

Meeting the Needs of Children Living with Family and Friends Carers



This Policy sets out Thurrock's approach to meeting our responsibilities under the Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2011.

Our Vision for Thurrock:

*Thurrock: A place of opportunity, enterprise and excellence, where individuals, communities and businesses flourish.***Achieving Our Vision:**

To achieve our vision, we have identified five community priorities:

- **Create** a great place for learning and opportunity
- **Encourage** and promote job creation and economic prosperity
- **Build** pride, responsibility and respect to create safer communities
- **Improve** health and well-being
- **Protect** and promote our clean and green environment

Our aim:

Our aim is to become a confident, well managed and influential council regarded by residents, peers and partners as ambitious for the people of Thurrock and totally focused on meeting their current and future aspirations.

Four Pillars of the Children and Young Peoples plan

Excellent childcare, schools, colleges and services

- Raise attainment and promote engagement, resilience, active learning and economic wellbeing.
- Ensure high quality education training and services for children, young people and families.
- Ensure progression routes to higher level qualifications.

Everyone Succeeding

- Promote the attainment and achievement of under-achieving children
- Promote and support inclusion
- Reduce and mitigate the impact of child poverty and disadvantage.

Protection When Needed

- Build parental and family resilience
- Deliver outstanding services for children who have been or may be abused
- Commission or deliver outstanding services for disabled children, children in trouble and children in care

Lean and Fit for the Future

- Strong & resilient governance & leadership across the Children's Partnership & LSCB
- Strong organisational discipline
- Effective resource use through integrated strategic commissioning, capital and financial planning.

Title	Meeting the Needs of Children Living with Family and Friends Carers
Purpose	To clarify the Council's position on supporting children living in a range of situations away from their parents and to meet its obligations under the Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2011
Prepared by	Roland Minto, Service Manager
Current Version revised by	
Approved by	Children's DMT
This version Date	July 2014
Version Number	1
Review Frequency	Annual
Next review date	July 2015
Status	

Diversity statement

The council recognises that many of the children and those who apply to become family and friends carers will come from diverse ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds, and/or may have particular disabilities, and that these factors must be taken into consideration when establishing the best arrangements for children.

Consultation

This policy/function has been circulated to:

Director Children's Services
Executive Head of Service – Care and Targeted Outcomes
Service Manager Throughcare
Service Manager Children with Disabilities
Service Manager Placements and Support Services
Service Manager Family Support Services
Service Manager Service Manager YOS and Targeted Youth Support
Service Manager Safeguarding and Child Protection Coordinator
Service Manager Workforce Planning & Development

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Definitions

“The 1989 Act” means the Children Act 1989;

“The 2008 Act” means the Children and Young Persons Act 2008;

“The 2010 Regulations” means the Care Planning Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010;

“The 2011 Regulations” means the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011;

“Private Fostering” refers to The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005.

“Care Plan” means the plan for the future care of a looked after child prepared in accordance with Part 2 of the 2010 Regulations;

“A child in need” is defined in section 17(10) of the 1989 Act, which provides that a child shall be taken to be in need if (a) he is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision for him of services by a local council under this Part; (b) his health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision for him of such services; or (c) he is disabled;

“Child” means a person under the age of 18. Where the context particularly refers to older children the term “young person” is used;

“Connected person” means a relative, friend, or other person connected with a looked after child. A person in the last category may be someone who knows

the child in a more professional capacity such as a childminder, a teacher or a youth worker although there 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 council;

“Foster carer” means a person who is approved as a local council foster parent (by a local council or an independent fostering provider) in accordance with regulation 27 of the Regulations 2011, or temporarily approved under regulation 24 of the 2010 Regulations;

“Fostering service” means a local council fostering service;

“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. References to “informal arrangements” in this guidance do not include arrangements where the child is looked after by the local council or where the child is privately fostered, placed for adoption, or subject to a residence or a special guardianship order. The legislation which governs these arrangements does not apply to an informal arrangement

“Looked After Child” means a person under 18 who is subject to a care order under section 31 of the 1989 Act (including an interim care order), or is accommodated under section 20 of that Act ;

”Parent”, in relation to a child, includes any person who has parental responsibility for that child;

“Parental responsibility” has the meaning given by section 3 of the 1989 Act, being all the rights, duties, powers responsibilities and authority which by law a parent of a child has in relation to the child and his property;

“Private fostering arrangement” means an arrangement where a child who is under 16 (or 18 if disabled) and who has not been provided with accommodation by the local council, is cared for and accommodated by someone who does not have parental responsibility for him 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 step-parent, as defined in section 105 of the 1989 Act;

“Responsible council” means, in relation to a looked after child, the local council or voluntary organisation as the case may be, responsible for the child’s placement.

Values, principles and objectives

In Thurrock we believe that the majority of children are most likely to have a happy and contented childhood, and therefore grow into well-balanced and self-reliant adults, if brought up by their own birth parents.

However, we recognise that for a minority of children this will not be possible. For these children we believe that living with an adult already known to them, usually, though not necessarily, a member of the extended family will provide the best alternative.

The expression “Family and Friends Carers” is used generically to describe these arrangements, but in practice such situations may vary enormously. In some circumstances children will have become Looked After by the Local Authority in response to family crisis, and been placed by the authority with an identified individual. In many others, the solution to the child’s living arrangements will have been identified and implemented within the child’s own family network.

