

Family and friends care policy

Introduction

This policy sets out the London Borough of Richmond's Specialist Children's Services approach to promoting and supporting the needs of children placed with family and friends carers.

Throughout this policy we use the following abbreviations:

LA – local authority

PR – parental responsibility

1. Values, principles and objectives

Values

The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames (Richmond) is committed to ensuring that all children in the borough grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their developmental needs. Where possible this should be with their birth parents or, if this is not an option, with a relative or member of the child's social network.

Statistics suggest that between 200,000-300,000 children in England do not live with their birth parents and that instead they live with family or friends carers. The decision that a child should be cared for by a family and friends carer is most often made by their birth parents and often the LA does not have any involvement in this decision.

A child may live with family and friends carers for a wide range of reasons: for instance parental difficulties, mental or physical ill health, domestic abuse, divorce or separation, alcohol or substance misuse, imprisonment or bereavement.

Many family and friends carers are grandparents or aunts and uncles, but they may also be older siblings or close family friends.

There are various legal options available for family and friends carers and these are set out later in this document. Richmond can offer advice and support to assist these family and friends carers in caring for children and making sure that their needs are met.

Principles

Richmond's family and friends carers policy is underpinned by the principles of the Children Act 1989. This Act says that:

- the welfare of the child is paramount;
- children should be safe and be protected by effective intervention if they are in danger;
- wherever possible, children should be brought up and cared for within their own families;
- parents with children in need should be helped to bring up their children themselves; this help should be provided as a service to the child and his family and should:
 - be provided in partnership with the parents;
 - meet each child's identified needs;
 - be appropriate to the child's race, culture, religion and language;
 - be open to effective independent representations and complaints procedures;
 - draw upon effective partnership between the LA and other agencies, including voluntary agencies.

The government's statutory guidance for Family and Friends Carers (2011) requires that local authorities provide support for relatives or friends caring for children and young people because their parents are unable to care for them, so that these carers can safeguard the child and promote their welfare. The principles listed above in relation to support that Richmond will provide for birth parents are also applicable to the support that we provide for family and friends carers.

Objectives

Richmond has developed clear, consistent and comprehensive policies and procedures regarding our work with and the support we will provide for family and friends carers.

The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of these policies and procedures so that family and friends carers can be fully aware of the different legal contexts and the support that they can access.

2. Evidence base

Evidence from research suggests that some of the benefits for children of being cared for by family or friends are that it:

- enables children to live with people they know and trust;
- reduces the trauma of separation that can be experienced if children have to live with strangers;
- reinforces a sense of identity and self-esteem, which comes from children knowing their family history and culture;
- helps children to maintain contact with their parents, brothers and sisters and other family members;
- encourages families to consider and rely on their own family members as resources;
- gives children the opportunity to stay linked to their own communities and promotes a sense of family community responsibility;
- strengthens the ability of families to give children the support they need;
- is culturally relevant.

Overall, research tends to support the view that family and friends care can be a positive choice for children and families and has tended towards good outcomes. Some studies indicate that children in family and friends placements do better across all outcomes and others that they do at least as well as children placed outside their families. In a review of research, Hunt (2001) concluded that whilst it cannot be said conclusively that children in family and friends care do better than those in non-related care, the weight of evidence is broadly positive; there is little evidence that they do worse, and some studies indicate that they do better. These positive outcomes are often achieved despite rather than because of adequate levels of support, which raises the question as to whether outcomes improve further with appropriate services.

A study funded by the Department for Education which compared the outcomes for children placed in friends and family placements and those placed in non-relative placements found that: 'In most cases family and friends provided excellent care of the children' (Farmer and Moyers 2005). Farmer and Moyers identified positive outcomes for children on the dimensions of attachment and family relationships, placement stability, continuity of experience, maintenance of relationships, safety, quality of care and child wellbeing.

Care within the extended family is normal practice in many communities where parents are unable to care for their children. When placing black and ethnic minority children, identifying possible carers from amongst family or friends is an especially important consideration. Farmer and Moyers found that whilst significantly more black and ethnic minority children were placed with non-related carers than with family and friends carers, those placed with family and friends were significantly more likely to be in ethnically matched placements.

From our experience of placing children with friends and family carers as opposed to mainstream foster carers, the feedback has been that they felt:

- contact was promoted and more easily managed;
- they remained more attached and had improved longevity of family relationships;
- they were pleased to be able to remain within their family;

- they received the support they needed around school and education and responded more positively to attempts to promote this;
- they felt supported and able to try a range of new activities and hobbies;
- the placement had helped them build their self esteem and confidence.

The main feedback from friends and family foster carers themselves was connected to issues of finance and a lack of consistency in social worker allocation. Overall they reported that they enjoyed being carers and felt a sense of satisfaction that the children had remained within their family network, which was echoed in the feedback of parents.

