week limit.
- Accountability for ensuring that the correct reports and paperwork are submitted to the Foster Panel lies with the Family Placement Team Manager. The Panel application must be quality assured and signed by the Head of Service (Looked After Children).
- The decision to approve the foster carers ultimately rests with Children's Social Care rather than the fostering panel. On receipt of panel minutes, the Agency Decision Maker will make a decision about whether or not the carer's are approved, taking into account panel recommendations.
- Accountability for the ongoing supervision of the child's placement rests with the child's team staff and management. Accountability for support, review and ongoing approval of the foster carers resides with family placement staff and managers in the usual way.

Support to Carers

- All Family and Friends foster carers will be provided with the same level of support as other departmental foster carers. The family placement service will provide a Supervising Social Worker as soon as it becomes apparent that the placement may need to extend beyond the 16 weeks allowed under Regulation 25. The Supervising Social Worker will work to provide the same level of support as is extended to other foster carers. The Family and Friends carer will also have access to any out of hours support services that are available to other foster carers.
- Arrangements should be made for Family and Friends foster carers to have access to the full range of training opportunities afforded to other approved foster carers.
- Family and Friends foster carers will receive a level of allowance in line with the approved BFC rates. Family and Friends foster carers will be assessed for financial assistance in respect of start up costs from the family placement budget as appropriate.

- Family and Friends foster carers will be provided with Fostering Network membership and a BFBC leisure card following full approval

Payment of Fostering Allowances to Regulation 24 foster carers

The child's social worker should notify the Family Placement Team Manager at the earliest opportunity that a suitable placement has been made which meets the initial requirements under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations.

The Family Placement Team Manager will initially authorise payment of fostering allowances (as detailed above) for a maximum period of 16 weeks (from the date of commencement of the placement) on receipt of the signed regulation 24 viability assessment form.

The Family Placement Team Manager may authorise continued payment of fostering allowances in the normal way on receipt of confirmation that the carer's application has been considered by the fostering panel and agreed by the agency decision maker.

Payments of fostering allowance may be suspended or terminated by the Family Placement Team Manager in the event that:

- The foster carer does not cooperate fully with the assessment process,
- On receipt of information that indicates that the carer could not lawfully be approved as a foster carer.
- Following a formal departmental decision not to approve the applicants as foster carers.
- Following termination of the child's placement with the carer

Foster carers should be advised of their right to appeal against any decision to suspend or terminate their allowance. This appeal should be made to the Head of Service (Looked After Children) in the first instance.

Overlap with legal proceedings

On some occasions, children may be placed with Family and Friends carers during the course of legal proceedings. In these circumstances, it may be necessary to speed up assessment and approval processes to bring them into line with court time-scales and deadlines. This may be particularly the case if the court is required to consider the possibility of the child living with the carer on a permanent basis. However, in all circumstances a full assessment must still be completed. In this circumstance the Special Guardianship assessment form will be completed as required by the courts.

In these circumstances, consideration should be given to whether the child's needs may be better met by their placement under a Child Arrangements Order or Special Guardianship Order rather than continued placement under fostering regulations.

See departmental policy on permanency planning, special guardian and child arrangements orders at:

Notifications to carers

Staff involved should ensure that the applicants are kept fully informed of the progress of their applications. After panel has considered their application in accordance with general fostering procedures it will rest with the Agency Decision Maker who has confirmed (or otherwise) the panel recommendation. This decision will be formally notified to the carer/s verbally within two days and in writing within five days.

Review of placements

Placements made under these regulations should be reviewed at intervals set out in Children's Social Care's policy and procedures for the statutory review of Looked After children.

The foster carer's terms of approval will be subject to annual review by the family placement team, or more frequently in the event of difficulty, complaint or allegations.