This policy sets out the framework of support available to children in these circumstances. It is based on the principle that as far as possible families prefer to conduct their lives without the intervention of outside agencies, and as far as is compatible with children’s safety and healthy development, Thurrock welcomes this approach.

Thurrock understands that there will be times when either the children themselves, or those caring for them, will require additional support. In such situations we will assess the needs of the child and attempt to provide support that is both timely and proportionate, in ways which reinforce rather than undermine the independence and coping mechanisms of the family in question.

Thurrock Council is also committed to the principle that, so far as is compatible with their safety and well-being, the wishes and feelings of children and young people should be taken into account in all decisions made and they should be active participants at all stages.

This policy is based on the principle that;

- In any family and friends arrangement, the child's best interests are paramount and must take precedence over the interests of others involved.
- Children unable to live with their parents should be enabled to live within their families or with friends where this is consistent with their welfare. In the great majority of cases this will not need any intervention by the council.
- The council will undertake the minimum statutory intervention in the lives of those children for whom it has a duty of care by working in partnership with family or friends through the use of this 'Family and Friends Care' Policy
- Support within family and friends arrangements will be based on the assessed needs of the child rather than their legal status. Family and friends (whether or not they are approved foster carers) may be provided with support to ensure that children do not become, or remain longer than is necessary, voluntarily accommodated by the council.
- Actions under this policy aim to promote permanence and stability for children by enabling those who cannot live with their parents to remain with members of their extended family or friends.
- Children are more likely to thrive in a place which they know will remain stable for the duration of their childhood.

Thurrock Council recognises that in some instances families will need assistance in establishing a 'permanent' arrangement legally and that those with day to day care may need to seek a legal basis for exercising their parental responsibility, so they can make appropriate decisions about the child's education, health care and wellbeing. Thurrock Council undertakes to provide appropriate advice and guidance on the options available and where relevant may provide practical support in seeking such a resolution.

It is imperative therefore that professionals working for Thurrock Council take the time to explain the relevant options to Family and Friends carers. It is also appreciated that times of family crisis may not be the best moments to explore complex legal arrangements and Social Workers and others should be prepared to revisit these discussions to ensure that carers have understood the information given, and had an opportunity to reflect calmly on the options available to them.

When children cannot live with their birth parents and are living with a Family and Friends carer, Thurrock council will expect its social workers to follow the guidelines below in relation to family and friends arrangements.

- If a child cannot live at home their parents will be expected and enabled to retain their family responsibilities and remain closely involved, as far as is consistent with their child's welfare.
- If a child cannot remain at home, all possible arrangements for the child to live with family and friends will be explored before other forms of living arrangements are considered.
- If a child has to live apart from their family both they and their parents will be given sufficient information and assistance to help them identify alternatives arrangements so they can contribute to making an informed choice about the most appropriate place for their children to live.
- If an 'out of home' arrangement is necessary, the least coercive legal status needed to meet the needs of the child will be sought.

- A child's age, gender, health, personality, race, culture and life experiences are all relevant to any consideration of needs and vulnerability and have to be taken into account when planning or providing help.
- The council has a duty to support arrangements that they have made. The level of monitoring, support and funding provided to the range of family and friends care arrangements will be based on an assessment of the child and carer's needs and clarity about the status of and accountability for the placement.

Appendix A – page 34 of this policy shows the social work process of support and intervention,

Evidence Base

National research tells us that children are more likely to thrive when safe and supportive family relationships and attachments can be maintained. Family and friends care is also likely to contribute to a child's sense of security and personal identity through minimising the degree of disruption they experience in other ways.

Research also tells that family and friends carers are more likely to be living in overcrowded conditions and suffering financial hardship than unrelated carers. Thurrock council has an understanding of the issues that affect children living in family and friends care arrangements within their area, and will work in partnership with children, their family and friends carers, parents and other stakeholders to ensure that services offered are evidence based and meet the needs of those requiring a service from the council.

Management Accountability

Responsibility for this policy rests with the Head of Service – Care and Targeted Outcomes, within the Children’s Services Directorate who will ensure that partner agencies both within and outside the council are aware of their obligations to support children in the care of family and friend carers. The responsible manager will ensure that all local authority staff understand the policy and operate within its framework so that it is applied in a consistent and fair manner across the authority

Training will be provided to ensure that all staff understand their responsibilities within the policy to provide appropriate support to family and friends carers, and are competent in the task of delivering services.

Children’s Social Care Quality Assurance Team, Thurrock Council, will monitor the implementation of this policy.

Legal Framework

Pages 14 to 22 of this policy describe the different types of Family and Friends care and seeks to explain the different legal status of each arrangement.

Social work staff working within Thurrock council to support family and friends carers will have professional knowledge and expertise that will assist carers to understand the legal status in relation to the child they are caring for. Social workers will work with children and their carers to ensure they have the necessary information to make informed choices about the most appropriate route for them to follow.

Appendix B - page 35 of this policy summarises the legal frameworks that may apply when caring for someone else's child and the entitlement to support services.

The distinctions in the types of Family and Friends arrangements

In the great majority of cases families and friends will be able to make suitable arrangements without any intervention by the council.

There is an important distinction between children in Family and Friends Foster Care and those who are subject to arrangements with their family members and friends. Children who are 'Looked After' may be placed by the Council with a relative or friend, sometimes on an immediate basis prior to being assessed as **Family and Friends Foster Carers**.