3. Management accountability

Management accountability for family and friends care policy in Richmond rests with the Principal Manager, Children Looked After & Leaving Care.

4. Legal framework

This section gives information about each of the arrangements under each of the following headings:

Route into the arrangement – how the arrangement comes about

Parental responsibility – who holds PR for the child

Approval basis – the role of the LA in approving the arrangement

Duration – how long the arrangement will last

Placement supervision – how the LA supervises the arrangement

Review of placement – how the LA reviews the arrangement

Support services – services the LA **may** provide to support the arrangement

Financial support – entitlement – financial support which the LA **must** provide

Financial support – discretionary – financial support which the LA **may** provide

4.1 Private fostering

Route into the arrangement

- This is a private arrangement whereby the child is being cared for 28 days or more (or the intention is that the arrangement will last for 28 days or more) by anyone who does not have parental responsibility, and who is not a close relative.
- Relative means grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (by full blood, half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or a step-parent.
- The child is not a looked after child.

Parental responsibility

- Remains with birth parents.

Approval basis

- The arrangement is assessed by the LA, but the carer is not 'approved' in the same way as an LA foster carer is. The arrangement may be prohibited if assessed by the LA as unsuitable.

Duration

- Subject to discretion of person with PR and readiness of private foster carer to continue to care for the child.

Placement supervision

- It is not a placement, but there are statutory visits to the child by a social worker (minimum six weekly in first year, then 12 weekly).

Review of placement

- It is not a placement, but the LA may do formal reviews in addition to ongoing assessment during visits.

Support services

- Provision of advice and support as determined necessary by the LA, which may assess the child as a child in need, with a child in need plan, and provide services or support for child or family under section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

Financial support – entitlement

- Can claim child benefit and child tax credit if not being paid to parent.
- Financial responsibility to maintain the child remains with holders of PR.

Financial support – discretionary

- LA has discretion to make one-off or regular payments under section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

4.2 Family care (informal)

Route into the arrangement

- In these arrangements, the relative has chosen to take on the care of the child but does not have parental responsibility, and the arrangement was not made by the LA. The child is not a looked after child. The relative may have felt that the parents were unable to care for the child; or the parents may be dead or otherwise not available (e.g. in prison); or there may be an agreement between relatives due to difficult family circumstances. Some informal arrangements may in fact fall into the category of private fostering (see below).

Parental responsibility

- Parental responsibility remains with birth parents, but the person who cares for the child may do what is reasonable to safeguard or promote the child's welfare.

Approval basis

- The LA plays no part in approving these arrangements.

Duration

- Subject to discretion of person with PR.

Placement supervision

- None.

Review of placement

- None.

Support services

- No entitlement but the LA may assess the child as a child in need, with a child in need plan, and provide services or support for child or family under section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

Financial support – entitlement

- Can claim child benefit and child tax credit if not being paid to parent. Financial responsibility to maintain the child remains with holders of PR.
- Guardian's Allowance payable if both parents have died, or the only surviving parent cannot be found or serving two years or more prison sentence.

Financial support – discretionary

- LA has discretion to make one-off or regular payments under section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

4.3 Family and friends foster carers

Route into the arrangement

- The child has been placed with the relative or friend by the LA, because the person who had been caring for the child was deemed not to be providing suitable care.
- The child is a looked after child and so the LA must approve the relative or friend as an LA foster carer.
- The child may be accommodated voluntarily with the agreement of the parents or may be subject to a care order.

Parental responsibility

- Remains with birth parents if child accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act, or if the child is subject to a care order or emergency protection order the LA will have parental responsibility and determines the extent to which it may be exercised by others.

Approval basis

- Approved as LA foster carers in accordance with Fostering Services Regulations. (If child is looked after, carers **must** be approved as foster carers even if close relatives.)

Duration

- So long as placement remains in line with child's care plan, as determined by LA.

Placement supervision

- Statutory: visits to child by social worker and supervision of foster carers by supervising social worker

Review of placement

- Statutory reviews of child's care plan (minimum six monthly) and annual reviews of LA foster carers' approval.

Support services

- Support to meet child's needs, including health plan and personal education plan. Training and practical support to foster carers in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations, National Minimum Standards and Children's Workforce Development Council standards.
- Young person may be entitled to leaving care support services.

Financial support – entitlement

- Child benefit and child tax credit not payable.
- Weekly allowance to meet the costs of caring for the child. This should meet at least the national minimum rate set by the Department for Education.
- The Manchester City Council judgment ruled that allowances must be the same for all foster carers, whether or not family or friends.

Financial support – discretionary

- Some fostering providers pay their foster carers a fee to recognise the carers' skill, experience and commitment.
- The Manchester City Council judgment (which requires allowances to be paid on the same basis regardless of the relationship of the carer to the child) did not consider fees. However, Statutory Guidance for Fostering Services requires that any policy in relation to the payment of fees must be applied to all foster carers who meet the criteria in the same way and must not discriminate on the grounds of a pre-existing relationship with the child.

