

8 FOSTER CARE

8.1 PHILOSOPHY AND POLICY

- 8.1.1 A child is 'looked after' by the local authority if (s)he is in their care by reason of a Court order/Police protection, or is being provided with accommodation for more than 24 hours by agreement with the parents and child. If (s)he is aged 16 years or over, a child themselves may request to be 'looked after'.
- 8.1.2 In all dealings with a child and her/his family the welfare of the child is paramount. Children should be protected from neglect, abuse or exploitation.
- 8.1.3 The child's family is the prime and best provider of care and protection. Services will work with the family to support them in fulfilling this role. Whenever possible a child should stay with her/his birth family, and within her/his own community.
- 8.1.4 Children should be looked after by the local authority only if it is in the child's best interests and there is no alternative, i.e. placement with friends and relatives, or when it is seen as the most appropriate way of supporting the family.
- 8.1.5 Children who do require to be looked after by Isle of Wight Council should, wherever possible, be cared for on the Island.
- 8.1.6 Substitute family care is considered the next best option to living at home for children who require to be looked after by the local authority.
- 8.1.7 In a few exceptional situations residential care may best meet the needs of a particular child.
- 8.1.8 Ideally children are looked after as part of a planned response. High priority will be given to a full assessment of a child's needs to produce a Care Plan in order to co-ordinate services to best meet the individual child's needs. This will be reviewed as laid down in the Children Act 1989.
- 8.1.9 It is the Isle of Wight's policy to use the Department of Health's Looking after Children system which includes comprehensive documentation in the process of planning and reviewing of looked after children.

- 8.1.10 In an emergency a child can be placed with a person who is an approved foster carer for a period not exceeding 24 hours without all the usual necessary pre-placement planning.
- 8.1.11 Being looked after may be a temporary measure, or may require longer term planning. All plans and decisions will be made in partnership with parents and will take the child's wishes into account.
- 8.1.12 The emphasis throughout discussions will be on planning for the child's return home. Separation from a birth family will only be a long term solution if a child's welfare can only be secured this way or, if the child were to remain with the birth family, then development would be impaired, or harm would be likely.
- 8.1.13 Placements will be made with approved foster carers only, except where a child can be placed with a relative or friend for a maximum period of six weeks while a fostering assessment is undertaken.
- 8.1.14 For those children who cannot remain with their parents but can be cared for by friends and family, without the need to be looked after, please refer to Family and Friends (Kinship Care) Policy (See 6.11).
- 8.1.15 The Isle of Wight seeks to ensure there is an adequate choice of high quality family placements available to meet as far as possible the individual needs of each child who cannot live with their own families.
- 8.1.16 Contact between children being looked after and their parents and families will be actively encouraged.
- 8.1.17 Wherever possible siblings will be accommodated together. Where this cannot be done a high level of contact will be maintained. Children will be accommodated as near as possible to their own community, family and friends.

8.2 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND CHILDREN'S GUIDE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

- 8.2.1 Regulation 3 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 requires fostering service providers to compile a written Statement of Purpose consisting of:
- A statement of the aims and objectives of the service
 - A statement as to the services and facilities to be provided by the fostering service

- 8.2.2 The Statement of Purpose must be provided to the Commission for Social Care Inspection and to:
- Any foster carer or prospective foster carer of the fostering service
 - Any child placed with a foster carer by the fostering service
 - The parent of any such child
- 8.2.3 The Statement of Purpose must be approved by the Council's elected members and reviewed at least annually.
- 8.2.4 Copies of the current Statement of Purpose are available in all workplaces.

CHILDREN'S GUIDE

- 8.2.5 Regulation 3 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 requires fostering service providers to produce a Children's Guide to the fostering service which includes:
- A summary of the Statement of Purpose
 - A summary of the procedure established for children to make a complaint
 - Details of how children can secure access to an advocate
 - The address and telephone number of the Commission for Social Care Inspection
- 8.2.6 The Children's Guide must be provided to the Commission of Social Care Inspection and to:
- Any foster carer approved the fostering service
 - Subject to their age and understanding, any child placed with a foster carer by the fostering service
- 8.2.7 Copies of the current Children's Guide are available in all workplaces.

8.3 GENERAL RECRUITMENT OF PROSPECTIVE FOSTER CARERS

INQUIRIES

- 8.3.1 All enquiries to foster offer a potentially valuable resource and as such must be given a positive, welcoming and quick response. The enquiry should be passed immediately to the nominated fostering officer. All

enquiries should be acknowledged within the time scales as outlined in the relevant quality standards.

- 8.3.2 The nominated fostering/admin officer will collect basic information from the enquirer and sent out informative literature.
- 8.3.3 All potential applicants must be made aware that information requested at this stage will be held on the Directorate's central computer as part of the client record system, and that any previous contact with the Directorate will be investigated.
- 8.3.4 If the applicant lives off the Isle of Wight a check will be made in due course with the authority in which they live regarding any previous contact with the Social Services Department.
- 8.3.5 Once the initial enquiry form is returned a follow up initial home visit must be offered.

INITIAL SCREENING INTERVIEWS

- 8.3.6 The home visit should cover issues outlined in the Standards checklist as below:
- The requirement to attend preparation groups
 - Allowances for children looked after by the Department
 - Areas to be covered during the carer's assessment
 - Reference procedures for carers
 - Support networks
 - The statutory yearly review of carers
 - Examples of reasons why children/young people require placement
 - Contact with the child/young person's family and friends
 - Insurance issues for carers
 - Foster carer's role within the agency - pamphlet of standards must be left with the applicants
 - Applicants must be asked to declare any possible conflicts of interest
- 8.3.7 Discussions should be honest and avoid unreal expectations. It should always be made clear to applicants when they are being assessed rather than participating in exchanges of information.

- 8.3.8 An initial assessment should take place at this interview as to whether a formal application should be made or whether there is any factor that makes either the inquirers or the Directorate decide not to proceed or seek clarification of a particular point before proceeding.

PREPARATION GROUPS

- 8.3.9 Following the initial interview a report must be written by the Social Worker with a recommendation as to whether the inquirer should be invited to attend preparation groups.
- 8.3.10 The Team Manager, who will make the final decision, must consider the report and recommendations. If this decision is affirmative, the inquirer will be asked to complete an application form and invited to the next available preparation group.
- 8.3.11 Preparation groups form a mandatory part of the assessment/training of new carers and ideally should be completed during assessment and prior to approval.
- 8.3.12 Where the decision is made not to proceed to assessment applicants should be informed in writing.

8.4 ASSESSMENT OF PROSPECTIVE FOSTER CARERS

- 8.4.1 Wherever possible a Social Worker must be allocated who will make contact with the applicants to establish the timescale of the assessment and begin the home study.
- 8.4.2 Where allocation for assessment cannot happen immediately applications must be prioritised according to the resources offered.
- 8.4.3 A waiting list must be compiled and applicants notified in writing and waiting times monitored by the Team Manager.
- 8.4.4 Whenever responsibility for the care of the child is to be shared by two people in a household, e.g. mother/daughter, both should be jointly assessed and approved. Couples (married/cohabiting) must be jointly assessed and approved.
- 8.4.5 There is no typical foster family. Applications are equally welcome from people who are married, cohabiting, or single. Both single women and men can be approved as foster carers.
- 8.4.6 Applications from homosexual men and women may be accepted and considered on their individual merits. A single carer or homosexual

carer may have additional qualities to bring to the fostering task, which make them the placement of choice for a particular child.

- 8.4.7 Single foster carers who do not have the support of a partner may have special or additional needs for support and training, as may homosexual carers to deal with discrimination.
- 8.4.8 A thorough assessment expects that a full discussion of issues of sexuality and sexual orientation will take place with all prospective carers, whether homosexual or heterosexual. All assessments should look at potential risks.
- 8.4.9 All assessments should be taken to the Fostering Panel for approval, except those for Family Link carers who offer care for less than 24 hours at a time, i.e. not overnight. These assessments will be considered at the Linking Panel and approved by the Fostering Service Manager.
- 8.4.10 All Social Workers concerned with the assessment of prospective foster carers should pay attention to ascertain the motives for wanting to foster.
- 8.4.11 BAAF Form F must be used for all approvals presented to the Panel.
- 8.4.12 Proof of identity such as birth and marriage certificates must be seen and then the prospective carer should be thoroughly checked.
- 8.4.13 References must be obtained from:
- Criminal Records Bureau (for all members of the household over 18 years) which includes Department of Health Consultancy Index and List 99
 - Probation
 - Area Health - Primary Health Care
 - Education - head teachers of schools attended by children in the family
 - Personal references x 2
 - NSPCC
 - SAAFA (for Armed Service personnel)
 - Previous partners
 - Employers including all those where the work has involved contact with young people

- 8.4.14 Personal referees must be interviewed and the issues outlined on the Report on Visit to Referee Checklist discussed and recorded.
- 8.4.15 An additional interview with a member of the wider family may be helpful especially when assessing long-term carers in establishing the importance of the extended family and their attitudes towards a foster child in the family.

DEPARTMENTAL RECORDS

- 8.4.16 Records must be checked to see if applicants or other members of the family are known. If so, the file should be examined.
- 8.4.17 Where the applicant lives off the Island a request must be made to applicants' local Social Services office to check their client records system and to follow up any records held.

CHILD PROTECTION REGISTER

- 8.4.18 The IOW Register or, where the applicant lives off the Island, the relevant local Register must be checked.

OTHER REFERENCES

- 8.4.19 Where the applicant is known to the Department in the capacity of a carer/worker, e.g. childminder, volunteer, casual or sessional worker, ISP /CAS provider, then references must be taken up with the appropriate officer as to their suitability as a foster carer.

HEALTH REFERENCES

- 8.4.20 Applicants require a full medical undertaken by their own GP. On completion of a medical the BAAF Form AH must be forwarded to Medical Advisor in order that her/his comments as to the applicants health and suitability as a foster carer can be discussed when the application is taken to the Fostering Panel.

FORM F ASSESSMENT

- 8.4.21 The Form F assessment should take the form of home visits to identify all the factors which contribute to a general picture of the applicants, their accommodation, their family and way of life in order to determine whether an applicant can be considered suitable to be a foster carer.

- 8.4.22 Couples who are being assessed should be interviewed at least once separately.
- 8.4.23 Children of the family should be interviewed to ascertain their feelings and views. The impact of fostering on the carer's own children should be carefully discussed and considered with the applicant.
- 8.4.24 Applicants and their children should be offered access to relevant training material such as the Children Who Foster video. Where the prospective carer has children who are not living in the household, the extent of the contact should be explored.
- 8.4.25 The assessing Social Worker must visit on at least one occasion when they can meet the entire household and explore the relationships of all the members. The extent to which other members of the household may participate in the care and daily life of a foster child; and the demands which are made on the applicants by other members of the household, e.g. elderly relatives requiring care.

Individual Particulars which must be Covered

- 8.4.26 Particulars relating to the prospective foster carer and other persons in the household which must be covered in the assessment are set out in the BAAF Form F.

SAFE CARING GUIDELINES

- 8.4.27 Standard 9.3 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services requires safe caring guidelines to be provided, based on a written policy, for each foster home, in consultation with the carer and everyone else in the household. These guidelines must be cleared with each child's Social Worker and be explained clearly and appropriately to the child.
- 8.4.28 Social Workers should ensure that guidelines are produced, based on this policy, during the assessment process (See 7.1). Social Workers must ensure that all members of the household are involved in this process and agreement is reached on the final guidelines.
- 8.4.29 This process should also be used as part of the preparation of applicants. It will present both the worker and the applicants with opportunities to reflect on their attitude to issues of abuse and how prepared they are to take on board the implications of abuse for both their household and any child they may foster.

GROUP ASSESSMENTS

- 8.4.30 In some situations prospective applicants will have been assessed using both individual and group meetings.
- 8.4.31 The BAAF Form F will be used and the areas outlined above will be covered. The primary difference will be that some of the information will have been collected in group rather than individual interviews. It is believed that the group process facilitates different aspects of the applicant's skills, personality and strengths to become apparent to the assessors.
- 8.4.32 The process also allows for a ready made support group to be available for those who are later approved as foster carers.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF SUITABILITY

- 8.4.33 The assessing Social Worker must make a clear recommendation as to the applicant's suitability for a particular type of fostering placement. They should state the number, age range and gender of child for whom the applicant could care.
- 8.4.34 When it is finally completed either the Senior Practitioner or the Team Manager will sign it.

SECOND OPINION VISITS

- 8.4.35 Second opinion visits are good practice.
- 8.4.36 They must always be undertaken where the assessment has raised concerns as to the suitability of the applicant to foster, or where an assessment have been undertaken by a Social Worker not experienced in foster carer assessments.

8.5 HEALTH AND SAFETY ASSESSMENTS

INTRODUCTION

- 8.5.1 These guidelines have been produced to provide fostering Social Workers and Panel members with a framework within which to consider health and safety issues when considering an assessment of a potential foster carer or when carrying out a review of the carer's registration.

- 8.5.2 Fostering Social Workers should satisfy themselves that each individual applicant's/carer's accommodation is suitable to enable the applicant/carer to provide safe and stimulating care. In reaching such a decision, a number of factors will need to be taken into account, not least the age, gender and numbers of children proposed to be fostered.
- 8.5.3 What may be appropriate for someone who is proposing to foster one baby for pre-adoptive placements may not be appropriate for someone who is proposing to care for teenagers through to independence.
- 8.5.4 These guidelines should therefore be considered afresh for each new application/review rather than applying a rigid minimum standard for all applicants/carers.
- 8.5.5 Panel members should ensure that they are satisfied with any steps taken to address issues raised by the health and safety assessment and that any risks identified have been minimised to the extent that the foster home provides a safe environment for children. It is to be hoped that assessments will not be bought to Panel were there is clearly a major contra-indication in this regard.
- 8.5.6 The Agency Decision Maker will also need to satisfy her or himself that the Social Worker and Panel have considered the relevant issues arising from this guidance for each application/review.

STATUTORY FRAMEWORK

- 8.5.7 Fostering services are required by Regulation 27 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 to obtain the information listed in Schedule 3 of these Regulations before considering whether the applicant is suitable to act as a foster carer and that their household is suitable for any child in respect of whom approval may be given. This includes details of the applicant's accommodation.
- 8.5.8 The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services require that the home and immediate environment are free of avoidable hazards that might expose a child to risk of injury or harm and contain safety barriers and equipment appropriate to the child's age, development and level of ability (Standard 6.6).
- 8.5.9 Standard 6.2 requires that the foster home is inspected annually to make sure that it meets the need of foster children.
- 8.5.10 Standard 18.5 requires that fostering services have a comprehensive health and safety policy in place.

