



Policies and Procedures

Service: **Children and Young People's Services**

Title: **Family and Friends Care Policy**

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Care Planning, Placement and Review March 2010

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ANNEX

1. Scope

- 1.1 This policy applies to all Children and Young People's Services staff and is relevant to all staff in partner agencies who work with children and young people.

2. References

- Children Act 1989
- Child Support Act 1991
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and 2011
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations, , 2010
- Care Planning and Fostering (Misc. Amendments)(England) Regulations 2015
- Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, DfE, 2010
- Special Guardianship Regulations 2005

3. Introduction

- 3.1 This policy sets out a framework for the provision of support to family and friends carers. In particular it provides a policy on the implementation of the duties of Durham County Council ("The Council") contained in the Children Act 1989 in respect of children and young people who, because they are unable to live with their parents, are being brought up by members of their extended families, friends or other people connected with them.
- 3.2 Children and young people who are unable to live with their parents should receive the support that they and their carers need to safeguard and to promote their welfare, whether or not they are "looked after" by the Council.
- 3.3 This policy aims to address when such children become "looked after" and sets out what the Council and its partner agencies will do to deliver effective services to children and young people who are living with family members or friends in the following circumstances:-
- a) Informal arrangements with a relative;
 - b) In informal arrangements with friends or other family members which last for a period of less than 28 days;
 - c) As a private fostering arrangement;
 - d) As a "looked after" child placed with foster carers;
 - e) Under a Child Arrangement Order or a Special Guardianship Order;
 - f) Or in arrangements which may lead to an Adoption Order.
- 3.4 This policy provides a framework for the provision of support to family and friends carers, whatever the legal status of the children for whom they are providing care. It requires the Council in collaboration with its local partner agencies to adhere to a consistent approach towards meeting the needs of children living with family and friends carers.

- 3.5 The policy is made in accordance with guidance issued by the Secretary of State under Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 and section 10 of the Children Act 2004.

4. Definitions

In this policy the following definitions apply:

- "the 1989 Act" means the Children Act 1989;
- "the 2008 Act" means the Children and Young Persons Act 2008;
- "the 2010 Regulations" means the Care Planning Placement and Care Review (England) Regulations 2010;
- "the 2011 Regulations" means the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011;
- "care plan" means the plan for the future care of a looked after child prepared in accordance with Part 2 of the 2010 Regulations;
- "a child in need" is defined in Section 17(10) of the 1989 Act, which provides that a child shall be taken to be in need if (a) he is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him of services by a local authority under this Part; (b) his health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without provision for him of such services; or (c) he is disabled;
- "child" means a person under the age of 18. Where the context particularly refers to older children the term "young person" is used;
- "connected person" means a relative, friend or other person connected with a looked after child. A person in the 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;
- "family and friends carer" means a relative, friend, or other person with a prior connection with somebody else's child who is caring for that child full time. An individual who is a "connected person" to a looked after child may also be a family and friends carer. A child who is cared for by a family and friends carer may, or may not be, looked after by the local authority;
- "foster carer" means a person who is approved as a local authority foster parent (by a local authority or an independent fostering provider) in accordance with regulation 27 of the 2011 Regulations, or is temporarily approved under regulation 24 of the 2010 Regulations;
- "fostering service" means a local authority fostering service;