However, in circumstances where parents or those with parental responsibility make arrangements for their child to live with family or friends, this will be a private arrangement and the child will not be considered as “Looked After” by the local authority. Additionally, consideration should be given to whether this might be a private fostering arrangement (see flowchart C).

The council position is that such a child should be enabled to live with a parent, someone who has parental responsibility, a family member or relative, or any connected person such as a friend, suitable to the task unless 'it would not be reasonably practicable or consistent with his welfare' .The council will ensure that, wherever possible, children are able to grow up with family or friends, and that such arrangements are capable of providing safe and effective care for them.

Family and Friends Foster Care

This applies when a child is already ‘Looked After’ by the council and is placed with a foster carer or is in residential care. The council has an obligation to consider whether it is in the child's best interests to be placed with family, friends or another “connected person” – who is defined as a relative, friend, or other person connected with a ‘Looked After Child’ (Fostering Regulation 24).

If a family member, friend or connected person who is willing to offer support is identified the child's social worker will undertake a viability assessment to establish whether that person is likely to be able to meet the child's identified needs, both now and in the foreseeable future.

If a ‘Looked After Child’ under a care order or interim care order who has already become the responsibility of the council is enabled to live with family, friends or any other connected person then the carer **must** become approved as a local council foster parent, unless they obtain an order themselves (for

example, a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order. A “connected person” means a relative, friend, or other person connected with a ‘Looked After Child’. (From April 2014 Residence Orders have been replaced in the legislation by “Child Arrangement Orders” and any subsequent reference to these should be interpreted accordingly dependent on when the Order was made.)

Where it is assessed that the family member, friend or connected person is likely to meet the needs of the child, the council will also consider whether it is in the child's best interests to remain ‘Looked After’ by the council or not.

If a family and friends carer acquires parental responsibility either via a Special Guardianship or Residence Order the child will cease being ‘Looked After’ by the council when the order is made.

There are circumstances where it may be in the child's best interests to remain ‘Looked After’ by the council. This may occur when an assessment has been completed under an interim care order, which identifies that the child's welfare will be at risk unless action is taken by the council to obtain accommodation and care. In this case, a child may remain in care with a care order to the council but be placed within a family, or with friends or with a connected person.

In some circumstances an immediate placement of the child with a family member, friend or connected person may be approved by the council if it is judged that the placement is the most suitable means to safeguard and promote the child’s welfare and that the placement cannot wait until the full approval process can be completed. This placement will be for a maximum of 16 weeks, which allows sufficient time for all checks to be carried out. The checks may include conversations with family members about criminal convictions and may include a Criminal Records Disclosure check.

For Family and Friends Foster Care placements a Care Plan, including a Placement Plan is required in accordance with the relevant regulations governing foster care.

A person temporarily approved as a Family and Friends Foster Carer will be entitled to the same support and services that are available to unrelated Foster Carers, including relevant fostering boarding out allowance. Temporarily approved Foster Carers will receive the training and support they need to provide an appropriate level of care to the child. As the placement will have been made without the benefit of a full Fostering Assessment the visiting requirements to the placement by Social Workers are higher than for other foster placements.

Support Services for Friend and Family Foster Carer (Fostering regulation 24 'connected others')

The council recognises that some children placed in Family and Friends Foster Care may have suffered or be suffering from the effects of physical or emotional abuse. They may be at risk of further emotional trauma as a result of past experiences unless specific Foster Carer support and training packages are provided.

A child in Family and Friends Foster Care remains 'Looked After' by the council and will therefore be subject to statutory reviews (usually at least every six months) at which the child's support plan based on meeting the needs of the child will be reviewed. Such a plan will also identify what assistance the carer will require to meet the child's needs. The plans are reviewed by the child's Independent Reviewing Officer (I.R.O.) and will include specific elements relating to education, contact with parents, siblings and other family members and health issues.

Services that may be offered to a Friend and Family Foster Carer can include:

- Training programmes to assist with managing challenging behaviour.
- Referral to welfare benefits advice.
- Membership of specific support groups for friend and family foster carers.
- Referral to Children's Education and Health Project Services-e.g. speech therapy
- Referral to CAMHS - Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
- Access to 'Out of hours' advice in case of emergencies.
- Some assistance to purchase basic equipment
- Ongoing support and annual review.
- This is not an exhaustive list and assistance required will vary from case to case.

Financial Support Process-Family and Friends Foster Carers

Family and Friends Foster Carers are approved by the council as foster carers to care for a specific child or children and are entitled to receive the Boarding Out fostering allowance.

In special circumstances, additional payments may be made to assist children with special or complex health needs. Additional payments are reviewed at least annually or whenever there is a significant change in the child's special needs.

Parental Arrangements with family and friends

The council has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are 'In Need' and to consider how such children can live with their families and friends before considering any action that may result in such children becoming 'Looked After'. To do this the council may assist the family in discussing the care of a child by a family member or friend and this will involve assistance with making decisions about whether or not legal orders are required and financial and social work support (Section 17 Children Act 1989). This does not constitute a placement by the council.

The support the council may provide for family and friends arrangements can be used to promote rehabilitation plans, to enable the move to the family member or friend to take place via a single payment or to provide financial support temporarily until the family member or friend has secured Income Support or Child Tax Credit and/or other state benefits to maintain the child. Cash payments to maintain the child will not usually be made beyond eight weeks.

