

**Information
for
Family and Friends
Carers**

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I. AIM

The Royal Borough of Greenwich is committed to improve outcomes for children and young people who are unable to live with their parents and are placed in the care of ‘connected persons’ – extended family members, friends and others - known to them.

We believe that such ‘connected persons’ carers should receive support to safeguard and promote the child’s welfare, irrespective of the child’s legal status.

This document sets out the range of arrangements that enable children and young people to be cared for by people they know, if they are unable to remain in the care of their parents.

It outlines the assessment, planning and decision making process as well as the support services, which may be available from Royal Greenwich, partner agencies, such as health and housing, and voluntary agencies.

It applies to family, friends and other connected persons who are caring for, or wish to apply to care for a child or children who are known to them and who are provided with or require accommodation by the Local Authority.

[Definition: A connected person is a relative, friend or other person who is ‘connected’ with a child. This could include a person who is known to the child in a professional capacity, such as a childminder or teacher.]

This document is available on the website and as a hard copy from the Fostering Service.

2. PRINCIPLES

All decisions made in relation to children will have their best interests as the paramount consideration. The primary aim of the Local Authority is to ensure that children and young people are safeguarded and their welfare promoted so that they can achieve their full potential.

Children and young people will be encouraged to express their wishes and views about any decisions that will affect them. Their views will be taken into account and where they cannot be acted on; a clear and honest explanation will be given.

Children and young people will be supported and assisted to become independent, to reach their full potential and play an active part in their community and society as a whole.

Family, friends or connected persons will be supported to enable them to care for a child to the best of their ability. Advice and information will be given regarding partner or voluntary agencies that can also provide the services and support required.

Where a decision is made that a child or young person cannot safely return to the care of their birth parents the Local Authority will make plans for permanence in a time-scale appropriate to the child's needs.

Contact between children and young people and those important to them, including immediate and extended family, friends and community links, will be actively promoted as long as it is in the best interests of the child.

Services to children and young people, family, friends and connected persons will respect their race, culture, language, disability, sexuality, gender and faith.

Children and young people, family, friends and connected persons who are dissatisfied with the service or support they have received will be provided with information on the complaints procedure of the Local Authority.

3. LEGAL STATUS OF THE CHILD

If a child cannot live with their parent(s) Royal Borough of Greenwich will always, if it is felt to be in the child's best interests, seek to place them with a relative, friend or other connected person.

Parental responsibility may lie with a child's parent or parents, or someone who has been given parental responsibility through an order made in court, for example, a Child Arrangements Order (previously Residence Order) or Special Guardianship Order.

[Definition: Parental responsibility means all the rights, responsibilities, duties and powers which a parent of a child has which enables them, by law, to make decisions about a child and his/her property.]

Before a child is looked after by the Local Authority every effort will be made to support the parent, or those with parental responsibility, to continue to care for the child or young person. Whatever the reason the child is no longer able to live with their parent(s) they will, even if moving to people that they know and trust, find leaving home unsettling.

A child who is **placed** by the Local Authority with a family member, friend or connected person, will be a Looked After Child.

A Looked After Child can only be placed with family, friends or a connected person if that person(s) has been approved as a foster carer under the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 or granted temporary approval under the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.

Prior to a child being placed with a 'connected persons' carer a Family Group Conference (FGC) may be held to bring together all those who are involved with a child to discuss and plan for the child's future. The meeting is arranged by a co-ordinator who helps those attending to formulate a plan, from within their own network, to support the child and, where appropriate, their current carers. The plan is recorded and regularly reviewed.

4. CARING FOR SOMEONE ELSE'S CHILD

4.1. Informal arrangement with a family member

Birth parents or those with parental responsibility may ask a close relative to care for their child, either temporarily, or on a more permanent basis. The legal definition of a close relative is:

A grandparent, aunt or uncle, brother or sister (whether full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or step-parent.

The child is not a Looked After Child and parental responsibility remains with the parent. The family member cannot make any significant decisions, for example changing a child's school, without consulting the parent of the child. The responsibility to financially maintain the child remains with the parent but the person caring for the child can apply for child benefit, child tax credit or universal benefit if the parent is not claiming.