IOW'S POLICY

- 8.5.11 The Directorate is committed to ensuring that any child or young person placed in foster care will be placed in a foster home that has been assessed and approved to a standard that is safe for children and young people to live in.
- 8.5.12 The Directorate is also committed to ensure that social work staff who are involved in fostering arrangements are sufficiently experienced and competent to make a professional judgement in connection with the placing of children and young people in a caring home environment.
- 8.5.13 The Directorate will also ensure that approved foster carers fulfil the expected competency to provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment (Standard 6.1).
- 8.5.14 The fostering Social Worker will gather evidence to satisfy the Fostering Panel that the prospective foster carer has '*an ability to ensure that children are cared for in a home where they are safe from harm or abuse*' (Competency 2.1).
- 8.5.15 The Directorate will inspect the foster home annually to ensure it can comfortably accommodate all who live there and that it meets health and safety standards (Standard 6.2).
- 8.5.16 Statutory visits to the foster homes will satisfy the Directorate that homes are warm, adequately furnished and decorated and maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene (Standard 6.3).
- 8.5.17 This process will ensure:
- Every child placed will have her/his own bed and the accommodation arrangements will reflect the child's assessed need for privacy and space or for any specific need resulting from a disability (Standard 6.4)
 - Where deemed necessary the child has her/his own room (Standard 6.5)
 - The foster home and immediate environment are free of avoidable hazards that might expose a child to risk of injury or harm and contain safety bafflers and equipment appropriate to the child's age, development and level of ability (Standard 6.6).
- 8.5.18 The Directorate is committed to providing the foster carers with adequate preparation and training which will cover health and safety issues. The carer will also be provided with written guidelines which outline their health and safety responsibilities (Standard 6.7).

- 8.5.19 Where the foster carer is expected to provide transport for the child, the Directorate will ensure this is safe and appropriate to the child's needs (Standard 6.8).
- 8.5.20 Foster carers will be made aware they may be interviewed or visited periodically as part of the Commission's inspection process (Standard 6.9).
- 8.5.21 A health and safety assessment must be completed by fostering Social Workers at the following times:
- During the assessment of potential carers, prior to the presentation of the application to Panel
 - When carrying out the annual review of the carer's registration. The health and safety assessment must be attached to the completed annual review form
 - Whenever a carer moves house or carries out major structural works or other changes to their existing property and it's immediate environment
 - Where there are major changes to the immediate environment surrounding the home, for example new building works or the creation of a new road (in such circumstances it will only be necessary to complete the relevant sections of the assessment)
 - Whenever the carer changes their car (in such circumstances it will only be necessary to complete the relevant sections of the assessment)

COMPLETION OF HEALTH AND SAFETY ASSESSMENTS FOR POTENTIAL FOSTER CARERS

- 8.5.22 Social workers should ensure that they inspect the applicants' accommodation during the first visit and pay particular attention to the proposed sleeping arrangements for foster children. If there are obvious hazards the Social Worker must discuss these with the applicants and consider:
- Whether the accommodation is unsuitable for any foster child
 - Whether the accommodation is unsuitable for the type or numbers of child proposed to be fostered (age, gender, disability)
 - If the application is in respect of a specific child, whether the contra-indications are likely to be outweighed by other factors such as the carer's relationship to the proposed foster child or the need to keep siblings together
 - Whether changes and adaptations can be made that will make the accommodation suitable and safe

- 8.5.23 If the Social Worker remains in any doubt about the suitability of the accommodation they should discuss this with their Team Manager before proceeding with the assessment. If necessary, guidance should be sought from the Panel.
- 8.5.24 If there are no immediate concerns and an application proceeds to full assessment then at some point during this assessment, the Social Worker should carry out a thorough risk assessment. This should be an open exercise fully involving the applicant in the process, but it is the Social Worker's assessment that must be recorded.
- 8.5.25 The risk assessment must cover the safety standards listed in Stage 5 of the Standard Requirements of Approved Carers.
- 8.5.26 If there are concerns arising from this exercise, these should be fully discussed with the applicants and there will be a need to consider the issues identified above. The weight to be given to specific concerns will need to be considered and if necessary the Social Worker should ask the applicant to take corrective action before the case is presented to Panel.
- 8.5.27 If the Social Worker continues to feel that there are unacceptable risks to any potential foster child then these should be discussed with their supervisor and if necessary advice sought from the Panel and/or Agency Decision Maker.
- 8.5.28 If these risks cannot be addressed to the satisfaction of the Social Worker, the Panel, or the Agency Decision Maker, then the application should be turned down. Staff should be mindful however of the applicant's right to make further representation before such a decision is reached if Panel has considered the case.

GENERAL GUIDANCE

- 8.5.29 Nearly half of all childhood accidental injuries occur at home and in the garden.

In 1999:

121 children under 15 died from accidents in the home, of these 86 children were under 5 years old.

Over a million children under 15 visited hospital with accidental injuries that had happened at home.

Nearly 580,000 of children injured accidentally at home were under 5 years old.

Falls account for almost a quarter of all home accidental injuries to children. They are the most common single cause of home accidental injury.

Collisions with a person or object are the second most common type of accidental home injury and the only one where the injury rates are approximately the same for children of all ages. Typically these injuries happen when children run into objects, run into each other or are struck by a falling object.

Burns and scalds are the third most common type of home injury. Burns and scalds particularly affect babies and very young children with scalds from hot drinks being the most common cause.

The fourth most common reason for children being taken to hospital is suspected poisonings. These happen when parents or carers think that children have consumed medicines, household cleaners, DIY or gardening chemicals. Nine in ten suspected poisonings involve children under 5 years old.

Most accidents happen in the lounge/living/dining room – probably reflecting where children spend most of their time. The next most common places in the home for accidents to happen are: the kitchen, bedroom and stairs.

Young children are not able to assess risk for themselves. They also have poor co-ordination and balance and need to touch and explore to learn about the world around them. As children get older they learn new skills and begin to understand what they are able to do safely but need to test out their new abilities and to feel that they are taking some risks. These factors all mean that children are particularly vulnerable to accidents in the home.

Children grow and learn new skills rapidly. It is important that the adults who care for them know what risks each stage brings. It is impossible to ‘childproof’ a home but knowledge of the potential for accidents and of effective safety measures can reduce the risk of serious injury. Extracted from the Child Accident Prevention Trust fact sheet on home accidents.

The Risks to Foster Children

- 8.5.30 There are a number of reasons why children in foster care are particularly at risk of accidents.
- 8.5.31 Carer’s own children will be aware of the potential hazards in their house, as they will have grown up with them. Most foster children joining the household will wish to investigate their new surroundings and the absence of good safety measures will increase the risk of injury.
- 8.5.32 Some foster children may be developmentally immature and if this is not taken into account and assumptions are made about their abilities, they are likely to be more at risk from similar hazards than their peers.
- 8.5.33 Others may not have received appropriate guidance in this area from their own parents and will be unaware of potential dangers.

- 8.5.34 A smaller but not insignificant number may have a tendency to self-harm and particular attention will be needed to minimising the potential risk to such children.

Completing the Health and Safety Risk Assessment

- 8.5.35 It is not possible to address every potential issue in this document, but Social Workers may find the following guidance helpful:

- The risk assessment should be completed with the applicant/carer but by the Social Worker
- The risk assessment must be recorded and signed and dated by the applicant(s)/carer(s) and Social Worker
- Social Workers must satisfy themselves that issues have been fully addressed rather than rely on the applicant/carer e.g. Social Workers should witness a test of fitted smoke alarms
- Social Workers must see any relevant documentation for themselves, such as firearm, MOT and motor insurance certificates. Social Workers should record the date these were seen
- Social Workers carrying out risk assessments should be mindful of the ages and likely abilities of children to be placed and view any potential hazards through the eyes of the child

Safe Caring Guidelines

- 8.5.36 All carers are required to produce safe caring guidelines for their home and these must be approved by every placing Social Worker and explained to the foster child (Standard 9.3).
- 8.5.37 Social Workers should consider with applicants and approved carers the implications arising for these from health and safety risk assessments.

Foster Carer Training

- 8.5.38 Fostering services are required to ensure that foster carer's preparation and training cover health and safety issues and the carer is provided with written guidelines on their health and safety responsibilities (Standard 6.7). These are contained within the Foster Carer Handbook and further information can be obtained from the organisations detailed below.
- 8.5.39 Social Workers should ensure that they pay attention to the training needs of carers and other members of their household, addressing these in the appraisal of training and development needs which must be documented in the annual review report.

- 8.5.40 Social Workers should encourage carers to make use of any available training opportunities run by the Directorate or external agencies.

Further Information

- 8.5.41 There are a number of organisations that produce advice on home safety. Details of two of the most useful are reproduced below.

Child Accident Prevention Trust

4th Floor

18-20 Farringdon Lane

London

EC1R 3HA Tel: 020 76083828 www.capt.org.uk

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

Edgbaston Park

353 Bristol Road

Edgbaston

Birmingham

B5 7ST Tel: 0121 2482000 www.rosipa.co.uk

8.6 COMPLETION AND SUBMISSION OF FORM F

- 8.6.1 The draft report must be shared with the applicants at least 14 days prior to presentation to Panel. If the applicants are unhappy with any of the content of the report, the Social Worker should seek first to deal with this by negotiation. If there is still disagreement, the applicants should be invited to submit their own comments in writing for presentation to the Panel.
- 8.6.2 Applicants should also be reminded of the expectation that they attend Panel in person.
- 8.6.3 The completed report must be signed by the applicants, the Social Worker and the Fostering Team Manager or Senior Practitioner.

BENCH-MARKING OF ASSESSMENTS

- 8.6.4 All draft BAAF Form F fostering and Family Link assessments will be bench marked by the Fostering Service Senior Practitioner (Fostering), against agreed standards (see Benchmarking BAAF Form Fs guidelines).

8.7 ASSESSMENTS FOR FAMILY LINK CARERS OFFERING CARE FOR LESS THAN 24 HOURS

- 8.7.1 Applicants must attend preparation groups.
- 8.7.2 Checks and references must be sought, as for all assessments, except for the medical reference.
- 8.7.3 A letter must be sent to the applicant's general practitioner asking for her/his opinion on the family's emotional and physical well being and whether there are any issues or concerns. The assessing Social Worker must decide whether to request a full medical.
- 8.7.4 Information must be collected and represented in Part 1 BAAF Form F. In addition a Part 2 report covering the following areas will be collated:
- Type of child/young person to be linked (including age, sex, disability, how child would spend respite hours)
 - Availability and flexibility
 - Additional accommodation information (including adaptations, equipment)
 - Motivation and experience
 - Brief description of family and routines (including attitudes to religion, race, culture)
 - Any other specific details to this family
- 8.7.5 The Social Worker must visit the family in their home for two assessment visits. On one occasion all members of the household must be seen together.
- 8.7.6 When the assessment forms are complete, a copy must be sent to the applicants together with the evaluation sheet, which they must be asked to complete and return with the signed assessment. The evaluation sheet must be presented with the assessment papers.
- 8.7.7 When a specific young person is being considered for the link, a linking report written by the young person's Social Worker must be included in the assessment papers.
- 8.7.8 The assessment papers must be presented by the assessing Social Worker to the monthly Family Link Linking Panel for consideration and a decision on approval by the Family Placement Team Manager.

- 8.7.9 The terms of approval must be clearly noted on the assessment papers, with any riders noted, including approvals for specific young people.
- 8.7.10 Any linking period that exceeds 24 hours, at any one time, will not be covered by the approval. In such cases, a full Form F assessment will need to be presented to the Fostering Panel.
- 8.7.11 The notifications of approval, support procedures, and reviews are the same as for other Family Link foster carers.

8.8 ASSESSMENT OF DAY CARE PROVIDERS

- 8.8.1 When families offer to provide day care they will be asked to complete the standard application form in order that the following checks may be sought:
- Letter to GP asking if there is any reason for them not to provide day care
 - CRB checks
 - Letter to school/Health Visitor
 - Two personal referee checks
- 8.8.2 Two visits to the family must be made clarifying:
- What the family is offering
 - What experience they have and the views of the visiting Social Worker as to their suitability
- 8.8.3 A copy of the Isle of Wight Standards and the Fostering Network Safe Caring book must be given to the applicants.
- 8.8.4 When all is completed, a letter must be sent from the Fostering Service Manager accepting, or not, the offer to provide day care.
- 8.8.5 If the offer is accepted, a file must be made up.

8.9 STAFF WISHING TO FOSTER OR PROVIDE AFTER CARE SERVICES TO YOUNG PEOPLE

- 8.9.1 Whilst it is recognised that recent reports and enquiries have raised a theme of lack of safety for young people in the public care system, highlighting concerns about relationships between staff members and young people, we would not wish to lose potential carers from within

the Council staff group who are able to offer good quality, safe care to Island young people.

- 8.9.2 The Isle of Wight Care Standards Commissioner has expressed the view that it is likely that amongst Council staff there will be people with experience and knowledge of working safely with young people. To bar this group from being assessed as foster carers may be depriving children of potential good quality placements.
- 8.9.3 The Fostering Services National Minimum Standard 4.5 states that the Fostering Service informs carers, managers and staff of their responsibility to declare any possible conflicts of interest.
- 8.9.4 There is an existing group of foster carers who are also Council staff providing good quality care and Combined Accommodation Scheme services to Island young people. In some cases extra measures have been taken to ensure the safety of young people in placement and to protect workers from a potential conflict of interest.
- 8.9.5 In light of all the above information, Isle of Wight staff members wishing to provide care and Combined Accommodation Scheme services will be fully assessed in line with the Directorate's current procedures. Where they wish to be considered for a specific named young person, particular consideration must be given to any areas of conflict of interest and means to address these must be written into the report presented to the Fostering Panel.
- 8.9.6 Where staff wish to be available for general placements, it may be difficult to highlight areas of potential conflict of interest until a young person is identified for placement. At the placement planning meeting, the child's Social Worker and the fostering support worker must identify, with the carer, those areas of conflict and what extra safeguards are to be put in place. These matters must be included in writing in the Placement Plan 2.
- 8.9.7 Foster carers or Combined Accommodation Scheme providers who are also members of staff must be supported and reviewed as any other carer/provider. However, it may be necessary to provide independent support and reviewing services from outside the Directorate where, for example, Fostering Service staff who wish to foster may be better supported from outside the team. This might help safeguard both carer/provider and member of staff from any potential conflict of interest. This decision must be made by the Fostering Service Manager.