4.4 Unrelated foster care

Route into the arrangement

- The child is a looked after child being accommodated by the LA under section 20, Children Act 1989 or because the child is subject to a care order, but has been placed with a foster carer by the LA.
- Alternatively, the LA may choose to place a child into residential care where this is considered to best meet the child's needs.

Parental responsibility

- Remains with birth parents if child accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act, or if the child is subject to a care order or emergency protection order the LA will have parental responsibility and determines the extent to which it may be exercised by others.

Approval basis

- Approved as LA foster carers in accordance with Fostering Services Regulations. (If child is looked after, carers **must** be approved as foster carers even if close relative.)

Duration

- So long as placement remains in line with child's care plan, as determined by LA.

Placement supervision

- Statutory: visits to child by social worker and supervision of foster carers by supervising social worker.

Review of placement

- Statutory reviews of child's care plan (minimum six monthly) and annual reviews of LA foster carers' approval.

Support Services

- Support to meet child's needs including health plan and personal education plan. Training and practical support to foster carers in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations, National Minimum Standards and Children's Workforce Development Council standards.
- Young person may be entitled to leaving care support services

Financial support – entitlement

- Child benefit and child tax credit not payable.
- Weekly allowance to meet the costs of caring for the child. This should meet at least the national minimum rate set by the Department for Education.
- The Manchester City Council judgment ruled that allowances must be the same for all foster carers, whether or not family or friends.

Financial support – discretionary

- Some fostering providers pay their foster carers a fee to recognise the carers' skill, experience and commitment.
- The Manchester City Council judgement (which requires allowances to be paid on the same basis regardless of the relationship of the carer to the child) did not consider fees. However, Statutory Guidance for Fostering Services requires that any policy in relation to the payment of fees must be applied to all foster carers who meet the criteria in the same way and must not discriminate on the grounds of a pre-existing relationship with the child.

4.5 Residence order

Route into the arrangement

- Birth parents may ask a relative to care for their child and the relative may then decide to

- seek a legal order for the child so that they also have PR for the child.
- The child may be at risk of becoming looked after and a friend or relative applies for an order.
- Or the child may have been looked after and their foster carer or other relative or friend applies for an order.
- In all these circumstances, application can be made without the support of the parents or the LA. Relatives may apply for an order after the child has lived with them for one year.
- Or, there can be benign reasons, e.g. after parents' death and in line with a prior agreement between the birth parents and the carer.

Parental responsibility

- Shared by parents and holder of residence order.

Approval basis

- Appointed by court following application.

Duration

- Until the age of 18, unless varied or discharged by the court before the child reaches 18 years.

Placement supervision

- None.

Review of placement

- None.

Support services

- No entitlement (but LA has discretion to provide services or support for child or family under section 17 of the Children Act).

Financial support – entitlement

- Can claim child benefit and child tax credit if not being paid to parent.

Financial support – discretionary

- LA has discretion to pay residence order allowance – usually if child was previously fostered by the carers, or exceptionally if making residence order prevents child becoming looked after. Any allowance reviewed annually.

4.6 Special Guardianship Order (SGO)

Route into the arrangement

- Birth parents may ask a relative to care for their child and the relative may then decide to seek a legal order for the child so that they also have PR for the child.
- The child may be at risk of becoming looked after and a friend or relative applies for an order, or
- The child may have been looked after and their foster carer or other relative and friend applies for an order.
- In either circumstance, application can be made without the support of the parents or the LA. Relatives may apply for an order after the child has lived with them for one year.
- Or, there can be benign reasons, e.g. after parents' death and in line with a prior agreement between the birth parents and the carer.

Parental responsibility

- PR shared with parents and any one else with parental responsibility for the child. The special guardian may exercise parental responsibility to the exclusion of all others with PR, apart from another special guardian.

Approval basis

- Appointed by court, following application from the applicant. LA must investigate the matter and prepare a report for the court dealing with the suitability of the applicant to be a special guardian.

Duration

- Until the age of 18, unless varied or discharged by the court before the child reaches 18 years.

Placement supervision

- None.

Review of placement

- None.

Support services

- If child was looked after prior to making the SGO, LA must assess for need for special guardianship support services. LA has discretion whether to provide support.
- Young person may be entitled to leaving care support services if was a looked after child prior to making of the SGO.

Financial support – entitlement

- Can claim Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit if not being paid to parent.

Financial support – discretionary

- Entitled to an assessment for financial support under the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 if child looked after prior to order and meets the criteria in the regulations.
- Subject to assessment as above and for former foster carers can include an element of remuneration.
- Regular or one-off payments.
- Any allowances reviewed annually.