- "informal arrangement" means an arrangement where a child is living with a family and friends carer who does not have parental responsibility for the child. References in this policy to "informal arrangements" do not include arrangements where the child is looked after by the local authority or where the child is privately fostered, placed for adoption, or is subject to a
- Child Arrangement Order or a Special Guardianship Order. The statutory provisions which govern each of these arrangements do not apply to an informal arrangement;
- "looked after child" means a young person under 18 who is subject to a care order under Section 31 of the 1989 Act, or an interim care order under section 38 of the 1989 Act, or an interim care order under section 38 of the 1989 Act or is accommodated by the local authority under section 20 of the 1989 Act or under an Emergency Protection Order (S44 of the 1989 Act).
- "parent" means a person who has parental responsibility for that child;
- "parental responsibility" has the meaning provided in Section 3 of the 1989 Act being all the rights, duties, powers, responsibilities and authority which by law that a parent of a child has in relation to the child and his property;
- "private fostering arrangement" means an arrangement where a child who is under 16 (or 18 if disabled) and who has not been provided with accommodation by the local authority, is cared for and accommodated by someone who does not have parental responsibility for him and is not a relative, and the arrangement continues for a period of 28 days or more and is intended to do so;
- "relative" means grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether full blood or half blood or by marriage or by civil partnership) or step-parent as defined in Section 105 of the 1989 Act; and
- "responsible authority" means in relation to a looked after child, the local authority or voluntary organisation as the case may be, responsible for the child's placement.

5. Context of Care by Family and Friends

- 5.1 Whilst most children are brought up by one or more of their parents, it is estimated that nationally over 300,000 children are cared for full-time by a relative, friend or other person previously connected with the child. Of these, as of **31 March 2010**, some 7,200 children were "looked after" children who were placed with family members and friends who had been approved as foster carers. Further statistics in respect of kinship care show that at the time of the 2011 Census, there were over 11.3 million children (0-18 years) living in England and an estimated 152,910 (1.4%) children were living in kinship care. In other words, in 2011, one in 74 children in England were growing up in the care of relatives. Since the last Census in 2001, the kinship child population had grown rate at a rate of 7% resulting in 9,543 more children in kinship care in 2011. (ESRC Study)

- 5.2 In this policy all such arrangements are referred to as "family and friends care" or sometimes as kinship care arrangements.
- 5.3 Family and friends carers play a unique role in enabling children and young people to remain with people they know and trust if they are unable, for whatever reason, to live with their parents. These children may or may not be looked after by the Council. They may not even be known to the Council.
- 5.4 The majority of relatives who provide such care are grandparents, aunts and uncles but may also include older siblings.
- 5.5 Many children who live in family and friends care do very well in life. Unfortunately some are vulnerable to failing to achieve good outcomes. Many family and friends carers both want and need support to enable them to meet the individual needs of the children in their care.
- 5.6 Family and friends carers commonly take on the care of children where the problems relate to parental factors such as domestic violence, alcohol or substance misuses, physical or mental illness or incapacity, separation or divorce, imprisonment or even the death of a parent.
- 5.7 There may be child-related factors such as disability or challenging behaviour.
- 5.8 Family and friends often start to care for other's children in a crisis or an emergency situation. The care may begin as a short-term measure but become rather more open-ended or even permanent. There may, due to particular circumstances, have been afforded little time for any advanced planning. The sudden change in the structure and dynamics of a family may impose strain not just upon the child and the carers, but with other siblings, children of the family and between extended family members.
- 5.9 The impact and effect of becoming a family and friends carer may be related to the characteristics and circumstances of the carer. If a grandparent there may be issues of age, health and financial if the income is derived from a pension. In other cases, carers may find that they have to reduce hours of work or cease employment to ensure the child receives suitable care. There may be issues relating to accommodation and space, as well as arrangements for education, child care and health to be addressed.
- 5.10 Each case will bring a unique challenge to the family and friends carers. The children and their carers should receive good quality services which meet the needs of every child. Partner agencies and specialists need to work together with the Council to ensure a comprehensive approach to early intervention to enable family and friends to offer appropriate care for children and young people who cannot live with their parents, access to a range of high quality support services at universal, targeted and specialist levels.
- 5.11 Family and friends carers must be made aware of the relevant support services and that these can be accessed by those caring for children irrespective of whether the children concerned have the legal structure of being "looked after" by the Council. Support services identified as necessary to meet the child's needs must not be withheld merely because the child is

living with a carer under an informal arrangement rather than in a placement with a foster carer or with a person with a residence order or a special guardianship order or even under an adoption order.

