

Home surveillance Policy for Suffolk's Fostering and Adoption Service

Operational from: December 2024

Version Number: 1

Date of [Equality Impact Assessment](#): N/a

Agreed by: CYPS Policies and Procedures Group

Responsible Service Area/Team: Corporate Parenting – Fostering and Adoption

Review date: December 2026

This policy outlines the approach and guidelines for the use of Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras and electronic surveillance in foster carers' and adopters' homes, ensuring that their use is consistent with safeguarding, privacy, and the best interests of the children placed in their care. The policy aims to balance the protection of vulnerable children with the rights of foster carers and adopters to safety, privacy and family life.

Legal Framework:

- National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011) (26.4) 'Information about individual children is kept confidential and only shared with those who have a legitimate and current need to know the information, and to those parts of a child's record or other information that they need to know.'
- UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)
- Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 18)

We will on request produce this policy, or particular parts of it, into other languages and formats, in order that everyone can use and comment upon its content.

Review Date:		
Version Control	Reason for revision and summary of changes needed	Date

Introduction

Many people, including foster carers and adopters have made the decision to have video or audio surveillance in their home. For the purpose of this policy, devices which are recording video and audio data, which is saved to cloud services come under the definition of CCTV.

It is accepted that people using CCTV are doing so, to help protect their properties from crime and to help them feel safe.

It is important however for anyone who has surveillance cameras and microphones in their home to use them in the right way and for the right reason. This is particularly important when there are children and young people, under the care of the local authority, living in the home.

We understand that the world is changing and consequently the way we view our safety has changed in line with this. There is an increased amount of CCTV out in public spaces and outside our homes, such as our cars and video ring/smart doorbells. This advancement has become an integral part of everyday life. Therefore, it is fundamental that to ensure your safety and privacy and that of a child or young person in your care that these policies are adhered to.

In response to these competing demands, the following policy has been produced to support Suffolk County Council Adoption and Fostering services and in particular foster carers and adopters regarding the use of CCTV and recording devices in the foster carers home.

The Adoption and Fostering Service has the responsibility to ensure that prospective and approved carers are suitable to work with children and young people and respect their privacy. Using CCTV and video cameras impacts on this privacy. Most homes do not use CCTV to record their families' lives and children in care should not be treated differently in this regard.

Types of surveillance

Surveillance and monitoring devices include facilities such as CCTV (both with and without voice-recording) and baby monitors.

Baby monitors: are regarded as a listening device unless they are being used to monitor the welfare of a baby when adults are not physically present in the room, e.g. when a baby is sleeping during the day.

CCTV: is closed-circuit television system on a private network. Footage is monitored mainly for surveillance and security purposes. The system uses strategically placed cameras that send the images to monitors placed elsewhere.

The Information Commissioner's Office advises that, whilst use of a domestic CCTV system may be appropriate, publicly uploading or streaming footage of identifiable people would need more justification. In most cases it would not be justifiable.

Note that audio-recording is considered as being particularly intrusive and so should be avoided unless there is a clear reason for it.

Monitoring of personal electronic devices: this includes monitoring the use of a child's own laptop, desktop, tablet, mobile phone or any other personal electronic device. This must be carried out with their knowledge and permission.

It is permissible to monitor online activity if it relates to the use of filters (i.e., parental controls) and monitoring the effectiveness of those filters to protect children from exposure to inappropriate online material and contact.

Covert Surveillance: Important note - only a court can sanction covert surveillance.

This is where the monitoring of an individual is carried out in a way, they are not aware of. This might include equipment such as hidden cameras and /or listening devices or secretly following the person. The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 governs the use of covert surveillance by public bodies.

Legislation

The Data Protection Act has significant implications for anyone already using or thinking of installing a Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV). The regulations and guidance relating to CCTV are covered by the UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA18). This legislation is regulated by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and carers must ensure that any CCTV system is operated within regulatory guidelines.

Guiding principles

Existing Foster Carers (including early permanence carers) must tell their Supervising Social Worker if they are going to install or change CCTV surveillance/ similar technology and should be expected to be asked about this at regular intervals.

Suffolk Adoption and Fostering service does not support the use of CCTV surveillance/ similar technology inside the fostering/adoptive household throughout the period in which the home is frequented by children who are 'looked after' by Suffolk County Council as Corporate Parents and any cameras inside the home should be removed prior to the approval as foster carers/adopters (Exceptional circumstances can be considered as detailed in the policy).

Smart speakers (used to play music, set alarms etc) are usually permitted in both communal and sleeping areas. Where they are connected to the internet or upload data to a third-party site however, there must be appropriate security measures in place (i.e. password authentication) to prevent the risk of hacking and to prevent children and young people accessing inappropriate material (i.e. explicit music) as far as reasonably practical.