4.7 Adoption Order

Route into the arrangement

- Looked after children: the LA may decide that the child should be placed for adoption. They can only do so with the consent of the birth parent or under a Placement Order made by a court.
- An approved foster carer can apply for an adoption order after a year of caring for the child.
- Other informal carers could apply for an adoption order if the child has lived with them for a period of three years.

Parental responsibility

- Transfers to adopters and relationship with birth parents is severed.

Approval basis

- Adoption agency assesses and approves prospective adopters, court makes order regarding specific child. If the child is not looked after then notice of intention to adopt must be given to the LA who then carry out an assessment or report for the court.

Duration

- Permanent lifelong relationship

Placement supervision

- When child is placed for adoption by the LA, the placement is supervised and there are statutory reviews. Once the adoption order is made, none.

Review of placement

- See above.

Support services

- Entitlement to assessment for adoption support services, which may be provided at discretion of LA in accordance with Regulations and NMS.

Financial support – entitlement

- Can claim Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit if not being paid to parent.
- Entitlement to assessment for financial support (part of adoption support) if child looked after prior to order.

Financial support – discretionary

- Subject to assessment, one-off payments or regular adoption allowance may be paid.

5. Information on services and support

The Family Information Service provides information and advice to all parents and carers within the borough on universal services in relation to childcare. They can provide carers with information about early years provision, day care and out of school services, schools and colleges, health services, leisure facilities and youth support services. Information can be obtained by visiting this website: <http://www.richmond.gov.uk/fis> or by calling 020 8831 6298 or emailing fis@richmond.gov.uk.

Special Guardians who require targeted and specialist services, such as special educational needs services and CAMHS can liaise with the Special Guardianship Support Social Worker within the Adoption & Permanency Team, who will be able to signpost them to relevant services.

Under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (revised February 2011) and the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005, local authorities are required to provide a range of adoption support services. Requests for adoption support services can be made by anyone affected by adoption. Adoptive parents can also request an adoption support assessment in respect of their adopted child. Following such an assessment an Adoption Support Plan is drawn up outlining the identified services and support needed, which may include financial support.

Friends and family foster carers have the support of a supervising social worker from the Fostering Team.

A list of organisations which provide information around parenting, childcare and a range of services and information, and which may be of use to friends and family carers appears as Annex A to this document.

6. Financial support

We pay allowances to a range of friends and family carers who care for children who are or have been looked after ('in care'):

- Friends and family carers
- Special Guardians who are caring for a child who was looked after immediately before the Special Guardianship Order was made
- Adopters, in some circumstances (please see below)
- Holders of Residence Orders, where a child was looked after immediately before the Order was made and would otherwise remain looked after.

All these carers receive the same basic allowance for a child of a particular age as would be paid to one of our 'mainstream' or 'stranger' foster carers (i.e. carers who care for children they did not know previously and are not related to).

In general, welfare benefits (typically Child Benefit) that the friends and family carers receive for the child are deducted from the amount we pay so that the overall amount remains the same as that paid to our mainstream foster carers (who are not entitled to claim Child Benefit). We do not deduct Disability Living Allowance paid to the carer for the child, on the basis that the child has been assessed to have additional needs beyond those of most of his or her peers and that this benefit is paid specifically to meet these needs.

Friends and family carers

In most circumstances, friends and family carers will be eligible to claim the relevant welfare benefits for the care and support of the child, as set out in section 4, above. The amount of any payment made to friends and family carers under section 17 of the Children Act will depend on the assessed need in individual circumstances.

Family and friends foster carers

Family and friends foster carers cannot claim any welfare benefits for children in their care, but are provided with a fostering allowance by the LA to ensure that they can meet the child's needs.

Special Guardians

Special Guardians who are taking on the care of a looked after child will be assessed for an allowance using a means test published by the Department for Education. Allowances are reviewed annually and may be withdrawn if it is assessed that they are no longer required in order to meet the child's needs.

Where the Special Guardian is the child's foster carer, we may also pay an additional amount equal to the fostering fee the carer was receiving for the first two years after the Special Guardianship Order is made and beyond this if we assess that this is necessary to meet the needs of the child.

Adopters

A means-tested (using the same DfE tool as above) adoption allowance is offered to adopters until children finish their first term of full time school.

In the exceptional circumstances listed below, Richmond will consider varying the amount and/or duration of the adoption allowance

- When the child is being adopted by their 'mainstream' or 'stranger' foster carers, the carers will be offered the allowance plus the fee they received as foster carers for the first two years and the allowance only for the following three years. After this the foster carers will be offered the means-tested core allowance only if at the time of placement it was assessed that had the foster carers not put themselves forward it would otherwise have been particularly difficult to find adopters because of one or more of the reasons listed below.
- If Richmond assesses that it will be particularly difficult to find adopters because
 - the child is to be placed with two or more other siblings, and/or
 - their ethnicity or age severely limits the number of prospective adopters, and/or
 - they have a disability and qualify for Disability Living Allowance and/or have severe emotional and/or behavioural problems,the means tested adoption allowance may be offered until the child is 18.
- If the child has severe disabilities Richmond will consider paying a non means tested enhanced allowance until the child is 18. The amount of allowance paid will be determined by the child's care needs.
- Adopters will no longer be eligible for an allowance if the child for whom the allowance is paid ceases to live with them.
- All allowances are reviewed annually.