Support Services – arrangements for family and friends

Each family and friends arrangement for a child not 'Looked After' should have a clearly written understanding between the child's parent or person with parental responsibility and the family member or friend caring for the child that the arrangement is an informal one and that the child is not being placed by the local council.

Support services for these arrangements are assessed and offered as required under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. Needs will be assessed

by the social work team through a Child and Family Assessment. Services will be provided following assessments.

Services which may be offered to support Family and Friends arrangements may include:

- Social work support, Family Support Services
- Referral to a parenting programme
- Temporary support to assist a child to attend school
- Support to access day care provision (under 5s)
- Short term support to establish contact with birth parents (and family members)
- Information about and access to support groups e.g. Grandparents Plus etc.
- Basic equipment e.g. every child should have their own bed, the family should have the means to prepare hot food etc
- Referral to benefits advice to maximise benefits for the family.
- A basic safeguarding check, which may include local police checks, health and safety, permission to contact GP, schools if relevant.
- This is not an exhaustive list and will depend upon the needs of the child.

Special Guardianship/Child Arrangement Orders

These are "private law" orders under the Children Act 1989 enabling family or friends to apply to court to formalise the arrangement they already have in caring for the child or to seek to care for the child. Sometimes courts in care proceedings may make such orders in cases where the child is to live with a family member or friend on a long-term basis.

A Special Guardianship Order (S.G.O.) is intended to meet the needs of some children who cannot live with their birth parents for whom adoption is not appropriate for whatever reason but who could benefit from a secure long-

term family arrangement. It aims to be more robust than a Residence Order by conferring parental responsibility on the special guardian and extending their capacity to make independent decisions about the day to day care of the child, by specifying the limitations on this to key areas, such as changing the child's surname or granting permission for a child aged 16-18 to marry.

Where requested, the council will assess and provide, as considered necessary, financial and other support services as prescribed by the Children Act 1989. The council may consider that financial support is more likely to be necessary when the child has been 'Looked After' by the council because the child may well have particular needs requiring financial support, which children who have not been 'Looked After' do not have. We would not automatically provide support for a child in a Special Guardianship arrangement if they had not been looked after previously or when they would have come into care through care proceedings. It is the Council's view that an individual proposing to apply for Special Guardianship should do so on the clear understanding that this confers long term responsibility for the child, and that financial support from the local authority may be time limited and subject to review/ means testing.

If a child has not been 'Looked After' by the council, provided he/she is deemed to be a 'Child In Need', he/she may nevertheless be entitled to support under section 17 of Children Act 1989.

A Child Arrangement Order may be helpful in cases where family or friends are caring long-term for children. Unlike a S.G.O. it does not enable the person in whose favour the order is made to exercise their parental responsibility to the exclusion of anyone else with parental responsibility. A family member or friend with a Child Arrangement Order rather than a Special Guardianship Order has a greater obligation to consult parents about decisions affecting the child.

Although the parent, family member or friend will share parental responsibility, no one can act in breach of a court order. A Child Arrangement Order

determines with whom the child is to live, and will prevent the parent from removing the child from the carer.

Children subject to a family and friends arrangement, or for whom family and friends carers have one of the above orders, are not in care of the local council and are not 'Looked After', although they may have previously had 'Looked After' status.

Some children may have been 'Looked After' by the local council by having previously been accommodated with parental consent. They may cease to be 'Looked After' once they are living with their family and friends, particularly if they are of an age to make the decision to remove themselves from an existing care placement.

Financial Support – arrangements with family and friends

The council has a discretion to make financial payments on a temporary under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to a family member where the child is assessed by the council to be a 'Child in Need' and the payments are required to support the child.

The local authority can support children and their carers through the provision of services and with discretionary payments, however there is no automatic entitlement to financial support under section 17(6) Children Act 1989. The general presumption regarding arrangements made privately within families is that the parents retain responsibility for the financial maintenance of their children.

In addition from April 2011 any section 17 payments will be taken into account by the Benefits Agency as part of means testing.

When considering providing financial support to prevent children becoming 'looked after' the local authority will undertake an assessment of need, which will ensure that parents and carers have accessed all the statutory benefits to which they may be entitled. Financial support should not be given to replace these benefits. Carers should be aware that they can claim child benefit and if applicable child tax credit and disability living allowance if these are not being paid to the child's parent.

Where financial support is offered a written agreement will be drawn up detailing the level and duration of support that is to be provided as well as the mechanism for review to ensure that all parties are clear about the arrangements.

Specific arrangements may apply to carers who have succeeded in obtaining a Child Arrangement or Special Guardianship Order, particularly if this is a route supported by the local authority to enable the child to cease being 'looked after'.

Private Fostering Arrangements

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

Many private fostering arrangements (as defined within the Children, Private Arrangements for Fostering Regulations 2005) will fall within the scope of this policy.

Private foster carers may be from the extended family such as a cousin or a great Aunt. However a person who is a relative as defined under the Children

Act 1989 i.e. a grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (whether a full blood or half blood relative or by marriage) or step parent will not be a private foster carer. A private foster carer may be a friend of the family, a parent of a friend of the child or someone previously unknown to the child's family who is willing to privately foster a child. The period for which the child is cared for by the private foster carer should be continuous but that continuity is not broken by the occasional short break. Exemptions to this definition are set out in Schedule 8 of the Children Act 1989.

