

Guidance for Child Care Arrangements under Delegated Authority

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Agreed by:

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Responsible Service Area/Team: Fostering & Sufficiency Service
Corporate Parenting Service

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Document Summary

This guidance relates to arrangements for children in care, who are placed with Suffolk County Council (SCC) foster carers, being left in the care of other adults under delegated authority. It should be used by:

- social workers and managers in fostering, kinship and family help services,
- foster carers - kinship and mainstream foster carers.

to support this area of decision-making for the child or young person whilst in foster care. As well as informal arrangements, this guidance covers the more formal approach using assessed Back-Up carers.

The guidance is based on the National Minimum Standards (NMS 2011) and other statutory guidance for Fostering Services. It should be read in conjunction with the SCC policies on ***Delegating Authority to Foster Carers and Children’s Homes v.2*** (2018) and ***Placement Planning for Children in Care v.1*** (2023).

Version Control

	Reason for revision and summary of changes needed	Date
2	Updating links, references to Kinship Care and new sections re. Foster Carer to Foster Carer arrangements.	31.07.24
2.1	Updating Link to Allegations guidance, Back up carer must be over 21	13.10.25
2.2	Back-up carer: Assessment considerations, Management oversight and review; LCS recording, GDPR and addition of Appendices. SFCA consult/amendments	12.03.26 / 12.05.26

If requested, we will translate this policy, or particular parts of it, into other languages and formats, so that everyone can use and comment upon its content.

1. Introduction

Standard 7.3 (NMS 2011) states that *“Foster carers understand what is in the child’s placement plan and have clarity about decisions they can make about the day to day arrangement for the child, including such matters as education, leisure activities, overnight stays, holidays and personal issues such as haircuts”*.

It is expected that foster carers should be given the maximum appropriate flexibility to take decisions relating to children in their care, within the framework of the agreed placement plan and the law governing parental responsibility.

2. Making the decision

The Placement Planning Meeting (PPM) is the opportunity to discuss who will be making which decisions for the care of the child. Whatever is agreed will be set out in the Placement Plan and updated at each Child in Care Review, as necessary. The PPM should take place prior to the child being placed with foster carers or within 5 working days of the start of the placement e.g. if it was made in an emergency.

Childcare arrangements, overnight stays and holidays for the child must be agreed at the PPM by the child’s social worker, those with parental responsibility and the foster carer, with support from their supervising social worker. If any party is unable to attend the PPM, their agreement should still be sought and recorded in the Placement Plan.

Standard 7.7 (NMS 2011) states that:

“Children can stay overnight, holiday with friends, or friends and relatives of their foster carer, or go on school trips, subject to requirements of the care/placement plan, if foster carers consider it appropriate in individual circumstances. [DBS] checks are not normally sought as a precondition.”

If in doubt about the best decision to make or if there is reason to think that a child may be at a specific risk in staying in a particular household, the foster carers should consult the local authority for advice.

The child and their carers must be told the criteria that will be used to make decisions about overnight stays with a friend, having a holiday with their friends or with relatives of their foster carers or to go on a school trip or other visits.

In making these decisions, foster carers and responsible parties must consider the following factors:

- Whether there are any relevant restrictions or exceptional reasons, contained in the child's care plan, including the placement plan;
- Whether there are any court orders which restrict the child from making a particular overnight stay, visit or holiday;
- Whether there are any factors in the child's past experiences or behaviour which would preclude the overnight stay, visit or holiday;
- Whether there are any grounds for concern that the child may be at significant risk in the household concerned or from the activities proposed;
- The age and level of understanding of the child concerned;
- the reasons for the overnight stay, visit or holiday and the length of the stay;
- The child's existing relationship with the potential Back up carer

Where a fostered child visits or spends a holiday with their foster carer's friends or relatives, there is no requirement the individual must be approved as a local authority foster carer as the child remains formally placed with their usual foster carers.

