

POLICY AND PROCEDURE



# **CHILDREN & FAMILIES SERVICES**

## **CORPORATE PARENTING POLICY**

FORUM APPROVED BY :  
Heads of Children's Services Group  
DATE :

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## **CORPORATE PARENTING POLICY**

### **Introduction**

This document sets out Kent County Council's policy in relation to Kent looked after children. These policy statements are supported, where necessary, by guidance or detailed procedures and they also inform Kent's Fostering and Adoption Service Policy.

It is important to note that this policy does not apply to other local authority looked after children placed in Kent.

### **Legislative Framework**

The following statutes and guidance govern fostering services:

- Adoption Act 1976
- Children Act 1989
- Arrangements for Placement of Children (General) Regulations 1991
- Children in Public Care
- Choosing with Care
- Leaving Care Act 2000
- Promoting the Health of Looked After Children (2002)
- Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations
- Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards (2002)
- Children Act 2004

### **Overarching policy**

#### **Promoting Permanence and Stability -**

Children need permanence – that is secure, stable and loving families that will support them through childhood and beyond - in order to make the attachments necessary to ensure they thrive and develop. Permanence is achieved when a child is legally secured or belongs within the family in which they live.

Achieving permanence for a child will be a key consideration while working with all children in need and their families as well as children who become looked after by the local authority.

- For most children, the best prospect for a permanent family that meets their emotional, physical, social, cultural and legal needs will be for them to remain with or return to their own birth parents without the need of a legal order.
- When a child cannot remain with or return home within a time-scale that meets the child's needs, the preferred option, where this is consistent with the child's welfare, is to seek a home for them within their extended family without a legal order. In order to facilitate this, it is mandatory that a Family Group Conference be offered to all families of children 9 and under. An informal arrangement will not exclude the possibility of financial and other support where this is necessary.

- Where a legal order is required to secure a kinship placement this may be achieved through a Residence Order or adoption. Approval of family or friends as foster carers for children subject to care orders will be exceptional and, ideally, short term.
- If a return home or a kinship placement cannot be achieved then adoption must be considered for all children 9 and under. Children over 9 years of age may also benefit from adoption if this is in their best interests and consistent with their wishes.

### **Contingency planning**

Where there is any doubt that restoration home or shared/kinship care is achievable within the developmental timescales of a child, alternative permanence plans, which might include adoption, will be pursued concurrently with other plans to avoid delay.

### **Children's names**

Children's original first names will not be changed. In addition, it is not normally appropriate to change a first name with which a child is familiar post adoption order unless there are exceptional needs for confidentiality or the name is likely to cause the child difficulty in the future. It might be appropriate for an additional family name to be included with the child's other names.

### **Confidentiality**

Information relating to looked after children will be kept confidential and secure and only shared as necessary to promote the best interests of the child (further information is available from the *Recording and File Management Procedure*).

### **Equality and diversity**

Every effort will be made to ensure that placements meet the ethnic, cultural or religious needs of children and that, where necessary, additional training or support is provided to the carers or placement in order to bridge any gaps in needs.

Every effort will be made to place a child in a family of the same race and culture. Choice of placement will take account of the child's previous family experience, his or her wishes and feelings, and birth parents views. However these may at times be very restrictive and unrealistic. Therefore no child will remain waiting for an identical match if this proves complex and likely to cause delay. Families will be sought for children with diverse ethnic backgrounds who will be able to reflect and demonstrate a commitment to and awareness of children's need to know about their history, culture and language.

Specialist arrangements are in place to ensure that the needs of disabled children are identified and met.

### **Listening to children**

In line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Kent Social Services charter for Looked After Children, Kent County Council Social Services is committed to ensuring that the interests of children/young people 'looked after' and those eligible for a service under the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 are provided with a means to contribute their opinions and discussions about the services that they receive.

In order to achieve this an independent organisation has been commissioned to provide a Children's Rights Service for Kent County Council's looked after children and care leavers, which is referred to as Upfront. Upfront provides a range of services to children and young people, which includes:

- support groups
- contribution to the review of KCC policy statements relating to looked after children and care leavers
- representing the views of looked after children and care leavers on relevant committees and working groups
- distribution of a regular newsletter to looked after children (SHOUT)
- advocacy for looked after children and care leavers.

