



# Connected Persons Fostering Assessments



Walsall Council

## Introduction



When parents have difficulties at home their child may need to be cared for by someone else. Sometimes parents may be able to organise this themselves, through private family arrangements with family members or family friends.

If a social worker is concerned for the safety of the child they may go to court to seek a legal order to protect the child. The court may decide that the child should be with a family member or friend and often asks the Local Authority to assess the family member to ensure they are suitable.

These arrangements are often called “kinship care.”

## Kinship Arrangements

Kinship care is the most common arrangement for children who don't live with their parents in the UK (Kinship, 2021). There are different terms used to describe kinship care; such as connected persons care or family and friends care.

More formal care arrangements include legal orders such as a Child Arrangements Order, Special Guardianship Order or a Care Order with a fostering arrangement. It is important you talk to your Assessing Social Worker about the different orders available and the different support they provide during your assessment process.

## Viability Assessment

Before a full assessment is completed, the Children's Social Worker will complete a shorter assessment with you called a Viability Assessment. This will explore your understanding of the safeguarding concerns for the child and your understanding of fostering your commitment. It will also cover some background information to ensure that you are suitable to foster. If this assessment is positive you will progress to a full fostering assessment.

We have a separate leaflet which explains about viability assessments in more detail.

## Assessment Process

A full fostering assessment will be completed by an Assessing Social Worker from the Connected Persons Team from the Local Authority. The assessment process will take around 12 weeks.

You will be expected to be available for 8 to 10 home visits with the Assessing Social Worker during this time period. You may also be asked to complete some training during this time to prepare you for fostering.

There will be a range of checks and references completed on you and members of your household. Everyone in your household will need to be involved in the assessment and agree to have checks completed.



## Checks

To become a foster carer there are a range of checks that must be completed:



- A DBS check for adults in your household
- A medical completed with your GP
- 2 personal references for each adult being assessed
- References from your ex-partners
- Employment references
- References from your children, if they are adults
- Direct work with your children, under 18
- School references for any children in your care or your children that don't live with you
- Health checks for any children in your care
- Checks with Local Authorities where you live and have previously lived

## What will I be asked?

This may depend on your specific circumstances and the information received through the checks and references. However during all assessments you will be asked about:

- your childhood and family history
- education and employment history
- your previous relationships
- your support network
- your experience of caring for children
- your understanding of any safeguarding concerns the Local Authority have
- your ability to meet the child's or children's needs
- The impact of this on your own children



## Assessment Outcome



When the assessment is completed your Assessing Social Worker will provide you with a copy and you will have an opportunity to add your comments and response.

If you agree, your assessment will then be filed with court. This means that the Judge, Children's Guardian and parents of the child will all receive a copy. You may wish parts of the assessment to remain anonymous, you will need to discuss this with your Assessing Social Worker. This will allow the judge to make a decision about where the child should live and under what legal arrangement.

The assessment will also be sent to "foster panel" and you will then be invited to attend foster panel with your Assessing Social Worker.

## Foster Panel

To be approved as a foster carer you must follow the fostering approval process, which is:



Foster panel has members of the public who have often worked with children or have experience of fostering. They will have a copy of your assessment to read and any comments you have added. They will also have copies of all the checks and references your Assessing Social Worker has completed. You will be invited to attend a foster panel with your Assessing Social Worker. They may ask you questions about your assessment. They will then make a recommendation about whether you should be a foster carer or not. This recommendation will be given to the Agency Decision Maker with your assessment for the final decision to be made.

## Agency Decision Maker

The Agency Decision Maker is an experienced social worker who usually holds a senior role in the Local Authority. They have the authority to approve foster carers for the Local Authority. They will review your assessment and the feedback from foster panel in order to make a decision.



You will usually have their decision 2 weeks after you have attended foster panel.

## Withdrawing and Appeals Process

During the assessment process you may decide that fostering is not the best route for you. This can be a very emotional time and a difficult decision to make. At any time you can withdraw from the assessment process. All we ask is that you inform us of your decision in writing.

You may complete the assessment process and disagree with the outcome of the assessment, at this point you can follow the Local Authority complaints process and contact the Connected Persons Team Manager.

If your assessment has reached the Agency Decision Maker stage and you disagree with their decision you can appeal through the Independent Reviewing Mechanism which is a national process for all fostering decisions. We have additional leaflets on the Independent Reviewing Mechanism if required.

# Important Information



## Children's Social Worker

Name:

Contact details:

## Assessing Social Worker

Name:

Contact details:

## Assessing Social Worker's Manager

Name:

Contact details:

Date of Assessment to be filed with court:

Date of Foster Panel:

Date of Agency Decision Maker:



# Glossary

<b>Agency Decision Maker</b>	An experienced social work manager in the Local Authority who is responsible for approving foster carers.
<b>Assessing Social Worker</b>	The social worker who will be completing your assessment with you.
<b>Children's Social Worker</b>	The social worker responsible for the children.
<b>Child Arrangement Order</b>	A legal order which can decide about where a child should live and give the adults they live with Parental Responsibility for the child, equal to the Parental Responsibility the child's parents have. It can also decide who and how often a child should see other people.
<b>Care Order</b>	A legal order which provides the Local Authority with Parenting Responsibility for a child, a full care order is in place until the child is 18 years old. An Interim Care Order lasts for 8 weeks and can be extended for a further 28 days and can keep being extended until the judge decides on the final care plan for the child.
<b>Child in Care</b>	Previously known as 'Looked after child'. This is when a child is being cared for by someone else other than their parents. Either the parents have agreed under section 20 or the court has made a court order so the local authority share parental responsibility.
<b>Parental Responsibility</b>	The legal duty to look after a child and meet their needs and the legal power to make decisions about the child's care.
<b>Special Guardianship Order</b>	A legal order which provides the carer of a child with overriding Parental Responsibility, above the level the parents of the child have. This is intended to be a permanent order until the child is 18 years old.
<b>Independent Reviewing Mechanism</b>	The IRM is a review process that prospective or existing foster carers can access when they do not agree with the qualifying determination letter sent to them by their Agency Decision Maker (ADM).



