

# Foster Carer Handbook



## **Moray Fostering Handbook**

A very warm welcome to the new Moray Council Fostering Scheme.

This Fostering Handbook is intended to be a live and working source of information and a good practice guide for foster carers. It will also support everyone working within Moray Council Fostering Service to understand the expectations, law, practices and policies of the service.

The handbook cannot cover every situation that foster carers will encounter and it is not intended as a substitute for a good working relationship between foster carers, supervising social workers, other staff and the parents and social worker for the child.

We hope that you find this a useful and helpful guide to your career as a foster carer for Moray Council.

## **Moray Council Fostering Promise**

Moray Council promise to deliver a fostering service that works to be caring and creative for the children and young people in Moray who need to have good quality care when they cannot be cared for by their family. We will recruit, train, support and retain highly skilled people to provide an elevated level of child care and nurture through which children and young people can thrive.

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## **1.0 The Legal, Policy and Practice Base for Fostering**

### **1.1 Aims and Objectives of the Moray Fostering Service**

We aim to provide a wide and varied range of fostering families for children and young people who require care on a short and long term basis. Our objective is to meet the needs of the children who are temporarily or permanently separated from their families. We will strive to promote a high level of safety and security, care, guidance and encouragement, for children placed with our fostering families.

We will:

- Provide a fostering family for children and young people
- Provide safe family homes
- Where appropriate, support the return of our children and young people back to their families
- Prepare the young people in our care for adult life and living.
- Prepare our children for moving on to a permanent home when they cannot return to their families.
- Provide short breaks to our children and young people when they need them
- To ensure that the children in our care know why they are in our care and what the plan for their future is

### **1.2 Legal Context of Fostering**

The ways that children are 'accommodated' or 'looked after' or 'cared for' and the ways that foster care is provided are determined by law. The main pieces of legislation that the fostering service work within are:

- The Children (Scotland) Act 1995
- The Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007
- The Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009
- The Children's Hearing (Scotland) Act 2011
- The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
- The Looked After Children (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2014
- Children (Equal Protection from Assault) (Scotland) Act 2019
- European Convention on the Rights of the Child

For those of you who are foster carers who may adopt, the main pieces of legislation are:

- The Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007
- The Adoption Agencies (Scotland) Regulations 2009
- The Adoption Support Services and Allowances (Scotland) Regulations 2009

You can find the full documented legislation on The Scottish Government's website.

### 1.3 How do children become Looked After and Accommodated?

You will hear the children you care for described in a number of ways, for instance **'looked after'**, **'looked after and accommodated'**, **'looked after away from home'** and **'in care'**. The correct terminology is **'looked after and accommodated'** although **'looked after away from home'** is also an accurate description. The term **'in care'** went out of date when the 1995 Act was implemented but is still regularly used. The term **"care experienced"** has been chosen by some young people and it refers to anyone who has been, or is currently living 'in care'. This 'care' will have been provided in one of a number of different settings, such as: Kinship care – living with a relative who is not their mum or dad. Looked after at home – with the help of social work. Foster care. Or in residential care – living with the support of a staff team.

For a child to become looked after and accommodated certain legal criteria have to be met:

- Where parents or persons with parental responsibilities have agreed to them being accommodated by the local authority or the local authority has found that there is no one who has parental responsibilities or the child is lost or abandoned. This is called section 25 accommodation or voluntary accommodation. If the parent asks to take the child back, under the age of 16 years old this cannot be prevented unless the social worker successfully applies to prevent this in one of the ways described below. However, if a child has been accommodated continuously for more than six months under section 25, the parent has to give 14 days' notice.
- Where the child has been made subject of a compulsory supervision order (CSO) by a children's hearing and this includes a condition that the child does not live at home. There are a range of legal grounds which must be determined and proved which will lead the children's hearing making a supervision order. The supervision order usually contains directions concerning the frequency of contact between the child and parent and may contain directions about other matters. Parents cannot remove children subject to supervision orders from foster carers without the children's hearing agreeing to this.
- Where the child is subject to an order, authorisation or warrant. The ones you are most likely to come across are a child protection order (CPO) or an Interim Compulsory Supervision Order (ICSO). A CPO is an emergency order, made by a sheriff, which allows the local authority to remove the child from home immediately. CPOs are used when the level of concern for the child is so great that it is assessed that it is not possible to wait for a children's hearing to be held. CPOs are time limited. An ICSO is made by a children's hearing when the panel decides that the child should be in a place of safety immediately. This might be with foster carers, with kinship carers or in residential care dependent on the child's needs. Whichever legal way the child or children living with you is accommodated, you should ensure that you get a copy of the legal order.

There are a number of people or organisations you may hear about or meet when a child is accommodated, a brief description of them is as follows:

**The Children's Reporter:** The reporter works for the Scottish Children's Reporter's Administration (SCRA). The reporter is usually a trained lawyer or a social worker. It is their job to decide whether sufficient 'grounds' exist for a case to be referred to a children's hearing. Where parents or children contest the grounds, or the child is under 8 years old there has to be a 'grounds hearing' in front of a sheriff.

**The Sheriff:** The sheriff is the equivalent of a judge in most other countries. As well as grounds hearings, they hear appeals concerning children's hearings decisions and they make decisions in permanence order and adoption cases.

**The Children's Panel** is made up of volunteers from a range of backgrounds who are interested in helping children. Three of them have to be present at children's hearings. They meet with the child, unless the child is excused from attendance, the parents, the social worker, often school staff and other 'relevant people'. Foster carers can often be deemed as relevant persons and you will be asked to attend to give your views to the hearing. It is an offence not to attend. The panel has to determine whether a supervision order is needed and, if so, whether the child can be supervised at home or whether he or she needs to be accommodated away from home.

Under the Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011, the following people are automatically considered to be a **Relevant Person**:

- Any parent (whether or not they have parental rights or responsibilities)
- Any other person who has parental rights and responsibilities (obtained through the courts)

This means that other people, for example foster carers, relatives and kinship carers, are **not** automatically considered to be Relevant Persons.

The test for being deemed a Relevant Person is that the individual has, or recently has had, significant involvement in the upbringing of the child. Information to enable the Panel Members to make this judgement can be provided in person at the Pre-Hearing Panel or in writing (via the Reporter). There is no requirement to attend the Pre-Hearing Panel in person but it is important to attend if you would like to participate in the discussion and contribute your views to the decision-making process.

**A Safeguarder** may be appointed by a children's hearing or a court when they consider that they need an independent person to investigate what will be in the best interests of a child.

**A Curator ad litem** can be appointed by the court in adoption cases and permanence order applications. Again they are independent of the court and the local authority and their duty is to safeguard and report on the best interests of the child.

#### **1.4 What are our Duties towards Accommodated Children?**

The local authority has a number of legal duties towards looked after and accommodated children:

- To safeguard and promote the child's welfare as their paramount concern. Social workers must visit accommodated children within 1 week of their placement being made and at least

every three months but the Moray council would expect that unless a placement is very settled the child's social worker will visit the child regularly. They must also have a written child's plan which must be formally reviewed every 6 months. This meeting is called a LAAC (looked after and accommodated child's) review.

- To make use of services that would be available for children were they cared for by their parents, such as health and education etc.
- To place siblings together or geographically close, if this is in their best interests.

**Moray Council foster carers will be expected to proactively promote contact between siblings who are placed apart in as natural a way as possible – again where this is deemed as being in their best interest.**

- To take steps to promote regular and direct contact between a child and anyone with parental responsibilities provided this has been assessed as being in the best interest of the child.
- To provide advice and assistance with a view to the time when the child is no longer looked after.
- To seek the views of the child, his or her parents and any other relevant person to the child when making decisions about a child's life.
- To take account, of the child's religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background.

**As foster carers, you will play a key role in meeting these duties. It is also important that you do not, either by mistake or purposefully, do something that is in conflict with these duties.**

### **1.5 National Health and Social Care Standards**

The Health and Social Care Standards 2018 (The Standards) set out what people should expect when using health, social care or social work services in Scotland. They seek to provide better outcomes for everyone; to ensure that individuals are treated with respect and dignity, and that the basic human rights we are all entitled to be upheld.

The Standards are underpinned by five principles: dignity and respect, compassion, be included, responsive care, and support and wellbeing. The principles themselves overarch the standards and reflect the way that everyone should expect to be treated.

### **1.6 Inspection of the Fostering Service**

The Care Inspectorate is the Scottish regulatory body for Scotland. They inspect all fostering services in Scotland under The Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 and against the Health and Social Care Standards (Section 1.5). During an inspection they evaluate the quality of care services deliver and they support improvement in individual services and across the care sector nationally. They provide a grade and produce a public report to reflect their findings.

Where care is not good enough they can also deal with complaints and carry out enforcement action. (Section 2.10 to read about complaints to the Care Inspectorate)

Children, young people and carers may be asked to take part in these inspections by attending focus groups, individual interviews or providing information to help the inspectors. Inspection reports are available on the Care Inspectorate website - [www.careinspectorate.com](http://www.careinspectorate.com)

## **1.7 Children's Rights**

The Scottish Government's vision is to build a Scotland where children's human rights are embedded in all aspects of society. A Scotland where policy, law and decision making takes account of children's rights and where all children have a voice and are empowered to be human rights defenders. The government are taking steps to ensure that children enjoy their rights as set out in the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child. (UNCRC)

The UNCRC sets out the fundamental rights of children and young people and the government are legislating to incorporate these rights in to Scots law.

The UNCRC forms the national framework through which we consider children's rights. It underpins the national policy and decision making frameworks for children such as getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) and supports the national vision to help provide every child with a good start in life and a safe and happy childhood.

As such we have designed the fostering scheme around children's rights based national policy including the National Health and Social Care Standards and the SSSC Learning and Development Standard for Foster Care. Moray Council make a clear commitment to supporting, promoting and practicing in a rights based way that ensures the best possible outcomes for the children and young people using our services.

Placement Services continue to develop our training and development with children's rights at the heart of this. For further information about how placement services are continuing to develop our approach to rights based practice ask your supervising social worker.

## **1.8 Valuing Diversity and Anti-discriminatory Practice**

A child's ethnic origin, religion, cultural and linguistic heritage are fundamental in helping them to form a positive identity. Children should be helped and supported to understand and take a pride in their cultural heritage and feel comfortable about their origins. Carers have an important role in helping children develop skills to deal with all forms of discrimination. If it occurs, you should be helped to tackle any discrimination against them. Carers who are asked to care for a child from a different ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious origin from themselves will be provided with additional information and support to help the child. For instance, adapting the family's diet to include dishes that the child will be familiar with and/or taking the child to a familiar place of worship.

Some children may have distorted ideas about gender stereotypes. Carers, both by example and discussion, can help children understand that there are different, more positive ways of behaving and feeling about themselves. Children and young people may have questions and concerns about their sexual orientation. Carers should offer guidance, support and information in a non-judgemental ways, if necessary seeking help from relevant organisations to support them.

Regardless of a child or young person's ethnic, cultural background, their gender, sexual orientation or any disability, the aim of the foster carer is to help the person feel valued, respected and proud of who they are and all of their achievements.

If you have a question or concern relating to diversity or anti-discriminatory practice please discuss it further with your supervising social worker.

### **1.9 Bullying**

Bullying is repeated, persistent and aggressive behaviour intended to cause fear, distress, or harm to another person's body, emotions, self-esteem or reputation. Children can be perpetrators or recipients of bullying, or both. Bullying can take many forms: physical, verbal, by gesture, extortion or exclusion and individuals or groups may be involved. It is important that you respond appropriately to bullying.

Research tells us that children who are looked after and living away from home are particularly vulnerable to bullying and may face discrimination from other children at school and in the community, simply because they are looked after. Furthermore there is strong evidence to suggest that the correlation between looked after children and bullying increases with age. Research has also shown that a high proportion of looked after children report being bullied in school. In 2003, a report by the social exclusion unit stated that 60% of the looked after children who were consulted during the study reported being bullied at school, compared with just 10% of all pupils. For some children, the impact of previous adverse experiences may result in bullying and controlling behaviour towards other children.

You need to be alert to the possibility of bullying within the home (between foster children or between carers' own children and foster children) or within the neighbourhood/community or school and also about how they might respond. You need to be aware that technology can provide new and different opportunities for children to bully or be bullied – social media, chat, instant messaging etc

You should:

- obtain a copy of the bullying policy for the school the child attends
- be alert to signs of distress that might indicate a child is being bullied
- give clear messages to all children about the unacceptability of bullying
- ensure that methods of managing children's behaviour and sanctions do not contain any elements of bullying
- find opportunities to actively promote the child's self-esteem
- take any incidents of bullying involving a foster child seriously and inform the child's worker
- agree with the child's worker who is responsible for informing the school (when relevant)
- ensure that the child is able to express their wishes and feelings about how to proceed
- take action to address any incidents of bullying within the home
- Familiarise yourself with current social media trends and apps.

### **2.0 Working with Children in Moray**

## 2.1 Types of Fostering

The types of fostering we provide in this service are outlined below.

- short term – this includes 'short breaks', when you are giving parents, other foster carers or children a break from each other
- emergency – when a child gets placed with little notice
- interim (temporary) – when the child plans to go back to live with their parents but they need to spend some time in foster care or while a permanent placement is being found (under 24 months)
- longer term – when you look after a child for more than 24 months
- permanent – when the child lives with you permanently and the child is subject to a 'permanence order'. This is an legal order by which Moray Council seek and obtain parental rights and responsibilities which may be shared with you depending on the child's circumstances.

Your fostering approval will determine what type of fostering you can provide and this can change over the course of your fostering career.

## 2.2 The Moray Fostering Scheme

Moray's Fostering scheme aims to:

- Promote the recruitment of new foster carers at all levels
- Promote the recruitment of new foster carers who will provide short break, temporary, long term and permanent care to children who may; -
  - (i) Be part of a sibling group;
  - (ii) Be older
  - (iii) Have complex needs which can be reflected in their behaviour
- Ensure the retention of existing foster carers, within the scheme
- Recognise and respond to the increasingly complex needs of children
- Recognise the demanding nature of modern fostering within the context of the learning framework and standards for foster care
- Deliver extended training and development opportunities for foster carers
- Provide choice and quality for children who need foster placements

The scheme includes:

- Opportunities for foster carers to advance through four levels
- Potential opportunities to achieve SVQ qualifications
- Learning and development reflected in the Standard for Foster Care 2017 and the Health and Social Care Standards 2018
- Increased support when children with more complex needs are placed
- Payment of foster care fees for level of skills

The structure supports you to move through the levels based on assessed evidence of the increased and developing skills, experience and ability to meet children's needs. Evidence will be gathered through monthly supervision with supervising social workers, use of reflective practice, group discussions and by gathering evidence for a portfolio.

The scheme outline is based upon the following 2 documents:

<http://www.newcarestandards.scot/>

<http://sssc.uk.com/about-the-sssc/multimedia-library/publications?task=document.viewdoc&id=3405>

An outline of the skills levels are as follows.

### **Level 1**

- Will apply to all newly approved foster carers (excluding specific recruitment)
- You must participate in mandatory post approval training which will include child protection and safer caring
- Linked to learning in pre-approval or induction stage of Standard for Foster Care
- Evidence of knowledge gathered and presented to first annual panel review
- To participate in regular planned supervision with your allocated placement services social worker
- With support, you will contribute to looked after child reviews/ children's hearings/ child protection case conferences
- To show an understanding of the importance of birth family links
- To show that you are aware of the impact of decisions which may challenge your views and be able, with support to accept and promote the care plan for the child

### **Level 2**

- You have completed all Level 1 development tasks and have evidenced your learning
- You have completed post approval training and learning linked to post-approval stage of Standard for Foster Care
- Skills development continues by attending training and by reflective practice with Placement Services Social Worker
- Regularly have children /young people in placement
- Develop and build on skills learned including carrying out tasks appropriately from the Child's Care Plan.
- To be able to manage personal/professional dilemmas constructively
- You can advocate constructively for a child without close support.
- At this level you may provide long term or permanent care for children whose needs present as being less complex subject to review.

### **Level 3**

- You have completed all Level 2 development tasks and have evidenced learning

- Carers are willing to care for children with more complex needs/behaviours including older children/ sibling groups
- Carers demonstrate resilience in dealing with potentially challenging situations
- Carers actively contribute to the development of less experienced carers
- High level of flexibility to meet the needs of children placed
- Show active engagement in learning and development and can demonstrate this in their practice
- Demonstrate understanding of complex behaviours in children and young people
- Be able to evidence their practice as outlined in the Standard for Foster Care
- Willing to attend meetings of Level 3 and 4 carers as required

#### **Level 4**

- Carers have completed all Level 3 development tasks and have evidenced their learning
- Carers will care for the children and young people who display the most complex behaviours/needs including older children
- There must be justifiable reason if carers refuse to care for a child when a match is considered appropriate
- Carers must be committed to maintaining placements through the most challenging periods
- One carer should not have work outside the home, to meet the needs of the placement and to have the availability to attend meetings
- Carers will evidence commitment to sharing and developing their skills with other carers including mentoring/buddying roles
- Must be available to attend meeting of Level 4 carers on a monthly basis

It is recognised that not all carers will wish to progress to levels three and four even if they can evidence their skill level. There will be no requirement to move through the skill levels. Carers can elect to deliver at Level 2 but will still be required to evidence their ongoing learning to maintain their skill level. It is expected that carers will not remain at Level 1.

Levels 3 and 4 can be achieved in one of two ways: -

Carers wishing to progress to Levels 3 and 4 must be committed to delivering consistently high levels of care and to provide care for children who may have greater needs or display more complex behaviours. They must show understanding of those behaviours which may be rooted in trauma and evidence through their practice that they can support children and young people in their recovery from their trauma. There is an expectation that carers will demonstrate the capacity to work through difficulties in order to sustain placements. Support for these placements will be more closely monitored and individual packages of support will be provided based on assessed and agreed need.

There will be times when placement services will specifically recruit to levels 3 and 4 to meet the needs of children and young people who require long term/permanent care will be required and for children who have complex or challenging needs. Specific recruitment will include an intensive assessment process and carers progressing through advanced training prior to matching. Carers will work as part of a team within placement services.

### 2.3 The Moray Fostering and Adoption Panel

Moray Council's Fostering Panel is set up under Regulation 17 of the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009 and sits jointly with the adoption panel. Each panel has to have at least three members who have relevant knowledge, skills, experience and expertise to be quorate. However the panel generally runs with 6 or more members. The panel may include professionals, carers and previous service users. The Department's medical adviser may also be present if there are specific health issues to discuss. An experienced panel member will chair the panel.

The fostering panel's roles include but is not exhaustive of:

- Considering applications for approval to become foster carers.
- If recommending approval, the applicant being considered suitable, the Panel shall state whether its recommendation is in respect of: -
  - a particular child or children;
  - any child; or
  - certain categories of children; and
  - the number of children each foster carer may have in their care at any one time
- To consider plans for permanent placements for children through foster care.
- To consider permanent placement of particular children with approved foster carers (the match).
- To undertake Panel reviews for carers which must be carried out within one year of the original decision to approve; and every three years following that first review (regulation 25(1)(a) and (b)). In addition, the local authority must review a carer's approval at panel where they think it "is necessary or appropriate to safeguard the welfare of any child who has been placed with that carer" (regulation 25(1)(c) and (8)).
- The Panel can also be asked to advise and make recommendations in relation to any other matter relevant to the performance of functions under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the Looked after Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009. These might include decisions in connection with reviews of foster carers, or specific concerns relating to an ongoing fostering assessment.

