



FAMILY AND FRIENDS POLICY

1. The Purpose of this Policy

As parents we do not always want to think about what might happen to our children if we cannot look after them, but it is one of the most important things we should do.

For many people the first time they will have to face this will be when they make a will and have to appoint a guardian, who is usually a relative that will be able either to look after the children themselves or make suitable arrangements for their care if the person making the will dies.

Some people may have to cope with family difficulties or suffer from long term illness and will need additional help to bring up their children. Often there may be someone else in the family who can support them or look after their children if they cannot. Families will frequently make their own arrangements with relatives and it is estimated that 300,000 children in this country are cared for full time by a relative, friend or other person who is connected to the child in some way. Most of the relatives who provide this alternative care are grandparents, aunts and uncles and sometimes older brothers or sisters. We now refer to all of these people together as 'family and friends' or 'connected people'.

If there is nobody in the family who can take over the care of the child, parents can turn to the state for help through Children's Services. Local councils offer a variety of services to keep families together and can provide substitute care for children either in foster homes or children's homes when this is not possible. About 70,000 children are cared for in this way in this country at any time.

This policy:

Gives information to carers who are family or friends about how they can look after someone else's child

Explains when and what the Council can do to support them

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Sets out the Council's approach to meeting the needs of the children living with family and friends

2. THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF ARRANGEMENTS THAT CAN BE MADE PRIVATELY

INFORMAL FAMILY CARE

A parent can make their own arrangement either with a close relative or someone else who has been given all the formal rights, duties and responsibilities to look after their child, such as another member of the family with parental responsibility or a legal guardian. These are called 'informal family arrangements'.

A close relative is a grandparent, a brother or sister, uncle or aunt by full blood, half blood or by marriage or civil partnership, or a step parent of the child. A step parent is someone who is married or has been married to the parent, but is not the natural parent of the child. A cohabitee of a mother or father does not qualify as a close relative. A legal guardian is someone appointed in a will.

These arrangements are entirely private, without the need to notify the local authority. They may be made, for example, when a grandparent takes over the care of a child due to adverse family circumstances or death of a parent or when a relative considers that the parents are unable to care for the child.

When these arrangements are made, the parent keeps parental responsibility for the child, but the relative does not automatically acquire it. This means that only the parent has the decision-making powers, rights and duties, though the relative caring for the child can do what is reasonable to safeguard or promote the child's welfare. In other words, informal family carers can make decisions about most day to day decisions, but they must refer back to the parents and any other person with parental responsibility for all the important decisions about the child's care.

These informal family arrangements can work well, as long as the relative and parent agree about how the child should be brought up and get along with each other; but if disputes occur, there is a variety of ways of resolving them:

1. A close relative can get parental responsibility by applying for a Child Arrangements Order, so that they can share all the rights, duties and decision-making powers with the

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parent. This can be done with the consent of all those who already have parental responsibility for the child or without their consent if the child has lived with them for at least one year before the application is made;

2. If a close relative wants to be able to have the final say in most decisions that are made about the child they can apply for a special guardianship order, as long as they have the consent of everyone who has parental responsibility or without their consent if the child has lived with them for at least one year before making the application (but this does not allow them to make a decision about adoption and other decisions which in law require the consent of more than one person with parental responsibility);
3. Specific disputes can be resolved without the need to acquire parental responsibility by applying to the court for either a Child Arrangements Order, a prohibitive steps order or a specific issues order, depending upon the nature of the disagreement. Legal guardians, special guardians, a step parent with parental responsibility and anybody with a Child Arrangements Order can apply for one of these orders, though the court will usually not make them if the young person is over the age of 16 or if the desired result could be achieved instead by making a Child Arrangements Order.

The effect of each of these orders is that:

- A **Child Arrangements Order** settles the arrangement for where and with whom a child lives and gives parental responsibility to the person with the order. The order continues until the child is 18 years old, unless it is discharged earlier. However, the child cannot be given a new surname or removed from the United Kingdom for more than a month without either the written consent of every person with parental responsibility for the child or the permission of the court;
- A **special guardianship order** has the same effect as a Child Arrangements Order, but the special guardian is given pre-eminent status in decision making, so that they have the final say in how the child is brought up. A special guardianship order provides legal security for a child until adulthood, unless it is discharged earlier. It is intended to provide a permanent arrangement for the child without going as far as adoption or completely excluding the parents.