6. Policy statement; key value principles and objectives

- 6.1 Durham County Council is committed to ensuring that children and young people are securely attached to carers, capable of providing safe and effective care for the duration of their childhood, and as far as it is consistent with their welfare, to promote the upbringing of these children and young people by their families.
- 6.2 The responsibility for the upbringing of children and young people is inherent in the parental role and that of extended family members. The outcomes for children who live within family and friends care are positive when compared to similar children living with unrelated Foster Carers. The local authority has a statutory duty to consider placing accommodated children and young people with connected persons where appropriate to do so.
- 6.3 Durham County Council may become involved in family and friends arrangements for a variety of reasons and has a duty under The Children Act 1989 to support children in these arrangements if they are assessed as children in need, or if the local authority have agreed to accommodate them under S20 of the Children Act 1989, or have assumed shared parental responsibility by virtue of a Care Order or Interim Care Order.
- 6.4 The policy applies to all children living in family and friends arrangements and the level of service provision will be dependent upon the assessed needs of the child and the involvement of the local authority in the making of the arrangement.
- 6.5 Access to a range of support services will be available, based on the needs of the child:
- universal services (available to all);
 - targeted services (via Single Assessment Framework); and
 - specialist services (via specialist assessments).
- 6.6 The local authority acknowledges the principle that access to services should not be solely dependent upon the legal status of the child or the involvement of the local authority in the family and friends arrangement.
- 6.7 The local authority acknowledges that caring for someone else's child does, at times, require greater expenditure and use of resources which may require the Family and Friends Carer to adjust their lifestyle and make sacrifices.
- 6.8 The local authority recognises that in some cases Family and Friends Carers may be struggling to cope financially even when in receipt of all appropriate benefits and they may need financial assistance for significant one off expenditure, or short term support to enable them to make adjustments, or to make it possible to continue to care for a child in the longer term.

- 6.9 The decision to look after a child or young person or to refuse a request for a child or young person to be looked after must be based on a full assessment of the child's needs and circumstances.
- 6.10 The local authority should only formally look after children when there is no other satisfactory way of promoting their welfare or protecting them from harm.
- 6.11 The financial circumstances of a Family and Friends Carer or prospective Family and Friends Carer or the cost of providing accommodation for a child will not be the sole factor in reaching a decision to look after or accommodate a child or not.
- 6.12 The local authority will, when intervening in a child's life and deciding that a child does need to be provided with care and accommodation, consider all options for a child to be safely cared for by a connected person, relatives or friend before placing them with unrelated foster carers or in residential provision.
- 6.13 The local authority has a duty to assess and meet the needs of the individual child or young person, and to assist in setting up arrangements which are self-sustaining in the long run. Family and friends care must be actively considered at the earliest stage and be the first option pursued, where it is considered to be in the best interests of the child or young person.
- 6.14 Family and friends arrangements must be appropriate, safe and practical and must be a better alternative for the child than living with an unrelated Foster Carer.
- 6.15 Where it is considered to be not possible to place a child immediately in an arrangement with a connected person then the local authority will be proactive and continue to explore the options of family and friends arrangements throughout their involvement.
- 6.16 Where the arrangement has been made independently of the local authority, between someone with parental responsibility and a close relative of the child either a sibling, grandparent, aunt or uncle then the child must be assessed as a child in need to be able to access services other than universal services.
- 6.17 Where the arrangement is made in conjunction with the local authority whilst carrying out duties in relation to the Children Act 1989, services such as financial assistance and support can be offered under S17 of the Act. It is important to recognise that circumstances may change and that the longer a "family agreement" lasts under such circumstances or where the Local Authority plays a significant part in the day to day arrangements for the child the more likely that this will be deemed a "looked after" arrangement. All arrangements are monitored by the Families First Teams at monthly 'Out of Parental Care' Panels. Legal advice from the local authority solicitor must be sought in all cases.
- 6.18 When agreeing family arrangements it is essential that a written agreement is drawn up between the Local Authority, parents and relevant extended family

members outlining the level of support that will be made available from the Local Authority (for example payments in lieu of benefits).