In addition, children will be encouraged to contribute their views both through the formal review process and directly onto their file.

### **Access to personal information**

Looked after children are encouraged to familiarise themselves with information that is kept on file about them and contribute their views in a way that is age appropriate (*for further information see Recording and File Management Procedure*).

### **Promoting contact with birth family**

Kent Social Services is committed to promoting contact between looked after children and their families wherever possible in order to both maintain good relationships and work together to achieve the care plan for their child/ren. Therefore, children will be encouraged to maintain links with their immediate and extended birth families except where this has been assessed as contrary to the child's individual welfare needs.

Contact arrangements are usually successful if they are made for a specific purpose and formulated in the context of a child's care plan. The issue of whether children continue links with their birth families/parents or brothers and sisters will be based on the child's individual welfare needs. The child's wishes and feelings should also have been taken into account.

Contact may sometimes be observed as part of court proceedings and where this is the case every effort must be made not to intrude upon the relationship between parent and child.

It would normally be expected that contact would take place within the child's placement, as this would provide a comfortable setting for contact. If there are good reasons why contact cannot be provided within the placement, for example where it is clear the parents may pose a risk to the child, the carer(s), and/or others living in the home, or the child wishes to have contact elsewhere, this must be clearly recorded.

Contact must be supervised by an appropriate person whenever there is clear evidence that anyone with whom the child is to have contact may pose a significant risk to the child.

Children should experience consistency in relation to contact arrangements, including those involved in the management of the contact session. Therefore carers are expected to provide transport for children to and from contact.

Contact should never be withheld as a means of managing difficult behaviour.

Kent Independent Support for Kinship and Adoption Service will manage all contact arrangements after an Adoption Order is made. For further information please see *Contact Policy and Guidance document*.

### **Privacy and respect**

Children's privacy will be respected as far as possible according to their age and capabilities. All Looked After Children will be encouraged to undertake their own personal care (such as toileting and bathing) to the extent that this is appropriate to their age, level of ability, and developmental stage. If a child or young person is disabled careful thought will be given to how best to manage their personal care in the most sensitive way (for more detailed information please see *Privacy Policy document*).

Every effort will also be made to ensure that a child's looked after status is not publicised or drawn attention to without their informed consent.

Children will be treated with respect at all times which means that even when action is having to be taken at short notice, for example an unscheduled move, children's belongings will be properly packed into suitable receptacles and not put into plastic bags.

### **Access to information**

On becoming looked after, children will be provided with a special pack that provides them with age appropriate information about their rights, what they can expect and how to seek help or advice. For children and young people in foster care, this pack will include a copy of the *Children's/Young Person's Guide to Fostering*.

### **Complaints and representation**

All concerns or complaints by looked after children will be taken very seriously unless there are well-evidenced reasons why this should not be the case. Procedures have been developed to help practitioners ensure that distinctions can be made between child protection concerns and complaints that should be pursued under disciplinary processes. In addition, NCH has been commissioned to provide an independent complaints and representation service for Looked After Children.

### **Reviews**

The statutory review meetings of all children and young people looked after by Kent County Council<sup>1</sup> must take place within the required timescale and be planned and organised in a way that take account of the child's wishes and feelings.

Reviews will be chaired by someone who is sufficiently distant and objective from the operational management of the child's case, and suitably qualified and experienced to undertake the task. Wherever possible, this will be undertaken by one of the local authority's Independent Reviewing Officers, who have been appointed specifically to undertake this role.

In the event that an Independent Reviewing Officer is not available to chair a child/young persons looked after review meeting an alternative review chair will be identified who is sufficiently independent and objective to be able to chair the review meeting, so that the principles of the legislation and guidance relating to the review of children's cases are adhered to.

Anyone acting in the role of an Independent Reviewing Officer for a child or young person looked after by Kent Council must be a qualified social worker, registered with the General Social Care Council (GSCC), and experienced to a level of Team Leader/Practice Supervisor or above.