8.10 APPLICATIONS TO FOSTER A SPECIFIC CHILD

- 8.10.1 Such applications may be received as a response to a specific advertisement for a family for a child or from someone who already knows of the child, possibly because they have previously cared for them. In such circumstances the general procedures for the approval of prospective foster carers outlined above apply, as well as the specific procedures outlined below.
- 8.10.2 Assessments of applicants in these circumstances will be recorded on BAAF Form F2.
- 8.10.3 When the Form F assessment is presented to the Panel the BAAF Form E on the child must also be presented. The Form E must accompany the Form F assessment sent to Panel Members prior to the Panel convening. The child's Social Worker must also attend.

8.11 ASSESSMENT AND APPROVAL OF RELATIVES AND FRIENDS AS FOSTER CARERS

KINSHIP FOSTER CARE POLICY

- 8.11.1 The Children Act 1989 s23 (6) requires a local authority to make arrangements for a child it is looking after to live with a member of her/his family unless to do so would be impractical or inconsistent with the child's welfare.
- 8.11.2 Further emphasis on the importance of family links is found in the requirements that a child be accommodated near her/his family home (S23 (7) (a)) and that siblings be accommodated together as long as this is practicable and consistent with each child's welfare (S23 (7)(b)).
- 8.11.3 Furthermore the '*right to respect for family life*' is protected under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights which has been incorporated into English law by virtue of the Human Rights Act 1998.
- 8.11.4 This policy has been produced to outline to children, parents, family and friend foster carers, Social Workers and Panel members, the IOW's policy on the use of family and friends as foster carers.

STATUTORY FRAMEWORK

- 8.11.5 The activities of both foster carers and fostering services are governed by the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.
- 8.11.6 Regulation 38 (2) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 allows local authorities to place a child for a period of up to six weeks with someone who is not an existing foster carer, providing that an immediate placement is needed, the person is a relative or friend of the child, and the person enters into a written agreement with the local authority.
- 8.11.7 It requires that the relative or friend should be interviewed, the home inspected and information obtained about other members of the household.
- 8.11.8 The local authority must be satisfied that the placement is in the child's best interest and should make a written agreement covering the details in Regulation 38 (3) (a)-(e), being:
- (a) To care for the child as if he were a member of that person's family
 - (b) To permit any person authorised by the local authority or (if applicable) the area authority, to visit the child at any time
 - (c) Where Regulation 36 applies, to allow the child to be removed at any time by the local authority or (if applicable) the area authority
 - (d) To ensure that any information which that person may acquire relating to the child, his family or any other person, which has been given to him in confidence in connection with the placement is kept confidential and is not disclosed except to, or with the agreement of, the local authority; and
 - (e) To allow contact with the child in accordance with the terms of any Court order relating to contact or any arrangements made or agreed by the local authority
- 8.11.9 The placement cannot continue beyond six weeks unless the relative or friend has by this time been approved as a foster carer by a fostering service in the usual manner.
- 8.11.10 During the six weeks of an immediate placement, the child must be visited at least weekly.

THE BENEFITS TO CHILDREN

8.11.11 Some of the benefits for children of being cared for by family or friends are:

- It enables children to live with people they know and trust
- It reduces the trauma that may be experienced when they have to live with strangers
- It reinforces children's sense of identity and self-esteem, which comes from knowing their family history and culture
- It helps children to maintain contact with their parents, brothers and sisters and other family members
- It encourages families to consider and rely on their own family members as resources
- It gives children the opportunity to stay linked to their own communities and promotes community responsibility for children's services
- It strengthens the ability of families to give children the support they need

GENERAL PRINCIPLES ON THE USE OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS AS CARERS

Private Arrangements

8.11.12 In many cases where a child's parents are unable to look after them, the child may go and live with a relative or friend, purely as a private arrangement that the Directorate will not be aware of. In some of these arrangements there may be a request or need for the local authority to provide services or in exceptional circumstances financial support.

8.11.13 This can be carried out under s17 of the Children Act 1989. In many cases it is more appropriate for advice and support to be given to enable the family to make these alternative care arrangements, particularly if this is likely to be a very temporary situation. Children should not be accommodated for the sole purpose of providing financial support to their carers.

Family Network Arrangements

8.11.14 The Children Act clearly defines the duties of the local authority to investigate and consider the possibilities for a child to be cared for within the extended family as an alternative to the provision of accommodation by the authority. It is essential that such possibilities

are explored as fully as possible before any decision to accommodate a child is made.

- 8.11.15 For both private arrangements and family network arrangements, if the carers are friends as opposed to relatives and the child is under the age of sixteen (unless the child is disabled in which case the age limit is eighteen), after 27 days the arrangement falls under the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 (See 4.6).

Regulation 38

- 8.11.16 The power to place a looked after child in an immediate placement with a relative or friend is intended to be used in exceptional circumstances only and not for an admission to care for which contingency plans could have been made.

Planned Moves to Family/Friends under Interim Approval Where Court Involved

- 8.11.17 When a case is before the Courts and a family member or friend has put themselves forward it should be made clear to the Court that an interim assessment will need to take place before the child is placed. The child's Social Worker is responsible for undertaking this assessment (and presenting to Fostering Panel) within a timescale of six weeks.
- 8.11.18 Where such planning has not been possible the powers may be used, where it would be clearly advantageous to a child to be placed with or to remain in the care of a familiar figure in reassuring surroundings.
- 8.11.19 Whenever the need for care or accommodation is being considered by the Directorate, either planned or unplanned, the possibility of a placement with a relative and friend must be explored before the use of other resources such as local authority foster carers or independent sector placements.
- 8.11.20 While there is recognition of the particular relationship and position of family and friends as carers, the Directorate will always seek to apply the same standards as apply to other carers.
- 8.11.21 In practice this means:
- The support and training needs of family and friend carers must be assessed and met in the same way as for any other carers
 - The relevant requirements of the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 must be applied

8.11.22 The fullest enquiries possible in the circumstances must be made, including checks with the Police locally, local authority checks and verbal checks with the family GP, to satisfy themselves that nothing is known which suggests that the relative or friend is not a suitable person to be entrusted with the child. Where possible, the parents' views or those of other relatives must be sought.

IMMEDIATE PLACEMENTS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN WITH RELATIVES AND FRIENDS (REG 38(2))

8.11.23 Before the use of Regulation 38 is made the following must be considered:

- Could the child be looked after by a relative or friend on the basis of private arrangements or a family network arrangement involving those with parental responsibility?
- Could a private arrangement with the agreement of those with parental responsibility be implemented:
 - If financial support to the relative or friend is provided under s17?
 - If the position of the child could subsequently be secured by a Residence Order (with or without a Residence Order allowance)?
 - Following a period of work with the family and a fuller assessment as to whether the child needs to be accommodated?

8.11.24 Regulation 38 (2) allows for the immediate placement of a child with a person who is not an approved foster carer for a period not exceeding six weeks.

8.11.25 On the IOW such a placement may be made where, after gathering as much information as possible and following discussion with the Service Manager who agrees the placement and is satisfied that:

- A child needs to be accommodated
- The urgency of the situation does not allow for a planned placement
- Placement with a relative or friend is the best available option in the circumstances

8.11.26 The following conditions must be met in order to make such a placement:

- The prospective carer is a relative or friend

- The placing Social Worker must inspect the accommodation and be satisfied that the accommodation and in particular the sleeping arrangements are suitable for the child
- This particular placement is in the child's best interests, taking into account the wishes and feelings of the child and those with parental responsibility wherever possible
- The prospective carer must be interviewed by the Social Worker and as much information as possible obtained about their circumstances and their likely suitability to care for the child
- Information must be obtained about all other members of the household. As many enquiries as is possible should be made i.e. Police, local authority records and GP
- The allocated Social Worker for the child must ensure that the carers receive at the time of the placement a copy of the Essential Information Record Part 1 and sign a Placement Agreement Part 1

ACTION TO BE TAKEN POST-PLACEMENT BY THE CHILD'S ALLOCATED SOCIAL WORKER

8.11.27 Once the child has been accommodated:

- As soon as possible after the placement is made, the carer must be asked to sign and return the Foster Carer Application Form so that full statutory checks and references can be undertaken. Criminal Records Bureau disclosure forms must be completed and the identifying documentation seen by the child's Social Worker
- The child's Social Worker must visit the placement weekly until the carer is approved as a foster carer (if this becomes necessary)
- As the child becomes an accommodated child they are subject to the usual requirements for accommodated children. The first statutory review must be arranged within four weeks of the start of the placement

8.11.28 If the placement is likely to extend beyond six weeks:

- A Social Worker from the Fostering Team will be allocated to undertake an assessment of the carer as an approved foster carer for the child
- A fostering assessment using the BAAF F2 format must be completed

8.11.29 If an assessment cannot be presented within six weeks of the child being placed, it will be necessary to obtain the Service Manager's

approval to exceed this date and a revised date must be set for presenting the assessment to Panel.

- 8.11.30 The child's Social Worker must complete a report on the child, which is presented to the same meeting of the Fostering Panel. Both Social Workers will be required to attend the Panel meeting.

ISSUES WHICH NEED TO BE EXPLORED WHEN PLACING A LOOKED AFTER CHILD IN KINSHIP CARE

- 8.11.31 When considering the use of relatives or friends as foster carers it is essential that early in discussions the full implications of fostering are explained.
- 8.11.32 This includes the process of assessing and approving them as foster carers, the role of the local authority in supervising the placement, the planning / decision making and statutory review processes in relation to children, the arrangements for review of their approval as foster carers and the authority's power to remove the child.
- 8.11.33 Assessment of relatives and friends as foster carers must include consideration of the extent to which the placement will affect the child's other family relationships. This means that there must be discussion and consultation with the child and her/his parents about the implications of such a placement.
- 8.11.34 Unlike other fostering situations the adults concerned, and in some cases the child too, may bring to the proposed fostering a history of subtle interpersonal relationships of which the fostering Social Worker will have no direct knowledge.
- 8.11.35 It must be recognised that in family and friends placements there are existing interpersonal relationships and networks.
- 8.11.36 The Social Worker's task is to gauge the extent to which any such tensions are likely to be aggravated and to assess the extent to which they can be contained.
- 8.11.37 The motives of relatives and friends in offering a home may be complex and not easily discernible.
- 8.11.38 Children can sometimes sense the basis on which relatives or friends have offered a home. If the child is being looked after following ill treatment or neglect, relatives may be more judgmental in their attitudes toward the parent(s) than if they were not members of the same family.

- 8.11.39 Related foster carer's feelings towards a child's parent(s) may be more intense and confused than those of unrelated foster carers. The potential for disruption is always there and social work support in such areas of stress will be needed – relative and family friend placements should not be regarded as self-supporting.
- 8.11.40 When relatives and friends become “official” foster carers they become part of a network of those responsible for the child. This is a new dimension to their lives and calls for many adjustments, not least the discussion of their family affairs with outsider professionals.
- 8.11.41 They will share many of the feelings and experiences of other foster carers and, as with any other family placements, their strength and stability will be the foundation of a successful placement. However, the stresses of fostering by relatives and friends are sometimes underestimated both by the relatives/friends and by placing authorities.
- 8.11.42 A crucial issue may be their attitude to the child's contact with her/his parent(s). Where such contact has been terminated or restricted the Social Worker must explore with the prospective foster carers any particular difficulties they may encounter in maintaining any conditions or restrictions e.g. supervised parental contact.
- 8.11.43 Relatives or friends may feel loyalty strained if given information, which is confidential and not generally available to other family members. Similarly they may feel troubled about disclosing or sharing information with the authority that they become aware of - for example if a child discloses sexual abuse -which could affect planning/decision making.
- 8.11.44 Some relative/friend placements will have a child protection element and this must be openly acknowledged.
- 8.11.45 People who foster a relative's or friend's child not unnaturally see themselves as the child's relatives or friends first and as her/his foster carers second, especially if s/he was living with them before becoming looked after.
- 8.11.46 Unlike other prospective foster carers they may not be seeking primarily to fulfil conscious or unconscious needs to care for a child, and also, unlike other foster carers they do not wish to become involved in assessment of the kind of child who would best fit into their family.
- 8.11.47 They may know much more about the child they are proposing to foster and his family than does the Social Worker. This calls for great sensitivity to the feelings of both adults and the child. It also calls for

discussions that are relevant, meaningful and specific rather than hypothetical.

- 8.11.48 It should not be assumed that relatives and friends will be able to talk openly and comfortably with a child about her/his parent(s) and the reasons for them not being able or allowed to look after her/him.
- 8.11.49 The feelings and sensitivities of friends and relatives may make this difficult and help may be needed. What must also be understood is that it can be very difficult for relatives and friends to reveal that a placement is not working, is becoming difficult to manage and tolerate or may disrupt. Again the authority must be clear about the carer's responsibility for open, full, frank discussion and sharing of views and information.
- 8.11.50 The level of detail required in a relative or friend placement will differ from one situation to another dependent upon the proposed length of placement or the particular circumstances involved.
- 8.11.51 Whilst some use of discretion is appropriate in these cases in relation to the normal physical expectations of a foster home (e.g. less bedroom space) the assessment of the suitability of the placement should otherwise be as thorough as in other situations.
- 8.11.52 The questions asked should be just as searching. There is a need for particular care to be taken where the child is being placed because of sexual or other abuse within the original family, since this may indicate family culture of weak boundaries, worrying attitudes and abuse. The same standards as for other carers should therefore be applied in relation to the safety competencies.

ACTION POST PANEL

- 8.11.53 On approval kinship foster carers will have the same status as other foster carers although they are approved for a specific child or children.
- 8.11.54 A recent High Court judgement has declared unlawful Manchester City Council's practice of paying lower rates to related foster carers. This requires the local authority to pay related foster carers the same scale as non- related carers.
- 8.11.55 While the placement is agreed under Regulation 38 the basic Fostering Allowance only will be paid. Once the Fostering Panel has granted approval, other payments in line with the Fostering Allowance procedures may be paid.

- 8.11.56 A fostering support worker will be allocated to offer advice and support, and to identify training needs.