The overriding principle applied to any consideration of delegated responsibility for alternative care arrangements by foster carers should be that no child in care is subject to multiple alternative carers/babysitters.

NOTE: In the event an allegation is made against someone caring for the fostered child(ren) under Delegated Authority, regardless of the nature of that arrangement, this would also be investigated in the context of the main foster carer(s)'s role in safeguarding children.

3. Overnight stays with the child's friends

Under delegated authority foster carers are able to agree to the child(ren) in their care staying with the child's friends overnight. It is expected, as with birth children, that the foster carer makes suitable arrangements and communicates effectively with the friend's parents to ensure that they are confident that the overnight stay is safe and appropriate.

Foster carers should always have contact details for the household in which the child will be staying. They should make contact with the household beforehand, as would any good parent, to assist in assessing the request and to confirm arrangements and to ensure that the household where the child will be staying have, in turn, the contact details of the foster carer(s).

Permission from the child in care social worker is not necessary, however the foster carer must inform both child's social worker and their SSW that these arrangements are taking place.

4. Babysitting and one off or occasional overnight and weekend stays with the foster carer's friends and relatives.

Under delegated authority foster carers can make arrangements for babysitting and one off or occasional overnight stays or weekend stays for the child with the foster carer's friends or relatives. It is expected that the foster carer knows and trusts the person who they are using and is confident they are suitable and able to manage the needs of the child for the necessary period of time.

As above, permission from the child's social worker is not necessary, where the authority has previously been delegated at the Placement Planning Meeting. However, the foster carer should inform the child's social worker and the supervising social worker that the arrangements are taking place.

NOTE: usual arrangements for babysitters, child minders or foster carers to allow a foster carer to attend fostering meetings or events are unchanged (see SCC *Schedule of Allowances* document).

5. Regular overnight arrangements with the foster carer's friends or relatives, known as formal 'Back-up carers'.

Paragraph 3.87 of the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services states that: "*Fostering services should seek to identify, as part of the approval process for a prospective carer, any individuals who may play a significant role in providing support for those carers. These may be back-up carers, regular baby-sitters, or family. There is no requirement to assess or approve these people as foster carers.*"

When foster carers require a break from fostering, many fostering households would prefer the child to be cared for by a known and trusted friend or relative.

SCC Fostering Service will need to conduct a proportional assessment of the friends or relatives who have been identified by the main fostering household as suitable to provide regular overnight stays or longer short breaks.

NOTE: All assessed 'Back-up' carers must be over 21 years of age.

Assessment and review of Back-up Carers:

A Back-up Carer suitability assessment will involve:

- A reference/information form completed by the foster carer for whom the person will be providing back-up care, to include consideration of the individual child's needs, suitability of the accommodation and any health and safety issues. (Part 1)
- An additional personal reference confirming suitability to care for children.
- DBS and Local Authority check on all adult members of the back-up carer's household (the service is responsible for any costs as it is for all foster carers).
- An assessment of the back-up carer by the supervising social worker undertaken in one visit. (Part 2)

Note: There is no requirement to undertake a medical check on back-up carers.

See Appendix 1 – Process Map

It is helpful for the service to be made aware, by either the foster carer or their proposed back-up carer, of any matter that may impact on the back-up carer's ability to care for a child safely or for which support from the service would be helpful.

Back-up carers should have an LiquidLogic (LCS) record as individuals, separate from the foster carer they will be supporting. This is because there is an assessment on them that gathers personal information. This means that, at the start of the back-up carer assessment process, they must be given a copy of the SCC CYPS Privacy Notice (or a link to the electronic version), so they know that we are holding and storing their information and to meet the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Back-up carers should be linked to the main foster carer via LCS Relationships. This is so that, when the main foster carers cease to be approved carers, the back-up carer's record is also closed down.

The assessment paperwork will require management oversight and authorisation but does not need to be presented to the Fostering Panel nor does it require (separate) Agency Decision Maker (ADM) involvement.