See: Statutory Review Of Children Looked After Policy And Procedure
Policy and protocol for the consultation of LAC and their families

11.3 Appendix 3 Regulation 24 Viability assessment: Immediate Placement Report for Connected Persons

Introduction: Placing a child or children with a connected person

Within the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (the 2010 Regulations), which provide much of the regulatory framework for these assessments, people who are potentially family and friends carers are referred to as 'connected persons', and that is the term which is generally used within this assessment form. *The Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services* defines a connected person as "a relative (defined as section 105 of the 1989 Act as a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle, aunt (whether of the full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or step parent), friend of or other person connected with the looked after child." In selecting a placement for a looked after child, the responsible local authority must give preference to a placement with a connected person who is an approved foster carer. If the connected person is not already approved as a foster carer, that person can be given temporary approval for a period of up to 16 weeks, during which they must be assessed as foster carers if the child's placement with them is to continue. In exceptional circumstances this period can be extended by a further eight weeks, if the approval process is taking longer than anticipated or until the outcome of the review if the connected person seeks a review of a decision not to approve them, using the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM).

Part 1 of the Family Rights Group assessment form is designed to provide the information that is required in order for the connected person to be given temporary approval while the fostering assessment is carried out. Because these assessments will probably have to be carried out and presented for approval very quickly, the form has been laid out so that the assessor will have the choice of handwriting or typing the report into the expandable boxes.

The 2010 Regulations specify the information that ought to be taken into account in deciding whether a connected person should be given temporary fostering approval. The Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on Connected Persons Care states that the local authority must ascertain as much of this information as is possible in the circumstances. Where a child is placed with a connected person who is to be temporarily approved, every effort has to be made to maximise the level and quality of information that will be used to decide whether the connected person should be temporarily approved. In particular, the information should focus on:

- an assessment of the quality of the existing relationship between the child and the connected person;
- the child's wishes and feelings about the placement;
- a visit to the connected person's home by the social worker, which should confirm that the physical environment and space available is suitable for the particular child;
- whether the connected person would require any additional resources in order to meet the particular needs of the child;
- the quality of the relationships between the members of the household, including children and young people, and their views about the proposed caring arrangement;
- impact of the proposed caring arrangement on other children and young people in the household, based on information about their history and current lifestyle.

How to use the Part 1 of the Family Rights Group form

The form consists of three sections:

- **Section A** provides basic factual information about the household and the child or children being placed.
- **Section B** consists of questions posed to the connected person, in order to provide information about the capacity of this particular household to meet the needs of this particular child, and what support might be needed in order for this to happen.
- **Section C** provides information from the assessing social worker, including an analysis of whether this child's needs can be met within this household, and whether the connected person should be temporarily approved as a foster carer for the child or children. The connected person can comment on the social worker's conclusion and recommendation.

It is intended that the connected persons and the assessing social worker should work collaboratively to complete the form. Although Sections A and B present information mainly from the connected person, the social worker has final responsibility for the content of these parts of the form. The social worker should discuss with the carers how they would be most comfortable providing information requested of them, in the time that is available to complete the form: this could be by the connected person writing their own answers to the questions, or it could be by talking to the social worker with the social worker doing most of the writing. However, the social worker must ensure that enough information is provided, particularly with regard to the areas of information identified above, to ensure that the local authority is able to make an informed decision about whether the carers should be given temporary approval as the child's foster carers for a period of 16 weeks.

Viability Study

Although designed to conform to the requirements for assessing a connected person at the time of a placement under regulation 24 of the 2010 Regulations, Part 1 of this form can also be used when a child is not yet placed, to assess whether a potential placement with a connected person would be a viable option. If the assessment shows that such a placement could be viable, then the local authority would have all the information needed in order to approve the connected person as a temporary foster carer, and make a placement under regulation 24.

Viability studies might be undertaken, for example, during court proceedings, where more than one family member has put themselves forward as potential carers for a child, and this has not been resolved in a Family Group Conference, in order to assess the comparative strengths and risks of each; or to carry out an initial assessment, where the local authority has reasonable doubts about whether a connected person could meet the required standards of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011.

