



Policy and Procedure: Actions when a Child becomes Looked After

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1 Policy

This policy sets out the immediate actions to be taken when a child becomes looked after, and then explains the key further actions to be taken following that. All children who become looked after must be admitted to the care of the authority in accordance with these procedures.

2 Working Principles

Actions must be child centred throughout the admission and initial planning process. The child's voice should be heard and proper account taken of their perspective and their views. Plans should always take account of the child's developmental progress and any difficulties they may be experiencing. The child's further development must be properly promoted with regard to their need for health and education assessment and provision. Care plans also must take into account the need for a constructive relationship with the natural family and appropriate contact arrangements.

Stability of placement is a priority. It should be recognised that looked after children may sometime develop challenging behaviours as a result of their particular history and circumstances, and where appropriate a package of support should be put in place, taking into account the need for relevant multi-agency and multi-disciplinary support. At some point following admission any relevant risk factors associated with offending should also be considered as part of the overall care planning process, in discussion with the Youth Offending Team.

All children becoming looked after must have the opportunity to achieve the best possible development regardless of their gender, ability, ethnicity, circumstances or age.

3 Visiting the child following admission

The child / young person must be visited at the placement within the first 7 days. This is a minimum legal requirement under the Fostering Regulations 2002 and it is expected that the child will usually be visited much sooner. This requirement is also applicable where a child changes placement. For full details of statutory visiting requirements see section 7 below.

4 Contact

Contact arrangements for the child must be planned and agreed at the outset. Bracknell Forest Borough Council will promote, encourage and facilitate contact between looked after children, their families of origin and others who have played an important part in their lives. Good, regular and consistent contact arrangements are also important in facilitating reunification.

For the majority of children the aim from the outset will be to reunite them with their family, provided that it is safe and practical. Developing and maintaining close links between the child and their family are essential to this objective. Where children have to live apart from their family, sustainable and positive contact arrangements will help the child to develop a proper understanding of their identity and origins. Contact will only be refused when there is clear evidence that it prevents the authority from safeguarding the child's welfare. See Bracknell Forest Policy and Procedure for Contact between Looked after Children and their Families, August 2005.

5 Forms and Notifications

The Essential Information Record Part 1 and the Placement Plan Part 1 should be completed on the same day that the child becomes looked after, and copies sent to the Education Co-ordinator, the child's school, the designated Nurse for Looked After Children, and the Access and Inclusion Branch of the Education Service. The Social Worker must also inform the Independent Reviewing Officer IRO. The standard notification sheet for children/young people in public care should be completed and sent to the local Health and Education authorities within no longer than 3 days of a child becoming looked after.

The Social Worker must always immediately inform any school/nursery the child is attending that the child has become looked after and explain the new arrangements as they affect the school/nursery.

The child must be provided with the complaints procedure the "You can Help" and "Who Cares about Health" booklets, and the Advocate card 'VOICE'.

A copy of the complaints procedure should also be provided to the parents.

For children placed outside of Bracknell Forest in the area of another local authority, the social worker must notify the Council with Social Service responsibility covering that area, and the local Health and Education authorities, of the placement.

See attached checklist in Appendix One for details of dates for the completion of LAC and related forms.

6 Health

6.1 Actions on Admitting the Child/Young Person to Care

Each child must have an holistic health assessment on entering the care system. In addition to the Essential Information Record Part 1, the standard notification and consent form must be sent to the LAC Health Co-ordinator at St Marks Hospital, Maidenhead. The standard consent form must be signed by parents or those with parental responsibility. This must be done within 5 days of a child becoming looked after, to ensure that the first Health Assessment can be quickly arranged. In cases where parental consent is not forthcoming, legal advice must be sought in accordance with the Department's policy for 'Consent to Medical', April 1998. Where a child is of sufficient understanding they may give or refuse their own consent to medical examination or treatment. In such a case the child should have access to medical advice about the decision they are making.

When the initial health assessment has been completed the results will be returned to the Social Worker, together with an action plan which must be followed and completed, and returned to the LAC Health Co-ordinator.

6.2 Further Health Assessment Procedures for Permanency

Whenever it is agreed that the care plan is for permanency a further medical assessment is required. In these circumstances BAAF forms 'M' and 'B', which record neonatal and maternal information about the child, should be sent to the Hospital Children's Services Manager for completion and return to the LAC Nurse to inform the further assessment. In all cases the consent of the birth parents must be sought, and the parents should be asked to complete BAAF form PH, a report on their own medical condition and history.