The fostering panel provides a high level of quality assurance to the council and have a very important role in considering the information presented to them. Members will ask questions to gain further information and to hear everyone's views. The panel will discuss their recommendation on their own, prior to advising applicants and they may recommend:

- Approval for the following three years (or a specified shorter period). This may include changes to age, gender or number of children to be cared for. It may also include a change to a different type of fostering, eg from respite to full time fostering
- The end of the carer's work with the department, if the carer has decided that they want to retire or do not wish to continue for another reason
- That a carer should be de-registered because the Department has not been satisfied with their performance. This is a very unusual occurrence and the carer would be advised well in advance that this is likely to be the recommendation and the reasons for it.

The discussion and recommendations from the panel will be recorded and sent to the agency decision maker who reaches a final decision. The agency decision maker's decision and reasoning will be made within 14 days of a panel convening and carers will then be notified in writing.

## 2.4 Foster Carer Reviews

As a Moray Council foster carer you will be formally reviewed every year. The 2009 regulations place a duty on the fostering service to review our foster carers formally by the fostering panel one year after initial approval and then at least every 3 years thereafter. The formal fostering and adoption panel review will be held on the set panel date which is usually the first Wednesday of the month and will include updated checks including PVG, medical, and home safety.

Year 2 and 3 Independent reviews will be held annually on the third Wednesday of the month and chaired by a fostering and adoption panel member. From here the review process will then follow this pattern with two independent reviews and a formal panel. Reviews will follow the pattern outlined in the table below.

Application and Assessment process	Formal Approval at Fostering Panel
Year 1	Formal Review at Fostering Panel
Year 2	Independent Review
Year 3	Independent Review
Year 4	Formal Review at Fostering Panel
Year 5	Independent Review
Year 6	Independent Review
Year 7	Formal Review at Fostering Panel
Year 8	Independent Review
Year 9	Independent Review
Year 10	Formal Review at Fostering Panel

You can expect that your supervising social worker will prepare you for all of your reviews well in advance.

Reports requested for **all** reviews are as below

- Child/ren views (if appropriate)
- Young People Who Foster (birth children residing with carers)
- Foster carers report and portfolio of learning evidence
- Supervising social workers report with approval and skills level recommendation
- Placing social workers views
- Foster Carer chronology

Formal checks required to be done to ensure the safety and wellbeing of both you as the carer and the children you look after:

- Disclosure Scotland records check as needed
- Medical:
  - a. record check every three years
  - b. full medical examination may be requested if there is a health problem

- c. full medical examination every six years
- Health and Safety check and car document checks every three years
- Local Authority check
- Pet questionnaire
- Unannounced visit pro-forma completed
- Checks may be requested at other times if a specific issue or concern has arisen. For any adult who is 16 or over who is a member of the household or any regular babysitter:
  - a. medical record checks every three years
  - b. Disclosure Scotland checks as needed

Additional reviews either formal panel or informal review can be called when necessary by agreement of the placement services team manager. They will be called in the following circumstances:

- Either the carer or their supervising social worker or both are seeking a change of approval. For instance the number of children the carer is approved to have or the age range within their approval.
- A carer has a significant change of circumstances. For instances, someone in the household becomes convicted of a criminal offence or the carers relationship breaks up.
- A serious allegation or complaint has been made against the carer or there are serious concerns about the quality of care they are providing.
- A foster carer resigns or retires.

Any identified actions from an independent review are then taken forward to become the action plan within your next supervision record. Ensuring the issues remain active until no longer required. Your skills level will be considered and a recommendation made at every review. This will be your opportunity to provide evidence for moving through the levels. An outcome of your independent review may be that a formal panel is required to discuss any arising matters further.

The supervising social worker and responsible senior social worker will ensure any recommendations are followed up from reviews are looked at with individual carers. Service feedback forms will also be given before your review to ensure that we can gather and respond to your views about what we are doing well and what we could improve on. This shall be sent back directly to the supervising social workers team manager.

Panel members make a recommendation regarding your foster carer review and this will be sent to the agency decision maker for ratification. A decision will be made within 14 days of the panel and relayed to you.

#### *Skills levels approval*

Supervising social workers will support you to develop a portfolio of evidence throughout the year. This should be an active part of your monthly supervision sessions. Evidence for the portfolio of learning can take any form but our framework has been developed in line with the Learning Standard for Foster Carers 2017 (SSSC) and the National Health and Social Care Standards 2018.

You should be clear about the recommendation of your supervising social worker in relation to where your skills equate to the levels in the Moray fostering scheme.

The Fostering Panel should satisfy themselves that the portfolio of learning presented to them meets the supervising social workers recommendation and the skills section as outlined within the Moray Fostering Scheme.

## **2.5 De-registration**

Becoming a Foster Carer is a lengthy process involving careful consideration on the part of the carers, their family and the fostering service. Consideration to de-register carers and the subsequent decision to end their status as approved and registered foster carers should be made with equal care and consideration. De-registration from the list of current foster carers may be sought in two ways:

- by the Foster Carers, or
- By Social Work staff.

### *De-registration by the Foster Carers*

A variety of circumstances can lead to foster carers indicating to their supervising social worker that they do not wish to continue fostering. When the supervising social worker is advised by the carers that they do not wish to continue fostering, the worker should discuss the reasons for this decision with them.

Such reasons may include changes in the carer's family or personal circumstances or dissatisfaction with their fostering activities and their involvement with the service.

It is important that foster carers are offered an opportunity to discuss the reasons for their withdrawal with the worker and the appropriate manager. Carers may also wish to express these reasons in writing.

In circumstances where a foster carer indicates their wish to deregister the supervising social worker will visit the foster home timeously to confirm the carer's wish to withdraw and the reasons for it.

Carers should then be offered a meeting with the appropriate manager to discuss any outstanding issues, for instance any dissatisfaction they feel with any aspect of the service provided to them, so that these can be recorded and action taken.

The supervising social worker will prepare a report and together with a letter from carers indicating their wish to withdraw from fostering, if available, copy of the original reports (Assessment report, fostering panel minutes and latest carer review minutes) should be forwarded to the placement services team manager. A formal acknowledgement of the acceptance of the withdrawal will be sent to the carers.

Sometimes foster carers withdraw, indicating that they may wish to return to fostering some time later. In such instances carers may need to undergo an assessment and preparation process with updated reports being compiled and presented to the fostering panel.

### *De-registration by the Moray Council*

In any circumstances where the Moray Council is seeking to withdraw carers registration no foster family should be unaware of concerns expressed and the action to be taken. Any concerns about a foster home will be raised with the carers during the ongoing supervising social worker contact. This

may be as part of a practice concern that has been raised, foster carer reviews or as a result of a disruption meeting.

There are a number of reasons why the withdrawal of foster carers registration may be considered. These may include:

- i. where there have been complaints substantiated against the Carers;
- ii. where allegations of abuse have been made against carers and where it is not felt appropriate for further children to be placed in the foster home;
- iii. where there is dissatisfaction with the standards and quality of care in the foster home;
- iv. where Carers do not adhere to the policies and practices outlined in the foster carers agreement and within the foster carer handbook;
- v. where there has been a placement disruption and it is not considered appropriate for the carers to continue fostering;
- vi. where foster carers' circumstances have changed and it is no longer appropriate for them to continue fostering;

In circumstances where the fostering service wish to withdraw carer's registration, the following procedures should be followed:

- i. The supervising social worker should arrange a meeting with the foster carers to discuss concerns raised. This can take the form of a review meeting but would generally be an informal recorded discussion in the first instance. Whether these concerns originate from complaints made against carers, dissatisfaction expressed about their fostering activities or are the result of a disruption meeting it will be clear to you what the concerns are.
- ii. Carers should be advised that a foster carer review is planned. This should be undertaken timeously and in accordance with the procedures previously outlined. A full formal panel review will be held following allegations made against carers or placement disruptions.
- iii. Where changes of approval are recommended by the foster carer review the minute of the meeting should be presented to the appropriate fostering panel for recommendation to the agency decision maker together with relevant reports.
- iv. Carers should be invited to the fostering panel, where appropriate, and will be given support to do so if required.
- v. The agency decision maker who will inform the carers in writing of the agency decision.

### *Practical Matters*

When carers cease fostering, the following practical tasks should be completed:

- i. Carers must return any papers, diaries or notes relating to children in their care or to their fostering activities to your supervising social worker who will arrange for relevant information to be stored in the child's or carer's file or destroyed when appropriate.
- ii. Your supervising social worker must arrange for the fostering equipment belonging to the Moray Council to be returned.
- iii. All papers relating to de-registration should be filed in the carer's file. Your supervising social worker is responsible for ensuring that the file is complete before being filed away. Your supervising social worker must inform the fostering payments section of de-registration.
- iv. Your supervising social worker is responsible for informing other agencies such as the Health Board, Education Department, voluntary agencies or other local authorities, who were informed about the approval of the carers in accordance with the Looked After Children (Scotland) Act 2009, of their de-registration.

### **2.6 Appealing decisions made and ratified by the ADM**

You can ask for a review panel if you are not satisfied by any decision made during your review or a formal panel. A request for a Review panel should be sent in writing to the panel advisor within 28 days of notification of the decision. A panel with different membership taken from a neighbouring local authority will be established to reconsider the recommendation made and Moray Council agency decision maker will make the decision.

For information about making a complaint, see section 2.12.

### **2.7 Foster Carer Agreement and Child's Planning Agreement**

The Foster Carer Agreement is an agreement between approved foster carers and Moray Council. This is required under Regulation 24 and Schedule 6 of the Looked after Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009. It ensures that you have a full understanding of your entitlements and obligations. Following approval, the foster carer agreement should be completed and signed by you and a representative of the Council. You will retain a copy and one will be placed in your file.

When a child is placed a day to day placement agreement, related to the needs of the child, should be drawn up between you and the child's social worker. This agreement should be done in advance of the placement being made and for emergency placements within three working days of the child being placed.

This will cover issues such as:

- Risk and need information
- Information concerning the child's background
- Arrangements for the child to see their family
- Any specific financial issues related to the child
- Arrangements for medical and other consents
- The frequency of social worker visits to the child and carer

## 2.8 Insurance Cover for Foster Carers and Foster Children

The Moray Council has in force the following insurance policies in respect of foster carers and foster children. They do not apply to families receiving adoption allowances or those supported by custody allowances.

### *Summary of insurance in force*

#### Third Party

The Insured: Foster carers approved by Moray Council.

The Activities: Fostering by the Insured of children and young people in the care of Moray Council.

The Indemnity: All sums which the Insured shall be legally liable to pay in respect of accidental death, bodily injury or illness, or loss or damage to property arising out of the activities described.

Principle Extensions:

- i. claims by foster children against foster carers
- ii. legal costs and expenses arising out of alleged breach of duties
- iii. claims made against foster children where they would be liable in law

Principle Exclusions:

- i. damage to foster carer's property
- ii. property insured elsewhere

Limit of Indemnity: £1million any one claim or series of claims, arising from one source or original cause.

#### *All Risks*

The Insured: Moray Council

The Property Insured: Buildings and contents belonging to registered foster carers of the Insured

The Indemnity: Any physical loss of or damage to the property insured due to the action (wilful or otherwise) of foster children residing with a foster carer or respite carer

Sum Insured: £100,000 any one household

Basis of Cover: Reinstate or replace at market value of the property of the time of the loss

Exclusions:

- i. the first £100 of each and every claim
- ii. losses covered by any other insurance

The policy is intended to cater for incidents of unusual or unexpected damage or loss rather than everyday wear and tear for which provision is made under the weekly fostering allowances. It is recognised that it is not always possible to distinguish between everyday wear and tear and the kind of specific additional damage which would warrant special assistance. If you are in doubt, you should discuss it with your supervising social worker.

The policy does not cover claims of less than £100 or the first £100 of any larger claim but amounts up to £100 will be met by the Council.

#### *Personal Accident*

The Insured: Foster carers approved by The Moray Council

Cover: Assaults on the Insured by children

Benefits:	Death/Capital Sum	£15,000
	Temporary Benefit	£100 per week per couple

#### *Legal Benefits Insurance*

The Moray Council does not hold insurance cover to protect against loss of, or damage to the private vehicles of foster/short break carers. Insurable interests rest with the owner of the vehicle and the extent of cover (i.e. comprehensive, policy excess, bonus protection etc) is at the discretion of the owner.

Where the car of a foster carer is damaged by a child in care, the Council may elect to make a contribution towards the financial loss arising. Each case will be decided on its individual merits.

All incidents must be reported immediately.

#### *Action to be taken following loss or damage to property or injury suffered by foster/respice carers*

Incidents should be reported in writing immediately to the appropriate social worker with the following information:

- a. foster carer(s) name and address;
- b. details of the injured person or owner of any property damaged, including their age and address;
- c. date and time of the accident, by whom and when it was reported, the exact place where it occurred and detailed of how it happened;
- d. full details of personal injuries or damage to the third party;
- e. in case of personal injuries, details of date and names of doctors or hospitals visited;
- f. whether the police or any witnesses were involved and, if so, details of the same;
- g. the name and age of the child concerned.

Carers are responsible for informing the child's social worker of the incident. It is the social worker's responsibility to complete a claim form.

Where a theft has occurred this should be reported to the police.

Written estimates of the cost of making good any damage should be forwarded to the fostering service as soon as possible, wherever possible providing alternative quotations from more than one firm of source.

If possible, avoid carrying out repairs until the insurers have responded. If a repair has to be done immediately, the account or receipt should be retained. In some instances, following the report of damage a local assessor will visit and it is therefore important to be able to show relevant evidence where possible.

### *General information*

The Council's "All Risks" Policy provides cover for malicious damage in the foster home by the foster child but NOT his or her family.

The Council's "All Risks" policy provides cover for theft from the foster home by the foster child but NOT by his or her family.

In both cases the Council may consider ex-gratia payments in cases of malicious damage to, or theft from a foster home by a foster child's family, with each case being considered on its merits.

If a foster carer makes a claim on their insurance policy, the excess will be met by the Council.

Fire Insurance - foster carers who own their own homes should ensure their insurance cover is adequate.

## **2.9 Confidentiality**

Foster carers will receive confidential written and verbal information about children, their parents and families. This will normally be from social workers but may also be from others, e.g. doctors, health professionals or teachers. Carers should check with whom they can share the information as this may have direct legal implications for foster carers.

Foster children and their families should be given a clear explanation by their social worker of what sort of information has been shared with them and why. Supervising social workers should discuss this with carers but generally it is to ensure that carers can provide a high level of care to the child or children they are looking after. Where other people without a need to know ask inappropriate questions, a polite and firm refusal to discuss the matter is usually sufficient. Information received from children or others about actual or potential harm to the child or another person must be shared with the relevant social worker as soon as possible. Under no circumstances can be an agreement between a carer and a child or their family or others to keep information a secret. (see the section on child protection 2.10).

### *Storage of confidential information*

Carers are required to keep all reports and papers relating to individual children or the fostering service in a lockable filing box or cabinet. These are provided by the Department. Any electronic data required to be held about a child should be discussed with you supervising social worker prior to this

happening. Information that identifies a child or family should not be sent electronically. When a placement ends, all paperwork relating to the child's placement should be returned to the child's social worker for shredding.

#### *Confidentiality with other carers*

Confidentiality must also be respected within carer support groups, training and especially when meeting informally with other carers. Carers should not share information in public settings or in places where confidentiality could be breached. In safe settings, specific issues can be discussed regarding a child, so that experiences of how situations have been dealt with can be shared. The confidentiality for the child, however, must be respected. Carers sharing information in safe settings must be able to do so with the confidence that individuals do not discuss the information outside of the group.

#### *Enquiries from the media*

Under no circumstances should a carer give information or have a discussion with the press or any media organisation about children in their care other than where they have prior agreement from the Department. Children who are looked after by the local authority cannot be photographed or featured in the media unless their parents or the Chief Social Work Officer, if the Department holds parental rights, has given permission.

Any enquiries from the media must be referred immediately to the carer's supervising social worker.

#### *Access to information about foster carers*

The Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009 require the local authority to retain confidential files for all approved foster carers. This file holds details of their approval, amendments to approval and termination of approval. It also contains a record of each placement with the foster carer. Records for approved foster carers must be retained for at least 25 years from the date on which the approval was terminated or until the carer's death, if earlier. The local authority must ensure that the information contained is treated as confidential and can be accessed only by court order or as provided for under legislation.

## **2.10 Recording and Report Writing**

Keeping a record of daily work with the child and the family is important. Carers are provided with daily log sheets and these should be used for keeping detailed records, and kept in the locked box supplied by the Moray council. The diary provided should be used solely to record appointments, dates etc, and should not contain details of any children. The supervising social worker can offer guidance on recording practice and training will be provided. Records must be kept by all foster carers for the following reasons:

- To record significant events (both the challenges and the celebrations) in a child's life and therefore contribute to the child's life history
- To show patterns of behaviour over time, recording progression or regression, eg sleeping, eating, social interaction
- To assess the child's needs, contributing to future planning for the child
- To record the child's time with their birth family and the child's reaction to this

- To provide reports or important information for children's reviews, hearings or court proceedings
- To evidence the learning and development of carers practice and to support and safeguard for carers in the face of complaints or allegations

Children and their parents have, in principle, a right to access information written about them but there are exceptions to this. You should take account of this when recording and writing reports. If any have any doubt about this, please speak with your Supervising Social Worker.

Furthermore it is important to:

- Keep records short and up to date – take time each day so that events are fresh in your mind and as accurate as possible
- Be clear whether you are giving an opinion or reporting facts
- Sign and date your entries
- Explain to the child, if they are old enough, that you are keeping the record and the reasons for it.

Some examples of what to record are as follows:

(Accidents and Illness requiring medical attention, details of where the child has gone missing and involvement with the police are reportable instances to the Care Inspectorate and should be reported to the duty line at the first possible convenience. The fostering service has 48 hours to report these incidents to the Inspectorate)

- Accidents, illness or medical/dental appointments
- Requests for help to any agency
- Family arrangements for the child and/or missed appointments
- The child's reactions to spending time with their family – the child's behaviours and if applicable the child's own words
- Specific care arrangements for the child if the child is staying elsewhere – such as routine, like dislikes, what do they enjoy, how do you sooth them etc
- Things that the child has said which cause concern
- Details of any difficulties in caring for the child, including what happened before and after
- Important events or changes in circumstances
- Details of occasions when the child has gone missing and where they were found
- Police involvement
- Damage to property
- Information from school, including attainments and achievements

Visits, meetings and arrangements with social workers, including hearings and reviews. Children who are looked after and have had a succession of moves during their childhood, often struggle to make sense of their identity as they have little information about their past. It is helpful if foster carers keep a memory box for each child in their care.

## **2.11 Child Protection Procedures**

Everyone has a responsibility to make sure children are safe and well cared for. If you have a child protection concern about a child in your care, this must be reported immediately to the child's social worker or their team leader.

In the case of a child not in your care, reports should be made to the following teams

- 01343 554370 (social work during office hours)
- 03457 565 656 (Social Work Emergency Out of Hours)
- 101 (Police Scotland)

Social work staff and the police may investigate these concerns.