Privately fostered children are protected by the Children Act 1989 and The Children and Private Arrangements for Fostering Regulations 1991. This places a responsibility on local authorities' children's services departments and other agencies such as health and education, to work with the private foster carers and the child's birth parents to make sure the child's welfare is paramount priority.

Thurrock Council understands its responsibilities as set out in legislation, regulation and national standards for private foster care arrangements and provided the council is satisfied that the child is safe, secure and having their needs appropriately met, will seek to fulfil its responsibilities with the minimum of intervention whilst meeting all legal obligations.

Support and Information

Family and Friends Carers have full entitlement to access all Universal Services offered by the local authority and the relevant local voluntary organisations, regardless of whether a child is Looked After or not, and we would encourage families facing challenges to access these in the first instance.

The Family Information Service (FIS) provides free and impartial information and advice on childcare and family support services in Thurrock. The service

is aimed at parents/carers (and prospective parents) of children up to their 20th birthday.

This includes:

- Childcare registered with Ofsted, including Childminders, Day Nurseries, Pre-schools, Out of School Clubs and Holiday Schemes.
- Parent and Toddler Groups
- Advice and support on free early education places for 3 and 4 year olds
- Childcare vouchers, tax credits
- Signpost to family support services and information on activities for childcare and families
- Work/life balance
- Childcare as a career or business
- Training and qualifications
- Positive Activities (5-19 years)*

*The service is tailored to individual needs.

FIS are an experienced team with a good deal of local knowledge, and works closely with many agencies including: Job Centre Plus, Ofsted, neighbouring authorities, services for disabled children and special education needs.

Appendix C – page 39 of this policy lists local groups and services.

Early Help

In 2011 the Munro Review of Child Protection recommended that local authorities consider the provision of locally delivered services giving families the opportunity to access services at an earlier stage to prevent the need for statutory intervention.

In line with Munro's recommendation Thurrock set out a strategy of early intervention services with the primary focus of safeguarding and promoting the well being of children and young people.

Following consultation with stakeholders, children and young people, and needs analysis across existing service provision services commissioned included:

- Domestic violence – perpetrators service and support for women
- Sexual Violence support services
- Drug and alcohol family programme
- Parenting programmes
- Family Intervention Project (FIP)

The commissioned service element of the strategy has now been embedded for since 2013. Service user feedback is playing an integral part of the monitoring.

Effective individual case monitoring is ongoing in order to understand the impact of these services. This is currently being reviewed by the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB). Initial desktop analysis has been undertaken to track the progress of children through the system where a commissioned service was part of the plan. Initial indications are that where cases are referred at an earlier stage via the MAGS process, cases are being de-escalated and not subsequently referred back in the ensuing twelve months

The framework to provide an early help offer aims to improve the way children's centres, schools, social work professionals, health, police, education and partners in the voluntary, community and faith sector work together to support children, young people and families across the Borough.

With universal provision and a locality based approach with services co-located and each locality led by a manager specialising in either Social Work, Health or Education and supported by a Senior Practitioner, the Early Offer of Help system re-design is intended to reduce the risk of harm to children through earlier intervention.

In circumstances where Family and Friends Carers require additional support to care for a child that does not meet the social care threshold for intervention such services as described above can be provided on a locality basis.

Family Group Conferences

Family Group Conferences have featured prominently in Thurrock's current early help offer since 2008. FGC's are encouraged for all families where there are concerns for the children. The emphasis is to achieve a Family Plan in the earliest stages of intervention.

Following careful consideration by the Children's Service Senior Management Team, a decision was made to remodel the service in 2012. A full time Family Group Conference Coordinator was recruited who ensures the delivery of FGCs to a high standard and leads the performance management of the service. 2 additional Coordinators were recruited in 2013 to maximise efficiency within the service and to avoid any delay for the child.

The FGC approach prioritises children who may be at risk of becoming looked after, particularly as part of the Public Law Outline Pre-Proceedings stage to ensure both the engagement of the wider family in the decision making process, and offering a means of ensuring that all the resources within the family's wider social networks have been engaged for the benefit of the child.

It is accepted that Family and Friends Carers can benefit from the pooled thinking provided by Family Group Conferences in exactly the same way as other carers.

Support Groups

In many instances Family and Friends Carers do not require external support to care for a child. However it is recognised that the circumstances, which have made the arrangement necessary, may have led to a range of difficulties such as strained relationships with the birth parents or behavioural challenges

from the child. Additionally the arrival of a young child within the household may lead carers to an uncomfortable reappraisal of their role and previous relationships within the family.

Under such circumstances the support of others may be extremely valuable. Significant support will be available from universal services through the Children's Centres as described above. However there may also be a need for more targeted support.

Thurrock keeps under review the need for a specific support group for Connected Person's Foster Carers, as well as others who have taken on the responsibility for children under Child Arrangement or Special Guardianship Orders, but also respects the fact that many families wish to maintain the privacy of their own arrangements without others being aware.

Accommodation

Thurrock Council recognises that a number of family and friends carers may need support with accommodation, as overcrowding can be a factor in family and friends carer arrangements. Some family and friends carers' homes may not have capacity to take on the care of a child or sibling group, particularly if the arrangement arises out of an emergency.

Thurrock Council recognises that living in unsuitable conditions may add to the pressures of caring for a child and will work with housing authorities, associations and social housing landlords to support carers to gain appropriate housing for their needs.

Thurrock Council can support carers with some limited costs relating to housing issues under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, following an

assessment and if it is deemed as the most appropriate action to safeguard and promote a child's welfare.