- 6.19 Where children become “looked after children” they and their carers, will be entitled to the range of services available for looked after children. Once it has been agreed that the child is looked after the social worker must ensure that the carers are assessed as friends and family foster carers and follow the Procedure for Temporary Approval of Connected Persons as Foster Carers in Urgent Cases. If temporary approval is granted under Regulation 24, the foster carer status starts from the date of approval. This process will need to be completed within a working day if the child needs to be placed urgently. The child CANNOT move to live with carers until temporary approval has been granted.

7. Assessing Informal Arrangements

- 7.1 The Council does not have a duty to assess informal and family care arrangements, unless it appears to the Council that services may be necessary to safeguard or to promote the welfare of a child in need in the area.
- 7.2 In such circumstances the Council will use the Single Assessment Framework for the Assessment of Children in need and their families as published by the Department of Health in 2000. The Council will provide information for parents and carers as to the stages of the assessment process, together with timescales and contact points for enquiries.
- 7.3 No child or young person should have to become a "looked after" child whether by agreement with those who hold parental responsibility for the child or by Court order for the sole purpose of obtaining financial, practical or other support to be provided to the child's carer.

8. Legal Context

- 8.1 The majority of family and friends carers act informally by agreement with those holding parental responsibility for the children in their care. If the carer is a relative of the child as defined in Section 105 of the 1989 Act or they have parental responsibility for the child, there is no requirement to notify the local authority of the arrangement as the arrangements do not fall into the definition of “Private Fostering”. In most such cases, the arrangements remain entirely private without the need for the involvement of the children's social care services. Where the carer is not a relative as defined by the Act, private fostering regulations will apply and the child must be assessed under the procedures.
- 8.2 If the child is assessed as being in need of support this may be provided under Section 17 of the 1989 Act.
- 8.3 Where a child becomes “looked after” because the child has been made the subject of a care order (including interim care order) or is provided with accommodation under s20 or s21 of the 1989 Act, section 22(C) of the 1989 Act applies. If it is not consistent with the child’s welfare or it is not reasonably practicable for the Local Authority to make arrangements for the child to live

with a parent, a person who has parental responsibility or who held a child arrangements order immediately before a care order was made (under s22C(5) the Local Authority has a duty to place the child in the 'placement' which in the opinion of the Local Authority, is the most appropriate placement available.

8.4 Section 22C(6) defines "placement" as:

- (a) placement with an individual who is a relative, friend or other person connected with the child and who is also a Local Authority foster parent;
- (b) placement with a Local Authority foster parent who does not fall within paragraph (a);
- (c) placement in a children's home;
- (d) placement in accordance with other arrangements.

8.5 Section 22C(7) requires a Local Authority to give preference to a placement falling within paragraph 6(a) over placements which fall within paragraph 6(b) to (d).

9. Family Support Services provided under S17 Children Act 1989

9.1 Under Section 17 of the 1989 Care Act the Council is subject to a general duty to safeguard and to promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need and so far as is consistent with that duty, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families, in particular by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's needs ("family support services"). This applies not only to a person who holds parental responsibility for the relevant child but also any other person with whom the child has been living.

9.2 A child is "in need" if he is unlikely to reach or maintain a reasonable level of health, or development or his health or development would be significantly impaired, without the provision of services by the Council or he is disabled.

9.3 Under Section 17 the Council will provide practical support as well as advice, guidance or counselling about how to manage issues such as those arising from contact or from caring for children with emotional or behavioural difficulties due to their earlier experience. The local authority may also provide financial assistance to the family. Such services are provided to support both formal and informal family and friends care arrangements.

10. The Provision of Accommodation under Section 20 Children Act 1989

10.1 Section 20 of the 1989 Act imposes upon the Council the duty to provide accommodation for any child in need within the area who appears to the Council to require accommodation as a result of:

- a) There being no person with parental responsibility for the child;
- b) The child having been lost or abandoned; or
- c) The person who has been caring for the child being prevented (whether or not permanently, and for whatever reason) from providing the child with suitable accommodation or care.