The Local Authority will not have any involvement if the child is felt to be safe and well cared for but relatives caring for the child who need help or advice, including financial assistance, can contact the Local Authority for assessment for consideration of support under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

Following the assessment to decide if the child is a 'child in need', the Local Authority will determine what if any support is required. This depends on the needs of the child and the circumstances of those who are caring for them. The child or young person does not become a Looked After Child because the Local Authority was not involved in making the arrangement.

Should a kinship carer make an application for a Special Guardianship Order, in relation to the child they are caring for under an informal arrangement, the Local authority may determine whether to pay for independent legal advice or representation for a kinship carer on a case by case basis.

4.2. Private Fostering

A parent or person with parental responsibility can make a private arrangement with someone, to whom they are not closely related, to care for their child. If this is for more than 28 days, either continuously or over the course of a year, it becomes a private fostering arrangement and the parent, and the person caring for the child, must notify the Local Authority.

Once the Local Authority is made aware of a private fostering arrangement there is a duty to make sure that the child is safe and that their needs are being met. A visit will be made to the private fostering home to assess that it is satisfactory. Statutory checks, including a health declaration and a Disclosure Barring Service (DBS), will be carried out on all members of the household over 16 years. Contact will be made with the person who placed the child and regular visits will be carried out to see the child.

The Local Authority does not 'approve' private foster carers but if the arrangement is felt to be unsuitable the Local Authority can prohibit the arrangement and the child must return to the care of their parent(s) or another alternative carer. There is no time limit for the duration of a private fostering arrangement but the Local Authority will undertake visits every 6 weeks in the first year and once every 12 weeks in subsequent years, until the child reaches 16 years of age (18 years if disabled).

The child is not a Looked After Child and the responsibility to financially maintain the child remains with the parent. The person caring for the child can apply for child benefit, child tax credit or universal benefit.

Where a private foster carer makes an application for a Special Guardianship Order, in relation to the child they are caring for under a private fostering arrangement, the Local authority will determine whether to pay for independent legal advice or representation for a private foster carer on a case by case basis.

4.3. Immediate placement by the Local Authority with a connected person

A relative, friend or a connected person who is caring for, or has been asked to care for a Looked After Child must be approved as a Family and Friends foster carer. The Local Authority may be involved in placing the child because the parent feels unable to care for the child and has asked for them to be accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 or the Local Authority feels the parent is unsuitable to care for the child and has initiated care proceedings under Section 31 of the Children Act 1989.

Any relative, friend or connected person with whom a child is to be immediately placed has to be considered for temporary approval as a foster carer under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. Prior to the child being placed an assessment should be carried out using the format outlined in Schedule 4 of the 2010 regulations. The assessment will include a DBS for all adult members of the household, a medical for each adult who will be caring for the child, local authority checks, references from family, friends and employers and details of the accommodation available.

Temporary approval under Regulation 24 of the 2010 regulations is given by a senior manager within Children's Services and is valid for 16 weeks only. If it is felt that a placement will be needed

for longer than 16 weeks then during this period a full Family and Friends assessment is carried out under Regulation 26 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011. If this assessment is not concluded before the temporary approval expires, an extension of up to 8 weeks can be given. At any time during the 16 weeks, or further 8 weeks if an extension is made, the Local Authority can make a decision not to progress with the assessment and remove the child from the placement.

A connected person temporarily approved under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, will receive a weekly allowance, linked to the London rate of the National Minimum Fostering Allowance, for each child in placement.

Where a connected person, (as above) makes an application for a Special Guardianship Order, in relation to the child they are caring for, the Local Authority will pay for independent legal advice and will determine whether to pay for representation on a case by case basis.

4.4. Emergency placement with a local authority or independent fostering agency carer whilst a connected person is identified or assessed

In an emergency the Local Authority may place a Looked After Child in a foster placement whilst they make enquiries as to whether there are any relatives, friends or connected persons who could care for the child.

