

Services for



**Children and Young People
in Buckinghamshire**

‘Looking after somebody else’s child.’

**A policy to promote and support the needs of
children living with family and friends carers**

Children and Young Peoples Service, Safeguarding Division

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Introduction

The Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, Family and Friend Care¹ published in 2011 makes it a requirement for each local authority with responsibility for children's services to publish, in collaboration with local partners, a policy setting out its approach towards promoting and supporting the needs of children living with family and friends carers, whether or not they are looked after children.

Family and Friends carers have said that they are often uncertain as to what help is available and how to access services. This policy should help family and friends carers and anyone in contact with them to understand the type of arrangements they are undertaking, the duties and responsibilities involved in these care arrangements, the types of services available and where to go for further information.

Background to the policy

Placements with family and friends carers come about because relatives or friends offer to care for the children in agreement with parents or arrangements are sometimes initiated by the local authority because of child protection or welfare concerns. A variety of family and friends arrangements exist, therefore, with or without the knowledge of the local authority and under a variety of legal arrangements.

The research evidence, although not conclusive, is broadly supportive of family and friends care as a viable option for children who cannot live at home with their parents and suggests scope for greater use of family and friends arrangements.

Much of the research highlights the high levels of commitment demonstrated by carers, their strong bonds with the children, the pleasure they found in the children themselves and the satisfaction they derive from caring.

Family and friends care is more likely to contribute to a child's sense of security and personal identity through minimising the disruption they experience in other ways. Children usually go to people they know, with whom they have a shared culture, and are more likely to remain in the same neighbourhood and school. Although carer attitudes towards parents are not necessarily favourable (depending on the circumstances leading up to these arrangements) and relationship difficulties are more common than in placements with unrelated carers, studies typically report that contact between children and their parents is more likely, though not necessarily with both parents.

The Campbell Collaborative review² concluded that children living with family and friends carers appeared to experience better outcomes with regard to behaviour problems, adaptive behaviours, psychiatric disorders, well-being and placement stability than did children with unrelated foster care. Furthermore there was no detectable difference between the groups on reunification, length of stay, family relations, or educational attainment. However, children brought up by family or friends were less likely to be adopted or make use of mental health services.

The numbers of children living with family and friends are believed to have been growing, partly because of the changing nature of family life³, growing problems with parental substance / alcohol misuse⁴ and the increasing prison population⁵. Child related factors such as disability or challenging behaviour might also be reasons.

¹ Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities. Department of Education. 2011

² Campbell Systematic Review 2009: Kinship care for the safety, permanency and well being of children removed from the home for maltreatment. Mare Winokur, Amy Holton, Deborah Valentine

³ DCSF (2010) Support for All. Family and relationships Green Paper. London. DCSF

⁴ Aldgate, J. (2009) Living in Kinship care: A Child Centred View. Adoption and Fostering.

⁵ DCSF & Ministry of Justice (2007) Children and Offenders Review. London. DCSF

Research from the 2001 census⁶ found that out of a UK population of 13.3 million children, 173,200 live with relatives. 9,004 of these were looked after and 164,196 (95%) were living in informal care arrangements.

Three distinct groups of relative carers were identified i.e. grandparents, siblings and other relative (aunts, uncles, cousins), the highest proportion being sibling carers, followed by grandparents, with other carers relatives being the smallest proportion. There were no estimates of the number of children cared for by friends.

Data from the 2001 census research showed that children living in kinship care arrangements were living with families whose characteristics were associated with increased risk of poverty and there was an over representation of ethnic minority groups. Kinship carers often had fewer educational and professional qualifications than the general population and for the most part were unemployed or in unskilled jobs.

Research about the characteristics and effectiveness of family and friends care in the UK focuses on placement of 'looked after' children with family and friends foster carers, including comparisons with children placed with unrelated foster carers. Studies by Farmer and Moyers⁷ found:

- The two groups of children were found to be remarkably similar in terms of their characteristics and the kind of adversities they had experienced prior to placement and had similar emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- Parental difficulties that led to the children being looked after were very similar.
- Family and friends foster carers were significantly more disadvantaged than unrelated foster carers, with 27% being lone carers, 31% having a disability or chronic illness, 35% living in overcrowded conditions and 75% experiencing financial hardship.

Children in family and friends care are, therefore, part of a wider group of vulnerable children who may face risk of socio-economic disadvantage and may require varying degrees of additional help and services at different times in their life. The work already undertaken in Buckinghamshire to tackle the 'Think Family' agenda, 'Care Matters' and the Child Poverty Act 2010 should help to secure better outcomes for those most in need, including those children living with family or friends, by delivering targeted and coordinated services, aimed to strengthen the ability of family members to care for children and young people.

