

UNANNOUNCED VISITS

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1. INTRODUCTION AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The requirement for unannounced visits to foster carers is set out in the Statutory Guidance and the National Minimum Standards for Foster Carers.

Fostering Services, Guidance and Regulations (2011)

5.67 Every foster carer should be allocated an appropriately qualified social worker from the fostering service (the supervising social worker) who is responsible for overseeing the support they receive. It is the supervising social worker's role to supervise the foster carer's work, to ensure that they are meeting the child's needs, and to offer support and a framework to assess the foster carer's performance and develop their skills. They must make regular visits to the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year.

National Minimum Standard 21: Support and Supervision of Foster Carers

21.8 Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year.

The purpose of the visit is also set out in the Guidance and Standards.

Fostering Services, Guidance and Regulations (2011)

3.82 Every foster home must be visited without appointment by a supervising social worker of the fostering service at least once a year, as a check on the standards of care being provided.

National Minimum Standard 10: Providing a suitable physical environment for the Foster Child

10.5 The foster home is inspected annually, without appointment, by the fostering service to make sure that it continues to meet the needs of foster children.

2. WORCESTERSHIRE FOSTERING'S PROCEDURES.

2.1 WHY DO FOSTER CARERS HAVE UNANNOUNCED VISITS

Unannounced visits are a way of the fostering service to get a better understanding of the child's lived experience within the foster home.

Although the minimum requirement is at least once a year our expectations is that there will be a minimum of at least 2 unannounced visits per year. This requirement better reflects the changing compositions of fostering households and will allow us to better monitor the experience of children.

The use of additional unannounced visits should be considered if there are concerns about the standards of care or as part of an action plan agreed with carers.

2.2 THE VISIT

Unannounced visits should be timed for when the looked after child or young person will be at home. This allows the supervising social worker to observe the relationship between the foster carers and the child or young person and speak to the child or young person about how they are getting on in the fostering household

During the unannounced visit all areas of the home should be seen, this includes the garden and any outbuildings. The supervising social worker should be checking that standards are consistent throughout the home e.g. bedrooms for looked after children are of the same standard as other bedrooms within the foster home.

Where children and young people are present, whether looked after or children of the foster carers, their permission should be sought to view their rooms. Supervising social worker should explain the reason for the request and be clear that it is not about whether bedrooms are tidy.

Although it is not necessary to complete a full health and safety during the announced visits consideration should be given to issues of health and safety. For example, are windows and doors locked, are the stairgates and fire guards in place if appropriate.

Any issues should be addressed during the visit and checked on the next visit.

If neither of the foster carers are at home when the unannounced visit is undertaken then the visit should not be continued, even if other household members are at home. It should be recorded that the visit was attempted but a further unannounced visit will need to be undertaken

If the foster carers are not at home and the looked after child or young person is home the SSW should check what the arrangements are for supervision of the child or young person (e.g. alternative carer, or if there is none when the carer is expected home).

If it is not possible for the supervising social worker to see all areas of the home and undertake appropriate checks a further unannounced visit should be completed.

3. RECORDING

The supervising social worker should complete the Visit Summary and note that it was an unannounced visit in the Purpose of Visit section. A case note should also be added but this should signpost to the completed Visit Summary. There is no need to add the details of the visit on a case note.

Team Managers as part of the supervising social worker's supervision should track unannounced visits and discuss whether there have been any issues arising from them. Outcomes of unannounced visits will be part of the foster carers annual review.