If there is a relative, friend or connected person who is a potential carer the Local Authority may make a decision to undertake a preliminary assessment. This requires the family member, friend or connected person to work with the social worker to complete a report that considers their suitability to care for the child. If the outcome is positive the child may be placed immediately or a full Family and Friends fostering assessment will be carried out by the Fostering Service whilst the child remains cared for by a Local Authority foster carer.

5. CONTINUING TO CARE FOR A CHILD AS A FAMILY AND FRIENDS FOSTER CARER

5.1 Assessment for full approval as a Family and Friends foster carer

If a decision is made as part of the child's Care Plan that they are to remain in the care of a temporarily approved Family and Friends foster carer then a full assessment under the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 must be carried out.

The placement of a child with a prospective Family and Friends foster carer in an emergency will only take place in exceptional circumstances. Usually children will be placed with a mainstream foster carer whilst an assessment of the proposed carer is carried out.

The assessment will be the same as for any other carer regardless of whether or not the applicant is related or known to the child. However, the relationship the proposed carer may already have with the child is taken into account and the assessment focuses on the specific needs of the particular child or children only, not the ability of the carer to meet the needs of any child who needs to be looked after.

There is also greater flexibility in respect of the nature of the home. Looked After Children are expected to have their own room but if the child is a family member or a relative of a friend it may be appropriate for the child to share a bedroom with the carer's own child.

Prospective Family and Friends foster carers are encouraged to attend pre approval training to help them understand the expectations of the Local Authority, the complexity and challenges of caring for a child who is living away from home, and the support and advice carers can access. All Family and Friends foster carers are considered on their ability to meet the individual needs of the child related or known to them, but following approval Family and Friends foster carers are expected to fulfil all of the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for Foster Care.

In circumstances where a child is not already in placement and the Local Authority feels the applicant is not suitable to become an approved foster carer the assessing Social Worker will advise the applicant that his/her recommendation to the Fostering Panel will be not to approve. At this stage an applicant, as at any time during the assessment, may choose to withdraw.

If a Family and Friends foster carer, who has temporary approval under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, is felt to be unsuitable to continue to care for a child placed with them, the Local Authority may terminate the placement before completion of the full assessment process.

5.2 Presentation to the Fostering Panel

On completion of the full assessment, whether or not a child is already in placement with the Family and Friends foster carer, a report is presented to the Fostering Panel. A copy of the final report will be shared prior to attending Panel so that any inaccuracies can be amended and any differences of opinion can be recorded. It is not always possible to show carers all of the report as some information, such as medicals or that given by third parties, may have to be withheld. However, the recommendation of the assessing Social Worker will always be discussed with them before the Panel meeting.

A letter will be sent out giving details of the time and venue of the Fostering Panel and all carers and applicants are expected to attend. The assessment will have considered all aspects of the carers past and present lifestyle, their attitudes and beliefs, ability to work with the Local Authority and to promote contact between the child and family members. The ability to care for the child, meet their needs and understand the impact of past experiences on the child's behaviour and development will have been fully explored, as will the ability to keep a child safe and care for them to a consistently high standard in a warm and loving family environment.

Those attending Panel may bring a friend or family member with them who will act as a supporter. The supporter cannot speak on behalf of those who have been assessed unless this has been agreed in advance with the Panel Chair and Panel Adviser. It is important to tell the assessing Social Worker if a supporter is attending, as there may be occasions when it is not considered appropriate for them to be present. Applicants and carers need to be aware that the Panel may refer to information in the report that is of a personal and confidential nature, which carers may not wish to share with their supporter.

There are 3 possible recommendations the Panel can make. These are to:

- Approve
- Not approve
- Defer for further information

5.3 The role of the Agency Decision Maker

The Panel acts independently of the Fostering Service and can only make a recommendation. This is forwarded, with the assessment report and a copy of the minutes of the meeting to the Agency Decision Maker. The Agency Decision Maker must make a decision within 7 working days of receiving a final copy of the minutes of the meeting. The decision will be verbally communicated to

applicants within 2 working days and a letter confirming the decision will be sent out within 5 working days.