A child cannot be given a new surname or taken out of the United Kingdom for more than 3 months, as long as the special guardianship order is in force, without either having the

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written consent of every other person with parental responsibility or the permission of the court;

- A **Child Arrangements Order** settles disputes about whom a child can see and how often;
- A **prohibitive steps order** means that a person with parental responsibility is prevented from taking steps that they would normally be entitled to take unless they have the permission of the court;
- A **specific issues order** is an order made by the court directing how a contentious issue should be handled or resolved.

PRIVATE FOSTERING

This is another private arrangement, but it is made between a parent and someone without parental responsibility for their child who is not another parent, close relative or legal guardian. The arrangement must last for 28 days or more or the intention should be that it will last for more than 28 days. The child must be under the age of 16, or 18 if they are disabled.

Private foster carers will usually be friends, more distant relations such as cousins, and other people who have taken a great interest in the child's welfare.

The private foster carer should ask the parent for any money they need in order to care for the child.

Parents can still ask someone to look after their child for any period up to 28 days, as long as they do not intend it to last any longer, without it becoming a private fostering arrangement.

Unlike informal family arrangements, private fostering arrangements are strictly regulated by the law. When a private fostering arrangement is proposed, the private foster carer or the parent or anyone else with parental responsibility for the child who knows of the proposal must notify the Children's Services of the arrangement at least 6 weeks before it is due to begin or immediately if it is due to start within this 6 week period.

You can do this by telephoning Children's Social Care on 01720 424354 and asking to speak to someone about private fostering. You will then be sent a notification form to complete, which should be returned to Children's Services. This will be your formal notification of the arrangement.

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Children's Social Care must ensure that the private foster carer is visited and that the child is being looked after properly. If the social worker thinks that the child's needs are not being met, Children's Services can impose conditions upon the kind of care that is being given or remove the child if they consider it necessary.

If this were to happen, they would either return the child to their parent, arrange for the child to live with someone else who has parental responsibility or a relative who was prepared to take over the care of the child. Failing this, the child may be accommodated by the Council itself.

Anyone who is thinking of making a private fostering arrangement should make sure that they know the law about private fostering before agreeing to it. This is set out in the Children Act 1989, sections 66 to 70 and schedule 8 of the Act, and in the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

The British Association for Fostering and Adoption (BAAF) produce a booklet for people considering becoming a private foster carer that tells people what they need to know and do. They also have a booklet for children, telling them what private fostering is and what it means. You can find these by clicking on the following links:

- [BAAF website: Private fostering England and Wales \(2009\);](#)
- [BAAF website: Private fostering - what it is and what it means.](#)

A young person will automatically cease to be privately fostered at the age of 16, unless they are disabled, when they will need to be 18. However, if they continue to live with their private foster carer after this age, the placement will become an informal arrangement with family and friends.

Private foster carers can apply for a Child Arrangements Order if they have the consent of everyone who has parental responsibility for the child or if the child has lived with them in total for a period of 3 years during the five years before the application is made.

Private foster carers can apply for a special guardianship order if the child has lived with them in total for a period of three years during the five years before making the application or if they ask the Court first for permission to apply or if they have already obtained a Child Arrangements Order.

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ADOPTION

Any family and friends carer can apply to adopt the child if the child has had their home with them for a total period of 3 years or more within the 5 years before the application is made. An application to adopt can also be made if the court gives permission first for an application to be made.

Adoption is the most complete and final transfer of responsibility for a child. It is permanent and is the only way a parent (mother or father) or anyone else with parental responsibility can lose it. The child is given the surname of the adopting family and any new first names and is treated in all respects as another child of the adoptive family, including rights of inheritance.

FAMILY SUPPORT

The Council, through Children's Services, can offer support to a family when a child is considered to be a 'child in need'. A child will be taken to be in need if:

- Children's Services decides that they need to provide services to the child and family to enable the child to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development;
- The child's health or development is likely to be significantly impaired if Children's Services do not provide these services; or
- The child is disabled.

'Development' includes the child's physical, intellectual, emotional, social and behavioural development. 'Health' means the child's mental health as well as physical health.

A child is considered to be disabled if they are blind, deaf or dumb or have a mental disorder of any kind or they are substantially and permanently disabled by illness, injury or a deformity that has existed from birth.

The definition of a 'child in need' has been left vague by the law, so that the responsibility for deciding in each individual case whether the Council needs to intervene or not has been left to the professionals employed by it.