Supporting Contact

Thurrock Council recognises that contact with immediate family members for children living away from home is usually a positive experience, helping them to maintain a sense of identity and belonging. However the management of contact can be a source of anxiety for some family and friends carers as family circumstances can be complex and challenging.

Thurrock Council has a duty to promote contact for all children in need and children looked after. The Child Care Act 1989 sets out the duties of the authority to promote and support contact for children and is always mindful that contact must be in the best interest of the child.

For children who are looked after by the authority, the arrangements for safe contact with parents and other family members will be clearly identified as part of their care plan. If the family can safely supervise contact within their own network, then this will be encouraged. However, when this may not be possible, particularly if the child is subject to care proceedings, the authority will be required to supervise the contact to ensure it is a positive experience for the child.

If the authority supervises the contact it is likely to take place at one of the local venues such as Oaktree Resource Centre or one of Thurrock Children's Centres. The cost of transporting the child to contact is the responsibility of the authority and in some circumstances parents can be supported financially if a child is looked after .

Further details of Thurrock Council's approach can be found in a separate policy – 'Planning and Managing Contact for Looked After Children' which is available from the authority.

For children in family or friends care arrangements contact is often arranged and managed by the carers and families themselves. The council will work with the carers and birth families to support contact and can assist with agreeing workable contact plans and arrangements. However unless there are exceptional circumstances, Thurrock will not supervise contact in private family arrangements, or where one of the parties has been granted Parental Responsibility through a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangement Order.

Thurrock council can offer advice and practical support to help children maintain contact with their birth parents and assist carers in making contact a positive experience for the child.

Complaints & Suggestions

We would like to hear from you if you have any comments or suggestions to help improve our services or if you are particularly pleased with our work.

If something has gone wrong do tell us straight away so that we can put things right as quickly as possible. We would hope to resolve most difficulties through discussion, but we recognise that in some circumstances we will not be able to satisfy everyone's hopes and aspirations.

Remember you have a right to complain and we are here to help you so please don't be afraid to ask.

Our aim is to give confidence to our customers, residents and visitors that we process complaints fairly and consistently and in line with our Customer Charter.

Social care complaints

Our adult social care and children's social care services have complaint processes that are separate to those for our other services.

You should contact the complaints manager for these service areas:

Social care complaints

Thurrock Council, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, RM17 6SL

: 01375 652 643

: ascfeedback@thurrock.gov.uk

Please address your complaint to either:

- **Adult social care complaints manager**
- **Children's social care complaints manager**

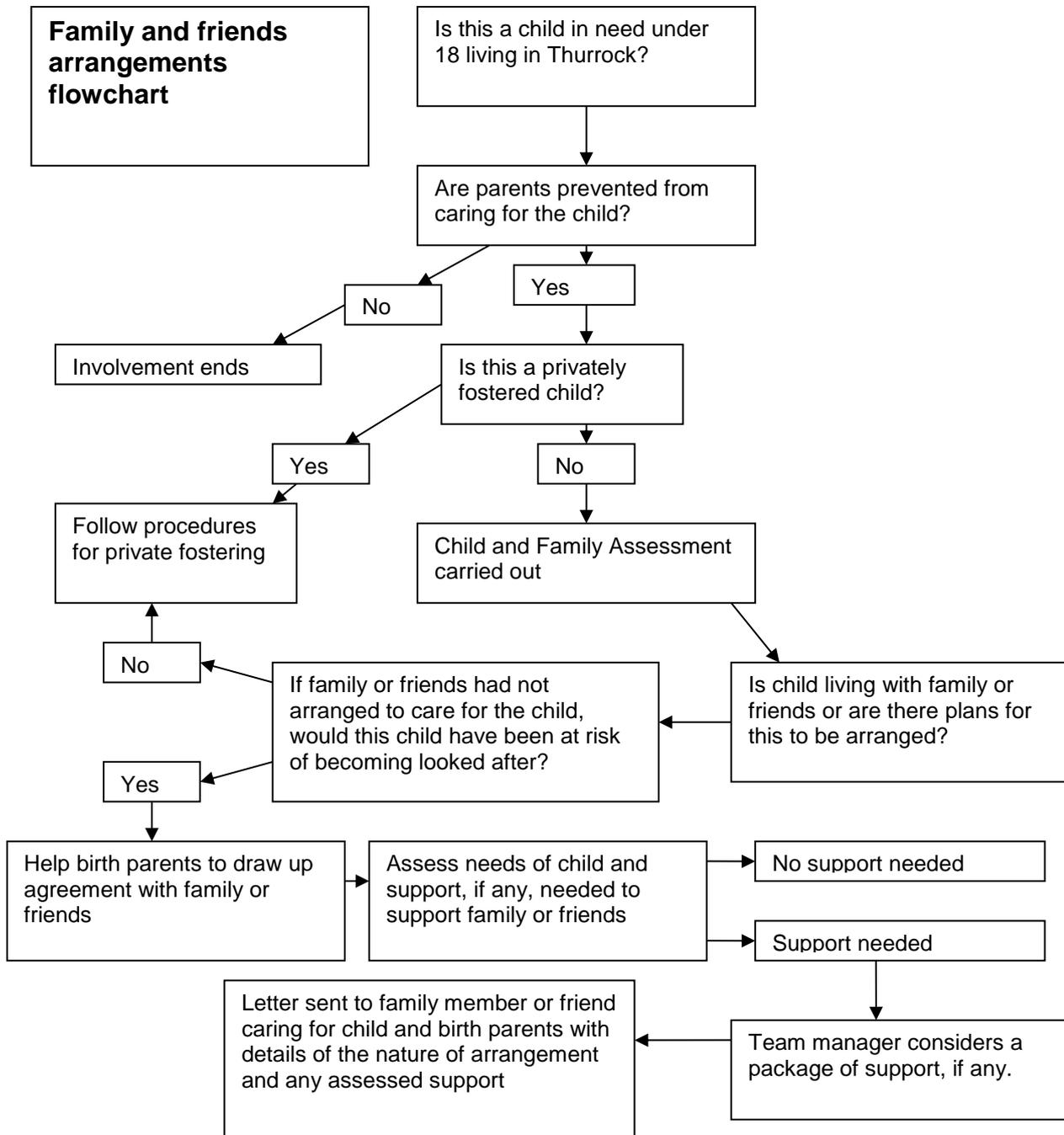
Related Policies & Documents in Thurrock