All applicants, including those who are currently caring for a child, can appeal if they do not agree with the decision made by the Agency Decision Maker. If the carers have been given temporary approval, their approval will be extended until such time as the appeal process is completed. Appeals must be made in writing within 28 days of receiving the Agency Decision Maker's letter, which will give details on how to appeal. Applicants may appeal through the Local Authority's own appeals process or use the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

The IRM is an independent body, which will hold a Panel meeting to review all of the information presented to the original Panel. Details on how to contact the Independent Review Mechanism will be included in the letter from the Agency Decision Maker. Although the IRM cannot change the decision made by the Local Authority they can recommend that it is reconsidered. The outcome of the IRM is sent to the Local Authority and the Agency Decision Maker will make a final decision, taking into account the recommendation of the Independent Review Mechanism.

The process for making an appeal through the Local Authority will also be outlined in the letter from the Agency Decision Maker and usually the assessment, with any additional information, will be referred back to the Fostering Panel for further consideration. The Panel's recommendation will be conveyed to the Agency Decision Maker who will take this into account when making the decision. The decision made following an appeal is final and there is no further right of appeal.

If the recommendation made by the Panel, and agreed by the Agency Decision Maker, is to defer until further information is available a time scale for a return to Panel will be set. Once the information is available a date will be arranged and applicants will be invited to attend the Panel. Any additional reports will be shared with applicants unless they contain confidential information.

Applicants who are approved will be approved for named children only and will not be eligible to care for any other child.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PLACING TEAM

6.1. Notification of the placement

The child's social worker must notify all those involved with the child that the placement has been made and an initial Looked After Child review should be arranged to take place within 20 working days of the placement starting.

Prior to, or within 5 working days of making the placement, a Placement Plan should be drawn up. The information to be recorded in the Placement Plan is specified in Schedule 2 of the 2010 Regulations. Carers need to have as much information as needed to care for the child. Where a Placement Plan is not immediately available, the carer must be told of any behaviour that has been a cause of concern in the past, or will put their home or family at risk. The carer will be given advice and support to put a safer caring policy into place in order to protect the child and other members of the family.

6.2. Financial support for the placement

Royal Borough of Greenwich (RBG) has a scheme of payments to those families who qualify, who provide substitute care of children through a range of legal options, i.e. foster care, family and friends fostering, child arrangements orders (formerly residence orders), special guardianship and adoption.

The key principle is that a fair core allowance should be set for all placement types. This is the amount which the Council agrees is the sum required to bring up a child. The Council has adopted the national core allowance figure (London rate) recommended by Central Government in their National Minimum Fostering Allowance (NMFA) which sets a clear benchmark for payments. This will ensure that there is no prejudice to meeting the child's needs with the type of order made, so that carers are not encouraged to choose one type of order over another for financial reasons.

Payments to persons other than local authority foster carers unless statutorily prescribed are discretionary and subject to means-testing.

Arrangements for financial support will be made by the placing social worker once the child is placed. Payments will be made in line with the Fostering Financial Scheme for the 16 weeks of temporary approval and, if a further extension of temporary approval is granted, payment will be made until either:

- the foster carer is fully approved
- any appeal has been heard and a final decision regarding approval made

- an order is made (for example a Special Guardianship Order)
- the placement ends.

If a carer requires additional finance to enable them to care for a child, for example, to purchase a bed or clothing, the Social Worker will submit a request for this.

6.3. Visits to the placement

If a child is placed under Regulation 24 (temporary approval as a foster carer) a visit must be made at least weekly, until such time as the first Looked After Child review meeting is held. Following this, visits must take place not less than once every 4 weeks until the carer is granted full approval under Regulation 27 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, or the final hearing of the care proceedings has taken place.

7. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

7.1 The role of the Fostering Service

Approved carers will be allocated a Supervising Social Worker (SSW) who will support and advise them. This worker is in addition to the Social Worker for the child or children who are in placement or who will be placed once the applicant is approved. When a foster carer is approved they will be joined as members of The Fostering Network. This is a voluntary agency, which provides free advice on all matters relating to fostering, including information on finances, benefits and tax. Fostering Network members can also access a help line and legal advice as well as training and support. Carers will also be given a copy of the RBG Foster Carer's Handbook, which gives information on all aspects of caring for a Looked After Child.