A further overview of research evidence can be found in information sheet 10

Family and friends care in Buckinghamshire

It is estimated that Bucks has a rate of 7 to 8 children per 1,000 living with kinship carers. This compares with England at 13 and the South East at 8 per 1,000. Within the South East the range is from 1 (Wealdon) to 21 (Thanet), however Slough and Reading are 15 and 16 respectively and Milton Keynes has a rate of 9 per 1,000 children.

Based on district level data it is estimated that between 800-900 children are living with kinship carers in Bucks and that the majority (90%+) are on an informal basis.

⁶ Shaileen Nandy and Julie Selwyn April 2011 Spotlight on Kinship Care

⁷ Farmer E and Moyers S (2008) Kinship care: Fostering Effective Family and Friends Placements: Jessica Kingsley

Who this policy applies to

This policy relates to all situations where a child / young person needs to live away from their family of origin and arrangements are being considered or have been made for him or her to be cared for by family and friends.

This policy is relevant to:

- Lead Members for Children's Services in Buckinghamshire
- Directors of Children's Services
- Managers of services for children in need and looked after services
- Social workers and other social care staff working with children in need and looked after children
- Buckinghamshire County Council's relevant partners
- Other providers of services to children in need and looked after children including private and voluntary sector providers
- Family and friends carers
- Children / young people living with family and friends carers and their parents.

The policy explains how Buckinghamshire County Council Children and Young People's Service and its partner agencies exercise their duties and responsibilities to children and young people living in these types of arrangements.

The policy is issued in accordance with the Statutory Guidance for Family and Friends, Department of Education, 2011 and also has regard to the statutory framework including:

- The Children Act 1989
- The Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2011
- Replacement Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations on Private Fostering, DfES 2005
- Fostering Services Regulations 2011
- National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011
- Special Guardianship Guidance DfES 2005
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
- Adoption Regulations amended 2011
- Adoption Statutory Guidance 2011
- Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
- Equality Act 2010

Due regard has been given to any relevant case law at the time of writing.

For the purposes of this policy the definition of a family and friends carer is:

'A relative, friend or other person with a prior connection with somebody else's child who is caring for that child full time. An individual who is a 'connected person' to a looked after child may also be a family and friend carer. A child who is cared for by a family and friends carers may or may not be looked after by the local authority'.⁸

The policy is supported by a number of information sheets:

1. Routes into Family and Friends Care
2. Private Fostering
3. Informal Family and Friends Care
4. Family and Friends Foster Care
5. Residence Order
6. Special Guardianship
7. Adoption
8. Services and Support
9. Alternatives to Court
10. Research Evidence

Statement of principles underpinning this policy

Children have the right to be brought up by their own families, so far as this is consistent with their welfare. This is one of the most fundamental rights in a democratic and civilised society.

Buckinghamshire County Council recognises the important contribution family and friends make in providing care for children who for a number of reasons cannot remain with their family of origin and supports the principle of placing children with family and friends carers as first choice, where it is safe to do so and is in the interests of the child's welfare.

If children and young people have to live apart from their family of origin, both they and their parents should be given adequate information to help them to consider alternatives and contribute to the making of an informed choice about the appropriate forms of care. Parents should continue to play as full a part in their lives as possible so far as this is consistent with their welfare.

Intervention by the local authority against the will of the parent or child should be avoided where possible and when required should be the minimum needed to safeguard the welfare of the child.

Parents and family and friends carers require information and support at different stages of the child's life. These needs may arise regardless of their legal status and not everyone's needs are the same; some need extra support during difficult or uncertain times in their own lives whilst others may need more intensive help over a longer period of time. Children who live with family and friends need a range of services that support children and families according to their individual and changing needs.

In our practice, support to children living with family and friends carers is underpinned by the principles that a child's welfare is paramount, and respect should be given to individual, cultural, family and community diversity. Children and families should be active participants in all aspects of our work and we should strive to work in partnership with professionals, children, parents and extended family. Evidence based practice will be used to inform decision-making and practice intervention.

Buckinghamshire County Council is committed to anti discriminatory practice and will not discriminate against anyone on the basis of their age, disability (which includes mental health and people diagnosed as clinically obese), race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment (people who are having or who have had a sex change, transvestites and transgender people), marriage and civil partnership.

Aims and objectives.

The objectives of this policy are:

To ensure that children who have to live apart from their family of origin have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond.

To ensure that the needs of children and young people in Buckinghamshire who are unable to live with their parents are understood and strategies, policies, and services are developed with the needs of these children in mind.

To seek to ensure that family and friends carers are provided with support to ensure that children do not become, or remain longer than needed, accommodated by the local authority under section 20(1) or S31 of the 1989 Children Act.

To increase the likelihood and success of family and friend placements when children and young people cannot live with their parents.

And therefore, we aim to improve the outcomes for children who cannot live with their parent/s.