This means that Children's Services can help and support relatives, friends and private foster carers to bring up children, but only those whose children are considered by a social worker to be children in need.

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Children's Services will always strive to keep children within their own family where at all possible, but sometimes this is not practicable or appropriate.

The Council can provide substitute care for a child only if:

- There is nobody with parental responsibility for the child; or
- The child is lost or has been abandoned; or
- The person who has been caring for them is prevented for whatever reason from providing the child with suitable accommodation or care; and
- There is nobody else who is suitable to look after the child in the family or among other people who are connected to the child.

A child can be away from their family or carers for just a few days or for a short period of time while problems at home are sorted out or they may never return to live with their parents or carers, depending upon the circumstances.

Short breaks can also be offered to relieve some of the stresses upon parents or carers while problems are being sorted out.

If Children's Services has to take over responsibility for the child in any of the above circumstances it can only do so with the agreement of a parent or other person with parental responsibility, unless there is no such person available.

However, Children's Services may have to remove a child from their parents or a carer against their wishes if the professionals who are involved with a family have looked into the situation and have concluded that:

- Either the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm and the harm has been caused by a parent (or someone else) caring for the child in a way that is less than what is expected of a reasonable parent;
- Or the child is beyond parental control;
- The parents do not want their child to be taken into care;
- There is no other suitable person in the family who can take over their care;

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- And a court has agreed that this is so and that the child would be better off in the care of the Council.

‘Harm’ means ill treatment or the impairment of health or development, including impairment suffered as a result of seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another person. This takes into account, for example, the effects on a child of witnessing domestic violence.

Again the definition of harm has been left vague to allow the professionals to decide in each individual case whether the harm caused to the child is so severe that the child should be taken from its parents.

The Council does not acquire parental responsibility when it looks after a child with the parent’s or carer’s agreement. The arrangement is voluntary and can be ended at any time by the parent or someone else with parental responsibility. This means that the Council has to work with all those who have parental responsibility in the best interests of the child.

However, parental responsibility is given to the Council when a child has been removed compulsorily and a court has made a care order or an interim care order in favour of the Council.

Those in the Council who have responsibility for the child must still work with everyone else who has parental responsibility, but the effect of the order is to allow the Council to make decisions about the child’s welfare and upbringing on its own if it disagrees with the views of the others with parental responsibility. It should do this only when others with parental responsibility are clearly unwilling or incapable of acting or making decisions that are in the best interests of the child.

4. HOW THE COUNCIL CAN INTERVENE

SUPPORTING FAMILIES

In general, social workers can:

- Offer advice, guidance or counselling about how to manage difficult issues or behaviour and tell you about other services that you could use as well;
- Help with the cost of getting to and from other services;
- Promote contact between the child and their parents and other members of their family;

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- Enable the child to take part in social, cultural or recreational activities;
- Provide home care assistance;
- Assist another person who is living with the child and is mistreating the child to move to other premises by helping that person to find accommodation or giving them cash.

The kind of services a family receives will depend upon the circumstances and a social worker's assessment of the child's needs. This assessment will cover not only the child's overall development, but also the family and social relationships that affect the child's upbringing, the parent's capacity to care for the child and whether they have sufficient resources to provide for the child.

Children's Services can give financial assistance too. This may be a single payment or it may be regular payments, depending upon the need.

All of these services are given to help parents continue looking after their child at home and they are also available to relatives, friends or private foster carers looking after a child in need.

When a child is being cared for by a relative, friend or private foster carer, however, and the carer needs some help with the regular maintenance costs of looking after the child, any financial assistance must normally be agreed between the carer and the parent, though Children's Services may 'top this up' in some circumstances.

PROVIDING ALTERNATIVE CARE

When Children's Services take responsibility for a child they will want to talk first of all to the child, the parents and anyone else with parental responsibility to find out what they think should happen next and whether there is anybody in the family who can look after the child either immediately or in the future.

This is because the law says that the Council must place a child either with another parent or someone else with parental responsibility before considering any other possibility, unless this would not be good for the child's welfare or it was not reasonably practicable. Another parent would be a former partner with parental responsibility, husband or wife where a couple have separated or divorced or a step parent.

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If this is not possible, then Children's Services must find, in their opinion, the most appropriate placement for the child. When considering this, the social worker will have to take into account the law about placing a child, which says that preference should be given to:

- Firstly a relative, friend or other person connected with the child who is also a local authority foster carer, then either;
- A local authority foster carer who is not a relative or connected to the child; or
- A placement in a children's home; or
- Any other arrangement.