Amounts of allowances

The amounts of all allowances are based on the National Minimum Fostering Allowance published by the Department for Education. The rates for 2011/12 are:

| Age of child | Weekly payment (daily amount) |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 0 - 2 | £129.01 (£18.43) |
| 3 - 5 | £132.02 (£18.96) |
| 6 - 10 | £148.05 (£21.15) |
| 11 - 15 | £ 67.02 (£23.86) |
| 16 - 17 | £ 97.05 (£28.15) |

7. Accommodation

In circumstances where a lack of suitable accommodation is preventing a child from living with a friends and family carer who would otherwise be suitable, the responsible social worker will discuss the situation with Richmond's Housing Directorate as appropriate. However, there is no guarantee that alternative accommodation will be offered as a result.

8. Supporting contact

Richmond operates a Contact Centre which offers supervised contact for children in Richmond's care, most often while they are the subject of court proceedings.

9. Family Group Conferences

Family Group Conferences (FGCs) are meetings of family members where they are helped to think through the issues surrounding the care of a child about whom the LA is concerned, and to come up with their own solutions to these. The meetings are organised and facilitated by people who have been trained to do this, and who are not part of the team which is working with the family (although they may still be employed by the LA).

Where the LA is so concerned about the welfare of a child that it is considering legal proceedings it will often organise a FGC to help the family to explore alternatives. Although there is no guarantee that the LA will feel that any plan put forward by family members following a FGC is suitable, experience suggests that in many cases families will be able to come up with plans which would perhaps not otherwise have been suggested.

10. Support groups

Support groups have previously been made available to both friends and family foster carers and special guardians, although take up has been limited. Consultations, in the form of questionnaires and informal discussions, have taken place with all friends and family carers within the borough and the children in their care in order to assess how to develop support groups in a way that would best engage them.

In order to maximise attendance at support groups, the possibility of accommodating all friends and family carers at the same group is being considered. Further to this, the option of forming

support groups for Special Guardians with neighbouring boroughs, such as the London Borough of Hounslow and the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, is being explored and further discussions need to take place in order to action this.

11. Private fostering

Private fostering is an arrangement where a child under the age of 16 years (or 18 years if disabled) is looked after for a period of more than 28 days by an adult who is not a close relative. A close relative is defined by the Child Act 1989 as a step-parent, grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of full blood, half blood or marriage/affinity).

Private fostering arrangements are made between family members or friends and are not directed by the LA. Anyone who is about to start caring for a child under a private fostering arrangement must notify the LA six weeks before the arrangement commences, or as soon as reasonably practicable after they begin caring for a child.

The LA has a duty to undertake an assessment of the arrangement to ensure that the carer is aware of, and able to meet the needs of, the child. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks will be sought for all members of the household over the age of 16 years. The LA will speak with the child's parent(s) to ensure that their agreement has been given, to clarify any financial contributions they will make, and to ensure issues of consent (e.g. for medical treatment) are established. Other relevant agencies will be informed of the arrangement, for example school and health services.

Private fostering arrangements are monitored by the LA for the duration of the placement. Statutory visits must take place a minimum of every six weeks within the first year; visits after every 12 weeks thereafter until the child turns 16 or the placement comes to an end. The supervising worker will expect to see the child alone at each visit. The worker is there to support the private foster carer with the task of caring for somebody else's child and may do this through referral to statutory services or by signposting to voluntary and independent support agencies.

Carers must notify the LA when a placement comes to an end and provide the details of where the child has moved to.

12. Friends and family foster carers

Children who are looked after by the LA ('in care') must live with a carer who is an approved foster carer. The term 'looked after' was introduced by the Children Act 1989 and refers to children who are subject to care orders and those who are voluntarily accommodated.

The placement of a child with a family or friends carer should be planned and the carer **must** be assessed and given temporary approval as a foster carer before the child is placed. This temporary assessment is conducted jointly by the child's social worker and a fostering social worker and takes approximately a month to complete.

The areas assessed are: general details about the applicant and all household members; CRB checks on all household members over the age of 16 years; ethnicity; religious beliefs; employment; health; previous and current relationships; relationships with family members and contact with them; suitability of accommodation; the resources and support available in the community; capacity to parent the child; ability to promote education, manage the child's behaviour, promote contact with other family members and parents; a chronology of the applicant's life to date including all significant events; and a health and safety report on the home.

The temporary assessment is sent to the Principal Manager for approval, and if approved the child(ren) are likely to come to live with the carer soon afterwards. The carer will be provided with an allowance for each looked after child they care for.

