

SAFE WELL PROSPEROUS CONNECTED

Children and Families Family and Friends Policy

Status	Date	By Whom
Approved	August 2022	Paul Cowling
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1. Introduction

In North Lincolnshire, our One Family Approach aims to create a system that works for all children, young people and families where we work together to provide and commission integrated services for children and young people.

This procedure contributes to the assurance that North Lincolnshire discharges its corporate parenting responsibilities diligently, ensuring that priority is given to the needs of Children in Care with a view to them remaining with or returning to live with their family or wider family network.

We have high expectations of ourselves as partners with families and communities to deliver positive outcomes and we have high aspirations for our children and young people. Using their strengths, assets, views and experiences and by working together using our values, influence and statutory roles, we will make the best decisions regarding local services and support, to help achieve the very best for our children and young people.

This procedure is within the North Lincolnshire Children and Families Strategy 2020/24 which clarifies our integrated “One Family Approach” and commissioning intent in relation to health, social care and education for children, young people and families.

We support children in care and care leavers to keep links with their community and wherever possible keep the continuity of their education and social lives.

We continue to support and help children and young people as they become young adults.

We will work to ensure our children and young people have equal chances and succeed along with their peers.

We recognise the vulnerabilities of children and young people in care and ensure action is taken to safeguard and promote their welfare.

We ensure that adults who work with and care for our children and young people are safe to do so and provide a consistent relationship with the child.

Legal and Policy Framework

These procedures are informed by the following legislation:

- Care Standards Act 2000
- Protection of Children Act 1999
- The Children Act 1989
- The Children Act 2004
- Special Guardianship Regulations 2005
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Foster Placement (Children) Regulations 1991

- Children and Young Person's Act 2008
- The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- Assessment and Approval of Foster Carer(s): Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations. Volume 4: Fostering Services July 2013
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- The Children and Families Act 2014
- The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015

The procedures are designed to comply with the following standards:

- DfE Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011
- NFCA Code of Practice on the Recruitment, Assessment, Approval, Training, Management and Support of Foster Carer(s) 1999
- Working together to Safeguard Children 2020
- Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations. Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Care Review 2010
- Replacement Children Act 1989 Guidance on Private Fostering, Dfe 2005
- Adoption Guidance, Adoption and Children Act 2002, revised February 2011
- Statutory Guidance on Fostering Service DfE 2011

Links to other Policies and Procedures:

- Children in Care Commissioning an External Service - Policy and Procedures (Contract Management)
- Case Management (CIN, CP and Courts) Policy and Procedures
- Case Management (Children in Care and Care Leavers) Policy and Procedures
- Independent Reviewing Service Policy and Procedures
- CAO policy and procedures
- SGO policy and procedures
- Staying put policy
- Fostering Policy and Procedures

This policy is based on government guidance entitled "Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities", released in 2011 by the Department for Education.

It is aimed at

- Family and friends carers
- Children and young people living with family and friends carers, or thinking about that
- Parents of children and young people who are living with family and friends carers

It is also of interest to:

- Cabinet member for Learning, Skills and Culture.
- Staff within North Lincolnshire's Children and Community Resilience
- Partners across North Lincolnshire
- Anyone who delivers help and support to children and young people

The Director for Children and Families has nominated the Assistant Director, Standards and Regulation, as the lead person for ensuring North Lincolnshire's children are well cared for in family and friends arrangements

2. Scope

The aspiration in North Lincolnshire is that all our children and young people will feel safe and be safe – enjoy good health and emotional wellbeing – recognise and achieve their potential. The procedures align to the Children and Families organisation structure in recognising the complementary functions of:

- safeguarding organisation (resources)
- safeguarding children (need/social work)
- early help and independent review (support and challenge) and
- access and inclusion (SEND/education inclusion/emotional health and wellbeing).

Our priority is to enable children and young people to remain in their families, schools and communities.

3. Values and Principles

We have adopted the following values:

- Every child and young person is unique and we must respect that uniqueness
- Every child and young person has the right to feel safe and be safe
- Every individual child and young person's circumstances, background and culture should be recognised, respected and valued
- Every child and young person should have the opportunity and support to discover their strengths
- Every child and young person should have the opportunity and support to reach their full potential in a complex multicultural context

- Every child and young person should have the opportunity to contribute positively to their local community
- Every child and young person has the right to help and support that are available, accessible and acceptable
- Every child and young person has the right to a stable family life
- Every child and young person has the right to be consulted on plans, interventions and help that affects them.