The law also makes it clear that if the Council decides to place a child for whom they have accepted responsibility with a relative, friend or any other person who is connected to the child, then the carer must be approved as a local authority foster carer.

There are some further legal conditions that Children's Services have to meet when looking for someone to look after a child. It must ensure, so far as it is reasonably practicable, that the placement:

- Allows the child to live near their home;
- Does not disrupt the child's education;
- Keeps brothers and sisters together;
- Is suitable to accommodate the particular needs of a child who is disabled; and
- Is within the Isles of Scilly where possible.

Trying to balance all of these conditions has the potential to create conflict between the Council and a parent; for example, if a parent has already decided against letting another family member with whom they have fallen out look after their child, they may find nevertheless that the social worker could be suggesting that their child is placed with them, if, in their opinion, it would be the best place for the child. It is also possible that a relative may want to care for the child but not want to be approved as a local authority foster carer; nor is it certain that a relative will always be approved as a local authority foster carer, even though they want to look after the child.

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These kinds of dilemmas will have to be resolved through discussion with the social worker. All the advantages and disadvantages of a particular arrangement will have to be considered to decide what is best for the child.

For example, a placement with another parent against the wishes of the parent with care of the child may provide the immediate care that is needed, but may not be able to provide long term stability and security for the child if the parents are in continual conflict. If a relative cannot be approved as a local authority foster carer, then another foster carer who can meet all the requirements of the placement may have to be considered. Sometimes it may be better to place a child outside of Norfolk, if it means they can live with a relative in another part of the country who can provide the most suitable home for the child.

There are no hard and fast rules about this, but an explanation of the objectives, principles and values that guide the work of Children's Services may help you to understand how social workers will resolve these dilemmas.

PRINCIPLES, VALUES AND OBJECTIVES

When we are trying to find the most suitable placement:

1. We believe that children are best looked after in their own family, unless compulsory intervention is necessary, and that relatives and friends have a vital contribution to make.

There is good research evidence to support this:

- Placements with family and friends last longer than with other foster carers and children have fewer moves;
- Family carers show greater commitment and persist with difficulties for longer than other carers;
- Because children go to people they know, there is less disruption;
- Contact with parents is more likely;
- Children placed with family and friends appear to do as well as children placed with other foster carers in terms of their health, education and emotional and behavioural development, though some studies have suggested that they do better;

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- In addition, we know that most children who are looked after by a local authority would prefer their parents to be given help to continue caring for them, but if this fails, they would prefer to live with another member of their family. Few would choose to be looked after by a local authority.
2. We will work in partnership with parents, family and friends, unless it is clear that they cannot make decisions or act in ways that put the welfare of the child first;
 3. Any differences of opinion or conflicts between those who have parental responsibility will be resolved by considering what is in the best interest of the child. This will be more important than anything else;
 4. Wherever possible, Children's Services will seek to resolve difficulties by negotiation, rather than compulsion and control. This means supporting and working with families to prevent the need for court orders;
 5. No child should come into care or stay in care unnecessarily. A child should not have to come into care just so that their family or carers can get the support services they need. Our support should be based on the child's needs, not who is looking after them. This includes financial support. A care diversion meeting will be held before any child becomes looked after unless they are in need of immediate protection. This will be chaired by the Children's Social Care Manager and involve all those involved with the child and any potential carers, family or friends.
 6. We will treat family and friends carers with the same respect and fairness as we treat our own carers and give them the same opportunities. Family and friends carers should not be disadvantaged because of their previous relationship with the child;
 7. We will listen to children when making decisions about the matters that affect them and will take their views, wishes and feelings into account, unless they are too young to understand.

We will want to ensure that a child has a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond whenever we have responsibility for them.

This may include helping the parents to heal the difficulties that caused the split, so that the child may return to live with them, as well as finding another family if the difficulties cannot be resolved.

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If a child stays in our care, we will want the same for them as any parent would do. We want them to grow up to be healthy and safe, to achieve and enjoy life, to make a positive contribution to society and to be financially independent.

In our opinion, the most suitable home for a child will be the one that will help us to achieve all of these things.