## **Leaving care**

KCC social services seeks to provide a consistent and high quality service to looked after young people of 16 years or over and young people who have left care after their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. KCC social services aims to ensure that it discharges its responsibilities as a corporate parent in full in addition to its duties under the Children Act 1989 (section 24) and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. In order to meet these aims KCC has entered into a partnership with a voluntary organisation (Rainier) to provide a 16 Plus service for this group of young people. The overall objectives of the 16 Plus service are:

- To provide a consistent and high quality service for young people eligible to receive a service
- To endeavour to enhance the life chances of looked after young people by seeking to normalise their experiences and minimise any adverse disadvantages that may exist due to their looked after status
- To develop resources and networks on a multi-agency basis to meet young people's needs
- To encourage and enable young people to achieve their full educational potential
- To promote links with local business communities in order to maximise training and employment opportunities for young people
- To consult and take account of the views of young people in developing services to meet their needs
- To work in partnership with young people in ways which will seek to empower and enable them to gain access to knowledge, skills and opportunities in order to raise their potential
- To promote the good health and physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of young people
- To assist in the creation of safe environments for young people to live in
- To promote the concept of good citizenship and the benefits of a law-abiding lifestyle

## **Criminal Injuries Compensation**

Kent County Council Social Services has a duty to protect the interests of those children within its care. Where Kent County Council holds a Care Order (Section 31, Children Act 1989) in respect of a child or young person who has suffered injury or abuse, we will make an application to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) on their behalf.

Kent County Social Services has implemented a fast track system whereby the applications made include all relevant reports by other concerned agencies including the Police, Local Education Authority, and the Health Authority. This process is undertaken by a Criminal Injuries Compensation Co-Ordinator (one in each Area) who gathers all the relevant information and identifies whether any further reports would be beneficial to the application. This preparatory work ensures the application can then be dealt with more quickly by the CICA.

The CICA operate a set tariff system with respect to the levels of awards made. However, offers of award are often lower than the set tariff and it is Kent Social Services policy to use the CICA appeal process to increase the award made to a child whenever it is appropriate to do so.

Any Criminal Injuries Compensation awarded to a child is held in trust for the child by Kent County Council up to the child's 18th birthday, although this can be up to 21 years upon the request of the young person or in special cases where requested by the CICA. The young person will be entitled to his/her award upon their 18th birthday. An advancement of the award can be made to the child/young person prior to their 18th birthday upon written request of the child's social worker/16 Plus personal advisor for specific reasons where it is for the sole benefit of the child and not for day to day expenditure.

Upon an Adoption Order being granted with respect to a child previously in the care of Kent County Council Services, the responsibility for any CIC award for the child will be transferred over to the adoptive parents. The adoptive parents will then take on the obligation of ensuring that the money is used for the sole benefit of the child and acting prudently in so far as any investments are concerned.

### **Life story Work**

Looked after Children often no longer have access to precious possessions such as photos and information about their early childhood or families. Therefore, every effort will be made to ensure that any memorabilia and all documents and photos that accumulate during their time in placement are kept safe for them and that they are helped to remember their life story.

### **Corporate parenting**

Kent takes its corporate parenting responsibilities very seriously and has set up a Children's Champions' Board to ensure that the interests of looked after children are understood and considered at the highest level. Information about the role of County Councillors is available to children in their introductory packs.

### **Delegation of consent and overnight stays**

Kent County Council Social Services aims to ensure that, through a process of responsible parenting, looked after children are granted, as far as possible, the same permissions and opportunities to maintain acceptable and age appropriate peer activities as would reasonably be granted by the parents of their peers. For further guidance refer to *Delegation of Consents*.

### **Children placed at home on care orders**

Where children are in the process of being rehabilitated home they may continue to be subject to a Care Order. It is Kent's policy that the period at home on a Care Order should be relatively short and that it should be actively kept under review with the intention of discharging the Care Order within a year of return home.

### **Allocated social workers**

Kent strives to ensure that every looked after child has an allocated social worker. Where this is not possible, a specialist Looked After Children Assistant will be identified to link with the child and ensure both continuity and consistency and that the child's care plan is being met. To ensure that best practice is in place specific procedures have been developed (for further information see *Unallocated case procedure*).

## **Access to records for children adopted from care**

Kent Independent Support for Kinship and Adoption Service is commissioned to provide the following services to people adopted from care:

- the counselling of adoptees
- giving information from birth records
- advising on and facilitating the tracing of and making contact with relatives

## **Placement of children**

### **Family placements**

Looked after children will normally be placed with KCC foster carers unless there are particular reasons why this is not possible or it has been assessed that residential care would better meet the needs of the child.