RESPITE WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

- 8.11.57 These arrangements relate to looked after children staying for short respite periods, not exceeding two weeks, with family and friends.
- 8.11.58 Police checks should be sought on all adults over 18 years in the family. Evidence endorsing the applicant's identity will need to be seen by Social Worker completing the CRB form. Sufficient time must be allowed for checks to be sent out and returned, i.e. four weeks.
- 8.11.59 The agreement from a Service Manager should be sought for the respite period. Details of the agreements should be noted on the young person's file together with the agreed visiting pattern by the child's Social Worker during the stay. If there is any past history of concern relating to the adult it is unlikely permission will be given.
- 8.11.60 Agreement of parents to the respite period should be sought by the Social Worker when a child is voluntarily accommodated, in a case where a young person is on an order every effort should be made to achieve agreement.
- 8.11.61 Given the young person will remain looked after while they are away, it is necessary for the Social Worker to ensure that the adult responsible for the young person has sufficient information to care safely. The information should include a copy of the Essential Information Record and the contact telephone numbers for Isle of Wight Social Services both during and out of hours.
- 8.11.62 Given the young person will be visiting a friend or family member, it would not be anticipated that an allowance be paid to the temporary caring adult while the young person stays with them. However, if there are exceptional circumstances the Team Manager may consider making a payment from the team's boarding out budget in addition to any fares required.
- 8.11.63 The foster carer will continue to receive the full boarding out allowance for the first week and 50 per cent for the second week, as set out in the protocol detailing carer' allowances.
- 8.11.64 Parents seeking to have overnight contact with their children will not come under the remit of this protocol. The Placement of Children With Parents Etc Regulations 1991 will cover this contact.

8.12 BAIL, REMAND, POST CUSTODY AND INTENSIVE FOSTERING

- 8.12.1 This service is provided by NCH on behalf of IOW in the following circumstances:

REFERRAL CRITERIA FOR FAMILY PLACEMENTS

- 8.12.2 The service is available for a child or young person aged 10 to 16 years who is bailed and at risk of a remand to local authority accommodation. The placement is available until sentence.

REFERRALS THROUGH YOT/SOCIAL SERVICES

- 8.12.3 The service is available for a child or young person aged 10 to 16 years who has been remanded to local authority accommodation. The placement is available until sentence.
- 8.12.4 The service is also available for young people aged 16/17 about to be homeless on their release from custody to serve the community element of a Detention and Training Order. The placement is available for period of Community DTO or 3 months.

REFERRALS THROUGH YOT

- 8.12.5 An Intensive Fostering service is available where a young person aged 10-17 is at risk of a custodial sentence and where family background has had a significant effect on offending. The placement is available as an alternative to custody for up to 12 months and as part of a Supervision Order.

REFERRAL PROCESS FOR ALL PLACEMENTS

- 8.12.6 The YOT worker must telephone Wessex Community Projects 01329 225720 for placement availability and suitability.
- 8.12.7 The YOT must provide Looked after Children paperwork and where appropriate Asset and Pre-Sentence Report plus other information relevant to a family placement.
- 8.12.8 An immediate Placement Meeting must be held and, within 72 hours, the Care Planning Meeting.
- 8.12.9 A young person remanded to local authority accommodation, if not requiring a service from NCH, can be placed as remanded to local authority accommodation with a parent.

8.13 COMBINED ACCOMMODATION SCHEME

- 8.13.1 Foster carers looking after young people in long-term placements after their 14th birthday will usually be attached to the Combined Accommodation Scheme.
- 8.13.2 Their registration will allow them to continue to care for the young person after the status of the placement has changed from fostering to supportive lodgings.
- 8.13.3 The fostering or supportive lodgings status will be based on the needs and legal status of the young person clarified in the Care Plan. It is likely that all looked after young people will remain fostered until after their 17th birthday and in many cases up until they are 18 years.
- 8.13.4 The Combined Accommodation Scheme staff will ensure the training needs of carers and providers are addressed so that they are able to support the young person develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.
- 8.13.5 The carers/providers need to be pro-active in supporting young people to address and take on new skills in areas identified in the Pathway Plan.
- 8.13.6 When a new placement is made with the carer/provider the written agreement/licence (or plans for homeless young people) must contain details of the young person's needs, and the requirements of what is expected of the carer/provider.

8.14 APPLICANTS WHO ARE REGISTERED AS A CARE HOME

- 8.14.1 When a new application is received from a potential foster carer the application form will ask if the applicants are registered as a small home.
- 8.14.2 If it is established that they are registered or there is likelihood that they should register, the Social Worker should refer to the Isle of Wight office of the Commission for Social Care Inspection where a check will be made of the household.
- 8.14.3 If there is no record of registration, but a vulnerable adult appears to be living in the household, discussion between the Fostering Service and the Commission must take place before an assessment as foster carers is started.

- 8.14.4 It may be useful for a joint visit to take place between the Social Worker and an officer from the Commission.
- 8.14.5 If there is a conflict of views as to whether the fostering assessment should be undertaken, it will be referred for a decision to the Commission.

ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL FOSTER CARERS

- 8.14.6 If an assessment goes ahead with a vulnerable adult in placement and/or with an already registered small home the assessment must clearly show the possible effects of the presence of the vulnerable adult on the fostering task and vice versa, and include the view of the Commission.
- 8.14.7 This information must be incorporated into the Form F and presented to the Fostering Panel.
- 8.14.8 If the application is recommended by Panel and approved by the Head of Children's Services, it must be clearly marked on the file, T cards and any existing computer system that this household also has a vulnerable adult cared for within it.

PLACEMENTS

- 8.14.9 No placements, even following approval and registration, can be made with the carers until a discussion between the Commission, the Social Worker of the young person (proposed placement) and the Fostering Service support worker and the care manager/Social Worker responsible for the vulnerable adult.
- 8.14.10 At that point a joint decision must be made as to whether it is appropriate to care for both vulnerable persons together in the same household.
- 8.14.11 A clear statement of issues, decisions and reasons for decisions must be recorded on all files.
- 8.14.12 This procedure must be followed prior to the placement of every child/young person to that household.
- 8.14.13 In emergencies the Commission can waive the procedure, although such a decision must then be followed up pursuing the outlined procedure.

- 8.14.14 In the case of no consensus arising out of the joint discussion the matter must be referred to the Service Manger and the Commission.

APPLICATIONS BY EXISTING REGISTERED FOSTER CARERS TO TAKE VULNERABLE ADULTS AND/OR BE REGISTERED AS A SMALL HOME

- 8.14.15 When a current foster carer applies to take an adult into their home, or requests registration as a small home the Commission and the care manager will contact the Fostering Service to discuss the application.
- 8.14.16 The applicants must be made aware that it is possible that registration as a small home may restrict their use as foster carers and vice versa.
- 8.14.17 In situations where the 'vulnerable adult' in the household is there as a result of being fostered by the carers under the Fostering Service Regulations prior to becoming an adult, and where the carers have and wish to continue to foster other children, there should be a flexible approach which allows fostering to continue if the interests of all concerned are able to be met.
- 8.14.18 The same procedures for other placements will be used, but the knowledge of the adult already gained by the Directorate will help the decision making process.

REVIEWS

- 8.14.19 When a foster home is also a registered small home the annual reviews of each registration will take into consideration the views of both the Fostering Service and the Commission, and decisions will be clearly recorded on file.

TERMINATION OF REGISTRATION

- 8.14.20 If the registration of the foster home or small home is terminated either the Head of Children's Services or the Commission will give notification to all parties and discussion between the two agencies will take place.
- 8.14.21 Any necessary subsequent action regarding registration must be referred to the Commission and Service Manager for a decision.
- 8.14.22 If the carers themselves initiate termination of registration, notification will be given to all involved parties, with consideration about how this affects other registrations.

FORMS / RECORDS

- 8.14.23 All decisions must be clearly recorded on each file with reasons given for the decisions.
- 8.14.24 Application forms for potential carers (both for young people and adults) must ask whether carers are already approved foster carers; registered as a small home or providing or intending to provide accommodation for vulnerable adults.

8.15 FOSTERING PANEL

- 8.15.1 The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 require the Fostering Panel to consider the case of every prospective carer referred to it by the agency and to make the following recommendations:
- Whether a person is suitable to act as a foster carer
 - The terms on which the approval is given
- 8.15.2 The Panel must also recommend whether or not a person remains suitable to act as a foster carer and whether or not the terms of approval remain appropriate:
- On completion of the first review of the carer's registration, which must take place within a year of approval
 - When requested to do so by the fostering agency on completion of any subsequent reviews
- 8.15.3 Social workers and applicants need to note that Fostering Panels only make recommendations, not decisions.
- 8.15.4 The authority to make decisions is vested in the fostering agency rather than the Panel and no member of the Panel may take part in any decision made by the agency.
- 8.15.5 The IOW Fostering Panel will make recommendations to the Head of Children's Services - the Agency Decision Maker - who must make decisions on behalf of IOW Council.

PANEL MEMBERSHIP

- 8.15.6 The Fostering Panel must consist of no more than 10 members. These must include:
- An independent Chair person possessing the necessary skills and experience (Independent means either an IOW manager who is not responsible for the day to day management of any

person carrying out assessments of prospective foster carers or someone from outside of the fostering service with the necessary skills and experience)

- 2 IOW social work staff, one of whom has child care expertise and the other of whom has expertise in fostering
- One of the elected members of the Council
- The following independent members:
 - (i) At least one person who is or within the past two years has been a foster carer for another agency; and
 - (ii) A person with expertise in education
 - (iii) A person with expertise in child health
 - (iv) A person (aged 18 or above) who has been placed with or who has had a child placed with foster carers

8.15.7 One of the Panel members must be appointed to act as Chair in the absence of the person appointed as Chair.

8.15.8 The Panel is only quorate when at least five members are present including the Chair or Vice-Chair, one of the social work staff and at least two of the independent members.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDICAL ADVISER

8.15.9 All prospective carers must be asked to have a full medical with their own GP.

8.15.10 The results of this will be recorded on BAAF Form Adult 1 and must be forwarded to the Medical Adviser. The Medical Adviser will note any significant issues which may affect the applicant's ability to foster and return the completed form to the assessing Social Worker.

8.15.11 The completed Adult 1 should be made available to the Chair of the Panel who must advise the Panel of any significant issues as noted by the Medical Adviser.

THE ROLE OF THE LEGAL ADVISER

8.15.12 There will not normally be a need for legal advice when considering applications from prospective carers or when reviewing carer's registration.

8.15.13 If such advice is needed, approval for seeking legal advice must first be obtained from the fostering Team Manager. Once this permission

has been obtained, workers should contact the Legal Adviser. Requests for legal advice may be made by telephone in the first instance but should always be confirmed in writing.

TERM OF OFFICE

- 8.15.14 Fostering Panel members are appointed for a term of three years. Members may not serve for more than two consecutive terms.

RESIGNATION OR TERMINATION OF APPOINTMENT

- 8.15.15 Panel members may resign at any time by giving one month's notice in writing to the fostering Team Manager.
- 8.15.16 If for any reason, the IOW believes that a member is no longer fit or able to hold office, the Team Manager should discuss the situation with the Agency Decision Maker. The Panel member should be given the opportunity to make representations but if the Decision Maker is of the view that the Panel member should no longer hold office, s/he should give written notice to this effect.

TRAINING

- 8.15.17 Panel members will be offered and expected to attend at least one day's training a year in respect of their role as Panel members or more general areas of interest relating to foster care.

8.16 PREPARATION AND CIRCULATION OF PANEL PAPERS

- 8.16.1 Papers must be submitted to the Panel Administrator at least twelve working days prior to the date of the Panel.
- 8.16.2 The Panel Administrator must meet with the Team Manager twelve days prior to the Panel to confirm the agenda and to make sure all papers are in order.
- 8.16.3 It is the responsibility of the fostering Social Worker and Team Manager to ensure that Panel papers are in order and submitted on time. The Team Manager is responsible for the quality assurance of any papers submitted.
- 8.16.4 In the event that papers are still missing or there remain outstanding concerns, the Team Manager will withdraw the case from the agenda and the Social Worker will need to book an alternative Panel date.

8.16.5 The Panel Administrator must prepare folders containing papers for circulation as follows:

- For Panel members:
 - An agenda for that Panel
 - The minutes of the previous Panel
 - Form F together with any other reports relevant to a particular case including previous Panel minutes but excluding all checks and references
- For Panel Chair:
 - The above papers
 - All checks and references
 - Reports from the Medical or Legal advisers

8.16.6 Panel papers will be circulated to members at least one week in advance of the Panel. These must be delivered directly to Panel members either by internal mail, IOW staff or by recorded delivery and a signature obtained as proof of receipt by the addressee.

8.16.7 At the conclusion of each Panel, all papers must be left with the Panel Administrator. If a Panel member is unable to attend they should contact the Panel Administrator to arrange for the safe return of papers. The Panel Administrator must ensure that all papers, other than file copies are shredded.

8.17 CONSIDERATION OF CASES BY THE FOSTERING PANEL

8.17.1 The Social Worker presenting the case must attend the Panel in person.

8.17.2 Applicants are expected to attend Panel, but will need to be excluded from discussions concerning third party information such as personal or medical references.

8.17.3 The Panel chair must ensure that all members have an opportunity to raise questions or offer comments on each application. S/he must also ensure that they fully understand any legal, social work or medical terms used. S/he must confirm that all checks and references have been received and are in order. S/he should inform members of any medical or legal advice received from the Medical and/or Legal Advisers.

8.17.4 Once Panel members have completed the process of seeking information and addressing any questions raised, the Chair should

ask each member if they support a proposed recommendation. There is no role for a formal vote, with the Chair rather seeking to allow the Panel to reach a consensus.

- 8.17.5 While unanimity will not always be possible, an evenly divided Panel would suggest that there are serious doubts sufficient to prevent the Panel making a confident recommendation. In such cases, the Chair may ask for more information to be made available before a recommendation is made.
- 8.17.6 In all other cases the Panel must make a clear recommendation as to whether an application should be approved and may attach conditions to the approval such as the numbers and ages of children which the approval applies to. Any dissent from the recommendation by a Panel member must be noted and the reasons recorded in the Panel minutes.
- 8.17.7 In any event the Panel must ensure that it gives clear reasons for reaching its recommendations and these must be recorded in the minutes.

URGENT PLACEMENTS

- 8.17.8 Exceptionally, the need may arise to seek a recommendation of the Fostering Panel before the next planned Panel meeting in order to minimise the delay in proceeding with a placement.
- 8.17.9 Requests for such placements must be directed to the fostering Team Manager. The Team Manager must discuss the matter with the Panel Chair, or in her or his absence the Vice-Chair, to determine that it cannot wait for the next Panel meeting. The Chair or Vice-Chair must ensure that a quorum of at least five Panel members meets to make a recommendation.

MINUTES

- 8.17.10 The Panel Administrator will minute each meeting. Draft minutes must first be checked by the fostering Team Manager. Minutes must then be passed to the Panel Chair for approval and they must be confirmed at the next Panel meeting.