The policy works in conjunction with;

Policy Guidelines for Assessment of a Connected Person as a Foster Carer
(August 2011)

Special Guardianship Policy (currently under revision)

Appendix A - FLOW CHART OF SOCIAL WORK SUPPORT PROCESS



The Children Act 1989 definition of a relative applies:
 A relative is someone who is a:
 Grandparent, Brother or Sister, Uncle or Aunt whether by full blood, half blood, by affinity (marriage) or a step-parent.
 A step-parent is someone who is or has been a party to a marriage in relation to whom the child is a child of the family. (Section 10(5)a)
 A relative is a child's grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (by full or half blood), or by marriage **or civil registration** or a step parent. [This is a 2008 amendment to the Children Act 1989.]

Appendix B – CARING FOR SOMEBODY ELSE’S CHILD - OPTIONS

	Private Fostering	Family Care (Informal)	Family and Friends Foster Care	Unrelated Foster Care	Residence or Child Arrangement Orders	Special Guardianship Order (SGO)	Adoption
Route into the caring arrangement	<p>This is a private arrangement whereby the child is being cared for 28 days or more (or the intention is that the arrangement will last for 28 days or more) by anyone who does not have parental responsibility, and who is not a close relative.</p> <p>Relative means grandparent, brother, sister, uncle or aunt (by full blood, half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or a step parent.</p> <p>The child is not a looked after child.</p>	<p>The relative has chosen to take on the care of the child but does not have parental responsibility, and the arrangement was not made by the local authority.</p> <p>The child is not a looked after child.</p> <p>Relative may perceive the parents to be unable to care for the child;</p> <p>or the parents may be dead or otherwise not available (e.g. in prison);</p> <p>or there may be an agreement between relatives due to difficult family circumstances.</p>	<p>The child has been placed with the relative or friend by the local authority, because the person who had been caring for the child was deemed not to be providing suitable care.</p> <p>The child is a looked after child and so the local authority must approve the relative or friend as a local authority foster carer.</p> <p>The child may be accommodated voluntarily with the agreement of the parents or may be subject to a care order.</p>	<p>The child is a looked after child being accommodated by the local authority under section 20 Children Act 1989 or because the child is subject to a care order; but has been placed with a foster carer by the local authority.</p> <p>(Alternatively, the local authority may choose to place a child into residential care where this is considered to best meet the child’s needs).</p>	<p>The child may be at risk of becoming ‘looked after’ and a friend or relative applies for an order, or The child may have been ‘looked after’ and their foster carer or other relative/friend applies for an order.</p> <p>In either circumstance, application can be made without the support of the parents or the local authority. Relatives may apply for an order after the child has lived with them for one year.</p> <p>Or, there can be benign reasons, e.g. after parents’ death and in line with a prior agreement between the birth parents and the carer.</p>	<p>Looked after children: the LA may decide that the child should be placed for adoption. They can only do so with the consent of the birth parent or under a placement order made by a court.</p> <p>An approved foster carer can apply for an adoption order after a year of caring for the child.</p> <p>Other informal carers could apply for an adoption order if the child has lived with them for a period of 3 years.</p>	

Parental Responsibility	Remains with birth parents	Remains with birth parents but the person who cares for the child may do what is reasonable to safeguard or promote the child's welfare	Remains with birth parents if child accommodated under section 20 CA, or if the child is subject to a care order or emergency protection order the local authority will have parental responsibility and determines the extent to which it may be exercised by others.	Shared by parents and holder of residence order.	PR shared with parents and any one else with parental responsibility for the child. The special guardian may exercise parental responsibility to the exclusion of all others with PR, apart from another special guardian, except in key areas such as name changes, permission to marry, placing the child for adoption, etc	Transfers to adopters and relationship with birth parents is severed.
Approval basis	The arrangement is assessed by LA, but the carer is not 'approved' as a local authority foster carer is. The arrangement may be prohibited if assessed by the local authority as unsuitable.	None	Approved as local authority foster carers in accordance with Fostering Services Regulations. (If child is looked after, carers must be approved as foster carers even if close relative.)	Appointed by court following application.	Appointed by court, following application from the applicant. LA must investigate the matter and prepare a report for the court dealing with the suitability of the applicant to be a special guardian.	Adoption agency assesses and approves prospective adopters, court makes order regarding specific child. If the child is not looked after then notice of intention to adopt must be given to the LA who then carry out an assessment / report for the court.
Duration	Subject to discretion of person with PR and readiness of private foster carer.	Subject to discretion of person with PR	So long as placement remains in line with child's care plan, as determined by LA	Age 18.	Age 18 unless varied or discharged by the court before the child reaches 18 years.	Permanent lifelong relationship
Placement Supervision	It is not a placement, but there are statutory visits to child by social worker (minimum 6 weekly in first year, then 12 weekly)	None	Statutory: visits to child by social worker and supervision of foster carers by supervising social worker	None		When child is placed for adoption by the LA, the placement is supervised and there are statutory reviews. Once the adoption order is made, none.