5. INFORMATION ABOUT SERVICES AND SUPPORT

LOCAL, NATIONAL, VOLUNTARY AND PRIVATE SERVICES

Close relatives, private foster carers and other people caring for someone else's child should be signposted to a variety of local and national services which could include those relating to:

- Childcare and out of school activities;
- Health;
- Parenting and family support;
- Learning and education;
- Special needs and disabilities;
- Leisure, sport and culture;
- Children's Centres;
- Welfare benefits and rights;
- Young people.

The [Gov.uk website](#) is the main source of information about government services and contains much information about benefits, employment, childcare and legal issues.

Children's Social Care can be contacted on 01720 424354

More information about the Citizens Advice Bureau can be found on their website www.cabcornwall.org.uk

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The child you are looking after may need specialised services and in this case you may need to talk to other professionals about your child; for example, you will need to talk to the child's school in the first place about any special educational need the child has or to your doctor if your child appears to have mental health problems. A doctor may then make a referral to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service for you, if this is needed.

MONEY AND OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES PROVIDED BY CHILDREN'S SERVICES UNDER SECTION 17 OF THE CHILDREN ACT 1989

Unless you are setting up a private fostering arrangement, when you must let Children's Services know that you are proposing to do this, you can ask Children's Services for some help.

If you think the child you are looking after needs some additional help or if you are struggling with money or the child's behaviour you can contact Children's Social Care by ringing 01720 424354.

You may find, however, that someone else who knows you may contact Children's Services if they have concerns about your child and the way you are bringing them up or if they think your child could benefit from the services that Children's Services provide.

If the request for help or the concerns comes within the Children's Services' responsibilities, we will arrange for a social worker to visit you to discuss what you and your child needs. The information that the social worker gathers will go into an assessment. This is a statement describing the problems and what is causing them, how they are affecting your child's development and what we are going to do to help. You should be given a written copy of this assessment.

Any services that the social worker decides should be offered for the child's benefit will be set out in a written plan.

This will be either a child in need plan if it is a matter of providing support, or a child protection plan should the child be considered to be at risk of significant harm.

You will be told immediately if it is being treated as a matter of child protection. A child protection plan can only be made at a case conference, which is held to take stock of all that has happened and to allow the professionals to make a decision about whether your child has suffered significant harm.

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Children's Services can provide a variety of services, ranging from advice to practical and material help, according to the circumstances. However, carers may sometimes need some additional money to help them get by with the costs of looking after another child.

If it is a private arrangement, parents will always be expected to make their own arrangement with the carer to cover the normal costs of maintaining the child; but if the best place for a child is with another member of the family or someone else connected to the child and the only reason preventing this from being possible is a shortage of money, then Children's Services may offer some financial assistance to 'top up' the parent's contribution.

This may be a single payment or an agreed amount of money that is paid regularly to the carer under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. Such payments could cover, for example, the cost of buying additional equipment and furniture to set up the arrangement or regular payments may be paid for a short period while the carer gets over some temporary difficulty, such as a sudden loss of income.

Such payments will be made on the grounds that:

- The child is a child in need and they are necessary to promote or safeguard the welfare of the child;
- The arrangement is the most suitable for the child;
- The parent cannot cover the costs themselves; and
- If the payment was not made, it would be necessary for the Council to provide alternative accommodation for the child.

All of these payments are discretionary. If they are regular payments, they will be reviewed periodically to make sure that they are still needed and that the money is being spent on the purpose for which it was given.

CHILD ARRANGEMENTS ORDERS, SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDERS AND ADOPTION

CHILD ARRANGEMENTS ORDERS

Children's Services can pay an allowance to a person with a Child Arrangements Order in certain circumstances to help with the maintenance of someone else's child and the costs of accommodation.

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It is a discretionary payment, which can be given to support an arrangement between family and friends to avoid the need for the Council to provide the child with accommodation.

When considering an application for an allowance, Children's Services will want to make sure that:

- The child will be given a safe and caring home, in which they can thrive;
- The carer can cope with the demands of other members of the family and maintain the child's contact with them;
- The carer is committed to the child throughout their childhood; and
- The carer will not be able to provide for the child adequately without the allowance.

The allowance will usually be paid for a short period only to support the costs of looking after the child during the transition period while they are settling into their new home. However, Children's Services may be willing to pay the allowance for much longer periods if it is necessary to keep the arrangement going for the child's benefit and the carer still needs the money. This could be up to the time the Child Arrangements Order expires or the child moves somewhere else, but this is likely to be exceptional.