8.18 ATTENDANCE OF FOSTER CARERS AT FOSTERING PANELS

POLICY

- 8.18.1 In the interest of openness in our management of the fostering service, foster carers must be invited to attend Panels considering applications and reviews, in order to make their own representations and/or answer questions from the Panel.
- 8.18.2 While attendance of applicants and carers is expected, attendance will be purely optional and voluntary. Following their attendance, applicants/carers will withdraw to allow the Panel to discuss and reach a recommendation.

PROCEDURE

- 8.18.3 Social Workers preparing and planning applications and reviews must encourage and support the foster carer to attend. In doing so, they should explain fully the way the Panel works and the procedure which will be followed.
- 8.18.4 The Social Worker must ensure that the applicant(s) are given a copy of the Fostering Panel Leaflet For Visitors.
- 8.18.5 Where an applicant/foster carer does wish to attend, the fostering Team Manager must be informed, so that they can ensure that:
- An additional 10 minutes is allowed in the Panel timetable, and a set time allocated to the item
 - The agenda indicates that the applicants/carers will be attending
- 8.18.6 The Panel Administrator must ensure suitable facilities are available and the Social Worker must ensure suitable arrangements are made to greet and look after the applicants/carers when they arrive at the office, until they go in to the Panel.
- 8.18.7 Applicants/carers, who must have seen their Panel report/review form, will be invited into the Panel once the Chair has established a preliminary list of questions/areas for clarification.
- 8.18.8 Applicants should be invited to make any representation they wish to make and may then be asked questions by the Panel. This will have to be tightly managed to avoid taking too long.

- 8.18.9 The Panel discussion should not necessarily go over ground which should have already been covered in discussions with the Social Worker during the review/assessment interviews.
- 8.18.10 Applicants/carers will then be invited to withdraw so that the Panel can conclude their deliberations and reach a recommendation. They should be informed of the recommendation immediately by the Panel Chair.

8.19 GUIDELINES FOR REFERRING CASES TO IOW'S FOSTERING PANEL FOR ADVICE

- 8.19.1 The following points are intended to be a framework for assisting with cases that are being brought for advice only. This will happen in exceptional circumstances only and most assessments for approval will be dealt with in supervision. The framework outlines the type of information that should be presented, and in what format.
- 8.19.2 The fostering Team Manager must provide a report explaining the reasons for the advice of Panel members being sought. The report should be a maximum of two sides of A4.
- 8.19.3 Form F1 or F2 should not be submitted with this report. The reason for this is to prevent the Panel reaching a provisional recommendation about the prospective or approved carers fostering status prior to them being presented formally to the Panel.
- 8.19.4 In order to protect their confidentiality, where advice is requested in relation to prospective carers, names or any other identifying information should not be given. If the carer/s are then later presented to the Panel for approval, this previous anonymity should ideally mean that the Panel would not automatically recognise the case and therefore not be influenced by any previous discussion.
- 8.19.5 In cases where medical or legal advice has been given which clearly states that existing carers should not continue to be approved or prospective carers' applications should not be pursued, then such cases should not normally be presented to the Panel for advice.
- 8.19.6 Examples of where it might be appropriate to seek the Panel's advice include:
- Where the carers are not meeting or going to meet a particular standard as set down in the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards
 - Where the Social Worker is having difficulty obtaining information required for the Form F1 or F2 and would value the Panel's input

on alternative ways that it might be obtained, that would also be acceptable to the Panel

- In Regulation 38 assessments, whether it is appropriate to proceed when there are issues of concern which would rule out approval of the relative / friend on a permanent basis, but in the short-term, the placement appears, on balance, to be in the child's best interests

8.19.7 Where advice is being sought, the carers should not attend the Panel, although they can be told that advice is being sought in relation to them. The fostering Team Manager must attend to present the case.

8.20 AGENCY DECISION MAKING

CONSIDERATION OF PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS BY AGENCY DECISION MAKER

8.20.1 Immediately after the Chair approves the minutes, these must be passed to the Agency Decision Maker, who is the Head of Children's Services. The Decision Maker may need to meet with the Chair to seek clarification of particular issues, but the Chair must not take part in the decision.

8.20.2 The Decision Maker must sign each recommendation in the Panel minutes, confirming s/he accepts the Panel recommendations or outlining an alternative decision. The original signed minutes must be held centrally by the Panel Administrator, with a copy of the signed Panel extract being placed on the applicant's case file.

NOTIFICATION OF DECISIONS

8.20.3 The Panel Administrator must prepare a letter for the Decision Maker, setting out her/his decision. If the decision is to approve, the letter must make clear the extent of this approval, including whether there are restrictions as to age, numbers or type of child the approval relates to and the circumstances for reviewing this approval.

8.20.4 This letter must be sent within five working days of the Chair receiving the minutes.

DECISIONS NOT TO APPROVE AN APPLICATION

8.20.5 If, after consideration of the Panel's recommendations, the Decision Maker is minded not to approve an application, s/he must notify the applicant in writing within five working days of receipt of the minutes

and offer them an opportunity to make representations to the Decision Maker.

- 8.20.6 The letter must include reasons and a copy of the recommendations of the Panel. If no representations are received within 28 days, the Decision Maker may confirm her/his decision.
- 8.20.7 If representations are made, the Decision Maker must refer these back to the Panel for further consideration. The Panel must once again make recommendations and the Decision Maker may then make a final decision.
- 8.20.8 This must be notified to the applicant in writing within five working days of the Chair receiving the minutes. The letter must include reasons and a copy of the recommendations of the Panel.
- 8.20.9 There is no further appeal against this decision, although the applicant should be advised of any rights they may have to challenge the way their case has been handled by way of the Directorate's Complaints and Representations Policy.

8.21 ACTION FOLLOWING APPROVAL

- 8.21.1 Once the Agency Decision Maker has written to confirm the extent of the carer's approval, the Fostering Team Manager must prepare a letter to the carer to:
- Formally welcome them as a foster carer for the IOW
 - Confirm the name of their fostering Social Worker
 - Enclose written information about fostering for the IOW, including a copy of the Foster Carer's Handbook, the Children's Guide, the training programme, the complaints procedure and the Foster Care Agreement
- 8.21.2 This letter must be hand delivered to the carer by the fostering Social Worker who must ensure that the Foster Care Agreement is signed by the carer and placed on their file before any placements are made with them. The carer should retain a copy of the Agreement.

FOSTER CARE AGREEMENT

- 8.21.3 Two copies of the Foster Care Agreement must be completed and signed after approval. This gives written information about the terms and conditions of the partnership between the Directorate and the carer.

- 8.21.4 The carer should retain one copy and one copy must be kept on the carer's file.

FOSTER CARER'S DETAILS

- 8.21.5 Following approval the foster carer's details must be updated on the computer and a file made up.
- 8.21.6 The carer's name and address must be forwarded to the local support group leader to ensure they are invited to the next support group meeting.
- 8.21.7 The carer's name will be added to the 'available list' once the Foster Care Agreement has been returned signed.

CASE RECORDS RELATING TO FOSTER CARERS AND OTHERS

- 8.21.8 Records in a file must be held on each carer. The file must contain a copy of the assessment, the letter of approval, the Foster Care Agreement, any review of approval and the outcome of that review, any written agreements to those placed in an emergency and any reports submitted to Panel.
- 8.21.9 Records must also be kept on all children placed, including the name age and sex of each child, the date the placement began and finished and in what circumstances.
- 8.21.10 Records must also be kept on each person who is not approved by Panel, or who withdraws an application prior to approval together with details and any reports.

NOTIFYING OTHER SOCIAL SERVICE PROVIDER TEAMS

- 8.21.11 Where an applicant is also an approved childminder, the appropriate Early Years Officer must be informed of the decision to approve or not to approve, by the assessing Social Worker. This is important for insurance purposes, as a childminder will not be covered if they exceed the permitted number of children for whom they are caring.
- 8.21.12 Foster carers who are also childminders should be advised to notify their Early Years Officer when children are placed with them. Where the decision is not to approve, this may have implications for the applicant's child minding registration.

APPLICANTS LIVING OFF THE ISLE OF WIGHT

- 8.21.13 For applicants living off the Island, the authority in which they reside must be notified of the outcome and decision to approve or not to approve in accordance with the Department of Health, Local Authority Circular, LAC (98)2.

8.22 REVIEWS OF FOSTER CARER'S TERMS OF APPROVAL

REVIEW FORMAT

- 8.22.1 The Fostering Service will review the approval of each carer after the first six months and thereafter at intervals of not more than one year. The household review must ascertain whether a foster carer and her/his household continue to be suitable and whether the terms of approval are suitable.
- 8.22.2 In addition, reviews must be carried out following investigations of a complaint or series of complaints against a carer (See 7.10).
- 8.22.3 Reviews are also necessary at any time where there is a change in the circumstances within the approved household, e.g. change in address, death of a spouse, separation, remarriage, substantial change in health or following birth /adoption of a child.
- 8.22.4 The annual review must be arranged and carried out by the carer's allocated Fostering Service Social Worker.
- 8.22.5 As many members of the carers' family as possible should attend the review.
- 8.22.6 The views of the foster carer, any child placed and those of any other local authority with a child placed in the foster home must be sought.
- 8.22.7 In addition the views of the Social Worker and parents of any child placed must also be sought.
- 8.22.8 The review should be evidence based and a foster carer's progress must be measured against current fostering standards. Concerns should be identified with a clear action plan on how those concerns will be addressed.
- 8.22.9 CRB checks must be updated every three years for all adults (over 18) in the household.

- 8.22.10 The carer's medical must be updated when necessary.
- 8.22.11 Any concern must be clearly documented and when there are ongoing concerns and persistent failure to meet fostering standards despite the existence of an action plan, consideration will need to be given as to whether a recommendation for deregistration is appropriate.
- 8.22.12 The safe caring plan must be updated and confirmed.
- 8.22.13 A fresh health and safety assessment on the foster home must be completed at the point of every review and attached to the Foster Carer Review of Approval Form.
- 8.22.14 Standard 23.8 of the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards requires that each review includes an appraisal of the carer's training and development needs. This should be recorded on the Foster Carer Review of Approval Form.
- 8.22.15 Social workers should also use the review to ensure that the carer's training profile is being kept up to date.
- 8.22.16 On completion of the review form, a copy of the section on training should be passed to the Training Manager. This will be used to help evaluate the effectiveness of the training programme as well as to help identify future training priorities.
- 8.22.17 On completion of the Foster Carer Review of Approval Form the Social Worker must arrange for a review meeting to be held with the carer and the Team Manager.
- 8.22.18 Following this meeting, unless a review needs to be presented to the Panel, the Team Manager must write to the carer to confirm their continuing registration.
- 8.22.19 The Fostering Panel must consider the first review and any subsequent annual review where there are any concerns, need to change the carer's terms of approval or the need to consider de-registration.

REVIEW OF HEALTH AND SAFETY ASSESSMENTS

- 8.22.20 Social workers should be mindful of the need to keep health and safety issues under consideration throughout the carer's fostering career.

- 8.22.21 As with applicant's, the process should be an open one with carers being fully involved, but it is the Social Worker's responsibility to complete a risk assessment and attach this to the carer's annual review of registration.
- 8.22.22 The risk assessment must cover the safety standards listed in Stage 5 of the Standard Requirements of Approved Carers.
- 8.22.23 If there are concerns arising from this exercise, these should be fully discussed with the carers. The weight to be given to specific concerns will need to be considered and if necessary the Social Worker should ask the carers to take corrective action before the completion of the annual review.
- 8.22.24 If the Social Worker continues to feel that there are unacceptable risks to any potential foster child then these should be discussed with their supervisor and if not resolved advice must be sought from the Panel and/or Agency Decision Maker.
- 8.22.25 If these risks cannot be addressed to the satisfaction of the social Worker, the Panel, or the Agency Decision Maker, then consideration will need to be given to terminating the approval of the carer.
- 8.22.26 Such cases must always be presented to Panel and the Agency Decision Maker must give the carer the opportunity to make further representations in accordance with the procedure the approval of foster carers (See 8.20).

8.23 FIRST REVIEWS AND OTHER REVIEWS PRESENTED TO PANEL

- 8.23.1 The Panel must always consider the first review of a carer's registration.
- 8.23.2 Reviews will need to be presented to Panel on other occasions including:
- Where there has been a major change in the circumstances of the carer or a member of their household
 - Where there has been a significant complaint against the carer (The Team Manager must decide if the complaint is significant, but this should normally be taken to include all child protection investigations)
 - Where there is a need to alter the terms of the carer's registration
 - Where it is proposed to terminate the carer's approval

- 8.23.3 Once the Panel has considered a review, the Agency Decision Maker must consider the recommendations of the Panel in accordance with the procedure for agency decision making (See 8.20).
- 8.23.4 If the Agency Decision Maker accepts the Panel recommendation s/he must write to the carer to confirm the terms of their continuing or revised registration.
- 8.23.5 If, after consideration of the Panel's recommendations, the Agency Decision Maker is not satisfied that the carer continues to be suitable or that the terms of the approval are appropriate, s/he must notify the applicant in writing within five working days of receipt of the minutes and offer them an opportunity to make representations.
- 8.23.6 The letter must include reasons and a copy of the recommendations of the Panel. If no representations are received within 28 days, the Agency Decision Maker is free to confirm her/his decision.
- 8.23.7 If representations are made, the Agency Decision Maker must refer these back to the Panel for further consideration. The Panel must once again make recommendations and the Agency Decision Maker may then make a final decision.
- 8.23.8 This must be notified to the applicant in writing within five working days of the Agency Decision Maker receiving the minutes. The letter must include reasons and a copy of the recommendations of the Panel.
- 8.23.9 There is no further appeal against this decision, although the applicant should be advised of any rights they may have to challenge the way their case has been handled by way of the Department's Complaints and Representations Policy.

8.24 RESIGNATION OF CARER

- 8.24.1 A carer may give written notice at any time that they no longer wish to foster.
- 8.24.2 Their approval will be terminated 28 days after receipt of such notice. The Social Worker must ensure that any papers relating to children are returned by the carer.
- 8.24.3 A closing summary must be prepared on the carer's file and countersigned by the fostering Team Manager before being passed to the team administrator for archiving.

8.25 TEMPORARY VARIANCE OF APPROVAL

- 8.25.1 Where, after careful matching, full discussion with the child's Social Worker and where it appears to be in the best interests of a child, it is necessary to place outside the carer's usual terms of registration, the approval of the Service Manager must be sought by way of a report.
- 8.25.2 This written report must give details of the children already in placement, their views and their Social Worker's views together with the fostering Social Worker's views of the proposed placement and be faxed to the Service Manager for consideration and approval.
- 8.25.3 A detailed report of the circumstances must be presented to the next Fostering Panel who must consider if there is a need for the revision of the carer's registration for this specific placement or for all placements.
- 8.25.4 The Panel's recommendation must then be considered by the Agency Decision Maker who must make the final decision.