Review of Placement	It is not a placement, but the LA may do formal reviews in addition to ongoing assessment during visits.	None	Statutory reviews of child's care plan (minimum 6 monthly) and annual reviews of local authority foster carers' approval	None		See above
Support Services	Provision of advice and support as determined necessary by the LA, which may assess the child as a child in need, with a child in need plan, and provide services / support for child/family under section 17 of the Children Act 1989	No entitlement but the LA may assess the child as a child in need, with a child in need plan, and provide services / support for child/family under section 17 of the Children Act 1989	Support to meet child's needs including health plan and personal education plan. Training and practical support to foster carers in accordance with the Fostering services Regulations, NMS and CWDC standards. Young person may be entitled to leaving care support services	No entitlement (But LA has discretion to provide services / support for child/family under section 17 of the CA)	If child was looked after prior to making the SGO, LA must assess for need for special guardianship support services. LA has discretion whether to provide support. Young person may be entitled to leaving care support services if was a looked after child prior to making of the SGO.	Entitlement to assessment for adoption support services, which may be provided at discretion of LA in accordance with Regulations and NMS.
Financial Support - entitlement	Can claim child benefit and child tax credit if not being paid to parent. Financial responsibility to maintain the child remains with holders of PR	Can claim child benefit and child tax credit if not being paid to parent. Financial responsibility to maintain the child remains with holders of PR. Guardians Allowance payable if both parents have died, or the only surviving parent cannot be found or serving 2 years or more prison sentence.	Child benefit and child tax credit not payable. Weekly allowance to meet the costs of caring for the child. This should meet at least the national minimum rate set by DCSF. The Manchester City Council judgment ruled that allowances must be the same for all foster carers, whether or not family & friends	Can claim child benefit and child tax credit if not being paid to parent.	Can claim child benefit and child tax credit if not being paid to parent.	Can claim child benefit and child tax credit if not being paid to parent. Entitlement to assessment for financial support (part of adoption support) if child looked after prior to order.

<p style="text-align: center;">Financial Support - discretionary</p>	<p>LA has discretion to make one-off or regular payments under section17 Children Act</p>	<p>LA has discretion to make one-off or regular payments under section17 Children Act</p>	<p>Some fostering providers pay their foster carers a fee to recognise the carers' skill, experience and commitment.</p> <p>The Manchester City Council judgement (which requires allowances to be paid on the same basis regardless of the relationship of the carer to the child) did not consider fees. However, Statutory Guidance for Fostering Services requires that any policy in relation to the payment of fees must be applied to all foster carers who meet the criteria in the same way and must not discriminate on the grounds of a pre-existing relationship with the child.</p>	<p>LA has discretion to pay residence order allowance – usually if child was previously fostered by the carers, or exceptionally if making residence order prevents child becoming looked after. Any allowance reviewed annually.</p>	<p>Entitled to an assessment for financial support under the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 if child looked after prior to order and meets the criteria in the regulations.</p> <p>Subject to assessment as above and for former foster carers can include an element of remuneration.</p> <p>Regular or one off payments. Any allowances reviewed annually.</p>	<p>Subject to assessment, one off payments or regular adoption allowance may be paid.</p>
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Appendix C – Contact Points & Local Services

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Network

Grandparents Plus has been funded by the Big Lottery Fund to develop the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG) Network.

Across the country, it's estimated that 200,000 grandparents and family carers are raising their grandchildren as a result of their parents' drug or alcohol misuse, imprisonment, mental health problems, disability or bereavement. These grandparents and family carers ensure that children stay within their families, providing the essential care, love and support they need. However, the grandparents and family carers themselves can often feel isolated and stigmatised, ignored by government policy and practice.

The GRG Network brings together grandparents who are raising their grandchildren and other family and friends carers to give them a voice, to share experiences, to find solutions and to tell government, children's services, the NHS, drug and alcohol agencies and others what needs to change.

Website - www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/network

Grandparents Plus

Grandparents Plus is the national charity (England and Wales) which champions the vital role of grandparents and the wider family in children's lives – especially when they take on the caring role in difficult family circumstances.

Telephone - 0300 123 7015

Email- advice@grandparentsplus.org.uk

The Grandparent's Association

The Grandparent's Association has been working with and for grandparents to achieve positive outcomes for their grandchildren for decades.

Website- www.grandparents-association.org.uk

Family Rights Group

We promote policies and practices, including family group conferences and a support framework for children living with family and friends carers

Website- www.frg.org.uk

Advice line- 0808 801 0366

Family Information Service (FIS)

The Family Information Service (FIS) provides free and impartial information and advice on childcare and family support services in Thurrock.

Website- www.askthurrock.org.uk

Tel – 01375 652801

Email – FIS@thurrock.gov.uk