- 10.2 When the Council is considering whether a child who is being cared for by family and friends "require accommodation" the question at (c) will be particularly relevant; "does the child appear to the Council to require accommodation because the person who has been caring for the child is prevented from providing the child with suitable accommodation or care?"
- 10.3 If it appears to the Council that the child requires accommodation then the Council must provide it.
- 10.4 Additionally the Council may provide accommodation for any child in the area (even though a person who has parental responsibility for the child is able to provide accommodation) if the Council considers that to do so, would safeguard or to promote the child's welfare. This power is often used to provide short breaks for a child.
- 10.5 Before providing accommodation under Section 20 the Council must, so far as is reasonably practicable and consistent with the child's welfare, ascertain and give due consideration to the child's wishes and feelings regarding the provision of accommodation. If a person with parental responsibility for the child, who is willing to provide accommodation or arrange accommodation to be provided or them, objects to the Council providing accommodation, the local authority cannot provide accommodation under s20. The Council will need to consider whether the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm unless he or she becomes looked after by the Council, and if so to seek a care order or an interim care order under Part 4 1989 Act. Further information on this can be found in Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 1: Court Orders.
- 10.6 Where a child is provided with accommodation under section 20, or is subject to a care order, the child is "looked after" and the duties in Part 3 of the 1989 Act, sections 22 to 22D and the 2010 Regulations will apply.
- 10.7 Section 22C sets out the ways in which looked after children are to be accommodated and maintained. Section 22C (2) to (4) provides that the Council must make arrangements for a child who is looked after to live with their parents, a person who is not a parent but who has parental responsibility for the child or, in a case where the child is in the care of the Council and there was a Child Arrangement Order in force with respect to the child, immediately before the care order was made, the person in whose favour the Child Arrangement Order was made.
- 10.8 This duty imposed upon the Council to "rehabilitate" the child is subject to the provision that the arrangements must be both consistent with the child's welfare and reasonably practicable, and reflects the principle that state intervention in family life should be to keep children safe and ensure that families have the necessary support to bring up their children.
- 10.9 For children subject to a care order the placement with their parents must be in accordance with the 2010 Regulations.
- 10.10 When the Council is unable to make arrangements under section 22C (2) to (4) then section 22C (5) requires the authority to place the child in the most appropriate placement available. The placement options are set out in

section 22C (6) to (9). It directs how the Council must determine the most appropriate placement. The Council must "give preference" to a placement with a person who is a relative, friend or other person connected with the child and who is also a local authority foster parent. The approval must have been given in accordance with the 2011 Regulations or have been temporarily approved as a foster carer under the 2010 Regulations.

- 10.11 Not all placements will meet all of the placement criteria in section 22C (7) to (9). The Council may face difficult decisions. The placement criteria are important because many children and young people benefit by being placed with relatives or friends or others connected to them, near their homes, continuing to attend the same schools, living with their siblings and in accommodation that suits any special needs. But decisions must be specific to the particular factual situation of the family. The most important issue is likely to be how far a proposed placement will meet the associated needs of a particular child or young person given their previous history and their current circumstances.
- 10.12 Section 22C reflects the principle that all children, including looked after children, should wherever possible be cared for by their families and friends. It is also intended to ensure that children placed with relatives do not automatically lose their looked after status. Section 22C of the 1989 Act also make it clear that if a looked after child is placed with family member, friend or any other person who is connected with the child, then the carer must be approved as a local authority foster carer.
- 10.13 A child who is looked after and is placed with a relative, friend or other person connected with the child in accordance with Section 22C(5) continues to be looked after. If a child is provided with accommodation under Section 20, the child's looked after status will end when the local authority considers that the child no longer requires accommodation under Section 20(1) of the 1989 Act. In the case of a child subject to a care order, the child will continue to be looked after until the order is discharged or the foster carer is granted an order which gives them parental responsibility for the child.
- 10.14 Section 22G imposes a duty upon the Council to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for looked after children which is within the Council area and meets the needs of children. However the placement proposed for a looked after child must always be the most appropriate available and that it will meet his or her needs as identified in the care plan.