It should be noted that a viability study carried out using Part 1 of the form will only provide enough information for approval as a temporary foster carer for 16 weeks under regulation 24 of the 2010 Regulations, and will not provide enough information for full approval as a foster carer under regulation 27 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. Such approval would require an assessment using Part 2 of the form to be completed and presented to the fostering panel within 16 weeks of the child being placed

Section A: Basic information

A.1 Details of the household

Please provide details of all members of the carer/s' household, including children, lodgers, carers' parents, etc.

Name	Gender	Date of birth	Position in Household	Ethnicity	Relationship to child being placed

Address, contact telephone numbers and carer's email address of household where child/ren are being placed:

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A.2 Details of the child/ren being placed

Name	Gender	Date of birth	Ethnicity

A.3 Are there any regular visitors to the household who would provide any care for the child, or be in regular contact with the child?

If so, please supply their name, address and telephone number:

A.4 Accommodation

(i) Please describe the accommodation, including the sleeping arrangements as they will be when the child is placed. What physical space is available for the child?

(ii) Describe the neighbourhood you live in, and what resources there are locally which could support you and the child/ren

A.5 Criminal convictions and cautions (these should be listed on a separate sheet of paper)

In responding to this question, you should be aware that:

1. As foster carers, you are exempt from the terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, and no convictions or cautions will be considered 'spent' on account of time having passed.
 2. You will be subject to a check with the Criminal Records Bureau, which will provide details of any convictions or cautions, regardless of when they took place.
- Do any members of the household have any criminal convictions?
 - Does anybody else who would be involved in caring for the child?
 - Please say who provided this information about convictions.
 - What information has the social worker obtained from checks with the local police force?
 - Have DBS forms been completed? If not, when will this happen?

Section B: Meeting the child's needs

ABOUT THE CHILD

B1. Child's relationship with connected person

How long have you known the child, and in what capacity? How well would you say you know them? Is the child used to visiting your home? Include when you last saw the child.

B2. Please outline any harm that the child is said to be at risk of suffering, or any danger to the child.

Even where you feel that a risk has not been proven, you should describe why it might be thought the child is at risk. Who is thought to pose a risk to the child? What steps will you take to ensure that the child will not be harmed or placed at risk of harm while staying with you? What support do you think you will need in order to manage this?

B3. The child's physical needs, including medical and dental care.

As a temporary foster carer, you will be responsible for ensuring that the child's basic physical needs are met, i.e. to be fed, clothed, sheltered and taken for medical and dental treatment when appropriate. Are you aware of any specific issues that could arise with regard to this particular child in ensuring these needs are met? How will you manage any such issues if they arise? What support do you think you might need?

B4. Education, learning and development

What steps will you take to ensure that the child's education is promoted, and that they have the opportunity to learn and develop while they are staying with you? What support do you think you might need?

B5. The child's views

How do you think the child feels about coming to live with you? Have you had the opportunity to discuss this with them yet?

B6. Contact

Has there been any discussion with you about plans for the child to have contact with their parents, other people with parental responsibility, siblings, or anybody else?

What is your view about these plans? In your view, who should the child be having contact with, how often should this happen, and where should the contact take place? Would you need any additional support to enable contact to take place in such a way as to be most beneficial for the child, e.g. an independent supervisor, contact centre, etc?

ABOUT YOU (THE CONNECTED PERSON) AND YOUR HOUSEHOLD

B7. Your household's composition and relationships

Please describe the nature of the relationships between all members of the household, as listed in A1. You should include in your description:

- the nature of the relationship each person has with the connected person
- the nature of the relationships with each other
- any sexual relationships
- any relationship with any person who is a parent of the child being placed
- any relationship to the child being placed
- any current or previous domestic violence between household members, including the connected person