If an allowance is paid for more than a year it will be reviewed annually to make sure that it is still needed.

An application for an allowance should be made before an order is made, unless this is impracticable. A social worker will then assess the need for the allowance.

If an allowance is paid, the amount will be the same as the basic allowance that is paid to the Council's foster carers, less child benefit, which the carer will be expected to have transferred from the parent.

The award of an allowance may affect the entitlement of people who are living on benefits and they should contact the Benefits Agency for advice about this before they apply for an allowance.

SPECIAL GUARDIANS

The Council can also pay an allowance to special guardians. Children's Services must assess the need for support of everyone who applies to the court for a special guardianship order and a

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special guardianship support plan has to be submitted to the court as part of the application. Whether an allowance is paid or not will depend upon the assessment.

Children's Services can contribute to make sure that the special guardian can adequately care for the child and meet the extra costs of looking after a child who has special needs, an illness, a disability, emotional or behavioural difficulties or is suffering from the consequences of previous abuse or neglect. This support may include costs for travel, enabling them to keep in contact with other members of their family and the legal costs of applying for a special guardianship order.

Special guardianship allowances will be given mainly to support a family arrangement and avoid the need for the Council to provide the child with accommodation. We may also give an allowance to people who are applying to be a special guardian where the Council has already applied for a care order or the child is already subject to an interim care order, but the need for this will also have to be assessed.

A social worker will undertake the assessment and this will include a financial means test.

An allowance may be paid to cover setting up costs or as a lump sum or as a regular payment. If it is a regular payment, it will be paid at the same basic rate as the Council pays its own foster carers, less the child benefit, which the special guardian will be expected to have transferred from the parent.

Regular payments will be reviewed annually to make sure that they are still needed and are being used for the purpose for which they were given. A special guardian can ask for the means test to be reviewed if their financial circumstances change.

ADOPTION

If you have adopted your child, there is a wide range of help and support that you can get from Cornwall Adoption services who act as an agency for the Council of the Isles of Scilly.

This includes:

- Information;
- Support groups for adopters;
- Workshops on topics that affect adopters;
- Individual support and advice;

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- Therapeutic work with adopted children;;
- Financial support in certain circumstances.

Contact can be made with this team adoption@cornwall.gov.uk

PRIVATE FOSTER CARERS

All private foster carers have to be visited by a social worker to offer support and make sure that the child is being looked after properly. During the first year after notification this will be at intervals of no more than 6 weeks and no more than 12 weeks in the following years. They may visit more frequently than the required minimum if it is necessary.

Private foster carers may also take part in the training that is offered to other foster carers.

Any financial support will be made available under the provisions of section 17 of the Children Act 1989, which are discretionary payments.

Although the private fostering arrangement will cease automatically when the young person reaches the age of 16, Children's Services will still have a responsibility to offer advice and guidance to the young person themselves until they are 21 years old. Children's Services must continue to advise the young person, assist them and befriend them until they reach this age.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS FOSTER CARERS

Whenever Children's Services place a child in their care with another member of their family or with someone who is connected to them, an assessment of that person's suitability to become a foster carer with the Council must be made, though Children's Services can place a child with a carer for no more than 16 weeks without approving them to allow a placement to be made immediately while the full approval process is undertaken.

This means that family and friends carers who want to look after a child who is already cared for by the Council will have more obligations and responsibilities than a relative who is providing informal care, because they will have to become a local authority foster carer.

It means that they will have to be assessed and have Disclosure and Barring Service checks done in order to be approved as a local authority foster carer.

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Whenever the Council has responsibility for a child, they will draw up a care plan, which sets out what the child needs and how the Council will meet those needs. When a child is placed with a family or friend's carer, the Council will still keep responsibility for this plan and how the child is brought up, but the carer will have delegated authority to bring up the child. A social worker from the Council's fostering service will visit regularly to make sure that the aims and objectives of the child care plan are being met, but also to offer support, advice and guidance to enable the carer to do this.

The social worker will visit every four to six weeks and will be there for the carer. These visits will be the appropriate time to discuss what is happening in the placement, to raise any issues or concerns and seek advice and information.

Family and friends' foster carers will also be expected to undertake training. All our foster carers are expected to meet The Children's Workforce Development Council's standards and to do the training to achieve them. These are a national benchmark and will give you the recognition you deserve, as well as ensuring that your knowledge and skills are up to date.