When looking at the value “Every child and young person has the right to a stable family life” we hold the following principles:

- Our priority is to enable children and young people to live with their families, schools and communities
- Where this priority cannot be achieved, we will work to ensure that they have permanence and stability within a family.
- We will support them to keep links with their community and keep the continuity of their education and social lives.
- Adults who work with our children and young people will be safe to do so and provide a consistent relationship with the child.
- We will continue to support and help children and young people as they become young adults.
- We will work to ensure our children and young people have equal chances and succeed along with their peers.

4. Legal Framework

Children in Care

Children who are in the care of, or are provided with accommodation by, the local authority are ‘looked after’ by the local authority up to the age of 18 and are encouraged to remain living with their carers past this age in ‘Staying Put’ arrangements. Looked After Children are also referred to as ‘children in care’

The phrase ‘children in care’ used in this document should be taken to encompass children in care, young people in care and young people who are care leavers.

Entering the care of the council under a legal order

When the council finds that the welfare or well-being of a child or young person is not best secured within their own family, they may act to place the child either in accommodation or in care. When a child is placed in accommodation, it means that the child and parents have

agreed that the council should look after the child (under s20 of the Children Act 1989). The parents keep parental responsibility for their child. When a child is taken into care, it means that the council has applied to a court for an order (usually a Care Order under s31 of the Children Act 1989) and the court has granted it. In these circumstances, parental responsibility is shared with the parents and the council will normally have the greatest say over what happens to the child.

When either of these things happens, the council has to provide a place for the child to live, and should consider whether any of the child's family and friends can do the job, before looking at a children's home or ordinary foster care.

The council can place a child for whom they have a Care Order with a family and friend carer for 16 weeks, during which time the carer must be assessed as a foster carer for the child, and approved by the Fostering Panel as a foster carer. If the Fostering Panel does not approve the carer, the child must be moved to live somewhere else.

The family and friends carer will be entitled to support and guidance that all foster carers can access. More information is available in the Fostering Policy and Procedures and Fostering Statement of Purpose.

What is a Family and Friend carer?

A family and friends carer means a relative, friend or other person with a prior connection to someone else's child who is caring for that child full time. For example, grandparents may have a grandchild living with them because the child's parents are unable to care for them. There is a whole range of ways in which the family or friends of a child or young person can take on the care of the child because the parents cannot care for them.

Informal care

This means an arrangement where a child is living with a family and friends carer who does not have parental responsibility for him or her. ("Parental responsibility" is the set of duties, responsibilities and rights that a natural parent has when their child is born. Parents will normally still have parental responsibility even if the child is living with someone else, but a court can share that responsibility with other people, including a family and friends carer or a local council.)

Such an arrangement can be made between the child or young person, his parents and a family member or friend who offers care. It does not need to be reported to the council (unless it is a Private Fostering placement – see below) and the only role of the council and agencies such as health, schools and so on will be to provide the kind of services that all children are entitled to.

Sometimes, when the council is working with a child and family, and it is agreed that the child should live elsewhere, the council may assist and advise a parent about securing a place with a family or friend carer. This is still an informal arrangement, because the council has not placed

the child with the carer but merely assisted in the process.

Private Fostering

This is a type of care where a child or young person aged 16 or under (or 18 if the child has a disability) is cared for full time for more than 28 days by someone who is not a close relative of his/hers and does not have parental responsibility.

By “Close relative” we mean a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether full- blood or half-blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or a step-parent. If you have these kinds of relationships to a child you are caring for, it is not a Private Fostering arrangement.

If it is a Private Fostering arrangement (the example given above of the young person living with their best friend’s family is a typical case) then the council will have to be notified and will carry out an assessment of the care for the child and monitor his well-being and safety from time to time. (enter “Private fostering” into the North Lincolnshire Council website’s search engine for more details, or contact the Single Point of Contact on 01724 296500)

Special Guardianship & Child Arrangement Orders

When a child or young person is going to stay with a family and friend carer for the rest of their childhood, they may consider either a Special Guardianship Order or a Child Arrangement Order. Both of these legal measures give the carer more rights and responsibilities over the care of a child than a simple informal arrangement does, and lets the carer share parental responsibility with the parents. More information is available in the Special Guardianship policy and procedures or Child Arrangement Order Policy and Procedures.