Temporary approval lasts for up to 16 weeks. If the plan is that the child needs to remain with the carer for longer than this then a full fostering assessment will need to be completed within these 16 weeks. An extension of a further eight weeks assessment time can be granted by the Fostering Panel if statutory checks have not been returned, further interviews need to be undertaken, or there has been delay caused by situations outside the assessing workers' control.

The full fostering assessment is completed by a fostering assessment worker. The carer needs to make themselves available for visits, complete some work themselves, undertake a medical with their GP, discuss their finances, give the details of referees who will be willing to also meet the assessing worker, and share very personal information as part of the assessment process.

The full fostering assessment is presented to the Fostering Panel, which is an independent body of professionals and others who all have relevant experience of fostering. Carers should attend this Panel with the assessing worker, and can bring a friend or relative along for support if they want.

The Panel makes one of three recommendations:

- to approve the applicant as a foster carer,
- to defer the application for further information, or
- to not approve the applicant.

If the Panel does not approve an application the applicant has a right of appeal within 28 days of receiving the decision. Appeals can be made to the LA or the Independent Review Mechanism.

At any point within the assessment process if the LA feels that the assessment is not working and that the family member or friend is not suitable to act as a foster carer, they can end the assessment. The LA has the right to remove any children that are living with the proposed carer without awaiting the outcome of an appeal process.

Once approved, friends and family foster carers are allocated a supervising social worker who will visit the home a minimum of once every six weeks. These supervision sessions are intended to provide support, advice and assistance to help family members adjust to the role of being a foster carer. Supervising social workers will provide support in meetings, relay important information about the case and ensure that carers' views are heard and their observations and experiences taken into account when planning for the child.

Training is available to all foster carers including friends and family carers, although there is no expectation for friends and family carers to attend training unlike mainstream foster carers. However, all friends and family foster carers are required to complete the CWDC Standards within their first year of approval as this is a national expectation.

All foster carers including friends and family carers are expected to keep daily records about the child(ren) in their care, these should provide details of any contact taking place and impact upon the child of this, any meetings attended, educational achievements or issues, general behaviour and demeanour, any medical issues, and any other relevant information.

All foster carers including family and friends carers are provided with membership of an independent support agency either Fostering Network or Foster Talk. The LA runs regular Fostering Forums where carers have the opportunity to discuss relevant issues with the Principal Manager and Fostering Team Manager. There is also the opportunity to attend Foster Carer Association Meetings which are run by foster carers and provide feedback to the Fostering Service.

13. Special Guardianship Residence Orders and adoption

Advice and guidance is available on the implications of these orders and the support services available and can be accessed by visiting www.richmond.gov.uk/adoption or by calling the Adoption and Permanency Team on 020 8891 7754. The team also has available a range of information and guidance leaflets on the respective orders produced by organisations such as BAAF, Family Rights Group, and the Grandparents' Association.

14. Complaints

All friends and family foster carers are provided with a copy of the LA complaints leaflet, which outlines the various stages of the complaints process. Copies can be made available to other carers on request.

Any carer wishing to make a complaint should contact the Corporate Complaints Manager either in person, by phone, by letter, by email or by completing the form provided in the leaflet or online.

15. Feedback

We welcome your comments on this policy – please send these to:

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TW1 3BW
m.ferguson@richmond.gov.uk

Annex A:

Useful organisations and information for family and friends carers

National organisations

Action for Prisoners' Families

Works to reduce the negative impact of imprisonment on prisoners' families. Produces publications and resources, and provides advice, information and training as well as networking opportunities.

www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk

Address: Unit 21, Carlson Court, 116 Putney Bridge Road, London, SW15 2NQ

Phone: 020 8812 3600

Email: info@actionpf.org.uk

Advice line: 0808 808 2003 info@prisonersfamilieshelpline.org.uk

Addaction

Offers a range of support developed for families and carers affected by substance misuse.

www.addaction.org.uk

Address: 67-69 Cowcross Street London EC1M 6PU

Phone: 020 7251 5860

Email: info@addaction.org.uk

Adfam

Works with families affected by drugs and alcohol, and supports carers of children whose parents have drug and alcohol problems.

www.adfam.org.uk

Address: 25 Corsham Street, London, N1 6DR

Phone: 020 7553 7640

Email: admin@adfam.org.uk

Advisory Centre for Education (ACE)

Offers free independent advice and information for parents and carers on a range of state education and schooling issues, including admissions, exclusion, attendance, special educational needs and bullying.

www.ace-ed.org.uk

Address: 1c Aberdeen Studios, 22 Highbury Grove, London N5 2DQ

General advice line: 0808 800 5793

Exclusion advice line: 0808 800 0327

Exclusion information line: 020 7704 9822 (24 hour answerphone)

BeGrand.net

Website offering information and advice to grandparents, plus online and telephone advice.