Although the assessment will have been completed there will continue to be a number of meetings and appointments that foster carers will need to attend. There may also be court proceedings that involve an assessment of the children, and their parents by expert witnesses. Professionals, such as the Children's Guardian who is appointed to make sure the children's views and best interests are represented within the proceedings, will want to talk to foster carers to gain an understanding of the day to day behaviour of the children they care for.

All foster carers are eligible for universal services from statutory agencies such as Housing, Health and Education, and these services are provided free of charge to everyone. However, the majority of government agencies also offer specialist services or advice which is only available to those who meet certain criteria. Family and Friends foster carers will be helped to access any services or support that is required for either themselves or the child placed with them.

7.2. The role of Family and Friends foster carers

Once approved, Family and Friends foster carers are expected to care for the child placed with them to the same professional standards as a foster carer caring for a child who is not related or known to them. The expectations of foster carers are outlined in the Foster Care agreement which carers sign shortly after their approval is confirmed.

The key points in the foster care agreement are:

- Caring for the child as a member of the family
- Agreeing not to use any physical punishment
- Informing the Local Authority of any serious injuries, accidents or illnesses the child may experience
- Informing the Local Authority if a child is missing
- Maintaining confidentiality
- Advising the Local Authority of any change of circumstances affecting the child, the foster carers or any member of the family
- Allowing the Local Authority access to the child at any time
- Allowing the Local Authority to remove the child at any time
- Working with the Local Authority to ensure that the Care Plan for the child is fulfilled.

A significant feature of Family and Friends foster care are the changes that take place in family dynamics and relationships. By taking on the day to day care of a child who is related or known, carers have to make a decision to prioritise their relationship with the child over that of the parent, who may be a mother, father, son, daughter, sister, brother, niece, nephew or close friend. It can be difficult for parents to understand the change of role and, as a foster carer, it can feel as if there is a conflict of loyalty between meeting the expectations of the parent(s) and the needs of the child. Attending the pre-approval training and support groups gives Family and Friends foster carers a forum where they can openly discuss these issues and give and receive advice from those in similar circumstances.

Family and Friends foster carers are expected to keep a day to day record of everything that affects the child they are caring for. These records will come in useful when speaking with the Supervising Social Worker, the child's Social Worker and those carrying out assessments. It will also help carers to contribute to meetings, including Looked After Children reviews and to Personal Education Plans, and can highlight areas that need to be discussed, identify work that needs to be done or timescales that have not been met.

7.3 Support after approval

Following approval a Supervising Social Worker from the fostering team will be introduced to the Family and Friends foster carers. Details will be given on the frequency of supervision visits, and the support groups and training available. Visits will be made at least 6 weekly, or more frequently if it is felt that the carer requires additional support. Two unannounced visits will also be made to the home each year by the Supervising Social Worker.

When a decision is made for a child to be placed with a Family and Friends foster carer a meeting will be held to discuss *delegated authority*. This entitles the foster carer to make day to day decisions about a Looked After Child, taking into account the views of the child, birth parents and the Local Authority. The child's placement plan should record who has authority to make particular decisions about the child and any reasons why day to day decision making is not being delegated to the child's foster carer.

The role of the Supervising Social Worker is to supervise and support the foster carer and their family – to be their 'secure base' for the foster carer to provide a secure attachment base for their Looked After Child.

Children's Services has adopted the Secure Base Model as an attachment based theoretical framework to underpin work with children and families and improve our practice. The Fostering Service has led the roll out the Secure Base Model. The model has been well received by both the foster carers and social workers and the Fostering Panel has commended the use of the Secure Base Model to evidence the capability of prospective foster carers to meet a child's emotional needs.

Following approval Family and Friends foster carers will continue to be paid an allowance in line with the Fostering Financial Scheme. The allowance covers the cost of caring for the child or children in their care. If a Family and Friends foster carer fulfils all the requirements, such as

completing the Training, Support and Development Standards and attending additional courses, they will be equally eligible for the fee payable to career foster carers.

