

Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Friends and Family Policy

Introduction

This policy sets out the principles and arrangements for supporting families caring for children under friends and family arrangements. The policy outlines:

- The values, principles and objectives of the local authority concerning friends and family care and support.
- The legal context of different types of friends and family care.
- The arrangements for support for different types of friends and family carer arrangements, including financial support, support with contact and accommodation.
- Information about family group conferences
- Information about complaints

Values, Principles and objectives

- Children should live with their birth families unless it is not safe for them to do so.
- People who care for someone else's child will always need support. This support should be based on the needs of the child.
- We believe children thrive best when living within their extended family and friends if they are not able to live with their birth parents. Keeping children as close as possible to their family and social culture reduces the likelihood of placement breakdown, reduces the anxiety in children of having to live with strangers in an unfamiliar environment and often results in better outcomes for the child¹
- To this end, workers in Family Services have a duty to look widely at friends and family networks for a child before considering any form of stranger care.
- Children, parents, family members and family friends should be involved in decision making and planning about child placements as collaboratively as possible. Children's views should be listened to and, where possible and safe to do so, taken into account when adults make arrangements.
- We respect that some families can make their own arrangements and the local authority may not need to be involved.

¹Research in Practice (RIP) briefing number 16 , 2008. For a fully referenced version visit the RIP website www.rip.org.uk/publications/researchbriefings.asp

- Where families do ask for support, the local authority will respond to this positively. Each family is unique and different and an expert on themselves, therefore they need individual support to fit their circumstances.
- Some friends and family arrangements will be supported as dictated by legal requirements. If children are not able to return to their birth families, ideally their home within the extended family or with friends would be supported by a residence order or a special guardianship order or through adoption.

Responsible officer

The Head of Service for Family and Care Resources is responsible for implementing the policy and can be contacted at;

Kensington Town Hall
Hornton Street
London W8 6QT

0207 3613317

Legal Framework

Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights, which is part of UK Law under the Human Rights Act 1998, requires public authorities to have respect for individuals and family life.

A Children in Need

Children in need are those living within the area of the local authority (RBKC).

A child in need is defined by the 1989 Children Act as follows:

He/she is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him/her of services by a local authority;

His/her health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for him/her of such services; or

He/she is disabled.

If friends and family carers were not available or had not offered to provide care the child would be at risk of becoming looked after.

The full procedure and guidance for supporting families of children in need is attached at appendix 1.

The Royal Borough provides the following support for children in need living in a friends and family arrangement:

Support package for friends and family carers of children in need.

Each friends and family arrangement for a child **not looked after** should be based on a full assessment of the child's needs, wishes and feelings. It should have:

- a. A **clear written understanding** between the child's parent and the carer that the arrangement is an informal one and that the child is not being placed by the local authority. The local authority will confirm this in writing.
- b. An **allocated social worker** to offer support under the relevant legislation. This will be reviewed and likely to end after a time.
- c. **Support for contact** with birth parents when needed.
- d. Information about and access to **support groups**
- e. **Basic equipment** e.g. every child should have their own bed. The family should have the means to prepare hot food.²
- f. **Benefits advice** to maximise benefits for the family.
- g. A basic **safeguarding check** (network check) including local police checks, health and safety, permission to contact GP, schools if relevant.
- h. All **financial support** is given with the aim of setting up an arrangement that is self-sustaining in the long time. Parents or those with parental responsibility continue to have prime responsibility for their child's maintenance. Any interim weekly payments are at maximum of income support level with a clear, written, time limit for review and end.
- i. The local authority will pay the child benefit amount for each child while an application to the child benefit agency is being processed. This will be reviewed after 6 weeks.
- j. We work together in partnership with our housing teams to ensure that our family and friends carers feel supported with their **housing requirements**. The needs of the family are considered in the viability and assessment procedure. The Council is aware that by taking a child this could give rise to accommodation overcrowding. A joint agency meeting can be arranged if the property belongs to a social landlord.

Financial Thresholds for approval

It is assumed that families being supported under this procedure would be in financial difficulties if the financial support were not provided. It is expected that they are living on benefits, low wage or in receipt of child tax allowance.

Child benefit - up to £120 per child approvable at team manager level with review by Head of Service after six weeks. Approval by Head of Service is needed to pay child benefit to the appropriate level between six weeks and receipt of child benefit.

² Start-up grant up to £500 to provide basic equipment for the child, for example bed and bedding, pushchair etc on production of receipts

Child Tax Credit - Team managers can approve an amount up to maximum up to £1000, or six weeks child tax credit, whichever is less. Sums over £1000 must be approved by Head of Service.