During an investigation, social workers and police will speak to the child, their family and any other relevant people, e.g. teachers, health visitors or you. They will discuss with health staff whether it is necessary for the child to have a medical examination. If so, the child will be examined by a paediatrician to make sure there are no injuries or other problems, for example poor growth or infections that require treatment. In some cases there may be a police doctor present. If there are any injuries, these may be photographed by the police for evidence. The investigation will be carried out in a sympathetic manner with the child's safety and welfare being the most important consideration.

Child abuse encompasses much more than physical abuse, it can include:

- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect
- Non-organic failure to thrive

#### *Responding to a child's disclosure of abuse*

Many children placed with carers have suffered serious abuse in the past. Sometimes social workers may suspect that a child has been abused but he or she has never disclosed any information. It is only when a child feels safe that they start to talk about it. If a child starts to talk to you about difficult memories, it is vital that you:

- Stop what you are doing so that you are available to the child to have a quiet chat
- Listen carefully, rather than ask questions. Do not ask leading questions such as 'did someone hit you?'
- Show the child that you are taking whatever he or she has told you seriously
- Tell the child that he or she is not to blame and that they were brave to speak up – this is a time for reassurance and lots praise for the child
- Make it clear to the child that this cannot be kept a secret and that the information will need to be passed on to their social worker
- Write down what has been said as soon as possible, using the child's exact words. It is important that you do not attempt to question or interview a child as, if you question the child in the wrong way, this could interfere with the formal process of gathering evidence needed for court proceedings. You must immediately inform the child's social worker or their team leader. You may also find it helpful to discuss the feelings evoked by the disclosure with your supervising social worker.

## **2.12 Child Protection Case Conferences and Core Groups**

The child's situation may need to be discussed at a child protection case conference. This is a formal, multi-agency meeting that shares agencies' risk assessments and identifies necessary actions to protect a child. This meeting also decides whether the child's name should be placed on the child protection register. The register is a list of children for whom there are identified risks and who require a formal child protection plan. As the carer for the child at this time you will often be invited

to attend a child protection case conference and you may be asked to provide a report. The carer's contribution to case conferences is very important. Supervising social worker's will advise on the content of the report and can arrange for it to be typed. Reports will be shared with the child and their parents. The only exception to this is 'restricted access information'. The chair of the case conference decides whether or not a report or part of a report will be restricted. Case conferences usually last between 1½ to 2 hours. Review case conferences are held every six months to review progress and decide whether the child's name needs to remain on the register. Carers may also be invited to become a member of the core professional group that meets more regularly to monitor progress.

### **2.13 Allegations and Complaints**

Although rare, allegations may be made about carers or members of their family by many different people. This could be children, their families, neighbours, professionals or others who have contact with them and may have a view.

Allegations are more serious than a complaint (see below) and can concern physical, emotional or sexual abuse, neglect or inadequate care. The Fostering Network booklet, Safer Caring, states that one in six foster carers will have a complaint or allegation made against them during their fostering career.

Safer caring practices (see section 6.10) that are learnt through preparation and training must be followed and should reduce the risk of unfounded allegations. A child or member of their family may make an allegation against a carer because:

- He or she has actually been abused by the carer or a member of their family
- Something has happened recently that reminds the child of an event that took place before the child was with the carer
- It is a way of trying to regain control over his or her life
- The child may misinterpret an innocent action such as putting an arm round them to offer comfort
- The child or his/her family sees making an allegation as a way of getting away from the foster home

If an allegation or suspicion of abuse is made, it will be considered in accordance with the Moray Council Child Protection Procedures. All allegations of abuse about a carer are dealt with by appropriately trained child protection staff and senior managers of the Department. Such investigations are uncommon but can take considerable time to conclude. The Local Authority has a duty of care towards foster carers and when an allegation of abuse has been made, carers will receive clear advice about process and timing, though not necessarily about the detail of the investigation. The carer's supervising social worker will ensure they have adequate information about what is happening and potential sources of advice and support, although they will not be able to discuss the detail of the allegation.

Placement Services provides all carers with individual membership of the Fostering Network. This can provide both personal and individual support as well as legal support and, if necessary, any legal expenses. Fostering Network's booklet Allegations Against Foster Carers contains valuable

information about what is likely to happen if an allegation is made, the investigation, legal procedures and where to get support. A copy can be obtained from the carer's supervising social worker.

Children in placement should not have to move unless it is the only immediate, safe solution or they refuse to remain in the placement. This will be balanced against the need to minimise distress and disturbance. If it is decided that the child should be moved, this can happen immediately without any period of notice. Written notice of the decision and confirmation of the date that the placement ended will be given as soon as possible. After completion of an investigation, unless an allegation has been judged completely unfounded, the Fostering Panel will review all the circumstances and make a recommendation.

Whether or not there is foundation for the allegation, the carers, their family and the child involved may need support and/or counselling after the event, either individually or together. The supervising social worker and the child's social worker can facilitate this. If the child has moved, continued contact between the child and the carers may or may not be possible dependent on the circumstances. The child's needs and future will normally be planned through a LAAC review. The needs of the carer and their family will be discussed with their supervising social worker and his or her line manager. The absence of a criminal conviction does not necessarily mean that abuse has not occurred. In some instances, even after full investigation, a serious allegation remains unsolved. The Fostering Panel will have to consider all the circumstances and recommend if the carer's family should continue to look after the children on behalf of the Local Authority. This recommendation will be made to the agency decision maker. Carers have the right to ask for a review of this decision.

If a child is subject to a supervision requirement, the children's hearing must be informed of any allegation no matter what the outcome. The Care Inspectorate will also be informed. The child and his/her family will be told of the outcome of the allegation in a manner suited to their age and understanding. Written information about the outcome will be sent to the parents or guardians of the child, the person against whom the allegation was made and senior staff within integrated children's services. Detailed records will be kept of all allegations, investigations, findings and outcomes. Information relevant to the carer will be retained in the carer's file. Information relevant to the child will be held in the child's file. Any reference to the carer will be held in a restricted access section of the child's file.

**The Fostering Network's advice and mediation service 0141 204 1400 or [www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk](http://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk)**

A copy of the Moray Council policy and procedures for complaints and allegations can be obtained from your supervising social worker.

#### *Complaints about carers*

Caring for someone else's children is not easy and fostering a child will place great demands on the carer and their family. Sometimes a complaint may be made against them. For example, a child may complain to their social worker that they are not getting enough pocket money. A member of the child's family may complain about the child's clothing or a neighbour may complain about their car being damaged. If a complaint is made about a service provided on behalf of the Local Authority they have a responsibility to investigate it.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, there are a number of ways this may be dealt with. It may be resolved through a joint meeting with the carer's supervising social worker and the child's social worker or it may involve meeting with the supervising social worker and his or her senior social worker. If it is not possible to resolve the issue or it is more serious, a formal complaint can be made through the Local Authorities complaints procedures. The manager of the service will provide an overview of the complaint and try their best to resolve this for you in the first instance. If this is not able to provide a resolution an investigator from a different section of the department, who is independent from the case, may be appointed. If a formal complaint is made the carer will receive clear written advice on the process for dealing with the complaint.

Carers have a right to representation or support in interviews relating to complaints. They may wish to seek advice or support from the Fostering Network. During the investigation process, carers should be informed about the progress of the investigation. At the end of the investigation, whenever possible, the carer should be given feedback. Sometimes, to protect the confidentiality of a third party, information cannot be shared with them. All carers have the right to complain about the service that they are offered or if they feel they have not been treated fairly. Complaints can be a helpful way of recognising gaps in services and help to maintain a high quality service. Comments, complaints and issues should, wherever possible, be resolved in discussion between yourself and your supervising social worker. If that is not possible, a meeting can be arranged with their line manager or a more senior manager.

The Care Inspectorate registers and inspects fostering services and a direct complaint can be made to them. It is not required that you go through the local authority complaints procedure first but it is preferable.

Care Inspectorate, Compass House, 11 Riverside Drive, Dundee DD1 4NW. Tel: 0845 600 9527 or [enquiries@careinspectorate.com](mailto:enquiries@careinspectorate.com)

A complaint can also be made to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, although you are required to use the Council's complaints procedure first. The Ombudsman should be contacted within 12 months of the date that problem you are complaining about first occurred. In special circumstances, the Ombudsman may be prepared to deal with matters out with this period. Write to

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, 4 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7NS.  
<http://www.spsso.org.uk>

See **section 3.8** for comments or complaints from children or young people.

See section 5.11 for foster carer complaints about the fostering service

## **2.14 Serious Incidents and Accidents**

Any serious incident or accident which involves a child must be reported immediately to the child's social worker, line manager, duty worker or, if out of hours the out of hours social work service. You can also receive support, help and information from your supervising social worker. In some

circumstances you may be required to fill in a form or to provide information to the child's social worker or the supervising social worker. They will advise you of the required steps and of the information you should provide.

All such incidents will be reported by the fostering team to the Care Inspectorate. A serious incident includes when a child or young person:

- runs away
- commits an offence
- is hospitalised
- suffers or discloses any incident of abuse

If you have an accident or suffer serious physical or mental health problems that may affect your ability to care, you should contact your supervising social worker or your line manager as soon as possible.

All serious incidents and accidents are reportable to the Care Inspectorate and as such must be reported to your supervising social worker within 48 hours.

## **2.15 Use of Social Media for and by Foster Carers**

### *How we will use social media*

It is the responsibility of our service to ensure applicants and foster carers are suitable to work with children and young people; providing not only a high standard of care but setting an example as role models.

Social networking sites (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Tumblr, internet forums and message boards etc.) are a popular way for adults and children to communicate and they provide an opportunity for users to share information with existing friends and also find new friends with shared interests.

We understand that some applicants and foster carers may wish to participate in social networking in their personal lives, however, they should also be aware of the potential risks involved in the use of this type of media and be mindful of the information they post and how it might be viewed when published, together with the potential impact on their reputation and by association the councils. The service has a responsibility to offer advice and guidance to protect applicants and foster carers from publishing anything that might reflect badly on them.

Both the service and foster carers have a duty to safeguard children and young people in their care. Any applicant or foster carer associated with the council is expected to behave appropriately and in ways that are consistent with our values and policies.

### *Applicants*

Social media checks will be undertaken by the service in relation to any applicant or foster carer. For applicants this will be done in line with our Form F assessments, ensuring that files held on each applicant include social media checks. The consent form permits assessors to undertake checks on applicants using search engines, e.g. Google, Bing etc.

The implications of internet use should be made explicit from the start of the assessment process. There is information in the public domain about how to configure appropriate privacy settings.

Applicants should understand that they need to maintain their own confidentiality and that of any child who may be placed with them.

### *Approved Foster Carers*

Social media checks will be undertaken as and when considered necessary and you will be asked to allow social worker staff to undertake checks via search engines, e.g. Google, Bing etc.

### **Checking social media sites**

Social media checks will be undertaken by Supervising Social Worker who will enter your name into a search engine using their own staff company account. The checks for applicants will be undertaken during Stage 1 of the assessment process. Staff will not search using their personal profiles.

Checks will only reveal profiles, photos, videos and comments that are in the public domain and only when security settings have not been correctly set up. Applicants and foster carers will not be requested to provide any personal passwords as these are not publically available.

Any information revealed in such a check which is a cause for concern, will be discussed with you at the first available opportunity. Causes for concern might include any inappropriate material whether in video, photo or written form, including views and opinions, whether implicit or explicit, that are not conducive to the role of a foster carer working for the council. The information might have been published by the applicant, foster carer or a third party.

In all cases supervising social workers will have to consider the source of the material and make a judgement on how it should be interested and acted upon. If there is a cause for concern this will be shared with senior operational management.

### *What expect of you in relation to your use of social media.*

Whilst most adults, children and young people recognise the need to keep safe and use the internet responsibly, there are a number of potential risks to bear in mind.

- Information posted on the internet is accessible everywhere and however private you think it may be, in the virtual world very little is completely private.
- Information might be disclosed whether inadvertently or intentionally, which could reveal information about a young person in care.
- Social media sites can also provide opportunities for the sexual exploitation and grooming of children and young people where gifts or rewards may lead to meeting a potential abuser offline.
- A young person in care may pass information to either family members or strangers through social media sites which might lead to them coming to harm.

### **Good practice**

- Go online and check your security and confidentiality settings. Reset them if necessary.
- Consider the consequences before posting anything on social networking sites and the impression it may give of you to those who access the information.
- If you identify yourself as being associated with the council you should only create content that is consistent with professional standards and within the council's policies.
- You should be mindful to make clear that any views posted are your own and not those of the council and make sure that any comments you make do not bring the council into disrepute.

- Confidentiality – any matters relating to the council, the fostering service and children in care should never be discussed or referred to on social networks.
- Social media sites should not be used to abuse or harass anyone or to post offensive or derogatory comments. Remember that you are personally responsible for any comments you post.
- In order to maintain appropriate professional boundaries, employees of the council, applicants, foster carers, children and young people should not be ‘friends’ of one another on social media websites, nor should foster carers have Looked After Children’s family members as ‘friends’.

## Security

- It is advisable that anyone using social networking facilities do all they can to limit access to their posts and that maximum privacy settings are in place which are reviewed on a regular basis.
- Children and young people should be advised never to give out personal details or information which could identify them or their location.
- Information and photographs of a looked after child must **NEVER** be posted on social media sites without the written consent of the placing Local Authority, birth parents and the child, if of an appropriate age. Once an image is on the internet it can be viewed and stored by other people within their friends’ network.
- Your immediate family and friends, who will be aware of their role in fostering, should be advised of the dangers of publishing anything which could identify a fostered child.
- If you use social media sites you should keep any contact information hidden and vet carefully any requests to become a friend.
- You must never identify a child in care, or an ex-child in care, or discuss your role as a foster carer.
- Children and young people should be encouraged to report any inappropriate use or comments in confidence.

Any breaches of confidentiality or the publication of material that is a cause for concern may affect your assessment, or approval status and placements.

Due to the fact that technology is constantly changing it is impossible to cover all circumstances in this guidance. Individuals are expected to behave online with the same respect for others as they would in any other aspect of life.

### 2.16 Working relationships

We recognise that we work in a stressful environment and that at times we need to have difficult conversations about many different things. We expect that you will have difficult conversations respectfully and thoughtfully and you can expect the same in return. We expect that interactions between professionals, foster carers or birth family are managed in a way that supports good working relationships. You can trust that we are fully committed to being open and honest about any concerns we may have and we would expect that you feel able and supported to raise any issues with us in an open and honest way.

### 2.17 Transport

It is important for all children that they are transported by the people who care for them. The expectation is that you will transport the children you are caring for as their needs determine. This includes, but is not exclusive to, transport to school and back, to their family time, any activities they may do etc. In any circumstance we expect that the person who cares for the child will transport them, however exceptional circumstances will arise over the course of your career with us. Your supervising social worker will always be willing to talk through any challenges that arise and seek to support the resolve of this in the best interest of the child.

The fostering service expect that there will be circumstances where transport can become problematic for carers. For example; some carers may have more than one child who needs transport and that this may not be easily manageable. In these circumstances you can expect that your supervising social worker will discuss this you at the point of making the placement or retrospectively when an emergency placement has been made how we can support these arrangements.

#### *Travel expenses*

Carers can claim expenses as outlined within the travel expenses policy. In exceptional circumstances of long term or exceptional travel the fostering service may need to approach foster carers to adjust payments or agree a set amount.

## **3.0 Foster Care Placements**

### **3.1. Placement Types**

All requests for foster placements are made by social workers from the children and families teams of Moray Council. Once a carer has been identified who can meet the needs of the child the supervising social worker will telephone the carer for an initial discussion. If both feel the possibility can be explored further, a discussion will be arranged between the carer and the child's social worker. It is essential that carers receive full information about the child, including:

- Their history including information about the reasons for the child being 'looked after'
- Information about the child's needs
- Family background and the arrangements for seeing family, including any restrictions on that
- Health and/or education information
- Information relating to the child's ethnicity, religion, language and culture
- Safer caring considerations
- The plan for the child
- The child's legal status, any planned changes in legal status and who has parental responsibilities

If it is agreed that the placement will go ahead, written information, including a copy of any legal order and consent to medical treatment, will be provided. You can expect that either a child's planning meeting will be held to do this or that in an emergency a meeting will be held within 72 hours of the child being placed which covers three working days.

In some emergency circumstances there may be very little, and exceptionally no information about the child. In cases like these the child's social workers will continue to seek information and share it with you whenever it becomes known.

### 3.2 When a Child is placed

The Scottish Government has issued national placement descriptors for care planning. When a child is placed with a carer, the placement will be defined as:

- Permanent
- Long-term
- Interim
- Emergency
- Short Break

When a placement is made in an emergency, the first few days are important in helping the child deal with separation from their family, or previous carers, as well as helping them to settle into unfamiliar surroundings and situations. It is helpful to the child at the start of the placement to:

- Be kind, warm and very patient
- Allow them to keep familiar toys and clothes, even if they are dirty or torn
- Find out what is important to them
  - Who are the important people in their lives? Try to be respectful of these important people – no matter the harm you see
  - What are the important things in their lives? What do they enjoy doing, watching, eating etc.

Explain family routines – as discussed in your family/safer caring policy (see section 6.10). Be clear about your expectations of the child within your home.

The child will probably be upset about leaving their present carers and familiar surroundings, sometimes with little preparation. Each child may react in a different way but all will need reassurance from you and, if they are old enough, a chance to talk about their feelings.

- For example, a child who is usually 'clean and dry' may start to wet or soil; some may be unusually clingy; other children may act out their distress by lying, stealing or running away. All these symptoms will usually lessen as the child settles down and begins to trust you

#### *Planned placements*

If the placement is planned, it can be useful for parents and children to have information about you beforehand. It is helpful if you can provide a profile of yourself and your family, including photographs and descriptions of their lifestyle and routines. Before introductions begin, a planning meeting will be held with the child's social worker, possibly the child and their family and your

supervising social worker. The meeting will discuss the reasons for the placement, its aims and the needs of the child. You will be given as much information as possible about the child and an opportunity to talk to those who know the child well. Arrangements may also be made for the parents to meet you. The child's social worker will discuss the move and appropriate details about you with the child and their family. Introductory visits will be arranged and will continue at a pace suitable to the child's age, understanding and previous experience.

All carers are expected to work in the following ways:

- Promote the health, education and personal and social development of children and young people in their care. Using the SSSC learning and development framework for foster carers to undertake and evidence what can be a very complex, demanding and, at times, exhausting role. It can also be extremely rewarding, and an opportunity to make a real difference in the life of a child or young person.
- Evidence a high level of emotional strength, resilience, and enthusiasm to care for children with complex social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties. Foster carers are required to be patient, tolerant, consistent, thoughtful, and empathic. Carers need to demonstrate that they are secure, resilient people who can maintain effective functioning through periods of stress.
- Demonstrate an ability to set boundaries and manage children's behaviour which is rooted in and interest and understanding of the child and the unique needs of the child. Structure, predictable routine and consistent approaches to the care provided from carer's is crucial, as they are for any child who is accommodated.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of trauma, loss abuse and neglect on a child's development, and on the child's ability to develop trust and form attachments to others.
- Have the capacity to accept, and celebrate, the individual child and place emphasis on recognising potential, and building on strengths, rather than focusing on difficulties.
- Working as part of a team alongside health, education and social work professionals. Carers need to demonstrate that they are well organised and able to attend frequent appointments and meetings, communicate effectively, and understand complex information. Carers also need to demonstrate that they can sustain working relationships with professionals, advocate for their child's needs, and accept support when it is needed.
- Foster Carers need to demonstrate that they are able to learn and apply new information and skills. They will need to attend generic training, and training specific to the needs of the child/children they care for.
- It is important that carer's are able to discuss, and reflect upon, how personal experiences, past and present, may impact on their role as foster carer's.