Adoption

It is possible for family and friend carers to adopt a child they are caring for. Adoption is intended to give all of the parental responsibility for a child to new parents, and removes it from the child’s birth parents. It is therefore a very serious measure that involves a lengthy process of assessment and approval. Again, legal advice is essential.

5. Support for Carers

Regardless of the legal status, the Local Authority will ensure that children and their family and friends carers will have access to the following supports as appropriate to their needs:-

Universal Support

All family and friend carers are entitled to use the same services as anyone else in the community to help support them and the children in their care. These are known as universal services and include such things as schools, GPs, information, advice and guidance, children’s centres etc. Children’s Centres are based across North Lincolnshire providing a

range of services, working closely with schools, health visitors, G.P's and other local service providers to ensure continuous support to children and their families. Details of the centres, include the weekly activities can be found at: www.northlincs.gov.uk

The North Lincolnshire Families Information Services holds up-to-date details about childcare, activities and services in North Lincolnshire for families with children 0-2.

Further details and a directory of help and support are available from the Family Information Service website:

Family Information Service, North Lincolnshire Council, Hewson House, PO Box 35, Station Road, Brigg, DN20 8XJ www.northlincs.gov.uk/fis

Tel: 01724 296629

Email: fis@northlincs.gov.uk

Targeted Support

Where problems arise in caring for the child or young person, and universal help is not able to resolve them, family and friend carers can ask for targeted help, designed to give additional support and help. Such services include FASST and IFS provided by the council's Localities and Partnerships. Family and friend carers can access such services via professionals they are in touch with -

e.g. teachers, health visitors, GPs – or by contacting the Single Action Point on 01724 296500.

Specialist support

Where problems are so difficult to resolve that targeted services are not sufficient, a referral may be necessary to specialist help. These include Children's Social Work, the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service or the Special Educational Needs Service. Again, referrals can be made with the support of professionals already involved with the family, or directly on the Single Action Point number above.

Financial support

Wherever possible, we believe that family and friend carers should be able to carry out their caring responsibilities free from interference from anyone. However, circumstances may arise where the local authority needs to be involved to provide support, and this can include a range of financial support.

Support when children are not in care.

Normally, children and young people who are living with family and friend carers will be there because of an arrangement between them and the parents of the child. Under these circumstances it will be for the carers and parents to come to an agreement about financial arrangements.

When a child is living full time with a family and friend carer, the carer is entitled to claim a number of benefits related to the child. Child Benefit and Child Tax Credits are two examples

of this, but there may be adjustments needed to housing benefit, invalidity benefit or other means-tested benefits the carer may be claiming. The Citizen's Advice Bureau is a good source of advice about financial matters.

Under certain circumstances, principally to prevent the need for a child to come into care, the local authority may offer small amounts of financial support to family and friend carers. This is at the discretion of the local authority and will need an assessment by a Social Worker.

Support when children are in care.

In some circumstances, it may be in the best interests of the child or young person to be taken into the care of the local authority, but placed with a family and friends carer. When this happens, the local authority will need to assess the family and friends carer as a foster carer. When a carer is assessed and approved as a foster carer for the child, the local authority will pay fostering allowances at the same rate that all foster carers receive and the family and friends carer will not be able to claim child benefit or child tax credit or housing benefit for the looked after child.

Supporting Family Time

Under most circumstances, children living with a family and friends carer will be better off if they keep in contact with their natural parents. Wherever possible this is best undertaken as an arrangement between then family and friends carer and the parent(s) of the child(ren) they are caring for. However in some circumstances this may need the support of the Local Authority and support and advice can be accessed by the Single Point of Contact telephone number.

Comments and/or complaints

If a family and friends carer, or a child or young person within their care, wishes to complain about any aspect of the help and support they receive from the Council, they are able to do so using the following methods:

Phone: 01724 297069

e-mail: Lesley.cooper@northlincs.gov.uk

Lesley Cooper,
Customer Contact and Relationships Manager,
Church Square House,
30-40 Church Square,
Scunthorpe,
North Lincolnshire
DN15 6NL