B8. Your family history

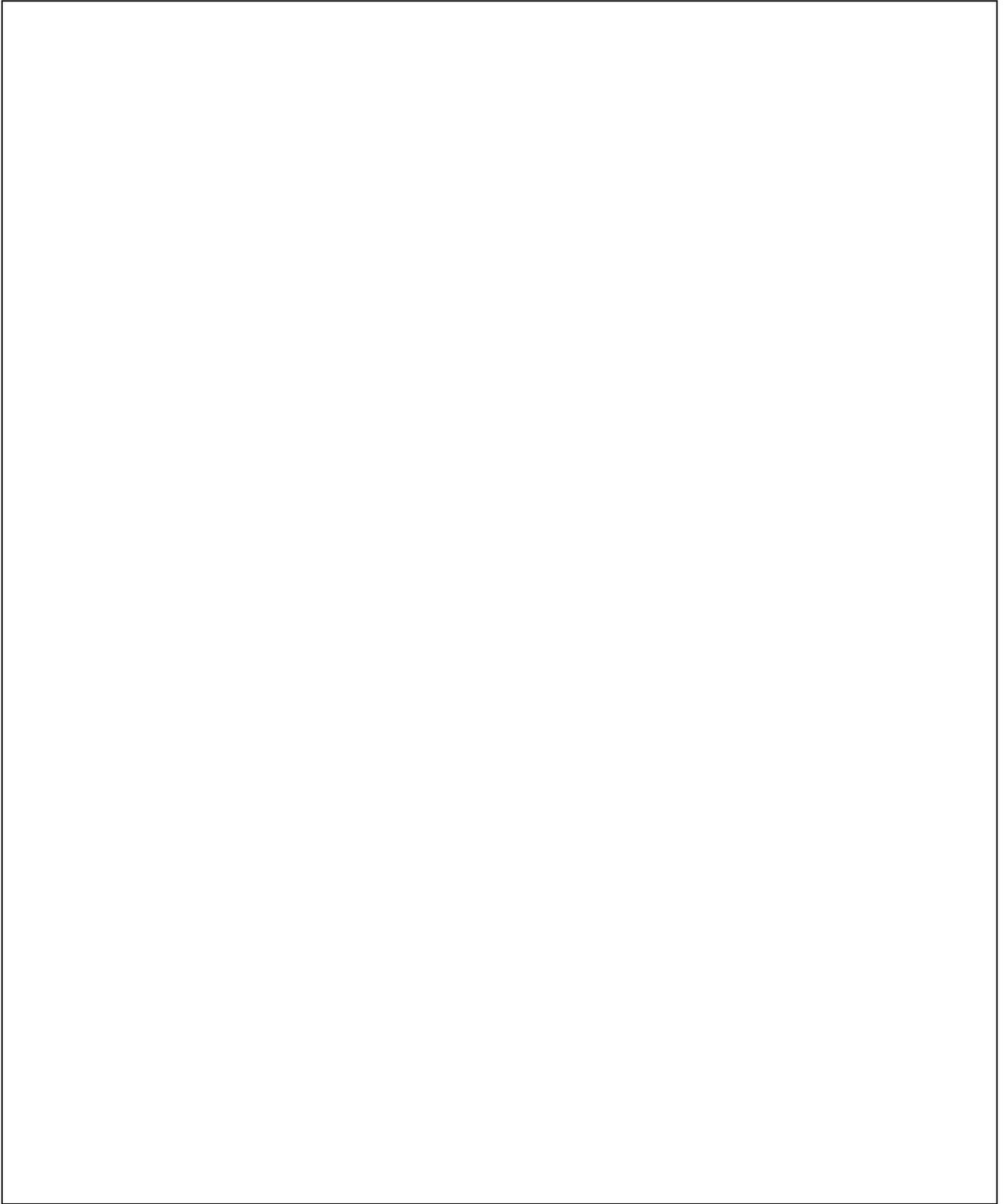
You should include in this:

- particulars of your childhood and upbringing, including the strengths and difficulties of your parents or others who cared for and raised you;
- your relationship with your parents and siblings, and their relationship with each other;
- your educational achievements, and any specific learning difficulty or disability;
- a chronology of the significant events in your life;
- details about other relatives, and their relationships with you and with the child being placed;
- your past and present employment and other sources of income;

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, occupying the upper two-thirds of the page. It is intended for the respondent to provide a detailed description of their health.