www.begrand.net

Helpline: 0845 434 6835

British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF)

Provides information and advice about adoption and fostering and publishes resources.

www.baaf.org.uk

Address: Saffron House, 6-10 Kirby Street, London, EC1N 8TS

Phone: 020 7421 2600

Email: mail@baaf.org.uk

Children's Legal Centre

Provides free independent legal advice and factsheets to children, parents, carers and professionals.

www.childrenslegalcentre.com

Address: University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester, Essex, CO4 3SQ

Phone: 01206 877 910

Email: clc@essex.ac.uk

Child Law Advice Line: 0808 802 0008

Community Legal Advice – Education: 0845 345 4345

Citizens Advice Bureaux

Helps people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free, independent and confidential advice through local bureaux and website.

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Department for Education

Lists details of telephone help lines and online services to provide information, advice and support on a range of issues that parents and families may face in bringing up children and young people.

www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families

Family Fund Trust

Helps families with severely disabled or seriously ill children to have choices and the opportunity to enjoy ordinary life. Gives grants for things that make life easier and more enjoyable for the disabled child and their family.

Address: 4 Alpha Court, Monks Cross Drive, York, YO32 9WN

www.familyfund.org.uk

Phone: 0845 130 4542

Email: info@familyfund.org.uk

Family Rights Group (FGR)

Provides advice to parents and other family members whose children are involved with or require children's social care services because of welfare needs or concerns. Publishes resources, helps to develop support groups for family and friends carers, and runs a discussion board.

www.frg.org.uk

Address: Second floor, The Print House, 18 Ashwin Street, London, E8 3DL

Phone: 020 7923 2628

Advice line: 0800 801 0366

Email: advice@frg.org.uk

The Fostering Network

Supports foster carers and anyone with an interest in fostering to improve the lives of children in care. Publishes resources and runs Fosterline, a confidential advice line for foster carers including concerns about a child's future, allegations and complaints, legislation and financial matters.

www.fostering.net

Address: 87 Blackfriars Road, London, SE1 8HA

Email: info@fostering.net

Phone: 020 7620 6400

Fosterline: 0800 040 7675

Email: fosterline@fostering.net

The Grandparents' Association

Supports grandparents and their families, especially those who have lost or are losing contact with their grandchildren because of divorce, separation or other family problems, those caring for their grandchildren on a full-time basis, and those with childcare responsibilities for their grandchildren.

www.grandparents-association.org.uk

Address: Moot House, The Stow, Harlow, Essex, CM20 3AG

Phone: 01279 428040

Helpline: 0845 434 9585

Welfare benefits advice and information: 0844 357 1033

Email: info@grandparents-association.org.uk

Grandparents Plus

Champions the role of grandparents and the wider family in children's lives, especially when they take on the caring role in difficult family circumstances.

Address: Grandparents Plus, 18 Victoria Park Square, Bethnal Green, London E2 9PF

Phone: 020 8981 8001

Email: info@grandparentsplus.org.uk

Mentor UK

Promotes the health and wellbeing of children and young people to reduce the damage that drugs can do to lives.

www.mentoruk.org.uk

Address: Fourth Floor 74, Great Eastern Street, London, EC2A 3JG

Phone: 020 7739 8494

Email: admin@mentoruk.org

Family Mediation Helpline

Provides information and advice about family mediation services and eligibility for public funding.

www.familymediationhelpline.co.uk

Phone: 08456 026627

National Family Mediation (NFM) Provides mediation services to support couples who are separated, and their children and others affected by this.

www.nfm.org.uk

Address: 4 Barnfield Hill, Exeter, EX1 1SR.

Phone: 0300 4000 636

Email: general@nfm.org.uk

Partners of Prisoners and Families Support Group Operates helpline and provides a variety of services to support anyone who has a link with someone in prison, prisoners and other agencies.

www.partnersofprisoners.co.uk

Address: Valentine House, 1079 Rochdale Road, Blackley, Manchester, M9 8AJ

Phone: 0161 702 1000

Offenders' Families Helpline Phone: 0808 808 2003

Email: info@prisonersfamilieshelpline.co.uk

Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT)

Provides practical and emotional support to prisoners and to their children and families. The Kinship Care Support Service provides support and advice to family members and friends who care for children whose parents are in HMP Holloway.

www.prisonadvice.org.uk

Address: Park Place, 12 Lawn Lane, Vauxhall, London, SW8 1UD

Helpline: 0808 808 2003

Parents Against Drug Abuse (PADA)

Delivers support and services to the families of substance users, including a national helpline.

www.pada.org.uk

Address: The Foundry, Marcus Street, Birkenhead, CH41 1EU

Phone: 0151 649 1580

National Families Helpline: 08457 023867

Parentline Plus

Provides help and support in all aspects of family life, including information, an online chat facility and a 24 hour helpline.