The care provided and circumstances of the Family and Friends foster carers will be reviewed at least every 12 months to ensure that they are able to continue to safeguard and promote the child's welfare.

8. CONTACT

Contact between Family and Friends foster carers and the parents of the children they care for can work really well because of a pre-existing close relationship. However, this is not always the case and even those parents who have asked family or friends to care for their child can respond differently once a child is placed. A decision for a child to live with someone other than their parents usually indicates that the parent is struggling to put the needs of the child before their own. This can be for a number of reasons, for example, if they are experiencing physical or mental health problems, are misusing substances or are in a violent/**coercive** relationship. The parent's difficulties are unlikely to change just because the child or children are no longer with them and it can be very hard for parents to see their children being cared for by someone else.

For these, and many other reasons, contact can be a very tense time for foster carers, parents and, most importantly, children. Even though expectations and emotions before and during contact may be heightened most contact sessions go well and parents, children and foster carers have a positive experience and look forward to the next meeting. However, unfortunately this may not always be the case, and if foster carers feel they need support they must discuss their concerns with the child's Social Worker and their Supervising Social Worker. If necessary, the Local Authority can arrange contact in a neutral venue such as a contact centre, help with transporting children to and from the venue, and provide someone to supervise for a time; and to review matters if the difficulties persist.

9. FAMILY MEDIATION

There are a number of organisations, in addition to the Local Authority, that can offer family mediation. A meeting of all members of the family in a neutral venue, with someone to chair the discussion, can provide an opportunity to talk through differences and remind everyone that their

focus should be on what is best for the child. It can take families a long time to come to terms with the involvement of the Local Authority in their lives and all those involved will be experiencing strong emotions. Relationships will be changed forever, but that is not to say that they cannot once again be positive.

Children need to trust adults and it is essential that all those who care for and work with them are as honest and open as possible. Children can come to terms with some very difficult information if it is given in a way that they can understand, is consistent and is presented truthfully and without prejudice. Foster carers and parents need to try and resolve their relationship difficulties in order to support children come to terms with their past and understand their present circumstances.

10. TRAINING AND SUPPORT GROUPS

Family and Friends foster carers have access to pre-approval training designed to help them understand their and the Local Authority's role in caring for a child who is looked after. The course covers a wide range of topics including delegated authority, behaviour management, safer caring and allegations. Those who have been on the course have commented that they feel better informed and more confident in their role as Family and Friends foster carers and have made useful contacts with others in a similar situation. The course is available to carers who have recently been approved at the Fostering Panel, those who have temporary approval and those who are currently being assessed.

There is also a series of practice based sessions covering topics that Family and Friends foster carers have identified as potentially problematic, such as supervising contact and helping children to understand why they cannot live with their birth parents. Family and Friends foster carers can also attend any of the courses in the Fostering Services training programme.

All Family and Friends foster carers must, within 18 months of being approved, complete the Training Support and Development Standards for foster care. Carers are supported to complete the standards and all of the training will have direct relevance to the task of caring for a child. For those carers who need additional support, for example, if English is not a first language, resources will be identified to ensure everyone has the opportunity to complete the standards.

II. LONG TERM OPTIONS FOR CARE

II.1 Permanent fostering with a Family and Friends foster carer

Wherever possible, a permanent arrangement for a Looked After Child should result in the minimum continuing involvement of the Local Authority. Looked After Children need to have a sense of belonging to the family they are living with. They do not, on the whole, want to feel different to other children, but the statutory requirements such as Looked After Child reviews, medicals and Personal Education Plans can single them out from their peers. Therefore a decision for permanent fostering will need to be based on the individual needs of the child and the ability of the foster carers to care for the child if the Local Authority was not involved. Such a decision may be made if, for example, a child has a high level of health needs.

II.2 Child Arrangements Order

This order replaces the old Residence and Contact Orders from 22 April 2014; and anyone with these orders need not re-apply.

A Child Arrangements Order is a 'private law' order (as opposed to a Care Order which is a public law order), and the carers need to apply to a court. The order determines where the child will live and a report will be completed and presented to the court which contains the views of all those involved, including the child. The Local Authority or the parent of the child does not have to be in agreement with the application for it to be made.