In order to achieve this we will:

Promote permanence for children by seeking to enable those children who cannot live with their parents to remain with their extended family or friends, in conditions that provide for their emotional and physical needs and are legally secure.

Provide a clear policy framework for family and friends care, which is supported by good demographic and needs data.

Work in collaboration with local partners to promote and support the needs of children living with family and friends carers, whether or not they are looked after.

Provide regularly updated information that is made freely and widely available and publicised by relevant means.

- Consult with and listen to the views of children and young people, family and friends carers and parents as appropriate when drawing up policies. Consultation to include children and adults with disabilities, using appropriate communication methods.

Consultation

In the preparation of this policy the following people have been consulted.

- Children & Young Peoples Local Trust Boards Aylesbury, Buckingham, Wendover and Wing; Marlow, Wycombe & Ridgeway and Chiltern and South Buckinghamshire.
- Commissioning and Business Improvement.
- Divisional, Operational and Team Managers for Children's Social care.
- Early Intervention and Prevention Manager
- Family Information Service
- School Improvement
- Children's Centre Managers

Implementation

This policy was approved by the Resources, Performance and Development Board for Children's Social Care on the 09/09/2011 and will be published on the Buckinghamshire County Council website at <http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/bcc>

Availability of the policy will be communicated to managers and social workers in children's social care and key partner agencies.

Further consultation will take place over the next 6 months with a group of family and friend's carers and children and young people. The policy will be updated in 12 months time and will reflect feedback from this consultation.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The Divisional Manager, Permanency and Placements, will be the senior manager who holds overall responsibility for the family and friends care policy and will ensure that the policy meets the statutory requirements, and is responsive to the needs of children and carers.

The policy will be reviewed every three years and updated as necessary by the ICS / Procedures Manager.

There will be ongoing monitoring and evaluation using statistical data and service user feedback.

The policy document invites feedback from people who are accessing and using the policy.

The next review will include consultations with family and friends carers and children who are living in family and friend care arrangements.

Appendices

1. Routes into Family and Friends Care
2. Private Fostering
3. Informal Family and Friends Care
4. Family and Friends Foster Care
5. Residence Order
6. Special Guardianship
7. Adoption
8. Services and Support
9. Alternatives to Court
10. Research Evidence

Feedback, complaints and enquiries.

We want to hear what you think about our services. We want to know when things go right, when things go wrong, and to hear your ideas on how we can do things better. What you say is important to us and will help us to improve our services to you.

Further information on how to contact us can be found on the Bucks CC web page at http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/sites/bcc/about_your_council/Feedback_and_Complaints.page or email xxx@xxx or call 0845 3708090

Glossary

'Accommodation' means that a child is being looked after by the local authority either with the agreement of the parents / those with parental responsibility (S20 Children Act 1989).

'Child' means a person under the age of 18. Where the policy refers to older children the term 'Young Person' is used.

'Child in Need' means a child whose vulnerability is such that 'they are unlikely to reach or maintain a reasonable level of health, or development or their health or development would be significantly impaired, without the provision of services by the local authority, or they are disabled' S17, Children Act 1989.

'Connected person' means a relative, friend or other person connected with a 'looked after child'. This person may be someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity such as a childminder, a teacher, or a youth worker although these are not exclusive categories.

'Family and friends carer' means a relative, friend or other person with a prior connection with somebody else's child who is caring for that child full time. An individual who is a 'connected person' to a looked after child may also be a family and friends carer. A child who is cared for by a family and friends carer may or may not be looked after by the local authority.

'Foster Carer' means a person who is approved as a foster parent (by a local authority or an independent fostering provider).

'In care' means the child is the subject of an interim or full care order or an emergency protection order.

'Informal arrangement' means an arrangement where a child is living with a family and friends carer who does not have parental responsibility for the child. These arrangements are not made by the local authority but are agreed between the carer and the person(s) with parental responsibility. These arrangements do not include children who are looked after by the local authority or where the child is privately fostered, placed for adoption or subject to a residence order or special guardianship order.

'Looked after child' means a person under 18 who is subject of a care order including an interim care order (S31 Children Act 1989), or is accommodated on a voluntary basis (S20 Children Act 1989).

'Parent' includes anyone who has parental responsibility for the child.

'Parental responsibility' means all the rights, duties, responsibilities and authority, which by law a parent of a child has in relation to the child and his property (S3 Children Act 1989).

'Private fostering arrangement' means an arrangement where a child is under 16 (or 18 if disabled) and who has not been provided with accommodation by the local authority, is cared for and accommodated by someone who does not have parental responsibility for him / her and is not a relative, and the arrangement continues for a period of 28 days or more or is intended to do so.

'Relative' means grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or stepparent. (Children Act 1989 S 105)

