

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**

Executive Summary

Children and Young Peoples Service, Safeguarding Division

Responsible Manager: Diana Large

Divisional Manager, Permanency and Placements

Date: 31st August 2011

Date of next review 31st August 2012

Name of team responsible for revising policy: ICS / Procedures Manager
Version Number 1

Introduction and background

This family and friends policy relates to all situations where a child / young person needs to live away from their birth parent(s) and alternative care arrangements with family and friends becomes an option.

The policy is produced in response to the Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, Family and Friends Care published in 2011, which requires local authorities with responsibilities for children 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.

There is a range of possible family and friends care situations including informal care, private fostering, family and friends foster care, residence order, special guardianship and adoption. The local authority may or may not be involved in the making of these arrangements and legislative duties and responsibilities determine the nature of the local authorities continued involvement with these families.

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.

The national and local picture.

The numbers of children living with family and friends are believed to have been growing, partly because of the changing nature of family life¹, growing problems with parental substance / alcohol misuse² and the increasing prison population³. Child related factors such as disability or challenging behaviour might also be reasons.

Recent research identified three distinct groups of relative carers i.e. grandparents, siblings and other relatives (aunts, uncles, cousins), the highest proportion being sibling carers, followed by grandparents, with other carers relatives being the smallest proportion.

Recent 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.

Children cared for by family and friends have been found to have remarkably similar characteristics to those children in the looked after population, in terms of the kind of adversities they had experienced prior to placement and the emotional and behavioural difficulties they present.

Research from the 2001 census⁴ 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.

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.

¹ DCSF (2010) Support for All. Family and Relationships Green Paper. London. DCSF

² Aldgate, J. (2009) Living in Kinship Care: A Child Centred View. Adoption and Fostering.

³ DCSF & Ministry of Justice (2007) Children and Offenders Review. London. DCSF

⁴ Shaileen Nandy and Julie Selwyn April 2011 Spotlight on kinship Care

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

Aims and objectives

The drivers for this policy include:

- The need 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.
- The need for family and friends carers to know the options available to them.
- The need for family and friends carers to know what help is available and how to access services and support.
- The need for greater clarity by local authorities when making decisions in respect of family and friends arrangements so that duties and responsibilities are clear to everyone from the outset and to ensure that children receive services according to their individual needs rather than their legal status.

This policy aims to ensure that the needs of children and young people in family and friends care are understood by the local authority and its partners and strategies, policies, and services are developed with the needs of these children in mind.

The policy promotes family and friends care as a permanency option for children and the importance of good demographic and needs data. The policy includes a series of information sheets, which provide a framework for understanding the different types of family and family and friend arrangements, the powers and duties of the local authority in relation to these arrangements and the services and support available within Buckinghamshire. The policy also sets out the principles governing our practice when working with family and friends carers and the children who are living with them.

Consultation and feedback

There has been consultation with a range of professionals within the local authority and with partner agencies. The feedback from these consultations has been used to enhance the current policy (e.g. as far as possible making sure the information is easy for service users and professionals from other disciplines to understand) and some information will be taken forward for consideration in the future, for example issues in relation to family and friends carers who care for a child with a disability.

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 will invite 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.