A Child Arrangements Order means an order regulating arrangements to any of the following:

- a) With **whom** a child is to live, spend time or otherwise have contact;
- b) **Where** a child is to live; spend time or otherwise have contact with any person.

This order can be granted to more than one person whether they live together or not. If a Child Arrangements Order states that the child will live with a person, that person will have parental responsibility for that child until the order ceases.

A Child Arrangement Order can be considered if there is a good working relationship between the Family and Friends foster carer and the parents of a child. The parent(s) and any others who had parental responsibility for the child prior to them being looked after, retains parental responsibility but the foster carer is able to make day to day decisions. In such arrangements, as part of the

discussions prior to an application for an order, the parents and foster carers need to discuss and agree on the decisions each will be responsible for. This is called delegated authority and the carer needs to have sufficient freedom to make decisions for the child to ensure that they can carry on with their day-to-day lives with the minimum of restrictions.

The order lasts until a child reaches 18 and the carer can apply for child benefit, child tax credit or universal credit. The Local Authority can agree to the payment of an allowance at the time of the making of the order but this is discretionary, means tested and subject to annual review.

The making of a Child Arrangements Order ends the involvement of the Local Authority. The parent of a child can return to court at any time if they wish to apply to have the order revoked.

Where a carer has been granted a Child Arrangements Order and makes an application for a Special Guardianship Order, in relation to the child they are caring for, the Local Authority will determine whether to pay for independent legal advice or representation for the carer on a case by case basis.

11.3 Special Guardianship Order

A Special Guardianship Order (SGO) can be made following an application by the foster carer to a court. A foster carer can make an application for an SGO, with or without the support of the Local Authority or the parent of a child, after the child has lived with them for a year. A report is completed by the Local Authority and presented to the court.

Although parental responsibility continues to be shared by the carer and the child's parents the carer is able to override a parent and make a final decision in almost all matters. The order lasts until a child is 18 unless it is varied or discharged prior to that age. A parent must obtain leave of the court to apply for a SGO to be revoked.

As part of the report submitted to court, the Local Authority must outline the support plan for the child and the carers, both now and in the future. This may include financial assistance which is paid either as a one off payment or regular payments. Any payment will be means tested and reviewed annually. The carer can apply for child benefit, child tax credit or universal credit.

The Local Authority has discretion to provide services or support to the child or the family and, if the child was a Looked After Child prior to the making of an SGO they may be entitled to leaving care services and support.

11.4 Adoption

The Local Authority can make a decision that a child should be adopted and, if the parent is not in agreement, an application can be made to court to dispense with their consent. If the court is in agreement a Placement Order will be made.

Adoption is a lifelong decision and transfers all of the parent's parental responsibilities to the adoptive parent. It effectively severs the relationship between the child and his or her birth parents. The Local Authority, acting as an adoption agency, assesses and approves potential adopters and the court makes the order. If the child is a Looked After Child the carers must give the Local Authority notice that they intend to apply for adoption.

Until such time as an Adoption Order is made, the Local Authority will continue to supervise the placement of the child with the carers. Once the order is made the Local Authority withdraws, unless on-going involvement is part of the support plan drawn up at the time the report was presented to court. Adoptive parents have an entitlement to be assessed for support and services and may receive either a one off payment or a regular allowance, which is means tested and reviewed annually. Adoptive parents can claim child benefit, child tax credit or universal benefit.

12. COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATIONS

A complaint can be made by a child, care leaver or an adult who has requested or received a service from Royal Greenwich Children's Services. A foster carer can also make a complaint on behalf of a child.