www.familylives.org.uk

Address: CAN, Mezzanine, 49-51 East Road, London, N1 6AH

Phone: 020 7553 3080

24 hour advice line: 0808 800 2222

Email: parentsupport@familylives.org.uk

TalktoFrank

The government's national drugs helpline which offers free confidential drugs information and advice 24 hours a day. Information and advice is also available via the website.

www.talktofrank.com

24 hour advice line: 0800 77 66 00

Text: 82111

Email: frank@talktofrank.com

Voice

Advocacy organisation for children living away from home or in need.

www.voiceyp.org

Address: 320 City Road, London, EC1V 2NZ

Phone: 020 7833 5792

Young person's advice line: 0808 800 5792

Email: info@voiceyp.org

Young Minds

Works to improve the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children and young people and empowering their parents and carers.

www.youngminds.org.uk

Address: 48-50 St John Street, London, EC1M 4DG

Phone: 020 7336 8445

Parents' helpline: 0808 802 44

Local organisations and support

The London Borough of Richmond offers a range of services to support parents and carers. For more information about these services please see Richmond's website or phone 020 8891 7969.

For advice about support that Richmond will offer adopters please contact **Sally Evenhuis**, Richmond's Adoption Support Social Worker. Sally is a member of Richmond's Adoption and Permanency Team which is based at 42 York Street, Twickenham, TW1 3BW. Sally's phone number is 020 8487 5193.

For advice about support that Richmond will offer Special Guardians please contact **Rebecca Marchington**, Richmond's Special Guardianship Social Worker. Rebecca is a member of Richmond's Adoption and Permanency Team which is based at 42 York Street, Twickenham, TW1 3BW. Rebecca's phone number is 020 8487 5465.

For information and advice about family and friends fostering, please contact Richmond's **Fostering Team**. The Fostering Team is based at 42 York Street, Twickenham TW1 3BW. Phone 020 8891 7423.

If you have difficulty understanding this document please visit reception between 9.00am and 5.00pm at the address below, where we can arrange a telephone interpreting service.

Nese keni veshtersi per te kuptuar kete botim, ju lutemi ejani ne recepcionin ne adresen e shenuar me poshte ku ne mund te organizojme perkthime nepermjet telefonit.

Albanian

إذا كانت لديك صعوبة في فهم هذا المنشور، فنرجو زيارة الإستقبال في العنوان المعطى أدناه حيث بإمكاننا أن نرتب لخدمة ترجمة شفوية هاتفية.

Arabic

এই প্রকাশনার অর্থ বুঝতে পারায় যদি আপনার কোন সমস্যা হয়, নিচে দেওয়া ঠিকানায় রিসেপশন-এ চলে আসুন যেখানে আমরা আপনাকে টেলিফোনে দোভাষীর সেবা প্রদানের ব্যবস্থা করতে পারবো।

Bengali

اگر در فهمیدن این نشریه مشکلی دارید لطفاً به میز پذیرش در آدرس قید شده در زیر مراجعه نمایید تا ترتیب ترجمه تلفنی برایتان فراهم آورده شود:

Farsi

જો તમને આ પુસ્તિકાની વિગતો સમજવામાં મુશ્કેલી પડતી હોય તો, કૃપયા નીચે જણાવેલ સ્થળના રિસેપ્શન પર આવો, જ્યાં અમે ટેલિફોન પર ગુજરાતીમાં ઇન્ટરપ્રિટીંગ સેવાની ગોઠવણ કરી આપીશું.

Gujarati

ਜੇਕਰ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਸ ਪਰਚੇ ਨੂੰ ਸਮਝਣ ਵਿਚ ਮੁਸ਼ਕਲ ਪੇਸ਼ ਆਉਂਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਪਤੇ ਉੱਪਰ ਰਿਸੈਪਸ਼ਨ 'ਤੇ ਆਓ ਜਿੱਥੇ ਅਸੀਂ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਤੇ ਗੱਲਬਾਤ ਕਰਨ ਲਈ ਇੰਟਰਪ੍ਰਿਟਰ ਦਾ ਪ੍ਰਬੰਧ ਕਰ ਸਕਦੇ ਹਾਂ।

Punjabi

اگر آپ کو اس اشاعت کو سمجھنے میں کوئی مشکل ہے تو، براہ کرم نیچے دیئے ہوئے ایڈریس کے استقبال پر جا کر ملیئے، جہاں ہم آپ کیلئے ٹیلیفون انٹرپرائٹنگ سروس (ٹیلیفون پر ترجمانی کی سروس) کا انتظام کر سکتے ہیں۔

Urdu

Please contact us if you need this leaflet in Braille, large print, on audio tape or in another language. Phone: 08456 122660 or Minicom: 020 8831 6001.

Education, Children's and Cultural Services, Civic Centre, 44 York Street, Twickenham, TW1 3BZ