### **3.3 Continuing Care**

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 became law on 27th March 2014. Parts of this Act are of particular importance to those working with looked after children and care leavers. The Continuing Care provisions and subsequent Ministerial Orders deliver important changes to existing

practice, offering looked after young people the right to remain in their care setting (if they are in kinship, foster or residential care) up to their 21st birthday.

The Scottish Government Guidance on Part 11 (Continuing Care) sets out in greater detail the principles and policy aims, and should be read in conjunction with the Staying Put Scotland Guidance (Scottish Government, 2013) which sets out the underpinning principles and philosophy of care which should inform the application of Continuing Care in practice.

### What is Continuing Care

‘Continuing Care’ is a legal term established by Part 11 of the 2014 Act<sup>1</sup>. It is defined as meaning the same accommodation and other assistance as was being provided for the eligible person by the local authority, immediately before the person ceased to be looked after. It is important to remember that it is not a new placement; it is the right for the young person to ‘stay put’ in the same placement.

### Transition

The policy intention behind the ‘Continuing Care’ provisions is to provide care leavers with a graduated transition out of care. It recognises that requiring young people to leave supportive care settings as young as 16 has contributed to extremely poor outcomes for these young people. The loss of relationships with the care provider or other significant people upon leaving care has also had a negative impact on many care leavers to make a positive progression to independent living. Continuing Care values the importance of encouraging and enabling young people to remain in safe, supported environments, until they are better ready to make the transition to independent living and underlines the importance of strong and positive relationships between young person and carers and the need for these to be maintained into adulthood.

Discussions and decisions around Continuing Care should not wait until a young person approaches or reaches 16. Proactive planning is important to allow young people and carers to properly plan for the future with confidence that this can be ‘long term’ based on good ongoing relationships. It is important to support young people to remain on looked after status for as long as possible. If they choose Continuing Care and then leave the placement, they have no legal right to return to care. Young people can remain looked after up until 18, if that’s in their best interests.

### Continuing Care things to note

Continuing Care is **not** a new category of ‘looked after’ children. Young people will have to formally cease to be looked after (i.e. ending a CSO or permanence order or voluntary arrangement). This does not mean that potentially eligible young people need to come off supervision requirements earlier than planned.

Although a young person will have to cease to be looked after to be eligible for Continuing Care, his/her day-to-day experience will be similar to those still formerly looked after.

## Eligibility

The Scottish Government introduced Continuing Care in stages to give local authorities time to plan.

The right to Continuing Care applies to all young people who leave foster care, kinship care or residential care in or after April 2015 and who were born after 1st April 1999 up until the age of 21 years old. Local authorities will have to provide care leavers with a continuation of the kinds of support they received prior to ceasing to be looked after (including staying in the same care setting where it is mutually agreeable).

This will require detailed discussion, planning and collaboration between all relevant parties, and in particular the young person to agree a level of support that meets the needs of the young person and is supported by the carer.

## Exceptions

The duty on local authorities to provide Continuing Care does not apply if the care leaver was:

- In secure care immediately before ceasing to be looked after.
- In a care placement (e.g. foster care) where the carer is unable/ unwilling to continue to provide the placement.
- The local authority considers that providing the care would significantly adversely affect the welfare of the young person in care.
- Or leaves of their own volition (i.e. their own will).

These exceptions do not mean that the local authority does not have to provide Continuing Care, but that it does not have to offer exactly the same accommodation the young person was in when leaving care. The council will be expected to find alternative accommodation for the young person, equivalent to their last care placement and appropriate to their needs.

## Welfare assessments

The Continuing Care Scotland Order (2015) articles 4 and 5 say that:

- The local authority must carry out a welfare assessment of the eligible person as soon as reasonably practicable before the person ceases to be looked after by them.
- The local authority must carry out a welfare assessment of eligible persons receiving Continuing Care at intervals not exceeding twelve months from when the person ceased to be looked after.

Articles 6 and 7 sets out what needs to be discussed and whose views should be sought when completing these. Seeking and recording the views of young people is central to this. The assessments are intended to complement the provisions in the Support and Assistance of Young People Leaving Care (Scotland) Regulations) (2003) and Supporting Young People in Scotland guidance.

How long does the duty to provide Continuing Care last?

- If the young person leaves the accommodation of their own will (there's no right to return to care so this is a fundamental decision that young people need to be supported with).
- If the accommodation ceases to be available, for example
- A carer is unable or unwilling to provide the placement
- The local authority closes the residential unit where the care leaver is placed
- If the arrangement between the local authority and the provider of the residential care placement comes to an end.
- The local authority decides that continuing the placement would significantly adversely affect the young person's welfare

Where a Continuing Care arrangement has come to an end through no choice of the young person, the local authority should find alternative accommodation, suitable to that young person's needs. Once the young person chooses to move on, the local authority's duty to provide the accommodation element of Continuing Care ends. It is still however under a duty to assess the young person for Aftercare support and, if the young person is deemed to have eligible needs, it must provide those services up to and including the age of 25. Once a young person leaves their Continuing Care placement they will be entitled to request Aftercare support, but a care leaver who chooses to receive Aftercare (thereby leaving their 'looked after' placement) cannot then claim Continuing Care support.

### **3.4 Private Foster Care**

Understandably, people confuse the difference between private foster carers and local authority foster carers. However, private fostering is quite different from local authority fostering. The term is used when a parent or person holding parental rights and responsibilities places a child under school leaving age, for 28 days or more, in the care of someone else who is not a close relative or an officially approved foster carer. There is a duty on the parent and the carer under the Foster Children (Scotland Act) 1984 to notify the local authority of the arrangement.

While fostering panels do not approve private foster carers, the Council still has a duty to secure the well-being of every private foster child. They must carry out necessary checks and take into account the wishes and feelings of the child about the placement.

### **3.5 The Child's Plan**

Every child placed with you should have a written plan. All children who are looked after, including those in short break placements which last more than 24 hours, require such a plan. The child's social worker is responsible for ensuring the child's plan is in place. Whenever possible, this is completed in consultation with the child, the child's parents or wider family, you as the carer and other important individuals or agencies in the child's life. It details the assessment of the child's needs and care arrangements. If the plan is not completed before the child is placed, it should be drawn up as soon as possible after the child arrives. The plan covers a range of issues usually including:

- The immediate and long-term plans for the child
- Details of the services to be provided to meet the child's care, educational and health needs
- The role of the child's parents or any other person in the child's life
- The arrangements for involving those people and the child in decision making

### **3.6 Review of the Child's Plan**

All local authorities are required by legislation to review the Child's Plan to ensure it is appropriate and meets the needs of the child, to consult formally with parents and children to see how the current plans are working, and to make sure they meet the best interests of the child. It also confirms the work of those involved with the child/young person and agrees future plans with the child. Reviews must be held at six weeks following the child's placement, three months subsequently and then every six months thereafter. These are the minimum requirements and reviews may be held more frequently if:

- There is a major change in circumstances
- The plan is no longer appropriate
- Rehabilitation to parents or wider family has failed and it is appropriate to achieve a permanent placement for the child as soon as possible
- The child no longer needs to be looked after by the Council.

You will be fully consulted and involved in the review process. You will be expected to provide a Carer's Report and attend the meeting. Your report should detail the child's progress in placement and highlight any concerns. This should be discussed and completed with your supervising social worker beforehand. Reports should be prepared and distributed before the review and will be shared with the child and their family. These usually include reports from:

- The child (if old enough)
- The parent(s)
- Others involved with the child or their family
- The carers
- The child's social worker
- The child's school or educational establishment

Children aged 12 and over normally attend their review. Attendance of younger children will be considered in relation to their age and understanding. You as carer and social workers play a valuable role in preparing the child by helping them complete their report "Have Your Say" supporting them within the meeting and ensuring that their views are presented. The child may also have an independent representative from an Advocacy Provider. Reviews are held where the child is living or another suitable venue.

### **3.7 Independent Support for Children in Foster Care**

Children in Moray can access independent advocacy from Who Cares? Scotland (Moray)

### **3.8 Complaints by Children and Young People**

Children can make a direct complaint to their social worker or the team manager.

Other services for children who wish support or who may have a problem or a complaint are:

- The Scottish Child Law Centre. This provides free advice from a lawyer. Their advice line is open; Monday to Friday, 9.30 am to 4.00 pm. T.0131 667 6333, Freecall Under 21s call from a landline: 0800 328 8970, call from a mobile: 030003301421, email enquiries@sclc.org.uk
- ChildLine is available for anything that a child may wish to discuss in confidence about being in care. Telephone ChildLine on 0800 1111
- Children can also contact their own social worker or the worker's team leader direct.

The Children and Young People's Commissioner, The Office of the Commissioner was established by the Scottish Government. Its duty is to promote and safeguard the rights of children up to the age of 18. Their primary responsibility is to generate widespread awareness and understanding of the rights of children, and to review the adequacy and effectiveness of any law, policy and practice as it relates to children. The Commission can carry out an investigation into how a service provider has considered the rights, interests and views of children in making decisions or taking actions that affect them. More information is available from:

Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People,  
Rosebery House,  
9, Haymarket Terrace,  
Edinburgh  
EH12 5EZ.

Telephone 0131 346 5350

The Young Person's freephone 0800 0191179 or visit [www.sccyp.org.uk](http://www.sccyp.org.uk)

### **3.9 Family Group Decision Making**

A family group decision making meeting is a structured process which can shape the direction and content of planning and decision making for children in a wide range of circumstances. The planning is led by the child's family as far as is safely possible and within the legal constraints of each situation. The family group will usually include extended family such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and siblings, as well as parents, and may include friends. Meetings are prepared and convened by coordinators who are independent of case management. A family group meeting may be called to support a child and their parents when a child is returning home or to consider whether there is anyone in the family network able to provide a permanent placement for the child. Foster carers are often invited to be involved.

### **3.10 Supporting Children to see their Family and Friends**

The local authority has a duty to promote the relationships between children looked after by them and their parents with parental responsibilities. They also actively promote sibling relationships if they are living apart. Seeing their wider family such as grandparents, aunts and uncles may also be

beneficial for children. Whenever statutory orders are made to remove a child from the care of his or her parents, the sheriff or children's hearing may make conditions or orders determining who the child may spend time with and the frequency of that. The child or a relevant person, including you as foster carer, can return to the sheriff or a children's hearing to seek to have these reviewed.

Family relationships are promoted to:

- Enhance the psychological and developmental progress and wellbeing of children who are away from their families
- Increase the likelihood of a child returning to live with his or her family where that is consistent with the child's welfare
- Test out parent's capacity to meet the child's needs.

Children can connect with their important people face to face, through letters, telephone calls, exchange of photographs and sending gifts and cards.

You will have details of these arrangements and this will be discussed when the child first becomes looked after. The need for and benefits of this for the child are considered in making each foster placement. The child's social worker carries out a risk assessment before making arrangements for the child to see their family. The child's social worker, in consultation with you, the child and the child's family and friends, will co-ordinate these arrangements. This will include the frequency and location and any supervision required. There are times when you may make the arrangements directly with the birth parents or siblings, in consultation with the child's social worker. Details of these arrangements should be contained in the day to day placement agreement and discussed at the child's reviews.

#### *If parents visit your home*

It is important if birth parents are visiting your home that they have an opportunity to be alone with their child, except where there are specific instructions that they meet only under strictly supervised conditions. Occasionally this needs to be supervised because of concerns about possible harm that may arise for the child or to observe their parenting skills. Visiting may be timed so that, for example, the parent can bathe the child and put them to bed or have half an hour in their room to help with schoolwork. You should try to keep them up to date about their child and what they have been doing. If the plan is for the child to return home, it is essential that parents know what doctors, teachers and others have said about their child. Helping a child maintain their relationship with his or her birth family is one of the most important tasks you are asked to do. It is also one of the most difficult tasks to undertake. It is important that you support children who are seeing their birth families. On occasions, children may refuse to see their parents. Although the child's feelings must be accepted and respected, you have an important role in helping the child to understand their own family's situation better so that the child may become more willing to spend time with their family. It is not always easy, or even possible, to get on with parents and build up a working relationship with them. Some parents can be unreliable about visits. You need to ensure that the child's expectations are realistic, for example saying; 'your mum said she'd try to come today, but she's got

a lot on so might not manage it. If she doesn't come, we'll go out and do something else'. Many children feel it is their fault when a parent lets them down – they are unlovable or it is something they have said or done. It is crucial that you find ways of handling their own feelings on these occasions. Negative comments should not be made about the parent as this may force the child into impossible choices of loyalty. If you have concerns about the quality of the child's time with their family, the child's negative or unsettled response to it or parents' lack of reliability, they must discuss this with the child's social worker.

### **3.11 Education of Children**

Children who are cared for by the local authority often do not achieve their full educational potential for many reasons but generally there can be challenges in ensuring that children do not have a disrupted education. You have a major role to play in helping children prepare for adult life by ensuring attendance at school and encouraging the child to value learning. Access to good education has a direct impact on a child's wellbeing. It can encourage a sense of being a competent individual and help build positive peer relationships. Decisions about the school the child will attend should be addressed either before or at the start of the placement. If appropriate, the child should continue at the same school in order to maintain continuity in their lives, although this can mean quite lengthy journeys.

The educational needs of the child will be reviewed on a regular basis as part of the care plan and education will play an active and important role in the team around the child. If a child is to be enrolled at a local school, you should only do this following discussion with the child's social worker. There will be discussions at day to day placement agreement meetings and child's reviews about who should receive report cards and other information, and who should attend parent evenings and other meetings. Parents may wish to be involved in these and an agreement needs to be reached about your responsibility and if/how this is to be shared. You should keep in close contact with the school as any other good parent would. You should read to, or with, children and encourage older children to join a library. You should take an active interest in the child's homework. You should encourage and advocate on the child's behalf about any issues or worries that the child has about school.

You should keep the child's social worker informed of the child's progress and consult together if there are any problems. For some children, an educational psychologist may be involved because the child has learning or behavioural difficulties in school. All schools have a nominated teacher who has a specific responsibility for looked after children who will be able to help and support both the child and the carers. If a child is excluded from school, there should be immediate, clear communication between the school, the child's social worker and you, to ensure that alternative arrangements are in place. Except in an emergency, the child should not be excluded unless their circumstances and alternatives have been discussed at the pupil support group.

You can give consent for children to attend school trips and outings, if the child is placed in permanent care. If the child is placed in temporary care it is the child's social worker who must give consent. You should keep the child's social worker informed of this and must consult if overnight

stays are involved. In some situations, where a child has to travel to school or to previous activities out with the immediate area, it is possible that an older child will be issued with a bus travel pass. This should be discussed with the child's social worker.

### **3.12 The Child's Important Paperwork**

#### *Birth certificates*

The child's social worker should obtain a full birth certificate for the child. This should be kept in the child's social work file. There may be occasions when you need access to the original or a photocopy. It may be helpful for the child to have a photocopy of their own birth certificate, which can be placed in their life story book.

#### *Passports*

Obtaining a passport for a child can take some months, depending on the time of year and the amount of background history known about the child. No holiday or travel arrangements should be made or purchased before discussing these with the child's social worker. Parents, or the person with legal responsibility for a child under the age of 16, must provide permission before a passport can be issued. Unless parental responsibility has been removed from the birth parents, the local authority will have to consult with them about an application for a passport. Should the local authority have the right to apply for a passport on behalf of the child, a senior manager will sign this form. Increasingly, some permanent foster carers will have this right vested in them under a permanence order. Some young people leaving care will need help to obtain their passport. This should be discussed with the young person's social worker.

#### *National insurance number*

The young person's social worker should discuss the obtaining of a national insurance number for any accommodated young person coming up to school leaving age.

#### *Bank Accounts*

If the child or young person has a bank account the administration of this must be discussed with their social worker. They can be supported to open an account and should be encouraged to do so for receipt of benefits and other allowances. The child's social worker or Through Care/After Care worker can advise on this.

## **4.0 Endings, Moves and Absconding**

### **4.1 When Placements End**

A placement may end when the child or young person returns to the care of their birth family, moves on to an adoptive family, moves to a permanent placement, to another foster placement or a residential unit, goes into continuing care or moves to independent living. Most moves can be well

planned in advance, but some happen as a result of a crisis or by the placement disrupting. For children, a move can be as disruptive in the child's life as when they initially became looked after. No child should be transferred to another placement at less than 24 hours' notice and it is preferable that 28 days' notice is given. Exceptions to this may be if the child or other people are at immediate risk. This could be due to the actions of the child or their family or if emergency circumstances in the foster family, eg severe illness, require the transfer. Generally moves are considered carefully at the child's review meeting.

Returning a child to the care of their family can be an anxious experience for all involved. It is important that any concerns are shared with the child's social worker and with your supervising social worker. You should receive extra support at this time. You as foster carers and social workers should be sensitive to the feelings of the child in such a situation. They should be able to return home with the support of all those involved in the placement. There are many situations when the move back home is a happy event for the child and for you. This is especially so where there has been an improvement in the parents' situation and where you feel that you have been successful in initiating or supporting change. Whatever the reason for the child's return home, it is important that the child leaves the foster home with a positive message about their stay and what they have achieved in the placement. Even if the child's stay has been for a short time, you should ensure that photographs of them and their family and a story about their time in placement –the things you will always remember about the child - are available for the child to help them make sense of their life when older. It is preferable that two copies of photographs with a clear description and dates on the back are provided so one copy can be retained in the child's file. You may also wish to give the child a small keepsake to remind them of their time in the foster home. A special meal or outing for the whole family together to mark the child's leaving may be a happy memory for all concerned.

Your own children and other children in the foster home may be affected by the move. Children should be given opportunities to express their feelings about the child's move. Sometimes foster children, or their parents, may want to keep in touch with you and your family. This can be very helpful for both the child and their parents. They may have come to rely on the support and encouragement of you. Continuing contact should be discussed with the child's social worker and supervising social worker to agree an appropriate level and form of contact. Children should have adequate clothing when they leave. It is important that all personal belongings brought into the foster home or acquired during the placement accompany the child in suitable suitcases/bags.

Occasionally complaints are made regarding disposal of children's possessions provided by their birth family. It can be useful to keep a discreet inventory of all the child's possessions. Where you have insufficient space to store clothes that no longer fit or toys that are broken or no longer used by the child, it may be appropriate to check if the parent wants them returned rather than immediately disposing of them.

#### **4.2 Adoption/Permanent Care – Preparing and Placing Children**

Though it can be difficult, temporary carers need to keep in mind that the child will move on. This may be particularly difficult if there is a delay in finding a suitable permanent placement. Regardless

of the time it takes to find a new family, you must be clear about their role in the child's life at all times. Clarity about the process involved in achieving a permanent placement and the process of introductions makes it easier for all parties to work together.