B9. Your health

Please describe your current state of health, including physical, emotional and mental health. Is there any significant information in your medical history? Please include any current or past issues of substance misuse or mental health problems.



Section C: Social worker's information

C1. Contact details of professionals supporting the placement

Name of local authority placing child:

	Assessing social worker	Assessing social worker's manager	Child(ren)'s social worker (if different)	Child(ren)'s social worker's manager
Name				
Address				
Telephone				
Work mobile				
email				

C2. Social worker's report on the wishes and feelings of the child

What are the wishes and feelings of the child about being placed with the connected person, and how have these views been ascertained? How recently has the child visited the connected person's home?

(Depending on their age and understanding, and time available, children/young people may be invited to express their views, by means such as writing, drawing or making a tape, and these can be taken into account in making a decision about temporary fostering approval.)

C3. Views of the parents and others with parental responsibility

What are the views of the parents and others with parental responsibility about the child being placed with the connected person? The parents should be invited, time permitting, to put their views in writing. Where the parents are opposed to the placement, why is this? What additional support might the carers need, where the parents are opposed to the placement, e.g. with managing contact?

C4. Comment and analysis by social worker

The social worker should explain the benefits and risks of placing the child with this connected person under a temporary fostering approval. Comments and analysis by the social worker should cover all areas relevant to the welfare of this particular child being placed with this particular connected person, but should in any case include:

- (a) the quality of the existing relationship between the child and the connected person
- (b) history and current lifestyle of other young people in the household
- (c) the home environment of the connected person and the space available there for the child

- (d) the nature of the relationships between the members of the connected person's household, including other children and young people, and their views about the child coming to live with them
- (e) likely impact on other children and young people in the household of the child coming to live with them
- (f) plans for contact
- (g) any support that would be needed to ensure the placement of the child could be maintained and their needs appropriately met

C5. Conclusion and recommendation

(i) The social worker should explain why they are recommending that the connected person should or should not be given temporary approval as a Connected Persons foster carer.

(ii) The connected person should comment below on whether they agree with the social worker's conclusion and recommendation, and where their views differ from the social worker explain what their disagreements are.

C6. Date temporary approval will lapse

This should be 16 weeks from the date the child was placed with the connected person

C7. Signatures

1st connected person Date

2nd connected person Date

Social worker Date

Social work manager Date

C8. Signature of the officer nominated with the authority to grant temporary fostering approval to the connected person

I do / do not (delete as appropriate) agree to the approval of the connected person who is the subject of this report to be a temporary foster carer, for a period of up to 16 weeks:

Name (print)

Position held

Signature Date

Comments:

C9. Agreement to extend temporary fostering approval

In exceptional circumstances, the local authority can extend the temporary approval of a connected person. The approval can be extended for a further eight weeks, if it has not been possible to complete the full assessment process within 16 weeks, or until the outcome of the review is known, if having been assessed and turned down at the fostering panel the connected person applies to the Independent Review Mechanism.

In agreeing to extend the temporary fostering approval, the nominated officer confirms that the placement with the connected person remains the most appropriate available for the child, the Independent Reviewing Officer has been informed, and the views of the fostering panel sought:

Signature Date

Reasons for agreeing to extend temporary approval, including any views expressed by the fostering panel (minutes of the panel discussion may be attached):

This form is based on work originally developed by C Edwards and E Brocklesby in conjunction with FRG and Hampshire Social Services

11.4 Appendix 4: Useful Organisations and Information For Family and Friends Carers

Action for Prisoners' Families

Works to reduce the negative impact of imprisonment on prisoners' families. Produces publications and resources, and provides advice, information and training as well as networking opportunities.

www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk

Advice line: 0808 800 2222

Addaction

Offers a range of support developed for families and carers affected by substance misuse.