8.26 NOTIFICATIONS TO RESPONSIBLE AUTHORITIES

- 8.26.1 Where notice is issued of the termination or variance of a carer's registration, or notice is received of a carer's registration, a copy of this notice must be sent to the responsible authority for any child placed with the carer and the area authority in which the carer lives.

8.27 USUAL FOSTERING LIMIT

- 8.27.1 S63 (12) and Schedule 7 of the Children Act 1989 set a usual fostering limit of three children unless all the children fostered are siblings or the carer is exempted from the usual fostering limit.
- 8.27.2 This does not include the birth children of the foster carer, or other children who reside within the household for significant periods of time but who are not fostered. It does include any children who are privately fostered.
- 8.27.3 If a foster carer exceeds this limit they are to be treated as carrying on a children's home.
- 8.27.4 A foster carer may only exceed the usual fostering limit if they are exempted from it by the local authority where they live.
- 8.27.5 Exemptions must relate to named children and in considering whether to exempt a person, the local authority must have regard to:

- The number of children whom the foster carer will then be fostering
 - The arrangements which the foster carer proposes for the care, accommodation and welfare of all the children living within the household
 - The period of time for which the foster carer is likely to require exemption
- 8.27.6 On the IOW, agreement for exemptions to the usual fostering limit is made by the Service Manager.
- 8.27.7 Where the exemption is granted the case must be presented to the next available Panel who must consider if there is a need for the revision of the carer's registration for this specific placement or for all placements.
- 8.27.8 The Panel's recommendation must then be considered by the Agency Decision Maker who must make the final decision.
- 8.27.9 Wherever possible and in all cases of planned placements of children, an exemption must be obtained prior to a child or young person being placed. Where this is not possible then exemption must be applied for within 48 hours of a child or young person being placed.
- 8.27.10 The request for an exemption must be made in writing to the Service Manager. It should include the information detailed above (See 8.27.5), a brief risk assessment and any extra support and/or supervision to be given by the fostering service.
- 8.27.11 The Service Manager's decision must be formally recorded on the foster carer's file and written notification must be sent to the foster carer, with a copy kept on file.
- 8.27.12 Decisions in respect of exemption requests for foster carers approved by another fostering service but living on the Island must be made by the Service Manager. Notifications of decisions on such requests must be sent to the foster carer as well as the placing authority as it is the carer who is granted the exemption not the local authority.
- 8.27.13 For IOW approved foster carers living in another area requests for an exemption must be made to the local authority in which they live. However, an exemption in principle must also be obtained from the fostering Team Manager.

8.28 MANAGEMENT, SUPERVISION & SUPPORT OF FOSTER CARERS

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORKER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

- 8.28.1 The child's Social Worker retains case accountability at all times for any child placed.
- 8.28.2 The child's Social Worker must carry out regular visits to the placement:
- When reasonably requested by the child or the carer
 - From time to time as circumstances require
 - In any event, within one week of the beginning of the placement and then at intervals of not more than six weeks during the first year of placement and subsequently at intervals of not more than three months
- 8.28.3 In the case of children placed with relatives or friends under Regulation 38 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, the child must be visited in the placement at least once a week.
- 8.28.4 The child's Social Worker should provide the carer with relevant advice and support to enable the carer to manage the placement successfully.
- 8.28.5 They should also keep the carer informed as to the progress of plans and consult with the carer before there are any significant changes to agreed plans.

SUPERVISING SUPPORT WORKER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

- 8.28.6 Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named support worker and has access to adequate social work and other professional support, information and advice to enable her/him to provide consistent, high quality care for each young person placed.
- 8.28.7 The supervising worker must ensure each carer is informed in writing of, and accepts, understands and operates within, all standards, policies and guidance agreed by the Fostering Service.
- 8.28.8 The support worker is also responsible for:
- Keeping the carer's file up to date
 - Keeping the profile in front of the file up to date

- Updating the T cards and checking availability
- Keeping the placement book up to date
- Taking the carer back to Panel in the event of the need to change approval, exemption, deregistration or review of carer after an allegation
- Ensuring an annual review of the carer is undertaken and any difficulties shared with the Team Manager
- Getting feedback from Social Workers regarding the success/suitability of placement and sending off the End of Placement report form
- Getting feedback from carer regarding their experience of placement and seeking completion of the End of Placement report form
- Raising with the carer issues that come up as a result of placements and identifying training needs and settings to address these
- Jointly investigating with the Social Worker or Social Worker from the Referral and Assessment team any allegation made against a carer
- Collecting from the carer any confidential papers relating to the child/young person at the end of placement or ensuring that they have been collected by child's/young person's Social Worker

8.28.9 The support worker's role is with the foster family, not the child/young person. However, communication with the child's/young person's Social Worker is vital.

8.28.10 Decisions regarding the young person in placement can only be made by the young person's Social Worker or Team Manager, not the support worker.

8.28.11 There must be no collusion with carers against Social Workers. If there is dissatisfaction with the Social Worker or her/his practice, the foster carer should be encouraged to take this up directly with the Social Worker. If necessary a three way meeting must be set up by the support worker.

8.28.12 Support workers are often invited to reviews and planning meetings regarding the young person placed. The support worker must ensure there is a necessity to attend before agreeing to do so.

8.28.13 There will be occasions when the support worker requests an invitation if there are difficult issues to be raised and/or if the carer needs support in the meeting.

- 8.28.14 Carers need to be clear when their support worker is available and who to contact in their absence, details of the night duty service and telephone number.
- 8.28.15 The support contract with carers must cover what support entails and pattern of visiting. It is good practice to make appointments for next time at each visit so carers know when they will see the support worker next.
- 8.28.16 The support worker must establish with the carer which meetings will be attended, including reviews, planning meetings, so expectations on both sides are known.
- 8.28.17 The support worker must be aware of the Isle of Wight Standards for foster carers and measure the service that carers provide against these.
- 8.28.18 They must liaise with the carer and the fostering Team Manager where carers are or may be failing to meet standards.
- 8.28.19 The support worker must ensure they are aware of the needs of children in placement. They may need to read the young person's file to have a good understanding of their needs. The carer may also find it helpful to have a look at information on the child's file, with the agreement of the child's Social Worker.
- 8.28.20 The support worker must raise awareness of carers to safe caring issues with different children in placement and ensure that the safe care plan is written down and seen.
- 8.28.21 The support worker should provide honest; clear feedback of both positive and concerning practice, together with suggestions for improving the quality of care provided.
- 8.28.22 Support must include all members of the foster family and the worker must visit at various times of the day to ensure they meet everyone from time to time.
- 8.28.23 A regular meeting with carers helps a trusting relationship to develop. Even when placements are very steady, visits are important. This ensures practice is picked up on that carers will not have seen for themselves; ensures the worker and carer know each other well enough to share concerns or to deal with complaints and allegations, should they arise.

8.28.24 If a carer has a new placement a quick phone call the following day to check how things are going ensures problems do not get established and it is always appreciated.

8.28.25 All support offered to any carer must be recorded on file.

VISITS BY SUPERVISING SUPPORT WORKERS

8.28.26 Supervising workers must meet monthly with foster carers.

8.28.27 If any other of visiting pattern is established this must be agreed with the Team Manager and recorded on the file.

8.28.28 Meetings must have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the carer's work.

RECORDS OF VISITS

8.28.29 Foster carer's files must include records of supervisory meetings. Records must be written at the meeting (or sent by the worker immediately afterwards) and signed by both the carer and the support worker.

UNANNOUNCED VISITS

8.28.30 There must be occasional, unannounced visits, by the support worker, at least one each year.

INFORMATION ON LOOKED AFTER YOUNG PEOPLE

8.28.31 Carers are entitled to all relevant information available regarding children placed in their care. This information is essential to enable them to care effectively and safely. The Fostering Service support worker must convene a meeting within two weeks of the placement at which all information and plans must be passed over that have not been given to the foster carers during the planning stage of the placement.

EQUIPMENT

8.28.32 Foster carers should be encouraged to collect and provide essential equipment for the fostering task prior to the young person being placed, i.e. clothes appropriate to the age of young person, personal washing equipment, beds, chest of drawers, duvets, pillows and toys.

- 8.28.33 There may be occasions when the Fostering Service asks a carer to take a young person they are not expecting and when essential equipment will need to be provided. This will be on loan for the duration of the placement and should be returned to the store by the support worker.
- 8.28.34 Any equipment borrowed from the store must be signed out with details of which carer it has been loaned to and signed in as returned.
- 8.28.35 If there is no suitable equipment in the store, a purchase order may be provided by the support worker, with the agreement of the fostering Service Manager.
- 8.28.36 Offers of second hand equipment may only be accepted if the item is undamaged and in good working order and generally of a high standard.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

- 8.28.37 The IOW's policy on not recruiting staff who work for the fostering service as foster carers is one way of avoiding potential conflicts of interest for both staff and carers.
- 8.28.38 All carers, managers and support workers need to remain aware of other potential conflicts of interest and their responsibility to declare them.
- 8.28.39 Carers must declare such conflicts of interest to their support worker and staff to their line manager as soon as they are aware of a potential conflict.
- 8.28.40 Examples of potential conflict include but are not limited to:
- A carer and a member of staff forming a sexual relationship
 - A member of the household/relative of a carer or worker becoming a service user of the Children's Services Directorate
 - A member of the household/relative of a carer or worker being arrested or prosecuted

OUT OF HOURS SUPPORT

- 8.28.41 The Fostering Service runs its own Out of Hours service available to all foster carers at any time, not only in emergencies. Carers are invited to ring directly onto the Out of Hours mobile phone number 07970 009824.

- 8.28.42 The duty Social Worker will have a list of available foster carers should the Filtering Officer/EDO have to make a placement.
- 8.28.43 All qualified Social Workers with the Fostering Service will be on the rota. The service provided is usually over the telephone. However there may be occasion when a carer needs support in person. At such a point the duty worker will make a home visit.

SUPPORT GROUPS

- 8.28.44 Support groups are seen as a valuable, additional source of support to individual carers, as well as a vehicle for developing wider networks, which enhance the substitute family care service.
- 8.28.45 Support workers must ensure that all carers have access to a support group relevant to their individual needs and encourage carers to take advantage of this.

FOSTERING NETWORK

- 8.28.46 The IOW is a member of the Fostering Network and carers should be encouraged to become individual members (thus gaining valuable benefits such as legal advice). We will reimburse carers for their annual membership fees.

RESPITE CARE

- 8.28.47 The IOW recognises that fostering, although often rewarding, can take a heavy toll on carers and other members of their household.
- 8.28.48 The need for respite care for carers is therefore accepted as a legitimate and necessary element of support for carers.
- 8.28.49 The need for respite care should be discussed and agreed on a case by case basis, taking account of the needs of both the carer and the child.
- 8.28.50 Wherever possible, such needs should be discussed and agreed at the beginning of the placement and recorded in the child's Care Plan and the Placement Agreement.
- 8.28.51 Where this is not possible arrangements for respite should normally be agreed within a statutory childcare review or Placement Agreement review meeting.

- 8.28.52 We should endeavour to provide respite to permanent foster carers where the demands on the carer are such that this was agreed as necessary during the matching process.

HOLIDAYS

- 8.28.53 Carers will be expected to take children in placement with them when going on holiday.
- 8.28.54 Any exceptions to this general rule should be negotiated with the child's Social Worker as part of the Placement Agreement/Annual Review/or any other stage of the placement, as should payment to the carer for the cost of the holiday.
- 8.28.55 Carers should be encouraged to take a regular break from fostering in order to retain enthusiasm for the task and to spend time with other members of the household, especially carer's own children.

8.29 FOSTER CARE FINANCE

FOSTERING ALLOWANCES AND ADDITIONAL FINANCE

- 8.29.1 The fostering allowances are based on the Fostering Network rates and reviewed and set for the beginning of April each year.
- 8.29.2 The up to date rates are contained in a leaflet circulated to all foster carers and fieldwork teams. The leaflet contains a list of additional claims, which may be made. These will be decided on at the discretion of the fieldwork Team Manager.

ALLOWANCES PAID TO REGULATION 38/FAMILY AND FRIENDS CARERS

- 8.29.3 See 8.11.55 for policy and procedure on children and young people placed under Regulation 38.

ALLOWANCES PAID WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE ARE ABSENT OR REMOVED

- 8.29.4 There are occasions when young people are permanently placed with carers and they leave the carer's home for a short period (i.e. school holiday, period of respite, reported as missing).
- 8.29.5 In these circumstances, where the period does not extend beyond one calendar week there will be no change, if it is between one and

two weeks the carer will receive 50 per cent of the agreed boarding out allowance.

- 8.29.6 If the period exceeds two weeks the allowance to the carer will normally cease until the young person returns.
- 8.29.7 When an allegation is received by the Directorate which necessitates a fostered young person being moved from the carer, the carer will continue to receive the full boarding out allowance for one week, 50 per cent for the second week and thereafter the allowance will cease.

INSURANCE CLAIMS

- 8.29.8 Foster carers are covered by the Council's insurance policy - insurance protects against risk - in this context theft, accident or malicious damage.
- 8.29.9 When a carer is seeking to make a claim their support worker must ring the Insurance Office, Directorate of Finance and Information, County Hall to discuss the claim and ensure it would be covered by the policy. They must also discuss and agree the method of payment.
- 8.29.10 The details of this discussion should be confirmed by way of a brief memo, outlining the circumstances and including the foster carer first and second names and address (The first name allows for a cheque to be paid).
- 8.29.11 The memo must clarify how payment should be made, either a direct cheque to the supplier on the basis of the quote/invoice, or a cheque to the foster carer and be accompanied by either a written quote for the replacement item or a receipt.
- 8.29.12 Alternatively, a speedier way forward is for a 'pink' to be completed on the basis of a quote (once agreement has been given by Insurance Section) seeking payment direct to the carer, advising that the receipt will be forwarded by the Fostering Service to County Hall. Treasurers will then arrange to reimburse the Fostering Code.
- 8.29.13 It is necessary for the support worker to keep an eye on this process from beginning to end to ensure all ends are tied up. Copies of documents, memos and pinks should be held on the foster carer's file.
- 8.29.14 The Directorate also has insurance cover with Fostering Network to offer legal advice and support to foster carer when allegations are made. There is a 24-hour help line available to all registered carers.