Any complaint should initially be discussed with either the social worker, their manager or the Independent Reviewing Officer for the child. A complaint can also be made to the Children's Services Complaints Manager who can be contacted at:

The Woolwich Centre
35 Wellington Street

Woolwich SE18 6HQ

Tel. No. 020 8921 3082

A leaflet is available on:

childrens.complaints@greenwich.gov.uk

The Local Government Ombudsman is a free independent service that investigates complaints relating to councils. The LGO can be contacted at:

Local Government Ombudsmen

Tel. No. 024 7682 000

The Oaks

No 2 Westwood Way

Westwood Business Park

Coventry CV4 8JB

APPENDIX I: NATIONAL AND LOCAL RESOURCES, SERVICES AND SUPPORT AVAILABLE FROM STATUTORY AND VOLUNTARY AGENCIES

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: Broadway House, 15-17 The Broadway, Hatfield, AL9 5HZ

Tel: 020 7553 3080 E-mail: info@actionpf.org.uk

Help line: 0808 800 2222 info@prisonersfamilieshelpline.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: 120 Cromer St, Kings Cross, London WC1H 8BS

Tel: 020 3817 9410

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: 72 Durnsford Rd, Bounds Green, London N11 2EJ

General advice line: 0300 0115 142 Monday to Wednesday from 10am to 1pm. Term time only.

Email: enquiries@ace-ed.org.uk

Children's Legal Centre

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

www.childrenslegalcentre.com

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

Tel: 01206 877 910

E-mail: 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

National phone service advice line 03444 111444

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.

Tel: 0370 000 2288

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

Tel: 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

Tel: 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

Office Tel: 020 7620 6400

Members only 020 7401 9582 from 10 am-3 pm, Monday to Friday
Fosterline: 0800 040 7675
24 hour legal helpline: 0345 013 5004
Stress counselling helpline: 0345 074 2799
Email: fosterline@fostering.net

The Grandparents' Association

Supports grandparents and their families, especially those who have lost or are losing contact with their grandchildren due to 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

Tel: 01279 428040

Helpline: 0845 434 9585

Welfare benefits advice and information: 0844 357 1033

Email: info@grandparents-association.org.uk

Website: <http://www.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 1 Addington Square, London, SE5 0HF

Tel: 020 8981 8001

Advice line: 0300 1237015

Email: info@grandparentsplus.org.uk

Kooth

Free, safe and anonymous online support for young people

Monday – Friday 12pm – 10pm

Saturday – Sunday 6pm – 10pm

Mentor UK

Promotes the health and well-being 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

Tel: 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

Tel: 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

4 Barnfield Hill, Exeter EX1 1SR.

Tel: 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

Tel: 0161 702 1000

Offenders' Families Helpline Tel: 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: 29 Peckham Road, London SE5 8BU

Help line: 0808 805 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

Tel: 0151 270 2108

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

Tel: 020 7553 3080

24hr 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

Tel: 020 7833 5792

Young person's advice line: 0808 800 5792

Email: info@voiceyp.org

Young Minds

Works to improve the emotional well being 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

Tel: 020 7336 8445

Parents helpline: 0808 802 5544

LOCAL RESOURCES

Families Information Service

The Families Information Service offers help and advice on a range of issues that affect you and your family. The free service is open to anyone in Greenwich with children up to the age of 19 (or up to 25 for families with disabled young people). You can get information about: Education and early years; School services; Children with disabilities; Benefits and work. There is also support available to help you to manage your child's behaviour, help if you are experiencing domestic violence or if you or a family member need support with your health.

Find out what's available for families in Royal Greenwich

[FIS Homepage](#) – [SEND Local Offer](#) - [Preventions Directory](#)

greenwichfamiliesinformation.org.uk

South London Counselling Services

The service provides a wide range of services including family mediation, home and school mediation, counselling and a child contact centre. It also provides a range of mediation and counselling services for men, women and children; to support and strengthen family life.

www.southlondonfamilycentre.org.uk

Tel: 020 7840 9020 (Monday-Friday)

Email: soutnlondonfamily@yahoo.co.uk

Parents Support Group

Group for parents and carers needing support and advice about adolescent problems.

www.psg.org.uk

Tel: 020 8469 0205 (Helpline)

Email: admin@psg.org.uk

Al-Anon (and Al-Teen)

Local support groups for families and friends of alcoholics. Separate local support group may be available for teenage children affected by others alcohol dependency.

www.al-anonuk.org.uk

Tel: 020 7403 0888 (Helpline open all year between 10am and 10pm)

Email: enquiries@al-anonuk.org