As above, the back-up carer is 'linked' to the fostering household and the ongoing suitability of the arrangement must be reviewed as part of the main carer's annual

household review. This is important as things may change for the back-up carer or for the main carer that need to be addressed and any action recorded. How the Back-up carers' involvement is reviewed may depend on how much care they are providing. For example, if they are providing a significant level of care then the SSW may wish to gain some direct feedback about how the arrangements are working.

When arrangements are being made for a fostered child to stay with the assessed back-up carer, the SSW and Child's SW should be advised so they know where the child is staying and with whom. This will also provide an opportunity to discuss any support needs for the child or back-up carer.

Under delegated authority to the foster carer, the supervising social worker for the carer would not routinely visit the child whilst with the back-up carer. However, the foster carer needs to ensure that the back-up carer understands that the child's social worker may wish to visit during the child's stay.

Back-up carers will be able to access training through CPD online and will be encouraged to explore issues relevant to their role as a back-up carer and particularly to ensure a child's needs can be met.

Back-up carers will not be registered foster carers and therefore will not become members of Fostering Network with their legal insurance protection cover.

Should an allegation be made against a 'back-up carer, the supervising social worker of the main fostering household will provide support and advice. Please see the guidance on Suffolk Fostering website: [2025-05-27 Allegation Guidance for Foster Carer and Prospective Adopters V5 \(3\)](#)

Kinship foster carers:

If delegated arrangements for kinship foster carers are with members of the child's family or part of the child's existing network, a full suitability assessment may not be required even if these are for regular and / or extended stays.

However, it may depend on the child's relationship with that person. For example, even within family networks there may be people the child or main carer does not know well. If the kinship carer is on the maternal side of the family, individuals on the paternal side may wish to offer overnight stays etc. In which case, an assessment of suitability may be undertaken.

The decision to undertake a suitability assessment or other checks e.g. DBS/police, will be made by the kinship foster carer with support from the kinship social worker.

Financial Arrangements for 'back-up' carers

The back-up carer can be reimbursed for their care and agreed expenses incurred whilst they care for the child. The payment for care will be equivalent to Tier Level One i.e. the usual Fostering Allowance (pro rata) dependent upon the age of the child. For current allowance rates see Suffolk's website

<https://www.fosterandadopt.suffolk.gov.uk/foster-with-us/fees-and-allowances>

The allowance and any agreed expense will be paid directly to the back-up carer by the main carer who will then claim the payment back through the LCS Carer Portal. Back up carers are responsible for declaring any payments made to them if their circumstances require them to do so e.g. as a Universal Credit Claimant or for tax purposes.

The supervising social worker will need to ensure that they confirm the dates when support has been provided with both the main carer and the 'back-up carer before they are able to approve the claim.

Using back-up carers for formal (paid) short breaks **does** count towards the main carers' short break allocation of 21 days per year per child placed. It is expected that the 'back-up carer' would not be providing any more paid care than this so carers will not be expected to claim expenses in excess of 21 days (per child placed per year).

6. Foster carers using other Foster Carers for back-up care

As well as friends and relatives, foster carers can make arrangements for babysitting and one off or occasional overnight or weekend stays for the child with other foster carers within their network of support.

As before, permission from the childcare social worker is not necessary, where the authority has previously been delegated at the Placement Planning Meeting. However, it is vital that the supervising social worker is made aware that the arrangement is taking place and it is expected as good practice that the child's social worker is also informed.

It is expected that the foster carer knows and trusts that the fellow foster carer, who they are making this arrangement with, is able to manage the needs of the child for the duration of their stay.

There may be two ways in which these ‘foster carer to foster carer’ arrangements could be made:

1. Where the foster carer receiving the child wishes to be paid as a short break carer. This will count towards the main carer’s 21 days allowance.
2. Where they do not expect to be paid and are doing it informally, perhaps in a reciprocal agreement. This will not count towards the short breaks allowance.