8.30 FOSTER CARER TRAINING

INTRODUCTION

- 8.30.1 Training for all carers begins at the point of referral and will continue throughout the assessment process and their life as carers. While all carers will have differing needs at different times, there is a requirement that all carers must undertake a minimum level of training as outlined below.

PREPARATION GROUPS

- 8.30.2 All applicants will be required to attend a series of preparation groups before an assessment report is presented to Panel (See 8.3.11).
- 8.30.3 An assessment will not usually begin until applicants have attended the initial preparation group, though this requirement may be varied in individual cases at the discretion of the Team Manager.
- 8.30.4 For applicants who have previously been approved by another authority or organisation and can evidence that they have undergone training commensurate with our preparation groups, then attendance may be waived at the discretion of the Team Manager.

ON-GOING TRAINING

- 8.30.5 The Learning Centre arranges a calendar of training events every year for all approved foster carers.
- 8.30.6 Support Social Workers have a role to remind foster carers of their agreement to take part annually in three training workshops, courses, reading, videos and any other opportunity that builds on carer's knowledge for the fostering task.
- 8.30.7 Support workers should ensure that carer's training and development needs are kept under review and that carers are encouraged to take up relevant training and development opportunities as they become available.
- 8.30.8 Carer's training needs should be formally re-assessed at the time of the annual review of the carer's registration and a plan put in place for meeting these.

- 8.30.9 Where carers have persistently failed to undertake required training consideration must be given at the time of the annual review to their continuing use as carers.

TRAINING PORTFOLIOS

- 8.30.10 Standard 16.9 of the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards requires carers to maintain a training portfolio.

- 8.30.11 Although the responsibility for maintaining the training portfolio rests with the carer, support workers must ensure that this is produced in an acceptable format and ensure that it is kept up to date.

- 8.30.12 The following elements must be included in the training profile:

- An analysis of the carers' strengths and weaknesses as measured against the Fostering Network competencies
- Details of any relevant learning prior to approval
- Record of attendance at training events, including preparation and post approval groups
- An evaluation of the effectiveness of all completed training
- An individual training plan for each carer with identified learning goals
- An analysis of the training needs of any birth children of the fostering household
- Copies of the relevant sections of the carer's annual review report

8.31 FOSTER CARE RECORDS

CASE RECORDING

- 8.31.1 The activities of both foster carers and fostering services are governed by the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

- 8.31.2 Standard 24.2 requires the fostering service to produce a written policy on case recording which establishes the purpose, format and content of files and clarifies what information is kept on carer's files and what information is kept on child's files.

- 8.31.3 Standard 25.7 requires the fostering service to produce a written policy and guidance for staff on the keeping and retention of files,

ensuring that carers, children and their parents know the nature of records maintained and how to access them.

8.31.4 Standard 25.12 requires the encouragement of carers and children to:

- Access their records
- Make additions and comments and
- Record personal statements, including any dissent

8.31.5 The 1998 Data Protection Act, which came into force on 11th March 2000, gives any living person who is the subject of personal information held by a social services authority, rights of access to that information.

THE PURPOSE OF RECORD KEEPING

8.31.6 Case recording is not an activity which is separate to social work practice, but rather an integral part of the social work service agencies provide to children and families. This applies equally to fostering services and their carers.

8.31.7 The purpose of recording is to:

- Provide a factual summary of the carer's personal details and circumstances
- Maintain a record of assessments, plans and reviews
- Provide an account of the service that has been, or is to be, delivered
- Include descriptions, professional opinions and direct observations of the worker
- Summarise the user's own views and perspective
- Facilitate reviewing the worker's practice in supervision

8.31.8 Ideally recording should be a shared activity between the worker and the carer. This means that recording formats themselves must be accessible and take account of the diversity of needs of carers. This might mean:

- The use of Braille or tape transcripts for carers with visual disabilities
- The translation of records for carers whose first language is not English
- Fostering support workers being sensitive to the carers' literacy skills

RECORDING STANDARDS

- 8.31.9 All records must:
- Be legible
 - Be accurate
 - Be up to date
 - Contain basic details of all contacts
 - Be written in plain language
 - Be well maintained

FILE FORMAT

- 8.31.10 It is important that files can be monitored and reviewed to ensure that children are protected.
- 8.31.11 The support worker is responsible for organising the file with the team administrator and for its upkeep.
- 8.31.12 Material in the files needs to be accessible to both workers and managers.
- 8.31.13 Files must be maintained in line with National Minimum Standards. National Minimum Standards say that files must be compliant with the legal requirements, and subject to legal safeguards can be seen by the foster carer (Standard 25.6) and require that there is a system for keeping records about allegations and complaints and for handling these confidentially and securely.
- 8.31.14 Records of complaints and allegations must be clearly recorded on the relevant files for staff carers and children, including details of the investigation, conclusions reached and action taken. Separate records must also to be kept which bring together data on allegations and complaints (25.13).
- 8.31.15 All files in respect of approved carers must contain as a minimum:
- A record of the initial screening process
 - The carer's application form
 - The original report on the assessment of the carer and any other reports submitted to the Fostering Panel
 - A record of the carer's attendance and performance at a preparation group

- The information obtained in relation to the assessment, approval, review or termination of approval of the carer
- The notice of approval
- The Foster Care Agreement
- Annual reviews of approval
- Notices of the outcome of reviews of approval, including revised terms of approval or notices of termination of approval
- Any agreement entered into by the carer in respect of an emergency placement
- A record of each placement made with the carer, including the name, age, ethnicity, religion and sex of each child placed, the dates on which each placement began and terminated and the circumstances of the termination
- A copy of the carer's safe caring guidelines
- A copy of the carer's training portfolio
- A copy of the carer's training profile
- A record of any complaints or allegations made in respect of the carer, together with the details of any investigation, its outcome and any action taken
- Evidence of management oversight and audit

8.31.16 Files in respect of family and friend carers who have a child placed under Regulation 38(2) must also contain:

- The agreement entered into in accordance with Regulation 38(2)(b)
- A record in relation to the placement, including the name, age and sex of each child placed, the dates on which the placement began and terminated, and the circumstances of the termination
- The information obtained in relation to the enquiries carried out under Regulation 38(2)

8.31.17 All files in respect of applicants who are not approved as carers or who withdraw their application prior to approval must contain as a minimum:

- All information obtained in connection with the assessment
- Any reports submitted to the Fostering Panel and any recommendations of the Panel
- Any notices given that the IOW is mindful not to approve or has not approved the application
- Any representations received in respect of the above notifications

- A closing summary

RECORDS IN RESPECT OF CHILDREN PLACED

8.31.18 Once a placement has been made, information in respect of the child must be placed in a separate file/module in the carer's file.

8.31.19 This information must include:

- A copy of the referral in respect of the child from the placing team
- Any reports or background history in respect of the child
- Copies of Looking After Children System Records such as Essential Information Records, Care Plans, Review of Arrangements and Assessment and Action Records

8.31.20 Once a placement ends, any such information must be returned to the child's Social Worker.

8.31.21 Case recording on carer's files must clearly identify if the recording is in respect of the child or the carer.

8.31.22 However, the nature of fostering is such that it is often difficult to separate the two when recording specific incidents. For example, if the child was missing from placement and the actions taken by the carer were being recorded, then it would be impractical to record this in such a way that kept the child and the carer entirely separate. It must therefore be recognised that such information in respect of children will remain on the carer's file even after the placement has ended.

8.31.23 Other information must also be retained on the carer's file that may contain information in respect of children who have left placement. This will include records of complaints made against the carers.

8.31.24 The IOW will retain a central record of referrals in respect of all children referred for a placement.

ROLE OF MANAGERS

8.31.25 Managers are expected to read files and develop good case recording skills in staff.

8.31.26 Managers must sign all assessment reports.

8.31.27 Files must be audited and countersigned by managers at a minimum of every six months.

CARER'S CONTRIBUTING TO RECORDS

8.31.28 Carers must be encouraged to contribute to their case records.

8.31.29 For applicants this will begin with an expectation that they contribute to the assessment report. This will be done in a variety of ways including eco-maps and family trees as well as the body of the report itself.

8.31.30 Approved carers will have a number of formal opportunities to contribute to their case record including:

- Feedback on placements
- Annual reviews
- The creation and maintenance of their training profile
- The creation of their individual safe caring guidelines

8.31.31 Carers must also be encouraged to make more general contributions to their case records throughout the year. The IOW must ensure that carers are aware of their right to access information held in respect of them and welcomes requests for such access.

8.31.32 Where a carer identifies a factual error in information held, this must be corrected immediately.

8.31.33 Where a carer disagrees about an opinion or judgement of their support worker or others and it is possible to reach agreement on amendments to the record, these must be made. If it is not possible to reach agreement, the carer's views must be recorded alongside the worker's.

REGISTER OF FOSTER CARERS

8.31.34 The IOW must maintain a register of approved foster carers, which must include the following particulars:

- The name, address, date of birth, ethnic origin, religion and sex of each foster carer
- The date of approval and each review of approval and
- The current terms of approval
- The name and address of each person with whom it has placed a child under Regulation 38(2)

- The date of each agreement entered into in accordance with Regulation 38(2)(b)
- The terms of any such agreement for the time being in force

FOSTERING PANEL RECORDS

8.31.35 Members of the Fostering Panel will be provided with confidential information on a regular basis. Full details on the handling of such information is detailed in the Panel procedures (See 8.15) and the following are some of the key points contained within this procedure:

- All Panel members will be required to sign a declaration agreeing to respect the need for confidentiality
- All Panel papers will be delivered to Panel members by hand, registered post or courier

ACCESS TO RECORDS

8.31.36 The IOW encourages and welcomes requests from carers for access to their records – see Departmental Access to Records Policy.

STORAGE OF RECORDS

8.31.37 The IOW recognises the importance of case records and will do all in its power to ensure records are kept secure at all times.

8.31.38 Files are the property of the IOW and should be accessible to authorised staff only. They must be kept in locked filing cabinets, in clearly labelled slings and in alphabetical order.

8.31.39 The worker responsible for a file must ensure that all files are stored in a metal lockable cabinet and that files are never left on a desk overnight, or for any significant period when not being used.

8.31.40 Files may need to be taken out of the office, for example to present at Court or to allow a worker to work away from the office. Prior permission must be obtained from the workers manager.

8.31.41 Whenever a file is removed from its usual place of storage, a record must be made, which can easily be found, which clearly states who has the file and when it was taken.

8.31.42 The record may be:

- A tracer card which sits in the place where the file would normally be, or

- An entry on a computer data base, or
- In a log book

8.31.43 The current volume must be clearly labelled, with the start date and the number of the file in the series of volumes.

RETENTION OF RECORDS

8.31.44 The records referred to above under File Format and Register of Foster Carers must be retained for at least 10 years, from the date an approval is terminated, from the date a placement under Regulation 38 (2) is terminated or from the date an application is not approved or withdrawn.

DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION AND CONFIDENTIALITY

8.31.45 Personal information is subject to a legal duty of confidence and should not normally be disclosed without the consent of the subject. However, the law provides for confidential information to be disclosed without consent if it is necessary for the protection of health or morals, the protection of the rights and freedom of others or for the prevention of disorder of crime.

8.31.46 Disclosure in such circumstances must be limited only to that information which is necessary for the end that has to be achieved and should be limited to those that need to know.

8.31.47 Decisions about sharing confidential information must be made on a case by case basis and decisions to disclose without consent must be recorded on the file together with reasons.

8.31.48 Where disclosure is to be made without consent, the subject must be made aware that the information is being passed on so that they have the opportunity to correct any inaccuracies or take legal steps to challenge the disclosure unless not doing so can be justified for overriding public policy reasons such as the protection of children or the investigation of a crime.

8.31.49 Requests for the disclosure of confidential information must always be passed to the relevant Team Manager.

8.31.50 Care must also be taken to ensure that confidential information is not accidentally disclosed by the overhearing of telephone conversations or other discussions.

ACCIDENT REGISTER

- 8.31.51 The team administrator will maintain a register of all accidents occurring to children while placed with carers.

COMPLAINTS REGISTER

- 8.31.52 The team administrator will maintain a register of all complaints made against foster carers. The register must include details of how the complaint was investigated (including timescale) and details of the outcome of the investigation.

8.32 CONTRACTING WITH MEMBERS OF STAFF TO COMPLETE ASSESSMENTS ON FOSTER CARERS

- 8.32.1 The IOW is mindful of the European Working Time Directive, which safeguards employees working hours.
- 8.32.2 Any full time or part time staff member undertaking an assessment of foster carers must first seek agreement from their line manager to undertake work additional to their existing contract.
- 8.32.3 The details of the assessment, the family to be assessed, the date for the meeting with the Fostering Service Manager for mid-assessment supervision, the date for the draft report to be available for typing within the Family Placement Team, the date for the final report to be ready for distribution, the requirement for presentation at Panel and any follow up Panel visits and presentations must be included in the letter from the Fostering Service Manager to the staff member.
- 8.32.4 Copies of the IOW Carer's Standards, the Fostering Network Safe Caring book, the BAAF Form F1 or 2, a copy of the initial application, all the references and a copy of the Fostering Service procedures must be given to the Social Worker to assist them in their work, by the Fostering Service.
- 8.32.5 It will be the responsibility of the assessing Social Worker to invite and prepare the applicants to Panel in accordance with the guidance.
- 8.32.6 The Fostering Service will meet the overtime claim of the hours incurred by the assessment at double time rate. The hours incurred must be claimed on the overtime sheets and submitted once the assessment has been finally presented to Panel. There will be an upper limit to the amount that may be claimed for any assessment.

8.33 FAMILY LINK SCHEME

- 8.33.1 Under the Children Act 1989 children with a disability automatically count as children in need and are entitled to an assessment for services.
- 8.33.2 A child will be regarded as being in need if:
- S/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 authority under the Act
 - Her/his health is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired without the provision of services
 - S/he is disabled
- 8.33.3 Children who visit their carer for 24 hours or more at any one time are accommodated under s20.
- 8.33.4 Regulation 37 of the Fostering Services Regulation 2002 allows for a series of placements with the same carer to be treated as a single placement where:
- No single placement lasts for more than four weeks and
 - The total duration of then placement does not exceed 120 days in any period of 12 months
- 8.33.5 The Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 introduced direct payments for 16 and 17 year olds so that they have more choice and flexibility in the way they receive a service.
- 8.33.6 Under the Carers (Recognition and Services) Act 1995, if a child is undergoing an assessment under The Children Act 1989 (and Community Care Act 1990, or, Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act), the parent/carers of the child can request and receive an independent assessment of their own needs.
- 8.33.7 This needs to be taken into account when making decisions about services offered to the child. As this legislation includes young carers, the needs of siblings within a family group may also feature when planning resources for the child.