Your role is to help the child understand and accept their move to permanent care and to look towards the future in a positive way. Explanations of the differences between temporary and permanent care can be done naturally in your home especially if the child sees other children move on. In many cases the child and you can continue to see each other very naturally beyond the move and this can help reassure the child. Children need to know what is happening and why.

### **4.3 Working with Children in their Life story**

It is everyone's job to help children make sense of their story and understand who they are and where and how they belong in life. Life Story work is the process of helping children separated from their birth families to remember and make sense of their early lives. Children who have been through the care system often experience changes in social workers, carers and home before being placed with an adopted family. Therefore this work, which usually includes making a Life Story Book, allows adopted children and young people to access to their heritage and past that may otherwise be missing, lost or forgotten.

It is helpful if a child comes to their new foster home with what is known as a life story book. This is a factual account of their lives since birth and includes photos of important people and places. It is written in such a way that children can make sense of their stories, however difficult those stories may be, and helps them in their sense of identity.

**The child will find it easier to settle into a new family if they have a good understanding about their past, their current situation and what the plan will be for their future.**

You are involved in helping the child to understand facts about his/her life and a life story book is a good way of engaging the child. How you react to their story is also crucial as empathy and acceptance show the child they are loveable, that it's not their fault. This can help in building strong connections and a sense of trust between you and the child.

If a child does not have their own life story book it might be something that you as their carer could create with them. How the task is to be undertaken should be agreed between yourself and the child's social worker.

Children can afford powerful emotional value to the objects and mementoes and family tales left by their birth families. Often with objects they are often too large, delicate or otherwise inappropriate to be included in their life storybooks. These items are often handed to the child leaving care in nothing more grand than a shoebox – unlike life story books, which are well presented in the main. Where at all possible stories and items from children's families and heritage should be actively sought out for them, stored and cherished as you would your own items and memories. These aspects of children's past will provide a sense of belonging in their future.

Biographical objects unsurprisingly can hold deep significance for the child. The act of being able to touch, hold and explore baby clothes, ribbons indicating length at birth, drawings, toys, souvenirs from family outings and gifts from birth family members are of real importance in helping them feel more emotionally connected to their pasts. Most of us will have something from a family member or dear friend that we cherish – letters, old photos, jewelry, a lock of your child’s hair. Such objects often have very little, if any, functional or material value, but act as anchorage points, inspiring feelings of comfort and wellbeing, sparking memories of particular relationships or events.

Crucially, for children in care or those who have been adopted, while they may keep the treasured objects, without birth family reminders of the personal stories associated with them their meaning and origin may easily be lost over time. It is crucial that those who care for our children actively try and seek out and record their childhood in the way that we would for our own children. Making note of funny, pleasant and even the difficult times.

Every child has a right to privacy and may not wish to make a life-story book. However, in these circumstances, a memory box should be kept, including some of the documents such as photos, drawings and certificates which would otherwise go in a life-story book and provided for the child when they leave foster care.

Life-story books do not stand alone. They can be completed in sections so can be added to over time. It is fundamentally important that life-story books are the basis of the day to day conversations that children need to help them understand how they ‘fit’, who they are, and what’s going to happen next. Everyone needs to know their story in order to understand and make sense of who they are. Without this there is potential of a lack of a sense of belonging leading to lifelong difficulties.

The following link is helpful when thinking about life-story work and the most recent thinking behind it.

<http://firststeps.first4adoption.org.uk/exercises/life-story-work>

#### **4.4 Linking the Child with a Permanent Family**

You have an important role in the linking process and will attend the Adoption and Fostering Panel to provide information about the child. You must be kept informed throughout the linking process about the progress being made. Before the panel you, with the child’s social worker, will meet with prospective permanent carers or adopters to provide further information on what the child is like to live with, give day to day information about the child and answer any queries the prospective carer may have. This meeting is often the first step in establishing a relationship between the prospective carers and present carers. Prospective carers will also receive medical, psychological and school reports and meet with other significant people, eg the medical adviser.

##### *Introductions*

A co-ordinator is appointed to help plan introductions and any follow up meetings. This helps to ensure that all plans are child-centred and that all necessary tasks are undertaken, with each person being clear of their role and responsibilities. An introduction programme will be discussed in detail,

with a written plan made available. It is important that you get to know a bit about the family you are preparing the child to move to. The child needs a clear message from you that he or she is allowed to become close to the new family. There must be lots of opportunities for you to discuss their feelings and any concerns with their supervising social worker and your support and contact from the department will be upped at these times.

You are in the prime position to observe the child's reaction to the new family and discuss this with workers. Preparing the child for their first meeting with the prospective adopter or permanent family will be the task of the child's social worker and you. Ways of helping the child become familiar with the family will depend very much on the age and understanding of the child. The new family may have provided a family book and tapes/DVDs may be useful, especially for young children who will benefit from getting used to images and sounds of voices. The use of close up photographs can help preverbal children to become familiar with the new family's facial features.

The speed and nature of introductions will depend on the age and previous experiences of the child. The first meeting between the child and the new family should be in a place familiar to the child and with a known adult present. Where possible, the first meeting should be arranged with no other children present, to allow the adults to focus solely on the child. Subsequent meetings will gradually move to the new carer's home, although this may not always be possible if the new placement is at a long distance. It is important that the move is well planned and that agreement is reached about how this can be achieved so that the child experiences everyone working together on this important day.

Open communication is vital between all parties. This helps the child feel more comfortable and relieves them of the fear of saying or doing something that is wrong. It is important to accept that the child will miss their foster family and that you will miss the child. Children must have the opportunity to say their farewell to teachers and friends at school and important people which may include your extended family and friends who live locally.

#### *When a child moves to a permanent family*

When a child moves to a new family, he or she may be vulnerable to the same wide range of feelings they had when being accommodated. A child can be sad, angry, frightened or anxious as well as eager, happy or relieved. It can be easier to focus on the pleasant aspects of the move and ignore the fact that the child has ambivalent feelings about it. The same may apply to you whose feelings may be equally ambivalent. By recognising and acknowledging your own and the child's mixed feelings, you can help the child handle these moves positively.

Children should be supported to see you again quickly after their move and introductions should include a plan for ongoing contact for the child and their foster family. Contact with the child after the move helps to reassure and to settle the child in to their new home. This may be by phone calls and/or an arranged visit. After several months it may be helpful for the child to visit your home. It can help you, your children and the child, to see that everything is all right.

#### **4.5 Other issues concerning placement endings**

You should check with the child's social worker about the need for any medical consultation or examination for the child. Any medical details/records and other records must be passed to the child's social worker. The child's social worker will notify both the health board and the education section of the child's move.

Return of equipment which is surplus to requirements should be discussed with your supervising social worker. Where a child is moving to another carer or to adopters, it is important that some familiar equipment, particularly their bedding, moves with them. See section on life story work (section 4.3) Where this is equipment routinely used by you, the supervising social worker should ensure it is replaced.

#### **4.6 Children being moved by the Department against the Carers' Wishes**

The Children and Families department has responsibility for the welfare of children and as such has the legal right to make decisions about a child's care. Very unusually, the department may exercise the right to remove a child from the foster home against your wishes. Every effort will be made to avoid placements ending in this way. However, if it is felt that the placement no longer meets the child's needs, it may be in their best interests to be removed from the foster home. Other than in situations of abuse, this should never occur suddenly, as difficulties or concerns about the quality of care in the placement should be shared and efforts made between you, the child's social worker and their supervising social worker to overcome them. Wherever possible, any major changes in relation to the child in foster care should be considered at a LAAC review.

#### **4.7 When a Child is removed without Permission**

Very rarely, a parent or someone else wants to remove a child without permission. The child's day to day placement agreement should specify who can or should have contact with the child, and whether there are any restrictions. If possible and safe to do so, you should try to negotiate with the person who wants to remove the child. You should try to make a note of the full name, address, telephone number and relationship of the person to the child. If the person is still insisting on moving the child, you should contact the child's social worker, the duty worker or out of hours for advice. If the situation is becoming dangerous or you are concerned for the welfare of the child, the police should be called by dialling 999.

#### **4.8 Children who go missing**

Occasionally children may go missing from care. Some may leave your home without permission or run away after a dispute, others may leave for school and not return and others may be out with permission but fail to return. The possibility that a child may come to harm whilst missing will be a concern to you and social workers.

There are many reasons why a child may be absent or missing. For some, the absence will be immediately worrying and for others the absence may not be so concerning. The history, age and maturity of the child will have a bearing on this. There are currently existing protocols between Police Scotland and local authorities. You should ensure you are aware of the particular protocol

that exists within your own local authority. This is to ensure that there is good communication and appropriate decisions are made. Once the absence becomes worrying, you should immediately report the child's absence to the child's social worker, team leader, duty social worker or out of hours.

Social work staff and you will agree what immediate actions are required to locate the child, by whom and when. This might include making a thorough search of your home, and the surrounding area, contacting the child's friends and relatives, visiting the parents' address or places the child frequents or which are of interest to the child and the place the child was last seen. The social worker will advise the parent or person with parental responsibility and, if appropriate, out of hours. The social worker and you will agree the appropriate timescales for reviewing the absence and when the child should be reported to the police as a missing person.

In all cases where the child has been missing for six hours they must be reported as 'missing' to the police. The social worker will decide whether any further action needs to be taken and by whom. If it is suspected, or known, that the child has committed, witnessed or been the victim of a criminal offence, the police should be informed immediately. If there is reason to suspect that the child has been abused, exploited or suffered harm, the child protection guidelines will be instigated.

#### *Follow-up on the child/young person's return*

When the child returns, you should ascertain whether or not they are harmed, hungry, cold, wet or exhausted. It is always better to manage the child's immediate needs and tell them you are pleased they are back than to respond with anger or advice. Subsequently, the social worker and/or you will:

- discuss with the child the reasons for the absence to determine what has occurred, what they have been doing and what may have happened to him/her
- reiterate expectations for the future
- identify and record what further action needs to be taken, by whom and when and the plan for implementing this
- offer the child the opportunity to discuss their situation with an independent person, for instance, the Children's Rights Officer or Who Cares? worker
- the social worker and police will decide if a joint interview is required and who will undertake this
- if necessary, a meeting to discuss the incident will take place and may include you as well as the social worker and the police.

Where a child persistently absconds, this should be explored with them. Consideration should be given to the possible reasons, eg conflict with you as carer, feeling powerless, bullying, being unhappy in care, peer pressure, physical or sexual abuse. They may want to be with their family and friends, be resorting to previous behaviours or be attracted to street life or to people who may present a risk or exploit them.

## **4.9 Preparation for Adult Life**

Preparation for adulthood starts at an early age. It is an incremental process, which needs to begin before a child becomes 16 years of age. (Also see life story work Sec4.3) Many children who are in foster care return to their own families and will need careful preparation for this. For some, this is not possible and they need support to become independent adults. They can be very vulnerable and are much more likely to be homeless, unemployed, exploited or get into trouble than children who have the support of their own family.

You have the important role of helping young people move on towards greater independence by providing them with opportunities throughout childhood to learn appropriate skills, like personal hygiene, managing their pocket money wisely, cooking and doing dishes.

The Council has a duty to provide Throughcare and Aftercare services to young people who are accommodated at, or after, their school leaving date up until the age of 19. In Moray these services are delivered through the Children and Young People workers in Placement Services, based in Rose Cottage, and a worker will normally be allocated to the young person sometime during their 15<sup>th</sup> year. The Council has also the power to continue to provide services to these young people from the ages of 19 to 21, and to continue to provide advice and guidance up until they are 26.

While they are still in placement, ideally around the time they are 16, an individual assessment of young people's needs with a plan of action is developed with the young person. Where they are settled and happy to continue in their placement this will be promoted and supported.

Their assessment can highlight that within their placement the young person is developing independence skills and no further work is necessary. Alternatively there may be a need to focus work in certain areas, or to acknowledge a goal that includes moving on. Their "pathway plan" should cover seven important areas:

- lifestyle
- family and friends
- health and wellbeing
- learning and work
- where I live
- money
- rights and legal issues

Young people can continue to be looked after until their 18th birthday. It is possible for the young person to stay with you as carers beyond this point if they are eligible for continuing care and if all concerned choose to take that route. Similarly the placement can convert to become lodgings. However, many young people wish to become independent sooner than this and even where there is a plan for independence, you as carers are often their most reliable support.

## **5 Support for Foster Carers**

### **5.1 Role of the Supervising Social Worker**

The role of the supervising social worker is to both supervise and assist you in the task of looking after children placed with them and ensure safe caring practices are followed. They must also support the review processes and identify training needs. They ensure adherence to the national health and social care standards and the SSSC learning and development standard for foster carers. The responsibilities of the supervising social worker are to:

- Visit regularly to discuss issues and concerns which arise for the you or your family
- Provide you with information and advice to enable you to give consistent, high quality care to the child or children you are caring for
- Source any necessary equipment you may need
- Attend meetings with you, such as children's reviews if you consider you need support
- Link in with, and, where necessary, negotiate with the child's social worker in discussing plans for the child
- Ensure that you have access to the necessary support if an allegation has been made against you.
- To prepare you for your annual review
- To ensure that your learning and development needs are identified and supported.

### *Unannounced Visits*

At least one unannounced visit must take place each year. The reason behind this unexpected call is to obtain a view of everyday life in the home. You as a carer and the supervising social worker should be aiming to work in partnership. You should both actively work towards building trust, communicate well and talk honestly about the impact and stress of caring as well as the positive aspects, both for you and your family. There should be regular planned contact with formal supervision set monthly. This may be increased at times of a new placement, change or unusual stress. Supervising social workers will visit from time to time when foster children are at home and they will keep a written record of each meeting, including any training and support needs expressed by you. This will be kept in your file and/or on the Moray council carefirst recording system. In the event of the supervising social worker being unavailable in an emergency or if you are unhappy with the support you are receiving, you should call the duty line 01343 563325.

## **5.2 Role of the Child's Social Worker**

Each child placed in foster care has a designated social worker. He or she will visit the child on a regular basis, including meeting alone with the child. The social worker has responsibility for:

- Ensuring statutory requirements for his or her care and protection are met
- Promoting his or her welfare and development
- Monitoring and recording progress of the child's plan, in consultation with you, your supervising social worker and the team around the child
- Undertaking direct work with the child
- Organising, coordinating and monitoring specialist support for the child when required
- Managing the child's time with their birth family and other significant contacts as set out in the child's plan.

You will meet the child's social worker in a range of meetings such as children's reviews, panels and you can expect regular telephone calls and visits to discuss the child's development and progress. Your supervising social worker will also have regular contact with the child's social worker and will occasionally organise joint visits to discuss placement progress.

### **5.3 Role of Foster Carer support Worker**

Each Foster Carer is allocated a Support Worker who will work alongside Supervising Social Workers to make sure placements run as smoothly possible. Your allocated support workers may help you with childcare, if available, either in your home or at Rose Cottage. This can be to enable foster carers to attend meetings or training events etc.

Supervising social workers will identify any equipment you may need to care for a child and they will ask support workers to will check placement services inventory of stock. Support workers will then deliver any equipment to you either before a placement is made or source and buy new equipment if required. They can also collect equipment and return it to the Equipment to a central store room at Rose Cottage when a Placement has ended.

You must check for any damage to equipment and wash equipment being returned as most will be re-used, however, all cot mattresses are disposed of and new mattresses issued for each new baby.

Foster carer social events are organised by support workers. A quarterly newsletter will be issued to all Foster carers and Staff with all up-to-date policies or procedures or feedback from events or any other relevant news.

Support workers can offer telephone support and will often pop in past your home if passing, to check-in and see and hear how placements are going or you need anything.

Support workers also keep in touch with birth children of foster carers and have a group called young people who foster which runs regular events or training for birth children.

Support workers are also involved in interviewing birth children before foster carers are approved and for reviews etc.

### **5.3 Emergency Social Work Service**

Out with office hours, the Moray Council out of Hours (OOHs) service 0345 7 56 56 56 responds to social work emergencies that cannot wait until the next working day. A team of social workers are on duty from:

- 5pm to 9am Monday to Friday
- 24 hours a day on all weekends and public holidays.

OOHs can provide support and advice to you on urgent issues over the telephone. There may sometimes be a delay before staff can offer assistance because of other, more urgent, priorities. They may, if the situation warrants, be able to make a visit, though this will depend on other

commitments at the time. OOHs will inform daytime colleagues of your contact. OOH's must be contacted when:

- the child runs away or fails to return home
- the child is seriously ill, has a serious accident or dies
- the child is in trouble with the police
- there is a suspicion or disclosure of abuse or any child protection matter
- there is a sudden crisis in the home, affecting the placement
- the child has been taken away from your home without authorisation or agreement.

OOHs can be contacted on 0345 7 56 56 56. Telephone advice and support can be accessed from social work staff in Cala on 01343 550990.

#### **5.4 Support Groups**

Support groups offer a valuable and fairly informal opportunity for you to share experiences and to learn from each other. They can be a lifeline at times of stress, helping to reduce isolation and providing mutual peer support. The group may decide on set topics or training on specific issues as well as providing an opportunity to share views and ideas. It is important that all information shared in the group is treated as confidential and not discussed outside the group. Groups are set up in accordance with foster carer levels. Some are mixed and some are specific for those providing a certain type of input, or training etc. For example: level 4 carers are expected to contribute to service development which may mean that a group session is dedicated to this. Groups are organised by supervising social workers and/or foster carers. Support groups are generally held monthly. You are encouraged to attend as they are considered to be a valuable source of support and development. You should discuss your interest in attending a group with your supervising social worker. There is a support group for the children of families who foster. Your supervising social worker can advise on this.

#### **5.5 Opportunities for Carers in Developing Services**

Lots of opportunities exist for you to contribute towards the development of our services. The skills and experiences that you have in working with children and young people are recognised and valued. The Carer Participation Strategy Document lists different ways you can contribute to the development of the Fostering Service .e.g.

- planning, developing and participating in recruitment campaigns
- being a trainer or co-leader with members of staff on training courses, preparation groups and seminars
- membership of fostering panels.

There are also a number of short life working groups and focus groups that come up which you can join. Information is available in the carers' newsletter, from your supervising social worker or in the Participation Strategy document.

## 5.6 Carer Training, Support and Development

Moray Council is committed to helping you develop your skills and knowledge through regular training programmes, support, and development opportunities. Attendance and participation is part of the commitment asked for. Learning styles and training needs vary from carer to carer, so we aim to provide a range of opportunities to reflect this. The full training calendar can be accessed through your supervising social worker. This will provide information on the target audience and booking information. You and your supervising social worker should explore and identify training needs in an ongoing manner. A record of training attended and offered will be kept on your file and will be included in reports and discussions at your carer reviews. Training needs can be met in a number of ways through:

- Carers' support groups – some of which may have a specialised remit
- Discussion's with supervising social workers or child's worker
- Courses or seminars, organised by the Department and by other organisations
- Reading relevant books and journals
- Online training courses or research
- Coaching by an expert - for example – looking at the impact of trauma and neglect on a child's attachment.