Consideration must also be given to foster carers undertaking childcare for other foster carers when this will bring them over the number of children in their terms of approval. Depending on the duration of the care being provided, a temporary variation or exemption would be required and approval from the Service Manager will need to be requested by the SSW in the usual way.

Please refer to Suffolk’s guidance on *Placements outside a Foster Carers’ terms of approval* (available upon request to your supervising social worker).

7. Regard for ‘family time’ arrangements.

In all cases, it is essential that any arrangements for overnight stays, visits or holidays which coincide with the child’s ‘family time’ are clearly discussed and resolved prior to the event taking place.

It is essential that anyone providing back-up care understands that they may need to support a child to see their family during the period of their stay and what this support will look like e.g. transport to a specified venue. There may be circumstances where the family time could be reorganised but often arrangements are set by the court so cannot be changed. Therefore, a conversation with the child’s social worker and the fostering social worker is crucial if any change is proposed.

Final Note

Whatever childcare arrangements are being made, it is important that these are communicated in line with agreements made during Pathway Planning about delegated authority and how it will be used by foster carers.

APPENDIX 1

BACK-UP CARER ASSESSMENT PROCESS MAP

1. Foster carer (FC) identifies potential Back-up Carer(s) and shares contact details with their Supervising SW (SSW)

2. SSW writes to proposed B-up Carer to confirm the process, share their details and a link to SCC CYPS Privacy Notice. [[Letter template Appendix 2](#)]

3. FC Completes [Back-up Carer Suitability Assessment Part 1 – Reference/Information from Foster Carer](#) and shares this with their proposed Back-up Carer(s), before submitting the completed Form 1 to their SSW

4. SSW conducts assessment visit to proposed Back-up Carer, asking them to complete the relevant [Back-up Care Agreement](#) [Appendix 3]

5. SSW seeks reference from Back-up Carer's personal referee (who is not the FC in question) [[Letter template Appendix 4](#)]

6. SSW completes the [Back-up Carer Suitability Assessment - Part 2](#) and submits to Fostering Manager for oversight and agreement.

7. Fostering Manager writes to Back-up carer to confirm agreement [[Letter template Appendix 5](#)]

APPENDIX 2 – Back-up Carer Proposal Letter template

Date:

Enquiries to: [Fostering Social Worker]

Tel:

Email:

Proposed Back-up Carer Address

Dear **Proposed Carer(s)**

Re. Fostering Back-up carer(s) for [Foster Carer(s) names]

I am writing to confirm that you have been put forward by [name of Foster Carer] as an alternative care provider for a child(ren) in their care, under delegated authority. This will be for short periods of time, as and when agreed between you and the foster carer(s).

The next steps are for [Foster Carer] to complete an Information/Reference form about you, that they will share with you, before submitting it to me as their Fostering Social worker.

I will then arrange to visit you at home to conduct an assessment with you.

Finally, once the assessment is complete, you will be asked to sign a Back-up Carer Agreement setting out key aspects of the role.

In the meantime, please find the link to Suffolk's Children's Services Privacy Notice that explains how we will use and store your information on our case recording system; and how we will protect your privacy. [Children and Young People Services \(CYP\) privacy notice - Suffolk County Council](#) . If you would prefer a paper copy of this information, please let me know.

If you have any questions about this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you in advance and I look forward to meeting with you soon,

Yours sincerely

[Name of Social Worker]

Suffolk Fostering

APPENDIX 3 – Back-up Carer Agreement

FOSTERING - BACK-UP CARER AGREEMENT	
NAME Back-up carer 1	
NAME Back-up carer 2	

In acting as back-up carers for [Main carers names] I/we agree to provide a safe and secure environment for the fostered child(ren) and to ensure their needs are met whilst in my/our care.

I/we have been given the opportunity to discuss and understand key aspects of caring for a foster child including safeguarding children specifically Family Safer Care; providing a suitable home environment; the potential for allegations and what happens in that case.

I/we have been given information about Suffolk CYPS Privacy Notice explaining how my/our information will be used and stored and my/our privacy protected.