11. Leaving Care

- 11.1 Statute imposes a duty on the Council to provide care leaving support to young people who are ceasing to be looked after and making the transition to adulthood. This applies to children placed by the Council with family and friends foster carers in the same way as it does to all other care leavers. For those who are, or propose to be, in education or training there will be an entitlement to a personal adviser up to the age of 25 and a bursary towards higher education and any other support relevant to their needs.

12. Pre-Proceedings

- 12.1 If the Council is considering instituting care proceedings, the Public Law Outline requires the Council to demonstrate that it has considered family members and friends as potential carers at each stage of the decision making process. The Council will need to disclose information about discussions with relevant family and friends at the pre-proceedings state. In relation to Court orders the Council must consider the potential of alternative carers provided that this does not jeopardise the child's safety and welfare.

13. Private Fostering Arrangements

- 13.1 If the carers of a child under 16 (or 18 if disabled) do not have parental responsibility for the child and are not the child's grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or step-parent and the placement continues for 28 days or more or is intended to do so, then the provisions in the 1989 Act and in the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 will apply, as the arrangement falls within the definition of a private fostering arrangement.
- 13.2 If the child is not disabled, the young person will cease to be privately fostered at the age of 16, but if the living arrangements continue then the statutory guidance will continue to apply as the arrangement will revert to that of informal family and friends care.
- 13.3 A child who is privately fostered may also be assessed as a child in need, and be provided with support under s.17 of the 1989 Act.

14. Special Guardianship, Child Arrangement Order and Adoption

- 14.1 If a relative, friend or other connected person proposes to make a long term commitment to caring for a child, an application may be made for a Child Arrangement Order or Special Guardianship Order.
- 14.2 In either such case, the person in whose favour the order is made will have parental responsibility for the child.
- 14.3 A special guardian may exercise parental responsibility to the exclusion of all others with parental responsibility (but they could not consent to adoption) and is responsible for all aspects of caring for the child or young person and for taking decisions to do with their upbringing.
- 14.4 To promote stability for the child relatives may now apply for a Child Arrangement Order or a Special Guardianship Order without the permission from the Court if they have provided care for the child.
- 14.5 In the case of a child who was looked after immediately prior to the making of a Special Guardianship Order, the child, the special guardian or parent has a right to receive an assessment by the Council for support services which may include financial support as provided in the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005.

- 14.6 However, children who were not looked after should not be unfairly disadvantaged as in many cases the only reason that the child was not looked after is that a relative stepped in quickly to assume responsibility when the parent was unable to provide the care.
- 14.7 People who hold residence orders have no right to an assessment for support, but the Council has the power to pay a Child Arrangement order allowance where this is the most appropriate way to safeguard and to promote the child's welfare.
- 14.8 Where a child is already living with a family and friends carer it may be possible for them to apply for an adoption order. In law this will extinguish the parental responsibility of the birth parents. The Council has a range of adoption support services available in this area to meet the needs of people affected by adoption. Both adopters and adopted children have the right to be assessed for certain support services.
- 14.9 Children who were looked after by the Council before the making of a special guardianship order may qualify for a range of support under the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005.

15. Financial Support

- 15.1 Where children are placed with family and friends carers informally by parents, those carers may experience significant financial difficulties as a result of taking on the care of a child or children, especially if the placement was not planned. The parents retain their responsibilities for the maintenance of their children.
- 15.2 Carers need to be aware of any entitlement to any state benefits and allowances, such as child benefit and tax credits. They must also be aware and be made aware of how to apply for any discretionary financial support which may be available.
- 15.3 Family and friends carers must be assisted by the Council to access the relevant information and advice such as via benefits advice services. A referral to the welfare rights service in all cases is essential.
- 15.4 Even with the receipt of all relevant benefits, there may be financial shortfall if unexpected items of capital expenditure have to be funded, such as bedroom furniture or school uniforms.
- 15.5 Similarly, there may be temporary or long-term changes to employment by the carers that may have significant financial implications and impact upon the stability of the child's placement.
- 15.6 The Council has power to make payments in respect of children in need under S.17(6) of the 1989 Act. The Council will inform the family and friends carers of the relevant eligibility criteria, when means testing applies, how to apply for any financial help and the manner and time at which the decisions will be made about eligibility. If financial support is offered, a written agreement will