Attending training events is also a way of meeting other carers and provides an opportunity to benefit from their experience and knowledge and to build up supportive relationships. Joint events with social workers, residential, educational, health and other staff, also provide an opportunity for all participants to share knowledge and skills. The fostering team promotes the use of a wide theory base including concepts such as: Social Pedagogy, DDP, Attachment Theory etc. All carers should have the opportunity to attend, or undertake online, training that is regarded as essential:

- Safer caring
- Child protection
- Receiving and storing of information
- Equality, diversity and rights
- Child development
- Internet safety
- First aid

You may attend specific training to develop your own skills, or if you require more specific skills to care for an individual child or children, for example:

- Administration of medication
- Attachment
- Trauma and neglect
- Moving and handling
- Self-regulation and behaviour management
- Use of self

- Caring for children with disabilities, eg children with breathing problems or children who have fits.

There will be occasional training for all carers about guidelines, procedures, or new legislation that affects Looked After Children and carers. Opportunities may exist for you to work towards relevant, recognised, qualifications when these are available within the department's resources. The library and information resource bank which the department has holds a selection of books, publications and magazines that may be helpful for you. Accessing this should be discussed with your supervising social worker

## 5.7 Helpful Organisations

The Fostering Network (TFN) is a national organisation with Scottish headquarters based in Glasgow. They produce a variety of publications on topics which cover areas that are important to those who are involved in the fostering service. These include leaflets, quarterly magazines, research and good practice documents. They also offer customised training, consultancy, advice, mediation and support for foster carers. Through individual memberships purchased by the Department, you have access to the advice and mediation service which offers legal and other advice where an allegation or complaint has been made against you.

### **The Fostering Network,**

Ingram House,  
227 Ingram Street,  
Glasgow  
G1 1DA  
Tel: 0141 204 1400

e-mail: [scotland@fostering.net](mailto:scotland@fostering.net)

[www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk](http://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk)

Other helpful organisations

### **Adoption UK**

55 The Green,  
South Bar Street,  
Banbury  
OX16 9AB

Tel: 01295 752240

[www.adoptionuk.org](http://www.adoptionuk.org)

### **New Family Social (for gay, lesbian and transgender adopters and foster carers)**

Tel: 0843 2899457

[www.newfamilysocial.org.uk](http://www.newfamilysocial.org.uk)

## **5.8 Carers' Safety**

The Council has a policy and code of practice in relation to violence at work. Foster carers are no different from members of the department's staff in potentially having to deal with violent behaviour in the carrying out of their duties. You are particularly vulnerable in that you generally work in a situation which is unsupervised and often without immediate direct support. It is, therefore, all the more essential that you are aware of personal safety when working with our children and young people. Incidents of violence within care placements are rare. However, this should not lead to complacency in planning how violence is handled.

Careful planning and early responses can prevent or reduce the potential for violent outcomes. Where there is a known history of violence within a family or by a child or young person, this information should be shared with you and appropriate strategies agreed prior to placement. You should always bear in mind the need to protect your personal safety. If there are signs of violence developing, you should seek support by calling the police or by obtaining other assistance. It is always better to withdraw from a situation and to summon support than to risk it getting out of control.

## **5.9 Foster Carers' Own Needs**

It is important for all those involved in foster placements to recognise that fostering is only one part of carers' lives and that you do, and should have, other aspects to your lives which are important to you. Fostering, particularly in the case of those caring for a number of children on a temporary basis, can in reality over take your life with little space, time or energy available for other activities. Such situations can lead to stress and general tiredness, making it difficult for you to do their best for their own or foster children. If you feel stressed or overwhelmed by the task you should feel comfortable discussing this with your supervising social worker in the first instance.

## **5.10 Partners**

Where the Council approve carers as couples, we expect that they will train, learn and care for our kids as couples. The fostering service recognises that at times couples have differences of opinions or other complex situations may arise. You can always rely on your supervising social worker for advice and support at these times.

However, when relationships breakdown unreconcilably you can expect that your supervising social worker will treat you both as foster carers. Where either person wishes to continue in their own fostering journey this will be considered and evidenced in its own merit to a fostering panel for solo approval. See the section on the Moray Fostering Panel (Section .

### *New Partners*

Where a registered foster carer meets a new partner the Moray Council will assess this person from the point that:

- They become a part of the household
- Both carers are asking to be re-assessed as a couple
- The relationship has been sustained for 2 years+

The fostering service will always support and respect your confidentiality and the sensitive nature of right to your private life.

### **5.11 Carers' Children**

Many foster carers have children of their own and it can be the children of foster families who take the greatest strain in fostering. Foster children bring with them a great deal of confusion and distress. It is often your own children who act as recipients of this distress. They may also find themselves embarrassed by the behaviour of the fostered child or feel responsible for him or her. Toys and treasures may be shared or broken. You may experience some difficulty in finding a balance between meeting the needs of your own children and respecting the confidence of the fostered child and parents. You may wish to protect your own children from the more distressing details of the foster child's situation by not giving them too much information. However, they should be aware that foster children will often tell everyone their 'story'. It is important that these issues are fully discussed with your supervising social worker or with the child's social worker. You and your children should discuss how fostering impacts on their lives. Involving your Supervising social worker in some of these talks can be helpful.

Your own children, particularly older ones, might benefit from knowing other children/young people who foster. Placement Services and the Fostering Network organise groups and have information and training packages. If you want to find out more about these resources you should discuss this with your Supervising social worker

### **5.12 Complaints by a foster carer about the fostering service**

If you are not satisfied with any aspect of the fostering service, you should discuss this with your supervising social worker, who will try and resolve the problem with the person concerned. If your supervising social worker is the one you are not happy with then you should speak to their Senior Social Worker or the Team Manager within the fostering service in the first instance. If your complaint is about the fostering service as a whole then you should follow Moray Council's complaints procedures.

Formal complaints should be made in writing. The fostering service will always try to deal with this informally. This does not mean that you are not being taken seriously; it is because the complaint is more likely to be able to be dealt with quickly and to your satisfaction when it is dealt with in this way. All complaints are recorded by the fostering service and the fostering service's Team Manager monitors them.

If you are not satisfied with this, your complaint will be dealt with in line with the Moray Council complaints policy and an independent investigation will take place.

In the unlikely event that your complaint is not resolved to your satisfaction, you will be able to contact the regulatory body - The Care Inspectorate and you can do this at any time.

Care Inspectorate, Compass House, 11 Riverside Drive, Dundee DD1 4NW. Tel: 0845 600 9527 or [enquiries@careinspectorate.com](mailto:enquiries@careinspectorate.com)

### **5.13 Confidential Reporting (whistleblowing)**

The Confidential Reporting is intended to cover major concerns that fall outside the scope of other procedures. These concerns may include:

- conduct which may be an offence or a breach of the law
- failure to comply with a legal obligation
- disclosures relating to miscarriages of justice
- health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as other employees
- damage to the environment
- inappropriate use of public funds, or other funds administered by Council employees
- possible fraud and corruption
- sexual, physical or other abuse of service users
- inappropriate use of social media
- any other unethical conduct.

All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity if you so wish. At the appropriate time, however, your identity may have to be revealed (e.g. you may need to come forward as a witness). Should this situation arise, you will be contacted in advance. The nature and detail of the concerns may be disclosed to relevant parties to facilitate an investigation.

How you raise a concern depends very much on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of the malpractice. As a first step, you should normally raise concerns with your supervising social worker or your senior social worker, unless you are implicated or involved in the issue causing concern. The professional within the council receiving notification of the concern, after due consideration and consultation as appropriate, will determine what action should be taken and will inform you of their decision.

## **6.0 Health and Safety**

### **6.1 Health and Safety**

You should have a copy of Caring about Health; Improving the Health of Looked After and Accommodated Children in Scotland. This is an A-Z health resource pack for staff and carers. You can obtain a copy from your supervising social worker. Or use the link below to access it on-line.

<http://www.healthscotland.com/documents/2437.aspx>

### **6.2 LAAC Nurses**

The Looked After and Accommodated (LAAC) Nurses work with children, young people, carers, residential staff and others to improve the health of children and young people who are looked after and accommodated. They carry out an initial health assessment on each accommodated child or young person and should be advised when a child moves placement or returns home. LAAC nurses will also provide carers and young people with advice on health-related issues and can be contacted by phone. This service is further supported by the health visiting service for children under 5 years old.

### **6.3 Health Assessments**

Children and young people who become Looked After and Accommodated may have a very poor history of healthcare and little recorded medical history. A comprehensive initial health assessment, undertaken by an LAAC nurse, provides a solid base from which to plan and implement the appropriate care and support children need in order to achieve their potential. The objectives of the health assessment are to:

- collate health information from various sources within the health system and produce an up-to-date picture of the child or young person's health
- identify any areas where health care has been neglected, eg missed appointments, missed immunisations
- recommend and develop a healthcare plan
- develop the child or young person's own health awareness through discussion of the health assessment recommendations
- encourage the promotion of a healthy lifestyle for the child or young person, eg dental care, healthy eating and safe sex
- initiate any referrals for further treatment.

You have a crucial role not only in preventing ill health but also in promoting positive health by following through recommendations made in the health assessment, ensuring health appointments are kept and helping the child or young person to take an interest in achieving good health.

### **6.4 Consents and Confidentiality**

Confidentiality issues regarding sharing health information is often necessary for the care of children and young people who are looked after and accommodated. Children and young people have a right, like anyone else, to expect that personal information learned during a health consultation will not be discussed without their prior consent or, in the case of young children, without the consent of the person with parental responsibilities (PR). The following is considered to be good practice in relation to confidentiality in health assessment reports:

- ask a young person/person with parental responsibilities if their consent has been obtained for the sharing of information. Let them know if there is anything that cannot be kept confidential (eg if there is any issue of child protection, danger to themselves or others)
- if a medical report is to be discussed at a meeting, it is good practice to check with the young person/ person with PR, prior to the meeting, that this is acceptable

- if a report on a young person has been copied to others, contrary to the expressed wishes of the young person/person with PR, this contravenes the principles of medical confidentiality, even when it is done with the best of intentions. It may be beneficial to have a discussion with the young person/person with PR on the pros and cons of sharing health information. If a young person wishes to keep their own health record, they need to have a secure place in which to keep it
- if a young person refuses to share health information, carers should be reassured by health professionals that any health issues are being dealt with and that there are no areas of concern regarding the safety of the child or others.

## 6.5 Storage of Medicines

You as the carer, the child's social worker, those with parental responsibilities and involved medical staff should ensure that you are confident about any necessary administration of medicines and have the relevant consent. The child's day to day placement agreement and plan should include all essential details about medical needs and ongoing medical conditions. Whenever a child is prescribed a new course of treatment, you must record the details as follows:

- the name of the medication
- the strength (eg 25 mg capsules)
- the dosage (eg two capsules to be taken three times daily)
- the total number of pills or volume of liquid/medicine prescribed
- the dates and times when the child is given the medication. Medicines – essential guidance
- courses of treatment should be finished
- medicines prescribed for one child should not be given to another
- you should be present while the child takes the medicine and record if it is refused
- medicines no longer required should be safely disposed of, preferably by return to the pharmacist but not in a waste or dustbin
- medicines should be kept in a locked cabinet in their original container
- dosage should not be exceeded for any prescribed medicine
- administration of medicine should be discussed with the child or young person to assist in their understanding of the process
- medication should generally only be administered on the advice of a doctor
- day-to-day ailments may be treated by you as a responsible parent, eg cold treatments.

If you have children placed with you who it is known may need urgent treatment, eg in relation to epilepsy, diabetes, respiratory problems or for severe allergic reactions, must have the relevant training before placement or as soon as possible afterwards if it is an emergency placement. Appropriate consultation with medical personnel should be arranged. Where there is a lack of clarity about medication or uncertainty about what may be taken in conjunction with any prescribed medication, you must always consult rather than act on your own initiative. In some situations, parents may have the relevant information, in others it may be necessary to contact a pharmacist, GP or NHS 24, or the child's social worker may liaise with relevant personnel.

## 6.6 Smoking

Moray Council's practice position is that if you smoke you will not be approved to care for a child under five years of age. It is an expectation that children will live in a smoke free environment, with carers smoking out with the home, and not in any transport used by children. This applies to any family and visitors to your home.

### *Smoking and young people*

- Any young person under 18 years who is in placement should not smoke
- You and social workers should always discourage young people from smoking
- You should not buy cigarettes for any young person in their care, no matter what their age
- Young people over the age of 18 may purchase their own cigarettes but should not be allowed to smoke in your home
- The above should apply to electronic or substitute forms of tobacco.

## 6.7 Drugs and Alcohol

Moray Council policy is that you must not provide children, below the age of 18, in your care, with alcohol. Most parents and carers worry about whether their teenagers may get involved in misuse of drugs and alcohol. While many will try them out, this will only become problematic for a small minority. However, looked after young people may be more vulnerable for a variety of reasons, such as trying to numb emotional pain, wanting to impress other young people or being introduced to drugs or alcohol by birth family members. It is important that you are aware of the signs of alcohol and drug misuse but also recognise that teenagers can be lethargic, excitable or withdrawn for a variety of reasons.

Some parents/carers believe that introducing teenagers to small amounts of alcohol in the home environment will help them to manage their alcohol intake when they are out with the home. If you are concerned that a young person placed with you may be misusing alcohol or drugs, speak to their social worker or your supervising social worker. The following agencies can offer advice:

Know the Score has a 24/7 helpline on 0800 587 5879 and an informative website <http://knowthescore.info/>

CREW Telephone 0131 220 3404 (office hours). <http://www.crew2000.org.uk>

## 6.8 Sleep Problems

Discuss any sleep related issues initially with child's/supervising social worker. Guidance and support on the care and management of children or young people with sleep problems can be obtained through a specialist health clinic. Initial advice about this can be sought from a health visitor, the LAAC nurse or a GP. Sleep Scotland gives advice on the management of children's sleeping difficulties and can be contacted on 0131 651 1392 or visit [www.sleepscotland.org](http://www.sleepscotland.org)

## 6.9 Pregnancy and Young People

If a young person who is being looked after becomes/is pregnant or is the father of an expected child, you should support the young person and may help them to develop the necessary skills which will be needed to cope with parenthood. In the early stages of pregnancy you may be involved with the young person, their GP and social worker to look at the options for the young person, ie whether to continue with the pregnancy or not, or to consider adoption as an option. The child's social worker, you and your supervising social worker will discuss the involvement of the young person's parents and the necessary consents. The young person's plan will be reviewed to ensure that future plans are clear for all those involved. In some circumstances it may be necessary to consider a change of placement.

### *Mothers and babies who are accommodated*

Babies born to children in foster care, who, if appropriate, remain with mum in placement, will be deemed to be Looked After and Accommodated, and subject to care planning. Any placement made will be after a detailed assessment of all the circumstances, the level of support needed and the appropriateness of the placement for the mother and child. The care plan for the mother and the child will be agreed between all those involved and will outline the responsibilities of the parent and carer clearly. It should state clearly what is expected of the young person in relation to the care of the child, how disagreements and problems will be dealt with, your role as carer and the consequences of the care plan not being adhered to.

Whatever the age or status of the mother, they have the right to care for the child unless, in doing so, there are genuine concerns for the safety and wellbeing of the child. Consideration will be given to the specific issues of the young person, including their degree of maturity and vulnerability, their relationship with you, their legal status and that of the child. Throughout, the mother must be given the opportunity to discuss her feelings about the baby, its care, the father, her own needs and future.

Young men who are expectant fathers or fathers will require advice and guidance on the responsibilities they will have. You should discuss this with the young person and the young person's social worker.

## 6.10 Developing a Family Safer Caring Plan

Helping children feel safe and protecting them from abuse is an important aspect of your role. At the time of placement, the child's social worker, you and your supervising social worker, should establish whether a child or young person is known to, or suspected to, have experienced abuse, has displayed problematic sexual behaviour, or has related to other children in a threatening, controlling or violent manner.

Children who are fostered have a right to expect that they will receive the care, encouragement, safety and security that good parents provide. Your family's safe caring plan is an indispensable component of the child's security.

### *Safer caring plan*

The purpose of a family safer caring plan is to ensure that everyone who lives in the household, and those who visit, know what the family rules are. It offers protection to you, other adults, their children and any child placed. This applies to all carers, including single carers with or without children. It also includes visitors to the household – for example, extended family members who may visit on a regular or occasional basis. A family safer caring policy is needed as:

- the history of looked after children may make them vulnerable
- looked after children deserve to fulfil their potential – their safety and wellbeing are central to this
- your family, parents and children can be at risk of complaints about the standards of care provided or allegations of abuse of the looked after child.
- Safer caring plan will include guidance on how:
  - no one touches another person’s body without that person’s permission
  - to help children to learn to say ‘no’ if they don’t want to be touched
  - older children may need extra help on how to seek comfort from an adult without clinging inappropriately to them
  - tickling and undressing games should be avoided
  - children who are old enough and able enough should be able to bath and wash themselves
  - wherever possible, carers of the same sex should assist young children
  - all carers and children in the household should have dressing gowns and slippers and should wear them when walking around the home in their nightclothes
  - carers should not share their bed with a child, even if the child is ill. children should not share beds. If children share bedrooms, clear rules should apply.
  - children travelling in motor vehicles should be seated in a way as to ensure safety for all. This may mean that children will travel in the back of a carer’s car to avoid any suggestions of a child saying he/she was touched
  - specific issues/points related to each individual child placed.

### *Reviewing the safer caring plan*

The safer caring family plan needs to be reviewed at regular intervals as the needs, age, and the levels of knowledge and development of your children, and those of any new child placed, change. The policy should also be reviewed if there are any changes in circumstance for the child or your family and at your annual review.

### *Showing affection*

You should not assume that the hugs and kisses you give your own children are appropriate for looked after children. You may need to show affection towards the child in a different way. Your children may need to know about how affection is shown and expressed when fostered children are around. Children should be asked if they want to receive a hug. This can be done in a light-hearted

manner, which does not lose its spontaneity. Physical contact is an important part in basic nurturing, not just in the everyday caring of younger children but in reassurance, encouragement, guidance and control for all children. Children who have been deprived of reliable holding or who have been physically abused may need to learn about positive physical contact.

When thinking about what is right for each child, you should consider:

- does the child seek touch or recoil from touch? Accepting affection may need to be gradually and sensitively dealt with
- what sort of touch does the child seek and from whom?

Physical contact should be accompanied by words that make it plain what the adult is doing. You should be informed about children who have been abused and what behaviours and expectations they will bring into your home. It is in everyone's interests that all carers are cautious and mindful of carrying out tasks alone or tasks that involve physical care, particularly in the early stages of placement. However, most children benefit in the long term from having wider experience of the ways in which caring and parenting tasks can be shared by both genders.

#### *Bedtime and bedrooms*

You should take care and leave the door open when putting children to bed. Wherever children sleep, there should be clear rules about who can go into which bedrooms. People should knock before they enter a bedroom. You may allow their own children into their bed to talk, play, and listen to stories. However, with looked after children it should never happen as it can be open to misinterpretation. Comfort and affection might be shown more safely outside the bedroom. Bathroom and personal care routines should be discussed with the child, parent and child's worker. If the child requires assistance, thought is required about who should undertake this whilst recognising the child's need for privacy. Children should be encouraged to be as independent as possible when washing their own bodies but account must be taken of their age and level of maturity. Doors can be left unlocked and ajar. Conversations can take place with someone outside the bathroom so the child is aware that someone else is there. Some children may wish to keep pants on. Your children and looked after children should not bath together.