In recognising that the child remains a Child in Care whilst in our care, I/we agree to the following:

- a. To ensure that any information given in confidence in connection with the child or his/her family is kept confidential and is not disclosed without the consent of Suffolk County Council.
- b. Not to administer corporal punishment
- c. Not to permit smoking by anyone in my/our house.
- d. To allow any paperwork in relation to our role as 'back-up' carers to be shared with the main foster carers including the outcome of DBS and other checks.
- e. To inform Suffolk Fostering Service immediately of any serious event including illness of the child or any other serious occurrence affecting the child/ren.
- f. To allow social work or other identified professionals visits in my/our home to see the fostered child(ren) at any reasonable time.
- g. To allow the child to be removed from our/my home by Suffolk County Council or a person authorised on their behalf if it is considered that to continue the arrangement would be detrimental to the welfare of the child.

Signatures

Name	Signature	Date
Back-up carer 1		
Back-up carer 2		

THIS FORM must be saved with the relevant, completed Back-up Carer FORMS 1 and 2 in LLCS.

APPENDIX 4 – Back-up Carer Reference Letter template and Form

Date:

Enquiries to: [Fostering Social Worker]

Tel:

Email:

Referee's Address

Dear [Referee]

Re. Proposed Back-up carer(s): NAMES

Address:

[Name of proposed Back-up carer] have been put forward by a Foster Carer as an alternative care provider for a child(ren) in their care, under delegated authority. This will only be for short periods of time. Your name has been provided as a referee.

I am sure you will appreciate that it is a significant responsibility to care for a child who is fostered. Your opinion as to the suitability of the person/s to provide a child with secure and stable care for short periods will be greatly appreciated.

I would be very grateful if you could answer the Reference Questionnaire enclosed and return this to me as soon as possible. It would also be helpful if you could include your telephone number in case I have any queries.

If you have any questions about this request, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you in advance for your assistance and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Name

Suffolk Fostering Service

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL FOSTERING SERVICES

REFERENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

REFERENCE FOR [Proposed Back-up Carer Names]:

- A) How long have you known the proposed carer(s)? How often do you meet and where?

- B) If you have children of your own why would you trust the proposed carer(s) to look after them overnight, or for a longer time?

- C) How do you think the proposed carer(s) set appropriate boundaries to manage children's behaviour?

- D) How do you think they would react to working with parents, relatives and friends of any child in their care?

- E) How do you think they would work with Social Care Services, Schools or Health professionals on behalf of a child?

- F) What are the good things this family has to offer a child?

- G) What do you think this/these proposed carer(s) might find difficult in caring for a child?

H) Do you know of any reason why it would be unwise for Social Care Services to agree for the child to be cared for by the proposed carer(s)?

Thank you for completing this form.

Name:

[Please Print]

Address:

Telephone No:

Signature:

Date:

IMPORTANT

Please tick if you do not wish for the contents of your reference to be shared with the proposed carer(s).

APPENDIX 5 – Back-up Carer Agreement Letter template

Date:

Enquiries to: [Fostering Social Worker]

Tel:

Email:

Back-up Carer's Address

Dear **Back up Carer(s)**

Re. Fostering Back-up carer(s) for [Foster Carer(s) names]

Thank you for completing the Back-up carer assessment process and for signing the Back-up Carer Agreement.

I am writing to confirm that you have been successfully assessed as Back-up carers for [name of Foster Carer]

You will be providing short periods of care for a child(ren) in their care, under delegated authority, as and when agreed between you and the foster carer(s).

Suffolk Fostering Services recognises how important support to carers is and knowing that they have someone who has committed to the back-up carer role for them is very welcome.

If you have any questions about this matter, please do not hesitate to contact the fostering social worker who completed your assessment. Contact details are above.

Thank you once again for coming forward to support a Suffolk Foster Carer and some of our children in care,

Yours sincerely

[Name of Fostering Manager or Service Manager]

Suffolk Fostering Service