6.3 Further Requirements following Admission

As prescribed by the Children Act Regulations 1991, arrangements must be made for the Looked After child to be provided with health care services, including medical, dental and optical care. The Department of Health Guidance 'Promoting the Health of Looked After Children' (2002) expands and clarifies these requirements.

The first health assessment must be made by a registered medical practitioner, although subsequent reviews may be undertaken by a nurse or midwife under the supervision of a registered medical practitioner. The first assessment should result a plan being established to promote the child's health by the time of the first review, within four weeks of the child becoming looked after. The health assessment and the actions which are required as a result will be presented at the review.

Further health assessments are to take place at least once in every period of six months before the child's fifth birthday, and at least once in every period of twelve months after the child's fifth birthday, unless the child is of sufficient understanding and he refuses to submit to the examination.

Health assessment and planning must:

- Promote the current and future health of the child, and not focus solely on the detection of ill-health, and cover developmental health and emotional wellbeing,
- Take a holistic view of health in its broadest context to cover exercise, healthy eating and substance use etc.,
- Ensure that the child is enabled to express their views and wishes, and is helped to exercise informed consent regarding any treatment,
- Be sensitive to age, gender, disability, culture and language,
- Actively involve birth parents where possible and appropriate,
- Consider details of the child's medical history.
- Review existing arrangements for the child's overall medical, dental and eye care and treatment,
- Review the need for preventive measures, such as vaccination and immunisation, and screening for vision and hearing

7 Education

7.1 Actions on Admitting the Child/Young Person to Care

The Education Co-ordinator for Looked After Children must be informed within 3 days via the standard notification procedure, that a child has become looked after, giving details of care and education placements. Where a child young person is under 16 years, a Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting must be arranged to include, child / young person, parent / person with parental responsibility, carer, school, designated teacher for LAC and the Education Co-ordinator for Looked After Children. The PEP meeting must be held within 20 days of a child / young person becoming looked after. PEPs should also be completed for pre-school children.

7.2 Further Requirements following Admission

Under the Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004, the Council has a duty to promote the educational attainment of children and young people in their care. Advice is set out in 'Education Protects: Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care' (2000). Under the provisions of the Statutory Guidance on the Duty of Local

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Authorities to Promote the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children under Section 52 of the Children Act 2004 the main requirements for the Council are:

- To seek the child's views about his/her education,
- To ensure that a Looked After Child (LAC) is in appropriate full time education as soon as possible and at least within 20 school days of becoming Looked After. If a child is to change placement, then prior to any placement being made an education placement should be identified for that child. Such a placement should also be identified within a minimum of 20 school days of a child changing placement,
- To ensure that each child who is looked after has a Personal Education Plan (PEP). This must be initiated within 14 days of them becoming Looked After, in time for the first Review meeting. A new PEP must be initiated whenever a Looked After Child changes school or changes placement. The PEP should be reviewed within 3 months and thereafter every six months prior to the statutory LAC review. The PEP must be completed in partnership with the child / young person, designated teacher, parent and / or relatives, carer or any other person that may be relevant. The PEP should cover the full range of educational needs, including:
 - Access to nursery or other high quality early years provision,
 - Support for children who are behind with their school work,
 - Suitable provision for children not at school, e.g. because of formal exclusion,
 - Transitional support for a child attending a new school or returning to school in relation to both curricular and pastoral issues,
 - Out of school activities,
 - Attendance and behaviour support,
 - Support for achievement,
 - Support for further/higher education and employment,
- To ensure that young people aged 16-17 have a Pathway Plan which addresses educational and employment opportunities and assistance relating to these should continue until they are 21 years old or if completing education or training until the age of 24,
- To be mindful that repeated changes of schools and of placement are damaging to a child. School can provide an important source of continuity and stability,
- To be mindful that securing an educational placement is one of the main criteria to be used in identifying a suitable care placement for a child / young person. A child / young person should not move care placement until a school placement is secured,
- To ensure that young people who are looked after are given encouragement and the opportunity to complete appropriate examinations,
- To monitor and track the educational achievement of looked after children and young people,
- To ensure that every LAC has access to appropriate equipment to support educational development, including books, personal computer and other necessary materials.

8 Statutory Visits to a Child Looked After

8.1 Foster Care

The Social Worker should visit a child in foster care as required and when reasonably requested by the child or the foster carers, but as a **minimum:**

- within **one week** from the beginning of the placement,
- then at intervals of not more than **six weeks** for the first year,
- after the first year at intervals of not more than **three months**

See 'The Fostering Service Regulations' (2002) Section 35 for details.