be produced indicating the level and duration of the support together with a mechanism for review to ensure that all concerned remain clear as to the arrangements.

16. Accommodation

- 16.1 The Council will engage where appropriate, with housing authorities and registered social landlords to ensure that the policies do recognise the important role played by family and friends carers and, where appropriate, priority is afforded to them to any move to different accommodation if that will serve to prevent a child becoming a looked after child.
- 16.2 The Council has power under Section 17 of the 1989 Act to give financial support towards accommodation costs if it is assessed that this is the most appropriate way to safeguard and to promote a child's welfare.

17. Supporting Contact

- 17.1 Contact with their immediate families is generally a positive experience for children who are not living with their parents, as it can help them to maintain a sense of belonging and identity.
- 17.2 Contact arrangements must always be determined by the extent to which they meet the needs of the child.
- 17.3 But management of contact may often produce emotional and practical strains on all the parties involved. The placement of the child will, by itself, have altered the dynamics of the family the child has left and the family with whom the child is placed. It can be confusing for the child.
- 17.4 The Council has a duty to promote contact for all children in need. If the child is not looked after by the Council there is a duty to promote contact where it is necessary to do so in order to safeguard and promote the child's welfare.
- 17.5 If the child is a looked after child, the Council is under a duty to promote contact unless it is not practicable or consistent with the child's welfare.
- 17.6 The Council will provide information to family and friends carers about local contact centres and family mediation services and how to make the best use of their services.
- 17.7 The Council may need to be more actively involved if there may be safeguarding concerns surrounding contact, with support provided for safe contact arrangements.

18. Support Groups

- 18.1 The Council recognises that support groups are a valuable way to help carers to access information about services which will help them to care for the children. Whilst many groups are run by voluntary organisations, independent from the Council, the council will provide information to family and friends carers, provide support groups and assist in developing networking

arrangements. The Council currently work in partnership with the Relative Experience Project who provide individual and group support to kinship carers across Durham which includes

- A volunteer befriender – someone who can visit on a regular basis, provide a listening ear and support the kinship carer to work on solutions to any issues they may have as a kinship carer
- Support for kinship carers to set up a local support group or cluster
- A link to Grandparents Plus National Support Network and advice line for kinship carers

18.2 Special Guardians and prospective special guardians benefit from support groups as part of the provision of support services provided by the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005.

18.3 Similarly the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005 make provision for support groups for adopters, adopted children and birth parents.

19. Family and Friends Foster Carers

19.1 The Council's Fostering Service has a Statement of Purpose set out on the DCC Fostering website prepared in accordance with regulation 3 of the 2011 Regulations. For greater detail reference should be made to the 2011 Regulations.

19.2 The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services cover fostering services' responsibilities with respect to all foster carers including those who are family and friends. They must not be disadvantaged nor discriminated against as a result of their prior relationship with the child.

19.3 Fostering allowances paid by a fostering service must be calculated for family and friends carers on the same basis as for all other foster carers.

20. Complaints Process

20.1 Any Family and Friends Carer or a child or young person who feels that they have grounds to make a complaint or representation should use the Council's complaints procedure. This can be accessed by contacting:

Utilising the information on our **Factsheet** – Compliments, Comments and Complaints about Children and Young People's Services:

<http://www.durham.gov.uk/media/1711/Compliments-comments-and-complaints-about-childrens-services/pdf/ComplimentsCommentsAndComplaintsAboutChildrensServices.pdf>

ANNEX

Practice Guidance

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