Start-up grant up to maximum of £500 per child on production of receipts. Team manager to approve.

Any review or extension of payments will include exploration of the efforts the family are taking to progress their claim.

B “Looked After” Children

The Children Act 1989 (amended by the Children and Young Persons act 2008) requires a local authority to seek first to place a child looked after with a relative,³ friend or someone connected to him or her. This requirement is strengthened by the Public Law Outline, which requires local authorities to show that they have considered family members and friends as potential carers at each stage of their decision-making process.

A Looked After child can only be placed with an approved foster carer, but Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, allows a child to be placed with a Connected Person⁴ for up to 16 (sixteen) weeks or while the carer is being assessed as an approved foster carer" In exceptional circumstances this can be extended by a further eight weeks with permission from the Head of Service.

These regulations, together with The Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011, set out the requirements for assessing, approving, supporting and supervising all foster carers, including those who are family members, friends or other people connected to a specific child.

The support packages available for looked after children in friends and family care are contained in the Borough's Foster Carer's Handbook and the payments scheme.⁵

³ Relative is defined as “a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether of the full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or step-parent.”

⁴ A Connected Person is defined as “A relative, friend or other person connected with a child. The latter is someone who would not fit the term ‘relative or friend’, but who has a pre-existing relationship with the child. It could be someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity such as (for example) a child-minder, a teacher or a youth worker.”

⁵ Copies of the payments scheme and the Foster Carer's Handbook are available from The Family Placement Unit ,140 Ladbroke Grove, London W10 5ND. 0207 598 4499 and 4441

C Children in Need of Permanent Care

The options for friends and family looking after children in need of permanent care secured by legal order are outlined in the Borough's leaflet "*What Is Permanence?*" Available from the Family Placement Unit.

Telephone 0207 598 4441

The support packages for children living with friends and family under a residence order, special guardianship order or adoption order are outlined in their special guardianship or adoption support plan presented to the court when the order is made.

Each plan is tailored to the specific needs of the individual child.

Payments are in accordance with the Borough's payments policy for carers of looked after children and children on permanence orders.

The Borough's leaflets on residence order allowances, special guardianship order allowances and adoption allowances give further information on the eligibility criteria for these payments and can be obtained from the Family Placement Unit. **Telephone 0207 598 4441.**

D Private Fostering

Some families will set up **private fostering** arrangements to solve their difficulties and these should be notified to the local authority under the private fostering regulations. The arrangements for private fostering are available online at http://www.proceduresonline.com/kensingtonandchelsea/childcare/keywords/private_fostering

Privately fostered children should experience feeling safe and secure and protected within their living arrangements. This means that the standard of service they receive from Children's Social Care should be robust and timely in order that the child's welfare and safeguarding matters can be satisfied.

Other sources of support for friends, family and people connected to a child in need, a looked after child or a privately fostered child.

The local authority publishes an online directory of local children's services which can be accessed via the Borough's website at www.rbkc.gov.uk/fis .

Families can also find local service information tailored to their needs by ringing 0207 361 3302. They can speak to an advisor who can help them navigate the directory and find services and organisations suitable for their needs.

A list of useful national organisations providing support to friends and family carers can be obtained from the Family Placement Unit ⁶

The Family Placement Unit also publishes a directory of state benefits available to foster carers, adopters and special guardians. A copy is available from the Family Placement Unit and is also published on line at

<http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/healthandsocialcare/adoptionandfostering/fostering.aspx>

Family Group Conferences

The Royal Borough supports Family Group Conferences (FGC) to ensure that the wider family and friends are involved in the plans for the child. A family group conference is an independently facilitated decision making and planning meeting in which the wider family group makes plans and decisions for children and young people who have been identified either by the family themselves or by the local authority as being in need of a plan that will safeguard and promote their welfare. The child is directly involved in the process, and the family make the plan. For it to be agreed the plan should take account of any conditions made by the local authority. Professionals attend the meeting to give information to the family, but the family makes the plan.

Further information about FGCs in Kensington and Chelsea is published in the Borough's leaflet " Family Group Conferences" available from The Family Group Conference Co coordinator, **0207 854 5983**.

Complaints

All local authorities are required to have a Complaints Procedure under the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 and where children are involved, under the Children Act 1989.

The Royal Borough's Complaints Procedure is available at

www.rbkc.gov.uk/fcsresponse

Or can telephone **free phone 0808 202 6210**

⁶ Friends and Family Social Worker ,Family Placement Unit, 140 Ladbrooke Grove, Westway Aid and Information Centre London W10 5ND. 0207 598 4692/4437/4441