#### *Photos and Films*

You should ask the fostered child's permission before taking photos or films and let them know who gets to see the photos. You must not feature foster children on any media, internet sites, social media (e.g. facebook, Instagram etc) or publications ( see Section 2.7). You need to make judgements on the suitability of films, games and TV programmes that children are allowed to view or play, paying particular heed to age guidance or restrictions.

Online gaming is another area which requires monitoring to ensure children are playing age appropriate games with other children. Any request for children to appear in public media (TV, newspaper, etc) should always be discussed with your supervising social worker or child's social worker in the first instance. The retention of photos when a child has left should be discussed with

your supervising social worker. Children may want to revisit their time with you as part of making sense of their life and photographs play an important part in this.

### *Privacy and secrecy*

Children may need help to distinguish between privacy and secrecy. Birth children need to be aware of the 'no secrets' rule, ie they must not agree to keeping confidences for the foster child. The reasons for this should be explained. All children need to know they can talk about things they find confusing or frightening. They may need help to identify whom they would choose to tell. For foster children this may be you, their social worker or a trusted adult.

### *Sexuality*

If the child has been behaving in sexually inappropriate ways safe supervision arrangements need to be considered with the child's worker and your supervising social worker. Children, and especially young people, may develop sexual feelings for you as their carer and members of your family. Open discussion about sex, feelings, emotions and relationships is the best way to avoid or diffuse such situations. Children in the household must understand that sexual activity with a looked after child is as unacceptable as it is with their own brother or sister. Although this can be very sensitive, it is an area of vulnerability that should be discussed with your supervising social worker. At the start of each placement you should consider with your worker and the child's worker aspects of their family policy which might need modifying. You and the child's worker should explain the rules in the household so that behaviour and expectation and the knowledge about routines are known. This may have to be explained a number of times.

## **6.11 Children with Disabilities**

Children who have a disability or long-term health needs should have the same opportunity for family life, leisure, education, employment, health, security and should be treated the same as any other child. They have the same need for fun, affection, security and support. When discussing the child before or when in placement, the child's social worker and your supervising social worker should ensure that:

- care needs are clearly detailed in the child's plan
- there is a safer caring plan for the child
- there are opportunities for you to meet with the appropriate medical staff
- somebody who knows the child, eg parents/carers or speech therapist, is available to advise you on communication with the child, eg the extent of the child's language, their use of symbols or signing to supplement speech
- you may need special training to look after children who have complex needs, eg epilepsy
- adaptation or aids that are required are discussed and supplied
- information about the full range of local services and support groups is available to you.

There are a range of agencies that offer information, advice and support for example:

Kindred supports families of children and young people with additional needs 0131 536 0583  
<http://www.kindred-scotland.org/>

### *Intimate care*

You as the carer, with the child's social worker and your supervising social worker, should discuss the safer caring plan for the child on placement and at frequent intervals. This should include all aspects of the child's intimate care taking into account their disability, physical, visual, hearing, speech or communication impairments. Intimate care encompasses areas of personal care that most people usually carry out for themselves. For a child/young person with a disability, this may include help with eating, drinking, washing, dressing and toileting. This can involve risks both for the child/young person and you as you may be required to touch the private parts of the child's body. It may be unrealistic to expect to eliminate these risks completely. However, by acknowledging them, developing personal safer caring plans and following good practice in intimate care, safety can be maximised for all concerned.

## **6.12 Sleeping Accommodation**

Where children are sharing rooms, consideration needs to be given to a number of issues, for instance:

- the age and gender of the children
- their need for privacy
- space for personal belongings and lockable storage for small belongings of each child
- issues of sexual vulnerability or possible behaviours that may be a risk to other children or carers.

If it becomes apparent that room sharing is not appropriate or no longer appropriate, this should be discussed with the children's social worker at the earliest opportunity.

## **6.13 Children and Young People Staying Elsewhere**

There are some circumstances when children and young people may ask to stay elsewhere, or where it is felt this may benefit the child. The basic principle for overnight stays is that when a child is accommodated under Sect 25 (voluntary) or under a CSO form the Children's Hearing, then legally the child is in the care of a foster carer and required to reside there unless exceptions are specified in the order or (Sect 25) agreed in the day to day placement agreement.

However the Getting it Right for Every Child guidance (GIRFEC, Scottish Government 2008) places great emphasis on ensuring that children and young people who are looked after and accommodated can experience the same range of experiences as their peers can.

### *Overnight stay with relatives*

Sometimes looked after children may stay overnight with their own parents or other members of their own family. The most obvious situation would be where there is an active plan to return the

child home. This is not an area where you could use your own judgement. Where they exist, these situations will be thoroughly assessed by the child's social worker to ensure that the place and people are appropriate for the child to stay with and will be a formal part of the care plan. Your role would be in providing suitable preparation to the child before they go, and in supporting them and providing information to the child's social worker after they return. Sometimes children may not be able to visit their own home, but there may be a relative who they can visit. The department has a duty to promote family relationships when it is in the child's interests to do so.

You should never enter into any plan for contact with the child's family, or to change existing contact arrangements unless they are confident that this has been authorised by the social worker, and if appropriate, the parent and /or Children's Hearing.

### *Babysitting*

Babysitting can be complex for you as a foster carer, due to the needs of the child, the availability of knowledgeable and reliable babysitters and any babysitter must be over 16 and preferably over 18. As the person will have 1:1 access to the child/ children, as well as your own knowledge and assessment of them, it may be necessary for social work to carry out a low key records check.

As a result of the above, your assessment will ask about your network, and we encourage you to identify someone who could support you in this way, so that this basic screening can be in place before you need it. It is worth also considering if there is any member of your extended family or network who might act as your 'back-up' to support you in a crisis situation or emergency, to provide babysitting, or to provide overnight care which might in some situations be more natural for the child than using a short break carer. If you have a friend or relative who can offer this, they need to be assessed and formally approved as your support carer.

Often foster carers find that it can be most effective to support each other in this way, by providing reciprocal care, as everyone can be confident in the care that will be provided.

To enable you to attend training or other work related events which conflict with caring for the child, the fostering support workers can be available to help, so it is always worth approaching them and making them aware of any babysitting needs as soon as possible.

Short breaks for foster carers are available in Moray. This service can be used to provide care for children and young people and it can be appropriate to use this service as an alternative to making a babysitting arrangement. However this does depend on availability and your request should be discussed with your supervising social worker as early as possible.

Often foster carers wish to leave children in the care of a relative because their own children are doing this. These situations can be difficult (but not impossible) to authorise, other than in response to an unforeseen situation, and are best covered by the 'support carer' arrangement above.

### *School trips and hobbies- based residential trips*

We are fortunate that children and young people in Moray have a wide range of opportunities available to them through school and community groups, and we are positive about supporting you to promote these for the children in your care. Most of our local schools offer residential trips both

within Scotland and abroad. While school trips are always safely supervised this may not necessarily be the case regarding hobby based groups, and for the latter it may at times be that you need to accompany the child to ensure that safe supervision is provided. It is always advisable to discuss these opportunities with the child's social worker before either making a promise to the child or committing to their involvement. There may be issues of permission; timing; and ensuring that the child's needs are met may be more complex than you might initially think.

When carefully planned these trips can be great fun and hugely beneficial to children at the appropriate time.

#### *Overnight stays with friends*

The issue of overnight stays with friends has been highlighted often in the past by young people as something which sets them apart from their peers. In 2008 the Scottish Government issued guidance to assist local authorities to enable children and young people to experience the full range of opportunities and life experiences that are open to their peers who are not looked after. For most young people, these experiences would preferably include having sleep-overs with their friends.

However, like any good parent, the local authority as a corporate parent must also ensure that their children are safe, while at the same time supporting them in forming lasting friendships. This means that we would hope that in each case there is an appropriate balance of normality, care and protection, which is based on the needs of each specific child or young person. Ideally these matters would be discussed at the beginning of the placement and form part of the day to day placement agreement. Likewise it would be good practice for the child's social worker to have discussion with parents who hold parental rights and responsibilities about this issue. Decisions about overnight stays may be reviewed at core groups and the looked after child review and included in the care plan to make sure that the situation is still appropriate to the child's circumstances. The placement agreement should confirm that parents' views on overnight stays have been taken into consideration, if this is in the best interests of the child.

When arranging overnight stays it is essential that:

- you must know the name and address of the person whom the young person is staying with
- you must contact the adult at the proposed address to ensure that the child is expected and is welcome
- a time for going to and returning from the visit must be agreed between you and those with whom the child is to stay
- it must be agreed that the child does not go off and stay elsewhere without notifying you
- if the child is to visit the household of another foster carer, the liaison social worker must be advised.

Questions that need to be considered:

- How sensible or mature is he or she?
- How long has he or she been friends with the other child?
- What are the views of the child's parents? Do they agree?

- Do you or the child's parents know the other family? If so, how well?
- Has the child stayed with these people before and, if so, how did it go?
- Do you know anything about the child of the family which would cause concern?
- Does your child require special care or constant supervision?

If a child or young person is under a Compulsory Supervision Order that specifies their residence then, if it was proposed that an overnight stay arrangement became more than occasional, the child's social worker would have to notify the Children's Reporter, and it is possible that fostering regulations may apply.

Generally, this is an area where as a minimum, the caution you would exercise with your own children is appropriate, as is an honest perception of the needs and vulnerabilities of the child or young person, and your knowledge of the proposed 'host' household. It is an area for regular dialogue with the social workers concerned.

#### *Sleep overs and friendships*

Scottish Government guidance on sleepovers

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/210818/0055724>

#### *Do carers have the right to know where the child is going?*

Yes. You should insist on knowing where the child is going and who with. This would be exactly the same information you would expect to have about your own child.

#### *If the child requests a sleepover, do carers have the right to veto it?*

Yes. You can make the decision in the same way you would about your own child staying over. If you think that the arrangement is a bad idea, whether because it is a school night, or because you do not think that the people/place are unsuitable or they are unknown, or you have any reasonable concern you can refuse to grant permission. Children in care can be particularly vulnerable and an important part of the fostering role is keeping them safe.

#### *What about last minute arrangements?*

You are entitled to use your judgement in the same way as outlined in the paragraph above.

#### *What if they are friends that the child has from before they came to the carers?*

Where the child has positive friendships, these should be encouraged, but you are still entitled to use your judgement.

#### *Do the parents of the child's friends need to be Disclosure checked?*

Children have a right to as normal a life as is possible, so common sense should be used. If the child is to stay over regularly or go on holidays, then Disclosure checks will have to be made. However, where the contact is more casual, it can be entirely appropriate for social workers to do a low-key check of the child/family without this being known by the subjects of the check. If the child is from

another local authority, there should be arrangements in hand so that you can have these checks undertaken locally when needed.

*Do the child's friends need to be Disclosure checked?*

It is not necessary for every friendship to be subject to checks, but a low key check may be appropriate, depending on the circumstances. Delaying friendships or activities because of checks must be proportionate.

*The child has medical needs or a problem such as bedwetting; can carers tell the host parent?*

Yes. The best interests of the child will require it. You should be mindful only to share information that host parents need to safely care for the child and not irrelevant information.

*Group attendance*

Attendance at groups including mother and toddler playgroups, after school groups and leisure activities should be discussed with your supervising social worker or the child's social worker.

*Home alone overnight*

When you are not at home, eg visiting relatives or friends, even if the child is older and mature enough to be left alone, this needs careful consideration by you, the child's social worker and your supervising social worker. A foster child who is under 16 years of age must never be left alone overnight. This does not mean that anyone over 16 can be left: their competence, reliability, behaviour, and the level of trust that exists between parties needs to be determined. This must always be discussed with the young person's social worker and your supervising social worker. It may be that the child's worker or you need to negotiate alternative arrangements, for example, staying with family or friends.

*Young people out alone*

Children being given the freedom to go out without supervision is a critical milestone. It is important that children learn basic skills such as road safety and what to do in an emergency and that older children learn to use public transport. Young people need to cope with the risks that are associated with teenage behaviour, how to cope with peer pressures, how to be assertive and say 'no', be aware of the hazards of drugs and alcohol, missing the last bus and being out at night. Looked After Children may be 'street-wise' but this does not mean that they can look after themselves. You need to know where they are going, who they are with and at what time they will be back. Arrangements for 'reporting in' should be made, eg by telephone or texting. As with all young people, you may have to negotiate, create boundaries and, if appropriate, apply sanctions. You should discuss this with the child's/young person's social worker.

## **6.14 Keeping Children and Young People Safe On-line**

What can you do to help protect children online? Children and young people are often referred to as the 'drivers' of the internet. They use the internet for education, entertainment and social opportunities. They communicate, interact, initiate and retrieve information at a rate that often leaves carers and parents bewildered and bemused. Young people will use it when and where possible – at school, in the home, at their friends, in internet cafes and in libraries. All are all freely available places children have access to the internet. It is your role to guide them but absolute protection may not be achievable. Some tips:

1. Talk to your children and help them understand that it is not 'cool' to give out their personal details to people they do not know in the real world. Explain that giving out personal information on the internet is dangerous and that strangers may be able to find out where they live, what school they go to, who their friends are and the dangers surrounding this.
2. If possible, have the computer or laptop located in a communal area in your home. That way you can keep an 'eye' on what the children are doing on the internet in a more casual way.
3. Ask your children to show you how to use the programmes they are registered with – such as Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat and Minecraft. Familiarise yourself with the guidance and security settings for these apps. It will make them feel good that they are showing you something. Help them to make sure the security settings are set correctly, such as making sure the image forwarding box is checked so that only friends can see their images and profile and that it cannot be forwarded on without their consent.
4. When gaming on the Xbox or Playstation make sure they only play with their friends and not strangers online. Ensure parental settings are on.
5. Use parental software such as Net Nanny. Some browsers offer integrated security applications, such as Firefox. Parental software will not block or solve all the problems that can occur on the internet, but will go a long way to helping you and your children stay safer online, especially for younger children. It is important that you able to stay up to date with the latest apps. Some of the websites below will support you with this.
6. Explain to children that whatever they post up on the internet – such as photographs, images of friends or any information – may not truly be removed forever when they want to delete them. There is a possibility that anyone on the internet could copy and use anything that is posted on the internet.
7. Talk to your children and explain that they should be very careful about accepting messages, images, or IM messages from people they do not know in the real world. Explain that they can contain viruses and also that people may not be who they say they are online or even look like the image they post on the internet.
8. Encourage your children to be careful about what they say on a 'blog' site and not to give personal information away. Friends can call them up for more information if they need to.
9. Remember that mobile phones now come with a wide variety of communication applications installed, such as the internet and IM, and hold the same dangers. You should discuss these with your child/children as you would for using the internet on a PC.

10. Advise your children to NEVER arrange to meet anyone alone who they meet online. If they feel they must or really want to meet someone, advise them not to go with a friend, but to let you know so that you or another trusted adult can go with them.
11. Enjoy the internet with your child/children – it is a valuable resource and very important communication tool for both education and entertainment.

If you would like further information or advice on internet safety or on any aspect of computer use with foster children, please contact placement services direct. Here are some useful links for more information about safety on-line.

[www.thinkyounow.co.uk](http://www.thinkyounow.co.uk)

[www.childnet.com](http://www.childnet.com)

### **6.15 Household Pets**

Household pets can be very beneficial to children. Pets such as rabbits, guinea pigs, cats and dogs can become the recipient of the child's emotion without demanding too much in return. Caring for animals can also teach children about responsibility. If a child has a pet that belongs to him or her rather than the birth family or foster carers, the pet should accompany the child if he or she moves to another placement, provided this is practicable.

There are a number of health risks and infections associated with pets such as parrots, dogs and cats. Children can become seriously ill or suffer permanent damage, including blindness, as a result of such infections. It is therefore important that dogs should be regularly wormed and play areas should be kept clear of fouling. Keeping of any pets should be fully discussed with your supervising social worker, prior to any coming into your home. Children with known asthmatic conditions affected by the presence of domestic pets will not be placed with families that keep animals. However, children can develop these conditions from contact with domestic animals.

Advice should be sought from your health visitor or GP if you have concerns about this. You must notify and consult with the Department before acquiring any type of pet. This includes looking after pets for short periods on behalf of others.

#### *Dangerous Dogs Act*

The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 was introduced in response to media publicity following some tragic incidents that involved children and dogs. This legislation introduced a range of specific requirements regarding the care and control of dogs bred for the purpose of fighting. The Act specifically refers to Pit Bull Terriers and Japanese Tozers but does not include other breeds which have a high record of attacks on children, eg Rottweilers. If you have other breeds of dog, an assessment of the dog will have taken place with you during your initial carer assessment. It is important to remember that some foster children will be frightened of dogs and that others will not have learned how to treat them kindly. Occasionally, children harm animals because they are angry with their carers. The safety of children in a foster family with dogs must be considered carefully.

The fostering team may ask a dog behaviouralist to carry out a visit to you to assist in the assessment of your dog. They can advise you and your supervising social worker on any risk factor associated with particular dogs.

### **6.16 Safety in the Home/Travel**

As children are looked after in your home, the department has a legal responsibility to make sure that the home is suitable and safe. When you were approved, the safety of your home would have been discussed and a health and safety checklist completed. It will be necessary periodically for you and your supervising social worker to check health and safety aspects of your home, as changes may need to be made depending on the age of the child to be placed with you, eg cooker guard, safety gate, window locks, etc. These checks should be updated if structural changes are made to your home. Updated checks are also be required for your carer review. You should discuss any difficulties you have with your supervising social worker or the child's social worker.

#### *Maintenance of car safety equipment*

Child safety seats are ordered for you by your supervising social worker. The type of seats required is dependent on the car it is to be used in and the age/size of the child. Car seats should be inspected regularly for wear and tear. If there is any sign of cracks in the chair or around anchor points, the chair must be disposed of immediately. If your car has been in an accident, even if minor, and the child's seat is in place, this should be checked and if necessary replaced. Please inform your supervising social worker of any such incident.

#### *Travel by cars*

When you are using your own car, you must make sure that:

- it is in good general order with up to date road tax and, where applicable, an MOT certificate
- seatbelts, booster seats and child car seats appropriate to the age of the child are provided and conform to British Safety Standard and EC Regulations
- childproof locks are fitted and used where appropriate
- the vehicle is regularly maintained and is in sound order
- the driver has a current full driving licence
- insurance should be fully comprehensive and include cover for business use
- your car insurance company should be informed that you are using your car to transport foster children. Your supervising social worker is required to check that you have a current driving licence and insurance cover and that children can be appropriately restrained while travelling in your vehicle. Seat belts/seats legal requirements:
  - you must wear a seat belt if one is fitted. There are few exceptions. The driver is liable to prosecution if a child under 14 years does not wear one
  - you must not carry an unrestrained child in the front seat of any vehicle
  - children under three years travelling in the front of any vehicle must be carried in an appropriate child restraint.

An adult belt may not be used:

- if an appropriate child restraint is fitted in front, but not in the rear, children under three years must use this restraint
- if an appropriate child restraint or seat belt is available in the front but not the rear, children between three and 12 years and under 135cm in height must use the front seat restraint or seat belt
- if travelling in mini buses or coaches, seat belts should be used if fitted.