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Statutory visits must take place at the foster home. The social worker can then take the opportunity to assess the suitability of the accommodation and the overall circumstances of the placement.

On each visit the Social Worker should consider whether or not it is appropriate to see the child alone. If there are any concerns about the child's welfare, or if the social worker has any reason to see the child alone then they should do so, and at a separate location if for any reason that may be advisable.

Statutory visits are a priority in their own right, and the visiting requirements will not be properly met if these visits are combined with other occasions when the child is seen, such as contact with family or transporting the child. Frequency of visiting must be consistent with the duty to safeguard and promote the child's welfare, so the actual level of visiting should often be well above the statutory minimum.

After each visit the Social Worker must record the visit, including in the report whether the child was seen alone, and also comment on child's health, welfare and other relevant matters. The report should also comment on the success of the placement including any comments made by the child or the carers. Any unplanned or informal contacts with the child should also be recorded.

8.2 Regulation 38 Placements

In the case of an emergency or immediate foster placement with a relative or friend under Regulation 38 the Social Worker must visit the child at least once a week during the first 6 weeks prior to approval by fostering panel. Following approval by panel the visiting requirements are as for all other approved foster carers as above. See Regulation 38, Foster Placement (Children) Regulations 1991.

8.3 Children Placed for Adoption

Under the provisions of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 an increased level of visits is required to safeguard the welfare of children placed for adoption. Research evidence indicates that adoption placements are most at risk of disruption during the first few weeks. This is a critical time during which the placement must be supervised intensively, and **the child must be seen alone on each visit**. These requirements apply in all circumstances, including where the child placed is a looked after child.

Adoption agencies, including local authorities, are required to

- ensure that the child and the prospective adopter are visited within one week of the placement and **at least once a week until the first review**. The frequency of following visits is then to be decided by the agency at the first and each subsequent placement review,
- ensure that written reports are made of these visits,
- provide advice and assistance to the prospective adopter.

Visits should be shared wherever possible between the child's social worker and the prospective adopter's social worker and there should be clarity from the outset about which social worker will conduct each visit. Both social workers should write reports of their visits and share these with the other social worker.

Where the child is being placed outside the area of the placing agency and if the placing agency's social worker cannot visit the placement, the placing agency should make arrangements with another agency to ensure a child and family social worker visits the placement.

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As part of a visit, the visiting social worker should see the child without the prospective adopter being present, unless the child is of sufficient age and understanding and refuses to see the social worker alone.

8.4 Residential Care

The Frequency of Visiting by a Social Worker to a child in residential care is not prescribed by Regulation but the Social Worker must visit a child in residential care at the same frequency as a child in foster care, and must apply the same considerations to visiting beyond the minimum standard.

9 Statutory Reviews

Local authorities are required to review the case of any child who is Looked After or provided with accommodation. The procedure for carrying out reviews is based on the requirements for the use of the DfES Looked After Children (LAC) documentation, which must be fully complied with.

See Policy and Procedure for the Statutory Review of Children Looked After, Bracknell Forest, February 2006 for full details.

The minimum requirements are as follows:

Each case is **first to be reviewed within 28 days** of the date upon which the child begins to be looked after or provided with accommodation. **A second review must be carried out no later than 3 months** after the first review and **thereafter subsequent reviews shall be carried out not more than 6 months after the date of the previous review.**

The requirements for the frequency of reviews as stated above is the minimum standard. However, a review of the child's case should take place as often as the circumstances of the individual case requires. If there is a change of placement or other substantial changes to the care plan then the date of the next review should be brought forward. Also if the IRO has specific concerns about a child and directs that a review should be brought forward then this must occur. Any request from the child or parent(s) for a review should be given serious consideration.

The Review of Children's Cases Regulations 1991 also applies to cases where the child is Looked After or provided with accommodation for a series of short periods at the same place where the following conditions are satisfied:-

- all the periods are included within a period which does not exceed one year,
- no single period is for a duration of more than four weeks, and
- the total duration of the periods does not exceed 120 days.

Cases to which this regulation applies must be reviewed within the first three months, and then reviewed on a six monthly basis.