### **Siblings**

The Directorate is committed to making every effort to place brothers and sisters together where this is appropriate. However, there are circumstances when separate placements are necessary to meet the individual needs of each child. If a decision is taken not to place siblings together, the reasons for this will be recorded together with any actions that are necessary to promote contact or resolve the difficulties.

In the event that brothers and sisters are placed separately it would be expected that they should at least have knowledge of each other. Contact should be maintained unless there are specific reasons why this is not desirable. Carers and prospective adopters are expected to appreciate the importance of maintaining these relationships.

### **Placement close to home/community**

Every effort will be made to place children close to their homes and communities. Where this is not possible or appropriate the reasons will be recorded.

### **Matching Children with carers**

Every effort will be made to choose a placement that meets the needs of the child and that the carers/placement receive as much information as is necessary to ensure that they understand and can meet the child's needs.

### **Own bedroom**

All looked after children will be entitled to a bedroom of their own unless they are very young (i.e. under 2) or choose to share with a same sex sibling or other child of a similar age. Where children choose to share bedrooms, this must not occur prior to formal agreement being given by the child's social worker.

Children under the age of 2 may sleep in the same room as their carers. In the case of Parent and Child placements, the child may share a bedroom with their parent unless individual circumstances render this inappropriate.

## **Placement stability**

All concerned will strive to achieve placement stability as this is in children's best interests. However, there will be circumstances which make it necessary to move a child and where this is the case every effort will be made to ensure that the move is properly planned and that the child is consulted about how best to manage the change.

Children placed for adoption need a period of stability to help them adjust and settle into their new lives. Therefore, it is best if adopters try to avoid planning holidays or overnight stays during at least the first 3 months after placement.

## **Safe Care of Looked After Children**

### **Risk Assessment**

All relevant and available information about a child must be sought, considered and shared with prospective carers to ensure that a placement is identified that can meet the needs of a child safely. Where appropriate, this process must include a risk assessment.

### **Bullying or victimisation**

It is recognised that looked after children are vulnerable to bullying and carers must be proactive in ensuring that:

- no bullying takes place within the placement;
- children are encouraged to report all concerns;
- early signs of bullying at school or elsewhere are identified and dealt with
- children are supported to develop social skills that reduce their vulnerability to bullying (either as victim or perpetrator)

### **Children missing from placement**

There must be an appropriate element of concern whenever a looked after child's whereabouts are unknown. In these situations the *Procedure for Looked After Children Who Go Missing* must be strictly adhered to.

### **Drug testing in school**

Kent County Council Social Services believes that it is not appropriate for looked after children to be subjected to random drug testing unless there is evidence that the child may be taking drugs.

### **Mobile phones**

Use of mobile phones by looked after children should be agreed in relation to the circumstances relating to each individual situation.

## **Internet abuse**

While Kent County Council actively supports the development of Information & Computer Technology skills among Looked After Children, carers must be alert to the potential risks that use of the Internet may pose to children and young people. Foster carers and staff should refer to the relevant section of the *Kent County Council Policy and Guidance on Relationships and Sex Education Policy for Looked After Children* for guidance on monitoring use of the internet by looked after children.

Kent County Council also strives to provide foster carers with copies of *Internet Safety: A Parents Guide*, produced by NCH.

## **Smoking**

The health risks associated with exposure to second-hand smoke, particularly for younger children, are well documented. Kent County Council will not place children under the age of 5 with foster carers who smoke and requires all placements to avoid exposing children to smoking.

## **Pets**

It is recognised that access to pets can be particularly beneficial for looked after children. However, children may not be used to handling or being around animals or might see them as rivals for attention. Therefore, Kent has developed a *Pet Policy* to ensure that looked after children are not placed at risk from exposure to household pets.

## **Dangerous weapons**

Kent County Council believes that it is not in the interest of looked after children to have access to dangerous weapons and has, therefore, developed a *Dangerous Weapons Policy* that ensures that any households where looked after children are living are free of such weapons.

## **Transporting children**

All looked after children must be transported safely and legally. Child car seats should be kept in good repair, and used appropriately in relation to the child's size. All car seats used must meet current EEC standards. Carers must ensure that their cars are maintained in safe working order. Kent County Council's *Policy and Guidance on Transporting of Children by Carers and Staff* should be adhered to at all times.