Extract from information from the Department of Transport [www.dft.gov.uk/think](http://www.dft.gov.uk/think).

Leaflets are available from the Department of Transport, your supervising social worker or council / police road safety officer.

### **6.17 Firearms**

Your supervising worker must be notified if you, or any member of the household, keeps or proposes to keep a firearm in your home and must be satisfied that the use and storage of firearms is in line with police requirements. Thought must be given to possible dangers that replica, imitation or ornamental weapons and other potentially hazardous items might present.

### **6.18 Leisure/Hobbies/Safety and Outdoor Activities**

It is important for all children's healthy development that they are active and experience age appropriate independence. However, additional caution over and above that exercised with your own children may be needed with looked after children as you may not be fully aware of their level of maturity, their physical skills and stamina, their awareness of and response to danger, their ability to interact appropriately with other children and adults and their previous experience of normal childhood activities. You may be comfortable allowing your own nine year old to walk to the park with a friend to play on the swings. However, a nine year old foster child may have no awareness of stranger danger. You should always carefully risk assess the situation. Involvement in a range of activities and sports is recognised as an important factor in enhancing emotional well-being, combating a low sense of identity and self-esteem and for expressing creative activity.

There is a great potential for you to engage children and to give them an opportunity to participate in the local community. Sporting activities can provide opportunities both for risk-taking and for developing teamwork skills. Drama, music, singing, poetry and art can have therapeutic application by providing means for expressing feelings and discussing issues in a safe environment.

There are some activities for which children or young people looked after by the Council may need special permission, eg if there is a risk of physical or emotional harm if the activity is not well prepared and supervised or the child does not comply with instructions. Although these activities may be part of your family lives, you will have to ensure the agreement of the department before allowing the child to participate. You should discuss with the child's social worker and/or your

supervising social worker any prospective activities at an early stage in the placement. The fostering allowance covers normal hobbies and activities.

### **6.19 Proof of Identity**

You may be asked for proof that you are authorised carers for a child. This can happen in a number of settings, for example, if there is cause to take the child to an Accident and Emergency Department. Identification cards can be provided by the Department for you. Please consult your supervising social worker for details of the process for accessing your I.D. card.

### **6.20 Managing Behaviour**

Beneath every behaviour there is a feeling. And beneath every feeling there is a need. When we meet that need rather than focusing on the behaviour we begin to deal with the cause and not symptom.

You should try to make sure that potential crisis situations do not escalate. Training is available on de-escalation and on self-regulation behaviour management. This requires intervention early on as young people begin to act out, recognising children's and young people's trigger points. You need to respond positively to warning signals and to help young people calm down.

This will involve:

- using a range of behaviour management and problem-solving techniques to dissuade and resolve conflicts
- recognising the signs and symptoms of anxiety and stress
- reading the verbal and non-verbal signals
- staying calm, in control of the situation and not becoming angry
- avoiding anything that may provoke a confrontation, angry or threatening response
- talking quietly and reassuringly
- distracting by doing something together
- suggesting alternative strategies for dealing with feelings.

Incidents of challenging behaviour can leave you feeling de-skilled and sore and they can evoke troubling memories and feelings for the child/young person. The child or young person may be embarrassed and upset about their emotions and it can be tempting for you to be left feeling like you want to end the placement. Both yourself and the child or young person will need support if there has been a challenging incident. It will be helpful to have a meeting with the child's worker, your supervising social worker and, if appropriate, the child's parents to look at all the circumstances. A risk assessment may be undertaken, and consideration given to whether changes to the child's plan or the safer caring plan are required. If at all possible children should **not** be moved following such an episode. A looked after and accommodated review may be required.

### **6.21 Searching Personal Belongings/Room**

You should be clear about items that children and young people are not permitted to bring into the home, for example, drugs, weapons, alcohol or stolen property. Children and young people should also be advised to leave some items, eg cigarette lighters and mobile phones downstairs or out with their bedrooms for safety and to avoid risk of disturbance to other members of the household. If you have reasonable cause to believe that there are prohibited items in the young person's bedroom, this may be searched. The young person's rights in this situation must be remembered. If possible, you should consult with the young person's social worker or your supervising social worker before deciding to search the room. You should tell the young person what you intend to do. If you think an offence has been committed or there may be some illegal substance or item in the room, the police may have to be involved. If the young person is missing from their placement, you may search for personal items such as an address book or diary to help find out where the young person might be. It is important that you consult with the young person's social worker or your supervising social worker about this. You must record the reason for, and the outcome of, any searches of a young person's room in your daily record. You must not carry out personal searches or strip searches. If you think that a young person has some dangerous or illegal item in their possession, they should be asked to hand it over. If you think that the young person or other people are at immediate risk, they must exercise judgement as to the best course of action, to ensure the safety of the young person or others. If the young person refuses to co-operate, or if they think an offence has been committed, the police may need to be informed.

## 7.0 Fees, Allowances and Holidays etc

### 7.1 Information on Fee Payments

<b>FEES – ONLY PAID TO FOSTER CARERS</b> Levels are determined by carers experience and permanent placements check with spreadsheet to determine level.  Carers retain their core fee, level for one child, for the NIGHTS the children are on a short break							
<b>Nights</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
Level 1 – 1 child	14.15	28.30	42.45	56.60	70.75	84.90	<b>99.05</b>
Level 1 – 2 children	31.13	62.26	93.39	124.52	155.65	186.78	<b>217.91</b>
Level 1 – 3 children	42.45	84.90	127.35	169.80	212.25	254.70	<b>297.15</b>
Level 2 – 1 child	19.81	39.62	59.43	79.24	99.05	118.86	<b>138.67</b>
Level 2 – 2 children	36.78	73.56	110.34	147.11	183.90	220.68	<b>257.46</b>
Level 2 – 3 children	48.10	96.20	144.30	192.40	240.50	288.60	<b>336.70</b>
Level 3 – 1 child	39.61	79.23	118.84	158.46	198.07	237.68	<b>277.27</b>
Level 3 – 2 children	56.59	113.18	169.76	226.35	282.94	339.53	<b>396.13</b>
Level 3 – 3 children	67.91	135.82	203.72	271.63	339.54	407.45	<b>475.37</b>
Level 4 – 1 child	65.09	130.17	195.26	260.34	325.43	390.51	<b>455.63</b>
Level 4 – 2 children	82.06	164.12	246.18	328.24	410.30	492.36	<b>574.42</b>
Level 4 – 3 children	93.38	186.76	280.14	373.52	466.90	560.28	<b>653.66</b>

Fostering fees are the financial reward for caring. They acknowledge the time, skill and effort involved in caring for a child. The fee is paid for each child placed. When the child/ren placed with you is/are on a short break and you have no other children in placement you will retain the core fee for your level for the nights the children are away

### 7.2 Information on Allowances

<b>ALLOWANCES – Child's age related so birthdays may result in an increase.</b>  Carers retain 25% of allowances when the children are on a short break				
	<b>0-4</b>	<b>5-10</b>	<b>11-15</b>	<b>16+yrs</b>
<b>Weekly</b>	<b>142.86</b>	<b>162.73</b>	<b>202.58</b>	<b>246.44</b>
<b>1 night</b>	20.41	23.25	28.94	35.21
<b>2 nights</b>	40.82	46.49	57.88	70.41
<b>3 nights</b>	61.23	69.74	86.82	105.62
<b>4 nights</b>	81.63	92.99	115.76	140.82
<b>5 nights</b>	102.04	116.23	144.70	176.03
<b>6 nights</b>	122.45	139.48	173.64	211.23

Fostering allowances are age related. Where a child's needs indicate additional expenditure may be required due to their disability, you should apply for appropriate disability benefits. Allowances are only payable when the child is in placement. Allowances cease when the child leaves the placement. If a child goes home overnight or has regular or occasional respite, the carer will receive an adjusted proportion of the maintenance allowance. Allowances cover all the normal costs of caring for a child such as food, local travel, hobbies, activities and personal hygiene.

Once young people have an income, they should make a contribution towards their clothing and personal expenses, unless they are on a very low income. Please advise the child's social worker and your supervising social worker as soon as a young person is in receipt of earnings or benefits. Please see the online version of the foster carer handbook for details about expected contributions.

All looked after young people who stay on at school beyond school leaving age or go to college are entitled to an education maintenance allowance. You should ensure that you or the young person apply for this allowance as it is intended as an incentive for young people to stay on at school or go to college.

#### *Continuing Care*

Moray Council has a duty to assess the needs of Young People who are already accommodated with foster carers and wish to remain with those carers past their 18th birthday. The possibility of the young person remaining with you, including any financial implications will be discussed with you and your supervising social worker.

#### *Retainers*

Retainers are paid to full time carers in recognition that they are available to take placements. A retainer can be paid for up to two weeks for Level's 1 and 2 carers and up to four weeks for a level 3 or 4 carer. If a child moves into a vacancy as soon as another child leaves, retainers are not paid. When a retainer is being paid, you may be asked to undertake short term pieces of work out with their normal remit, eg taking a child to give another carer a weekend break. Occasionally retainers can be paid for longer, for instance if there is a bereavement or serious illness within the family. This must be agreed with the team manager for placement services. Where you are suspended from taking placements due to a child protection or standards of care investigation a retainer can be paid while an investigation is ongoing if agreed by the Service Manager.

#### *Exceptional circumstances*

Occasionally the demands of a child in placement means that no other child can be placed with you, even though you are registered to take more than one child. In these circumstances, a fee may be payable following discussion with the child's social worker, your supervising social worker and authorisation by the team manager. This payment will be reviewed 3 monthly.

#### *Clothing allowance*

Clothing allowance forms part of the standard allowance as outlined above. All children should be adequately clothed when placed with full time carers. However, this may not be possible if a child is placed without any additional clothing. If it is necessary for you to buy clothing in advance of receiving an agreed grant this must be agreed with the child's social worker and receipts must be retained and given to the social worker. Parents may wish to provide clothing – it is helpful if you can accommodate parents' views as far as practicable. It is expected that when the child leaves the care placement, he or she will have an adequate set of clothing.

You should make an inventory of clothing when the child arrives or leaves, so that the child's clothing needs can be assessed and disputes avoided. How the clothing allowance is spent is a matter of judgement between you, the child, his/her parents and the child's social worker. You should keep a record of how clothing money is spent and receipts retained for inspection by your supervising social worker. The foster carer diary can be used for this. Any unspent clothing allowance should be returned to placement services at the end of the placement. Exceptional, one-off payments may be made for expensive items, eg if the child is taking part in a special religious ceremony. Such needs must be discussed with the child's social worker and your supervising social worker in advance.

#### *Pocket money*

Pocket money allowance forms part of the standard allowance. Children should be encouraged to open a savings or bank account.

Age Bands	Allowance	Food	Clothing	Transport	Personal (Pocket Money)	Household
0 - 4		34%	22%	8%	6%	30%
Total	£142.85	£48.57	£31.43	£11.43	£8.57	£42.85
Age 5 - 10						
Total	£162.73	£55.33	£35.80	£13.02	£9.76	£48.82
Age 11 - 15						
Total	£202.58	£68.88	£44.57	£16.21	£12.15	£60.77
Age 16+						
Total	£246.44	£83.80	£54.22	£19.71	£14.78	£73.93

### *Christmas, or other religious festivals, and birthday allowances*

These allowances are paid to cover additional expenditure at one week's standard allowance. Birthday payments are paid two weeks before the birthday and Christmas allowances are paid four weeks prior to Christmas. If a child moves just prior to their birthday or Christmas, the purchased gift(s) should be passed to the new carers as these allowances are not paid twice.

### *Holiday allowances*

Before booking any holiday for an accommodated child or young person this must be discussed and pre-authorised by the child's social worker and your supervising social worker. Two week's extra allowance is paid before the start of the school summer holidays. This is to cover additional expenditure over the school summer holiday period. It is paid to foster carers whether or not they actually take the foster children on holiday. If a child moves prior to or during the school summer holiday, the allowance will be reclaimed on a pro-rata basis (if it is half way through the holiday, half the allowance will be reclaimed) unless you have already taken the child away on holiday.

If a child moves into your home during the school summer holidays, the holiday allowance will be paid on a pro-rata basis. The normal fee and maintenance are paid during holiday periods and it is expected that both the maintenance and the holiday allowance will be used towards the actual costs of caring for the child on holiday.

Young people may get invited to go on holiday with a friend or through a youth group. Such arrangements need to be agreed by the child's social worker. The cost of school trips will be covered by the Department if it is in the child's best interests to attend. This should be discussed with the school and the child's social worker. You should give the child's social worker and your supervising social worker at least 3 months' notice if considering taking a child on holiday or going on a school trip. Do not book any holiday without prior discussion with your supervising social worker.

In some instances, the child's parents will need to consent to a holiday or trip. If you are likely to want to take a child abroad, the social worker should be asked to make a passport application as soon as possible as there can be difficulties.

Moray council will not support children's holidays during term time. Any such extraordinary request must be discussed and agreed in advance with your supervising social worker and the child's social worker and would require authorisation from senior managers.

### *Travel allowances*

You cannot claim travel expenses for activities that are part of normal family life such as transporting a child to the local school or to go shopping. However, reasonable costs for travel undertaken as part of the fostering role will normally be reimbursed. Approved journeys may include:

- regular or distant hospital appointments
- visits to prospective carers or adopters
- journeys to a residential school
- travel to reviews
- visits to the child's family
- travel to training events
- transport to a non-local school
- collecting the child and dropping them off at the start and end of short breaks

As far as possible, such expenses should be agreed in advance with your supervising social worker who can provide advice on how to claim and relevant forms. Receipts/tickets will be required. Claims should be made at regular intervals – at least three monthly and before the end of the financial year on 31 March. Claims that are more than three months old cannot be approved. When a private car is used, payments will be at an agreed mileage rate. VAT receipts for petrol must be obtained and attached to the claim form.

#### *Other expenses*

Where you deliver training or take part in carer recruitment or similar activities this should be claimed on a carer expenses form and passed to your supervising social worker.

### **7.3 Equipment**

Once you are approved, the department has the responsibility to provide essential equipment to you. Your supervising social worker will talk to you about any furniture or equipment in the home which is available for any child placed, and what additional items are required. Your supervising social worker will complete the necessary arrangements including the approval and delivery. Equipment will either be new or, if used, clean, in good condition and will meet relevant safety standards. Cot mattresses for children under one will be provided new. The type of equipment can include safety equipment such as fireguards, window catches and equipment to suit the child's age, such as a cot or high chair. A full list can be obtained from your supervising social worker. Items will be replaced as a result of wear and tear.

Major items of essential equipment are 'on loan', with the exception of bed linen. If you stop fostering, or change your age range, these items should be returned. If the procurement process for equipment is not followed then placement services cannot guarantee full re-imburement of sums paid by you.

### **7.4 Insurance**

You are expected to have adequate home, contents, vehicle, personal injury and third party liability insurance. You should inform your insurance company that you are fostering. If insurance companies are not given full information, any claim could be discounted on the grounds that they were not completely aware of material facts. If you have any difficulty in obtaining insurance cover, this should be discussed with your supervising social worker. Any damages or theft caused by a foster

child should, in the first instance, be claimed through your own insurance company. If the claim is not accepted, there is an excess to pay or your insurance premium is increased because of a claim, this should be discussed with your supervising social worker, who can help you submit a claim to the department.

The Council has public liability insurance in place. This covers carers for accidental death, injury or illness to any third party or their property as a result of your actions as a foster carer as long as these were accidents and not intentional. There are terms and conditions that apply to this insurance.

It is your responsibility to ensure that your car insurance covers any additional liability relating to your role as a carer. Any vehicle used for children must be maintained in a legal and roadworthy condition and used in compliance transporting with statutory regulations. You must also ensure that your insurance has a business clause which allows you to transport children in foster care. This should not cost any extra.

You must have your own holiday insurance and insurance for your foster children if you take them on holiday. You should check if the child can be covered by your own holiday insurance or if you need to obtain this through another company. If difficulties are experienced, the Fostering Network may be able to provide advice. It is vital that any accident or injury to the child, you, your family, or anyone else, is reported to your supervising social worker and the child's social worker as soon as possible. They will advise on any actions, forms or reports that should be completed. Any delay may invalidate any insurance claim.

Individual membership of the Fostering Network is purchased for carers. This entitles members to legal advice and representation, if required. Terms and conditions are available from the Fostering Network on 0141 204 1400.

## **7.5 Carers' Holidays**

Full time carers are entitled to take a paid break from fostering each year, although many choose not to do so. Your carer fee continues to be paid when you take a break but the allowances stop as these are paid for the costs of caring for the child. The maximum short break entitlement is 35 days. Other than in emergency circumstances, eg the need to care for an ill family member, supervising social workers should be notified at least three months prior to the break so that alternative placements can be identified and children can be well prepared for the temporary move. Relatives and friends of some carers can be approved as respite carers to cover for holiday breaks. You should speak to your supervising social worker if you have relatives or friends willing and able to undertake respite care. Carer's holiday entitlement runs from January to December – full calendar year.

## **7.6 Administration of Fees and Allowances**

Payments are authorised by the senior social workers in the supervising team responsible for you as the carer. Any adjustments to payments are usually made in the next week. All payments are made into your nominated bank account. You are advised to check your payslips on receipt and contact

placement services should you require clarification or have concerns. Payslips should be retained and used for P60 calculations.

## **7.7 Tax, National Insurance and Pensions**

You are self-employed, and it is important that the tax implications of this are understood. For tax purposes, you will usually have to fill in a self-assessment tax form each year. HM Revenues and Customs (HMRC) provides very helpful information concerning this process that can be accessed on the website address given below. You should keep a record of:

- total income from fostering
- the date of birth of each child placed, date placed and, where applicable, the date they left
- those who intend to use the profit method (see HMRC website) to calculate taxable profit should keep detailed records to support their claim for expenses
- all records must be kept for six years after the end of the tax year in question
- you should retain all the payment slips they receive from the Council.

Newly self-employed helpline 0845 915 4515

Guidance notes for foster carers on: [www.gov.uk/foster-carers](http://www.gov.uk/foster-carers)

### *National insurance contributions (NIC)*

As you are classed as self-employed. Please check with your local social security office re NIC payments. Registration is required even you are exempt from income tax, although you can apply for small earnings exception. If you wish to protect your state pension, bereavement and incapacity benefit you should consider paying a self-employed contribution, even if your earnings are below the threshold.

Advice should be obtained from the Self-employment helpline: 0845 915 4655.

### State Pension

To qualify for a full pension sufficient NIC or credits must have been made from employment, self-employment or certain benefits. Voluntary contributions can also be made. A second state pension was introduced in 2002 for those caring for children aged six years and under, people with disabilities or those who have a very low income.

Advice: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) Pensions Forecast: 0845 3000 168

Home responsibilities protection (HRP) This protects entitlement to basic state pension by reducing the number of years of NIC or credits that are required. You can claim HRP for any full tax year (after April 2003) when you have been a carer. The claim must be made within three years of the end of the tax year in question.

## **7.8 Benefits and Children with Disabilities**

There are a number of benefits designed to assist parents/carers in meeting the extra costs involved in caring for children with a disability. These are based on individual circumstances. The child's social worker should assist you in applying for relevant benefits. The benefit most likely to be applicable for foster children in your care is disability living allowance (DLA).

Further advice is available through [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)