You will have to provide evidence that you are meeting these standards. The standards are accompanied by a workbook that sets out how examples of meeting everyday events can be used to provide this evidence. The fostering service's social worker and an experienced foster carer will help you through this process.

Family and friend's foster carers have to complete this training within 18 months of being approved. There are also other training courses available for foster carers and all these are open to family and friend's carers too.

All foster carers receive a regular fostering allowance to cover the basic costs of maintaining a child, This allowance is paid to cover the normal costs of caring – food, clothing, pocket money and the usual personal, household and transport costs. In addition there are specific allowances paid for holidays, birthdays, Christmas and other religious festivals and a setting up grant.

It is not a salary or a wage and therefore the basic allowance is disregarded for income tax purposes. Because it is not deemed to be earnings, the amount of the allowance cannot be included in any calculation of income for the purpose of securing a loan or mortgage. If a foster carer's means of financial support is from state benefits, the basic allowance does not affect these and it can be received on top of their benefits.

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ACCOMMODATION

Sometimes the only reason that is preventing another family member from looking after a child is lack of space in their home. If you are a council or social landlord tenant, Children's Services can support you in making an application to move to more suitable accommodation to enable you to look after a child who would otherwise have to be provided for by the Council.

If the child you are thinking of looking after has a disability, we can help with providing aids and making small adaptations to your home to accommodate their needs.

If you are expecting the child to live with you permanently Children's Services may support an application to the district council for large adaptations to be made to a house or pay for the work to be done if it is not covered by the district council's responsibilities.

CONTACT

The Council has a duty to promote the contact between a child who is living away from home and their parents, other relatives and their friends, but only if they are considered to be a child in need.

If a child is not looked after by the Council, but is a child in need, it is required to promote contact with their family if it is necessary to "safeguard or promote their welfare". If a child is in the care of the Council, it must "endeavour to promote contact, unless it is not practicable or consistent with the child's welfare".

If you are being supported by a social worker you can talk to them about any difficulties you are having with contact. The social worker may be able to give you advice and information about services that can help. However, they cannot give legal advice.

If the contact arrangements were set by a court, you may need to see a solicitor about resolving any disputes.

SUPPORT GROUPS

If you are a grandparent looking after your grandchild you can find information that may be helpful from the [Grandparents Association website](#).

FAMILY CONFERENCES

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When a parent asks Children's Services for some help because they can no longer look after their child, Children's Services will immediately want to see if there is someone in the family who can take over the care. One of the most effective ways of doing this is to hold a family conference.

This is a meeting of the wider family which is held with Children's Services to encourage the whole family to find their own solution to the problem. This may include finding someone within the family to care for the child, but it may also come up with new or additional ways of supporting the parent.

Children's Services will always seek to hold a family conference first when they are faced with a request to look after a child. Ideally it should be held before a parent gets to this point, but if this is not practicable it should be held as soon as possible to explore all the options for the child.

For those children who are already in the care of the Council, a family conference should be arranged as soon as possible to see if there are any relatives or other connected people who could offer a home to the child and become a local authority foster carer.

The social worker will talk to everyone in the family and arrange the meeting.

6. COMPLAINTS

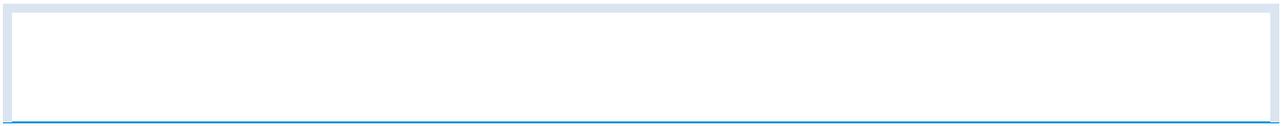
We hope that the relationship that develops between us will mean that any difficulties that arise can be resolved quickly and easily by discussion; but inevitably there will be some occasions when this does not work out.

If you are not satisfied with any aspect of our service or wish to compliment us on our service you can do so by completing our complaints form

Any child, member of their family or family and friends carer can make a complaint about the services that they receive. If you have a social worker visiting, you can take up your complaint first of all with them or their manager, but if it cannot be resolved this way then you can make a formal complaint to the Senior Manager Children's Services.

Family and friends foster carers are also obliged to report any circumstances within the fostering service which they consider likely to harm significantly the safety, rights or welfare of any child placed by the fostering service and they are protected in doing this by the Council's whistle blowing policy.

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March 2016