Pet cameras are usually permitted in communal areas with the express purpose of monitoring animal behaviour when no-one else is in the household or throughout the night where this is considered necessary by the carer/s

CCTV outside the home to protect property (e.g. driveway and garden) is permitted.

For foster carers (including early permanence carers), any device which could be considered monitoring equipment (Visual and/or Audio) must be noted in the family Safer Care plan and the Home Safety Checklist. It should be made clear where the technology is situated, how it is positioned, why it is in use and that all household members are aware of it.

For prospective adopters, the use of CCTV/similar technology must be noted in the home safety checklist.

Exceptions to the use of CCTV in the household

The use of CCTV in the fostering household will only be considered where it is related to the safety of household members and there are no equally effective alternatives.

Before agreeing to CCTV being installed in the fostering household, Suffolk fostering service will first consider if the fostering household is the right place for the child/young person.

If it is felt there is a need to install a CCTV system inside the home, there must be a clear purpose for needing it, which is proportionate and balanced with the situation. Suffolk Adoption/Fostering service would not permit the installation of CCTV in a child/young person's bedroom as this is their private space and should remain so. There are however exceptions for a child/ young person who has a specific disability or health need that would warrant the use of this.

When there are no effective alternatives and that CCTV within the household is deemed necessary, the fostering/adoption Social Worker must complete a short report requesting the agreement to the use of CCTV inside the foster home. This must be signed by the Carer/s, Social Worker, Childcare Social Worker (if relevant), Practice Manager and the Service Manager. The completed and signed report should be uploaded to the carer/s file on LCS, and a copy should be provided to the carer/s to ensure any actions/comments are shared and agreed. Any agreement for CCTV equipment needs to be sought in a timely manner to ensure that everyone in the home is safeguarded and within a time frame that is practically possible.

The areas to consider in the report are (as derived from the guidance supplied by the Information Commissioners Office):

- Identify the reasons for installing the CCTV system. There are a range of measures by which a home can be safeguarded and these need to be explored first and reasons given as to why these will not be sufficient.
- It must be clear what is being recorded and viewed.
- It needs to be known if there are any other children in care within the home and how they will be affected by the CCTV system. This will be influenced by the proposed positioning of the cameras. If any system is going to be installed, then there needs to be reassurances that the privacy of others within the home and any child looked after is not compromised. The Local Authority will need to ensure that the camera is positioned appropriately.
- There will need to be an Agreement about who will have access to the images produced by the camera. It also needs to be clear as to who will take responsibility for the viewing and the disposing of any pictures or footage taken by the camera.
- It must be clear if the information is required to be used as evidence and why.
- Internet security is vital and therefore any system which has an internet connection must have the necessary up to date software to prevent this being breached.

Where it is agreed by the Service Manager that a CCTV system can be used inside the household the following principles should always be adhered to.

- All members of the household and any visitors must be aware that cameras are in place and why.

- The cameras can only be positioned in communal areas and not in bedrooms, bathrooms or toilets (save for baby monitors for very young children or a child where there is a specific and agreed need for a camera in bedrooms).
- In fostering households, the Safer Care plan must make it clear that cameras are in use within the foster home, where they are positioned and why they are being used.
- It must be made clear to all members of the household and professionals involved with the children placed, what happens to the information captured by the cameras. Information should not be stored indefinitely and deleted as soon as it is no longer necessary. If there is no use for the footage, then it must be deleted within one month. Any information which is required to be kept must be stored securely. Any information recorded by the system must only be used for the purpose for which it is intended.
- There needs to be clarity regarding who is responsible for the correct installation for the CCTV system and the accuracy and use of the information it gathers.
- The information must not be used for any purpose other than protecting the property or improving safeguarding and must not be used as a way of supervising children within the home (save for a sleeping baby being monitored from another room for example).

Further Information

The Fostering Network

Information from the Fostering Network on using CCTV at a foster home [\[https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/node/12534\]](https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/node/12534).

Advice to all foster carers and fostering services is that CCTV, or other forms of video or audio surveillance, is **not necessary or appropriate** for monitoring or managing children's behaviour. This means that this type of technology is not suitable for use inside most foster homes.

CoramBAAF

Do not consider it advisable to use CCTV/video cameras within a foster home if this is about surveillance of children.

[Guidance on the use of domestic CCTV \(Updated 1st August 2019\)](#);

Surveillance camera code of practice (2013) – information on recording images 'beyond the confines of the property'

The [Information Commissioner's Office](#) publishes guidance, e.g. 'guidance on the use of domestic CCTV and 'guidance for people being filmed by domestic CCTV'.