10 References:

- Policy and Procedure for the Statutory Review of Children Looked After, Bracknell Forest, February 2006.
- 'Looked After Children Policy and Procedure', Bracknell Forest, September 2002.
- Policy and Procedure for Contact between Looked After Children and their Families', Bracknell Forest, August 2005
- 'Policy and Procedure for Permanency Planning for Looked After Children', Bracknell Forest, August 2005.

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- The Department of Health Guidance 'Promoting the Health of Looked After Children' (2002)
- Duty of Local Authorities to Promote the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children under Section 52 of the Children Act 2004
- 'Education Protects: Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care' (2000)

Alex Walters, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care, October 2006

Appendix One

CHILD CARE ADMISSION

DOCUMENTATION AND ACTION CHECK LIST FOR PLACING SOCIAL WORKERS

Day 1 :	Date completed and initials
➤ Complete Placement Plan part 1 on child's admission and EIR part 1. Print forms from SWIFT	
➤ Copies of paperwork to carer, parent, child and file, signed parts to file, ie medical consents. EIR1 notification and Health Consent (BAAF).	
➤ Yellow Financial Details Form for Foster Carer Payments needs to be completed as soon as child goes into placement. Supervising Social Worker will complete this task. ➤ If the placement is with an independent fostering agency the Social Worker must ensure that the details are recorded on the SWIFT Placement Form arrange for invoices to be passed to the Finance Section. (See Placement Pack)	
➤ Contact arrangements to be agreed between child and parent/carers.	
➤ Copies of complaints form for Child and Adult to be given out.	
➤ Give out booklet "You can Help", "Who Cares about Health" and Advocate card 'VOICE'	
➤ Social worker to write to parent/carers with parental responsibility informing them where the child is placed – unless a decision has been made that placement is confidential and parents should not know, in which case Care Proceedings need to be taken out. (See standard letter in Placement Pack.) Copy of letter to be filed with the LAC documentation.	
➤ Input SWIFT with placement details.	

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<p>Within 5 working days :</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Complete Placement Plan 2 at or before Care Planning meeting – to be chaired by manager – complete Care Plan at meeting. Meeting to be attended by child, SW, supervisor, FP SW, carer and parent. Take first copy of EIR 1 & 2 to correct and to add further information to. Print Care Plan from Word. ➤ Social Worker to assist Supervising Social Worker to complete Placement Agreement Form at Care Planning Meeting. This to include details of support arrangements for the foster carers. A risk assessment should also be completed in relation to contact if there are known concerns. ➤ Arrange PEP meeting-to be held within 20 days of placement ➤ A copy of the agreement between the child and the Social Worker (see standard form in Placement Pack) is to be given to the child. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Review date to be fixed for first statutory review – to be held within 28 days. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Minutes of planning meeting to be distributed to all attendees/invitees. ➤ Provide fully completed copies of EIRs and Placement Plan 2 (obtain from SWIFT) to carer. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Notifications to School, Education, other Local Authorities, education, carers, LACs health administrator, Jan Poole - Send copy of EIR1 plus medical consent to:- LAC's Health Administrator, St Mark's Hospital, Maidenhead, within 5 days. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Write to parents to advise them that they will lose Child Benefit when child has been Looked After for 8 weeks and that they should notify the Child Benefit Office. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Update SWIFT with placement planning details. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Children's Guide sent to child 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Child Placed Out of Bracknell :- Out of Borough letter to be sent to appropriate local authority. Notify finance of any costings. Contract may need to be drawn up Follow 'Guidance on putting External Placements on SWIFT' 	

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<p>Visiting Requirements :</p>	
<p>➤ Visit client regularly as needed minimum requirement – within first 7 days and 6 weekly thereafter. Visit to include speaking to the child alone and looking at child's bedroom (periodically and also speaking to the foster carers).</p> <p>If Regulation 38 placement children must be visited weekly for first 6 weeks.</p>	
<p>➤ Short break visiting within first 7 placement days or before first Review</p>	
<p>➤ Update SWIFT re. visiting arrangements, and record visits.</p>	
<p>Child Benefit Forms CH193 & CH193A (Info Sheet) :</p>	
<p>➤ At 5 weeks CH193 to be sent off to Child Benefit Office NB: There is a separate Child Benefit Form CH193D to notify Child Benefit when a child returns to their family and is de-accommodated.</p>	

➤ **NB:**

- Children's Guides are a responsibility of the Family Placement Team.
- Ensure that copies of Care Plan, Placement Plans, EIRs are distributed to carers, child and their parents/carers.
- Placement Plans 1 and 2 should be given to supervising social worker.