## **Promoting children's health, development and well-being**

All concerned with the care of looked after children must recognise and actively support their good physical, psychological, and emotional health. This will be achieved by:

- Providing a warm and nurturing family environment wherever possible
- The development of individual health assessments and plans for looked after children, and working alongside other professionals in the best interests of the child
- Ensuring that children attend all scheduled medical and dental appointments and that medical advice is sought appropriately
- Modelling healthy behaviours
- Ensuring that child and young person have access to a varied and nutritious diet

- Ensuring that children are aware of their right to seek confidential health care
- Ensuring that children and young people have regular opportunities to take part in social and leisure activities, including physical activity
- Ensuring that a child's emotional needs are met by a range of services that promote resilience
- Providing children with opportunities for personal and spiritual development should they wish to do so
- Complying with related policies and procedures, such as Health and Safety and Relationships and Sex Education for Looked After Children.

### **Immunisation**

Kent County Council, in acting as a reasonable parent, will ensure that all looked after children are immunised as appropriate to their age and medical guidance. It is Kent's policy that children should receive the MMR vaccine except where medical advice for individual children suggests this immunisation should not be given. This will not apply where Kent County Council does not hold parental responsibility (i.e. where a child is accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989) and the child's parent refuses to consent to the immunisation.

### **Blood borne diseases**

Kent County Council endeavours to ensure that children and carers are provided with current advice regarding prevention of the transmission of blood-borne diseases, such as Hepatitis and HIV, in caring for children. Guidance about this is included in the Fostering Manual.

### **Activities outside of the foster home**

Children will be encouraged to take part in activities that will promote their development and health. However, regular attendance of children at alternative care arrangements in the community, such as nurseries, playgroups, and afterschool clubs, must be appropriate to the child's care plan and proportional to the amount of time spent in placement.

### **Promoting positive behaviour**

Many looked after children have experienced traumatic situations. Others may have disabilities or conditions which severely affect their opportunity to develop healthily. Such experiences will impact upon their ability to communicate and express their needs appropriately. It is likely that, at times challenging behaviours will be presented which reflect their sense of frustration; anger; confusion; anxiety; loss and hurt.

Therefore, the children will need a greater level of care and one-to-one attention. Behaviour that may be viewed as 'naughty' is often an expression of past hurt and abuse. Kent County Council does not permit smacking or any form of physical chastisement as a means of disciplining children. There may be a few occasions when, as a last resort, it might be necessary to restrain a child and where this is considered to be likely specific training will be provided to ensure that this is undertaken safely within the placement.

All carers will be helped to develop strategies for parenting hurt children which will prevent, avoid or defuse difficult behaviour.

Kent County Council's has developed policy and guidance that encourages and promotes positive behaviour. Detailed guidance is available in *Promoting Positive Behaviour Policy and Guidance*.

## **Relationships and Sexual Health Education for Looked After Children**

Kent County Council, as a corporate parent, is committed to helping its looked after children form healthy relationships that contribute positively to their overall development. Children and young people should not be disadvantaged as a result of being looked after in accessing services, information, education, and personal support with regard to sexual health. Detailed guidance about this is available in *Relationships and Sex Education Policy for Looked After Children*

In addition, specific Speakeasy training is available to those who care for pubescent or adolescent children.

## **Promoting children's education and achievement**

Educational opportunity and achievement is crucial to achieving a positive future for all children. This is particularly true in relation to looked after children, for whom education is a key factor in helping them to overcome past disadvantage. However, it is recognised that looked after children and young people face many barriers to educational success. Therefore, Kent County Council and its partners undertake to give looked after children every opportunity to fulfil their potential and build a bright and successful future, and will provide them with full time education in a mainstream school where possible.

All those responsible for the care of a looked after child are required to actively contribute to promoting their education by maintaining regular communication with the child's school/educational provision and contributing to the development and implementation of Personal Education Plans.

Children are entitled to expect that carers will:

- Act as advocates and problem solve with schools and teachers
- Take an active interest in their school and home work and encourage them to aspire to do well
- Ensure that there is suitable quiet space available to enable a child to study
- Identify when remedial help is necessary and make every effort to make it available to the child
- Encourage reading and enjoyment of books
- Attend parent's evenings
- Praise children's efforts and celebrate successes
- Be fully aware of children's progress in terms of marks and grades and ensure these are reported to the child's social worker

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