

VISITS TO LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN Departmental Policy

This guidance is intended to cover looked after children in the following situations:-

- In foster care, either with Leicestershire's foster carers or with an Independent Fostering Agency
- In Leicestershire's 'In-house' children's homes
- In agency residential placements inside and outside Leicestershire
- In residential school (52 week, weekly and term-time boarders if Section 20 or 31).
- When children are placed with parents.
- In supported lodgings and independent living accommodation (if Section 20 or 31).
- In prisons, secure accommodation and young offender institutions (if Section 20 or 31).
- In pre adoptive placements
- In long term hospital placements if Section 20 or Section 31.

This guidance also applies to those in private foster care.

Children in short periods of respite care (either from home or from one foster carer to another) should have a different visiting pattern – see later in this guidance.

Different Guidance applies to: -

- Disabled children in a series of short-term breaks.
- Children placed in an emergency under Regulation 38 with kinship carers

(See Appendix 1)

Some of these placement situations, in foster care for instance, have a minimum level of visiting requirements laid down in law. It is however the policy of Leicestershire Children and Young People's Service that all looked after children (and private foster children) receive a statutory visit within the first week of placement and thereafter every month for the first year in placement. After the first year the future visiting pattern will be determined at the next statutory review but must not be less than **one visit every 3-months**.

If a child changes placement, the monthly visiting pattern should restart until a 12-month period has passed.

What is the purpose of a Statutory Visit?

The role of the Child Care Operations Worker

The following is taken from guidance to the Children Act 1989 (Volume 3) This has been written for children in foster care but the general principles can apply to all statutory visits.

"Visiting the child has a number of purposes. These include: -

- a) A measure of child protection; to talk to the child, to safeguard and reassure a child who may feel isolated and vulnerable and who is away from family and friends.
 - The standard of care should be observed and the child's bedroom sometimes seen.
 - Some visits should be unannounced, in order to provide a balanced perspective of the quality of life in the foster home..
 - Visits should occasionally take place when all the members of the household are at home.
 - The child should sometimes be seen alone, perhaps outside the foster home. This reinforces the child protection element. It also helps child and social worker to get to know each other and build up a relationship of trust. Both child and foster parent should feel free to get in touch with the social worker at any time.
- b) An opportunity to evaluate and monitor the achievement of goals, with the child and carer, and to contribute to the review of the plan, to monitor, with the help of the carer, the child's educational progress; and generally to identify where help is needed.
- c) Monitoring the contact arrangements;

and
- d) To give support to the carers (whether they are **residential workers, foster carers, parents or relatives**)

- e) Visits should not be neglected because a placement is going well. Ongoing review of the plan for the child requires that visits take place at least at the frequency the Regulations require. The social worker will not be equipped to identify and help with pending difficulties if no care has been taken to establish a relationship with a child and carer. Nor will it be possible otherwise to assess fully long-term situations.
- f) There are some circumstances where visits in excess of the minimum frequency will be especially necessary. For example, where the role of the child's parents is changing, the child's needs have changed, or there are concerns about the placement. There will inevitably be periods in any placement when the placement may be under particular stress.

A Statutory Visit is:-

- made by the allocated Child Care Operations or 16 Plus Service social worker
- recorded as a statutory visit

Where

- The child is seen
- The names of all those present are recorded
- The young person is seen alone if aged over 5 and living in residential school, a children's home, is in supported lodgings, independent living, in custody, placed with parents.
- The child is seen alone in foster care (including private foster care) if there are concerns about the child or if it is felt that this will promote the relationship between child and worker.
- The visit should be unannounced once a year.
- The child's sleeping arrangements are seen. These should occur at the start of a placement and annually thereafter. (This may not be possible if the young person is in custody). For an older child the child's permission should be sought before doing this. For children of all ages safe caring principles should be observed.

When a child who has been reported missing from care returns a visit should be made within 72-hours to see the child. For children who are in residential care this visit, "by a person independent from the line management of the home", can sometimes be done by a Police Officer. If the child is in foster care or placed with parents this visit is normally done by the social worker. (See the 'Missing from Care Guidance' but be aware that this will change when the 'Missing from Home Guidance' is implemented)

The Role of the Family Placement Team Worker

Fostering social workers visit foster homes for some or all of the following purposes:-

- a) To carry out an assessment, especially if the children have been placed under Regulation 38.
- b) To supervise the foster carers about the development of their skills as carers
- c) To offer advice on behaviour management issues
- d) To offer support
- e) To deal with financial issues.
- f) To evaluate the impact of the fostering role on all members of the foster family and to offer respite and additional support if necessary.

The Role of the Residential Worker

- a) To implement the care plan for the young person
- b) To ensure the young person is equipped with clothes and other personal items
- c) To offer the child one to one contact, help and support
- d) To help create a warm homely environment in which the young person feels welcome and accepted
- e) To help the young person into education, employment or training

Children in more than one placement

Some children and young people may be placed in residential school and in foster care or a residential home. Even if the department is not funding the residential school placement termly visits should be made to the residential school.

Children Placed in Respite Care

Children who are placed in respite care from home for a short period of time should be visited within the first week of the placement and weekly thereafter until the child returns home. Children in foster care who have respite care with another foster carer should occasionally be seen in their respite setting.

Children /Young People on Care Orders or I.C.O.'s Placed with Friends and Relatives (Kinship Care Placements under Regulation 38)

In these circumstances the Fostering Services Regulations 2001 state that weekly visits must be made to the placement until the Fostering Panel has given full or temporary approval to the placement. After this the usual statutory visits can take place.

Disabled Children in a Series of Short-Term Placements (1995 Regulations)

Visits should be made:-

- a) Within the first seven placement days of a series of short-term placements.
- b) Thereafter, if the series of placements continues, at intervals of not more than six months or, if the interval between placements exceeds six months during the next placement.