www.addaction.org.uk

Tel. 020 7251 5860 or email

info@addaction.org.uk

Adfam

Works with families affected by drugs and alcohol, and supports carers of children whose parents have drug and alcohol problems.

www.adfam.org.uk

By telephone 020 3817 9410 (please note we do not operate a helpline)

By email

Admin@adfam.org.uk

Advisory Centre for Education (ACE)

Offers free independent advice and information for parents and carers on a range of state education and schooling issues, including admissions, exclusion, attendance, special educational needs and bullying.

www.ace-ed.org.uk

ACE Adviceline - 0300 0115 142

CORAM BAAF Adoption and Fostering Academy

Provides information and advice about adoption and fostering and publishes resources.

<http://www.coram.org.uk/corambaaf-adoption-fostering-academy>

CoramBAAF Advice Line

CoramBAAF members and those wanting information on adoption and fostering can contact the CoramBAAF Advice Line on 0300 222 5775, Mon – Fri, 9-1pm, or email advice@corambaaf.org.uk

Coram's Children's Legal Centre

Provides free independent legal advice and factsheets to children, parents, carers and professionals.

www.childrenslegalcentre.com

<http://childlawadvice.org.uk/>

If you are calling about **family law** the number is **0300 330 5480**.

If you are calling about **education law**, the number is **0300 330 5485**.

Citizens Advice Bureaux

Helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free, independent and confidential advice through local bureaux and website.

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Department for Education

Lists details of telephone help lines and online services to provide information, advice and support on a range of issues that parents and families may face in bringing up children and young people.

www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families

Family Fund Trust

Helps families with severely disabled or seriously ill children to have choices and the opportunity to enjoy ordinary life. Gives grants for things that make life easier and more enjoyable for the disabled child and their family.

<https://www.familyfund.org.uk/>

Call us on 01904 550055

Email: info@familyfund.org.uk

Family Rights Group (FGR)

Provides advice to parents and other family members whose children are involved with or require children's social care services because of welfare needs or concerns. Publishes resources, helps to develop support groups for family and friends carers, and runs a discussion board.

www.frg.org.uk

Freephone Helpline Number 0808 801 0366

Email: advice@frg.org.uk

The Fostering Network

Supports foster carers and anyone with an interest in fostering to improve the lives of children in care. Publishes resources and runs Fosterline, a confidential advice line for foster carers including concerns about a child's future, allegations and complaints, legislation and financial matters.

www.fostering.net

Grandparents Plus

Supports grandparents and their families, especially those who have lost or are losing contact with their grandchildren because of divorce, separation or other family problems, those caring for their grandchildren on a full-time basis, and those with childcare responsibilities for their grandchildren.

<https://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/>

Mentor UK

Promotes the health and wellbeing of children and young people to reduce the damage that drugs can do to lives.

www.mentoruk.org.uk

National Family Mediation (NFM)

Provides mediation services to support couples who are separated, and their children and others affected by this.

www.nfm.org.uk

Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group

Operates helpline and provides a variety of services to support anyone who has a link with someone in prison, prisoners and other agencies.

www.partnersofprisoners.co.uk

Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT)

Provides practical and emotional support to prisoners and to their children and families. The Kinship Care Support Service provides support and advice to family members and friends who care for children whose parents are in HMP Holloway.

<https://www.prisonadvice.org.uk/>

Parents Against Drug Abuse (PADA)

Delivers support and services to the families of substance users, including a national helpline.

<http://www.pada.merseyside.org/>

Parentline Plus

Provides help and support in all aspects of family life, including information, an online chat facility and a 24 hour helpline.

www.familylives.org.uk

TalktoFrank

The government's national drugs helpline which offers free confidential drugs information and advice 24 hours a day. Information and advice is also available via the website.

www.talktofrank.com

CoramVoice

Advocacy organisation for children living away from home or in need.

www.voiceyp.org

Young Minds

Works to improve the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people and empowering their parents and carers.

www.youngminds.org.uk