STAFFING

- 8.33.8 The Children's Disability Team and the Fostering Service provide dedicated staff. Other Social Workers within the CDT refer children to the scheme and are responsible for making the placements of those children.
- 8.33.9 Other Social Workers within the FPT occasionally have some responsibility for Family Link Carers.

BUDGET

- 8.33.10 The Fostering Service Manager and the Service Manager hold the budget.
- 8.33.11 Children are allocated a number of hours per month. This is based on the assessment of the child, the wishes of the parents and the availability of the carers.
- 8.33.12 100 hours per month is considered the maximum available (equivalent to two full weekends). This is set at the time of the placement agreement.
- 8.33.13 The allocation is flexible in that hours can be exceeded by up to five per month. Any more than that and carers or parents must contact their Social Worker to request an increase.
- 8.33.14 Similarly, the finance section can pay up to five hours increase, but they must refer to the Fostering Service if a higher claim is received.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- 8.33.15 The scheme is for children aged between 0 and 18 years of age who have a permanent mental and/or physical disability and/or a serious medical condition.
- 8.33.16 For a full definition of disability and policy on eligibility see 2.3.1.
- 8.33.17 Any child who fits the criteria of 'disabled', or who has a serious medical condition can be assessed for a Family Link.
- 8.33.18 Exceptions to this are children who have a high level of need, which cannot be provided for within a Family Link setting, for example, a need for nursing care.

MAXIMUM CARE AVAILABLE

- 8.33.19 Children are able to have up to 100 hours of care per month.
- 8.33.20 In certain circumstances, such as illness of a parent or carer, this can be increased. If the need for more care is ongoing, a shared care arrangement will need to be considered.

POST-18 YEARS OF AGE

- 8.33.21 In certain cases, if their assessed need is to continue receiving support from their Family Link Carer, this can be planned for by the transitional worker, Adult Services.
- 8.33.22 It will become either a private arrangement, using direct payment finance or when Small Homes Regulations apply, and carers will need to change their status.
- 8.33.23 In both cases, carers will be deregistered unless they continue to offer a service to another child under the age of 18.

PLACEMENT PRACTICE

- 8.33.24 The IOW runs a two-tier system for the placement of children with Family Link carers.
- 8.33.25 For children who receive more than 24 hours care at any one time, the looked after children format will be employed (LAC). These children will be accommodated under s20 of The Children Act 1989.
- 8.33.26 For children who spend less time with their carers, a Placement Agreement will be made at the end of an introductory period. Reviews will usually take place six monthly and no less frequently than annually.

ASSESSMENT OF CARERS

- 8.33.27 The Fostering Service Regulations 2002 require all carers with whom children are accommodated to be registered as foster carers. The Regulations allow for a carer to be approved specifically for a scheme such as the Family Link Scheme. This is standard practice on the IOW.
- 8.33.28 For applicants who are offering day care only, a shorter form of the BAAF Form F will be completed (With the exception of references,

which remains the same as for a full assessment). The completed report will be presented to the Linking Panel for approval. The decision-maker will be the Fostering Service Manager.

STANDARDS FOR CARERS

8.33.29 All Family Link carers are required to adhere to the IOW Standard Requirements of Approved Carers. This encompasses many of the UK National Standards for Foster Care.

SAFE CARE

8.33.30 All Family Link carers must have a safe-caring policy, to ensure that both carers and the children placed are aware of the safe care practices within the home. This should be a general policy that should be added to at the time of each new placement, taking into account the needs of the child.

FOSTER CARER AGREEMENT

8.33.31 Carers must sign a Foster Carer Agreement after approval. At their annual review they must be asked to renew their agreement.

MANUAL HANDLING AND LIFTING

8.33.32 Family Link carers are not considered as employees of the IOW Council and the Manual Handling Operations Regulations (1992) do not apply. Under s3 of the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974), we need to do as much as possible to ensure the health and safety of people who may be affected by the Directorate's undertakings.

8.33.33 Where children have a lifting assessment, this needs to be included in their assessment (FL1). In addition to this, parents need to be specific about their child's care needs.

8.33.34 When considering a possible link, attention needs to be paid to the fact the child will grow and become heavier, or may have a degenerative condition. The carer's assessment should cover what levels of handling carers are capable of and how well suited their accommodation is for children with mobility difficulties.

8.33.35 Medical contraindications need to be considered carefully by the Directorate's Medical Advisor.

- 8.33.36 Training in manual handling techniques should be offered. This is separate to the current Manual Handling and Lifting course, which covers the movement of inanimate objects.

ASSESSMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND LINKING

- 8.33.37 The Family Link Scheme receives a referral once it has been discussed and agreed at the Short Term Break Panel that it is an appropriate referral.
- 8.33.38 The referral will be a copy of the Short Term Break Assessment that will have been completed by the CDT Social Worker.
- 8.33.39 A Family Link Fostering Service worker must then visit the birth family to complete a detailed information form and to meet the child. This provides the Fostering Service worker the opportunity to gather appropriate information, explain the scheme and obtain direct experience of the parents/carers and child.
- 8.33.40 The Fostering Service worker must make up a card for the young person and a copy of the assessment form and detailed information form must be put into the waiting list file.
- 8.33.41 Each month there is a linking meeting where the Family Link Linking group considers each young person on the waiting list and the available carers to put together suggested links.
- 8.33.42 If a suitable link is identified the information must be passed to the CDT worker for the young person.
- 8.33.43 The following day the Fostering Service worker must attend the CD Team to discuss all possible links and current situations for those on the waiting list.
- 8.33.44 The carer must be given a copy of the profile of the young person and asked if this is a link they will consider.
- 8.33.45 If they agree to try the link, the Social Worker for the young person must be advised.
- 8.33.46 If the carer feels this is not a suitable link then the name will go back on the waiting list. If there is another suitable carer this will be suggested and the process repeated.
- 8.33.47 The CDT Social Worker must read the profile of the carers. If satisfied this is a suitable potential link, the Fostering Service worker

must set up an initial meeting, inviting the carer, the young person's family and the Social Worker. This will usually take place at the young person's home.

- 8.33.48 There should be a number of introductory meetings set at the family and the young person's pace.
- 8.33.49 When the carers and young person's family feel the visits are going well and benefiting the young person, then a formal Agreement Meeting must be held when the number of allocated hours is agreed, the timings and patterns of visits, medical and dietary needs are clearly established and transport arrangements set up.
- 8.33.50 The Social Worker for the young person and Fostering Service worker must attend this meeting and complete a full written agreement.
- 8.33.51 Family Link carers must receive regular support from the Fostering Service worker who must complete the annual review of registration with the carers.
- 8.33.52 A referral must be made to the Adult Learning Disability Team for any young person who reaches the age of 16. The transitional worker will become involved to assist and plan for the move from children to adult services.

EQUIPMENT

- 8.33.53 There is an equipment budget for Family Link, held by the Fostering Service. Some equipment is held in store, such as stair gates.
- 8.33.54 Essential equipment needs to be identified during consideration for a suitable link. Wherever possible we will purchase equipment that makes things more manageable, for example a trip-trap chair to be kept at the carers.

REVIEWS

- 8.33.55 Children placed under the LAC system will be reviewed accordingly. It is important to stress that the Family Link does constitute a completely separate placement to any other placement in public care (i.e. a foster placement).
- 8.33.56 It is useful to use the FL 1 assessment form as 'Essential Information'.
- 8.33.57 In the interests of efficiency, the Family Link placement review can be incorporated into the main LAC review. The carers can be asked to

attend part of said review. If necessary the FPT Social Worker can also attend.

8.33.58 The 'non LAC' format uses the Family link review form (FL7) and is as follows:

- Paper review after one month (usually done over the telephone to see how things are going)
- Three months later (meeting between carers, parents and CDT Social Worker)
- Six months thereafter

8.33.59 In some cases all parties will agree to review on an annual basis. Team Manager CDT will ratify this.

8.33.60 The Placement Agreement must be signed on an annual basis by the carers to ensure they are familiar with their undertaking. This can be added to the existing agreement.

PAYMENT SYSTEM

8.33.61 Carers are paid an hourly rate. The payment is for expenses and does not have to be declared for tax purposes and does not effect benefits payments.

8.33.62 When a child who is staying for one complete week, the parents or carers will be expected to pay the care component of DLA towards the cost of their stay.

8.33.63 This is collected by the Finance Section. It is the responsibility of the CDT Social Worker to inform parents/carers of this requirement.

8.33.64 Carers are usually expected to transport a child one way and the parents the other way. In cases where the carer is asked to undertake both journeys, one journey can be funded by the scheme. Carers should use a mileage claim form.

8.33.65 In certain circumstances, mileage can be paid for both ways, for example where the carer is on a low income.

8.33.66 Carers who only have the child for a short period of time will receive little in payment; this needs to be taken into account when requesting carers to transport a child.

- 8.33.67 Carers are issued monthly claim forms which state the allocated hour. They must complete the forms monthly and have them countersigned by the parents/carers.
- 8.33.68 The form must be sent to the Finance Section at Social Services and Housing Headquarters. Finance will pay up to five hours over the allocated hours. If a claim exceeds this they check with the Fostering Service Team or the child's Social Worker prior to making a payment.
- 8.33.69 Following payment, details must be entered on FIDO. The forms are sent to the FPT. Each claim must be checked and initialled and the amount claimed entered against the amount allocated on a chart.
- 8.33.70 The forms must be filed under the carers' name in a file. The chart of allocated and used hours must be kept at the front of the same file.
- 8.33.71 The amount of hours used must be monitored at each review, changes being made as necessary.
- 8.33.72 The mileage claims must be filed in the carer's file.

8.34 ACCESS TO FILES

- 8.34.1 All foster carers should be advised that the Directorate maintains files, and have the right of access and confidentiality. The information will be treated as confidential and generally disclosure will only be by consent.
- 8.34.2 All formal requests for access must be made by application in writing to the Director of Social Services. An Application for Access to a Foster Carer's File Records form is available for this purpose.
- 8.34.3 Access must be given within 40 days of the day the request is received by the office.
- 8.34.4 The request must be passed to the Fostering Service Manager, who together with the supervisory/support worker, will put together all relevant files and decide on the consents necessary before access can be given.
- 8.34.5 Where consent is necessary, this must be sought within 14 days of the Directorate being satisfied as to the identity of the subject and the information required. The consent must be received in writing.
- 8.34.6 Access to information not requiring consent and to information, which can be made anonymous, must be given within 40 days. Access to

information requiring consent must be given within 40 days of consent being received.

- 8.34.7 If no reply to a request for consent is received after 30 days it must be assumed that consent is refused.
- 8.34.8 Subjects must be advised that information or names/identities are being held back if and when this occurs (but not why) unless this admission in itself is likely to cause serious harm to the subject or another individual.
- 8.34.9 Once an access request is received routine recording will continue on the record but no amendments may be made which would not otherwise be made. The information must not be tampered with to make it acceptable to the subject.
- 8.34.10 Generally the access appointment should take place within the Fostering Service offices. An interview room must be available exclusively. It may be necessary to arrange a pre-access appointment in order for special interpretive counselling to be given. A Social Worker must be present at the access appointment to offer advice and guidance.
- 8.34.11 Subjects will not be permitted to remove documentation but will be able to make notes and take photocopies. Any photocopies should be clearly marked e.g. "copy given to Mr at access visit".
- 8.34.12 If there are genuine reasons for suspecting that an individual has improperly made a request for disclosure of confidential information and been given access, this must be reported to the Director who will consider whether to report the matter to the Police.

RECORDS TO BE KEPT

- 8.34.13 A record must be kept on the file of all access appointments.

ADVICE

- 8.34.14 In case of any doubt or where the procedure is not specific the advice of the County Secretary and Solicitor (legal) should be sought.

RIGHT OF APPEAL

- 8.34.15 If a carer is dissatisfied with the Directorate's response to either her/his request for access, the Directorate's decision as to the

operation of exemptions or to her/his request to have records changed s/he will have the right of appeal.

- 8.34.16 The appeal is to a Committee of the Council consisting of three members. At least two of the three members must not be members of the Social Services and Housing Select Committee.
- 8.34.17 The subject must be given written notice within 28 days of receiving the Directorate's response to her/his request.
- 8.34.18 The subject may make representations to the appeal Committee in writing and if s/he wishes in person.
- 8.34.19 This right of appeal is additional to any recourse available through the Courts or through the Local Commissioner for Administration.

FREQUENCY

- 8.34.20 There is no limit to the frequency at which requests for access may be made.
- 8.34.21 The service will be given free of charge.

8.35 INDEPENDENT FOSTERING AGENCIES – DISCHARGE OF LOCAL AUTHORITY FUNCTIONS

- 8.35.1 Once agreement has been given by the local authority to make arrangements with an independent fostering agency, the local authority must enter into a written agreement with the agency which sets out:
- Which of its duties the local authority proposes to delegate
 - The services to be provided to the local authority
 - The arrangements for the selection by the local authority of particular carers
 - A requirement for the agency to submit reports on the placement and in particular following any supervisory visit
 - The arrangements for termination of the agreement
- 8.35.2 Where a child is to be placed with an agency carer, the local authority shall enter into an agreement which sets out:
- Details of the carer with whom the child is to be placed
 - Details of any services the young person is to receive

- The terms (including payment) of the proposed foster placement agreement
 - The arrangements for record keeping about the young person, and for the return of records at the end of the placement
 - A requirement for the agency to notify the local authority immediately in the event of any concerns about the placement
 - Whether and on what basis other young people may be placed with the carer
- 8.35.3 An agency foster carer with whom a child is placed should be treated as if s/he were a local authority foster carer.
- 8.35.4 The local authority must report to the Commission any concerns they may have about the services provided by the agency.

8.36 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

STATUTORY FRAMEWORK

- 8.36.1 Standard 4 of the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards requires fostering services to have clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.
- 8.36.2 A number of other Standards require specified activities to be monitored and records kept. Reference is made to the relevant standards throughout this policy.
- 8.36.3 Regulation 42 of the Fostering Services Regulations requires independent fostering agencies to establish and maintain a system for:
- Monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 7 (See 8.36.13) at appropriate intervals; and
 - Improving the quality of foster care provided by the fostering agency
- 8.36.4 A report of any review carried out under this Regulation must be supplied to the Commission for Social Care Inspection and made available on request to:
- Any person working for the purposes of the fostering service
 - Any foster carer or prospective foster carer of the fostering service
 - Any child placed with a foster carer by the fostering service

- The parent of any such child
- 8.36.5 The system for carrying out such reviews must provide for consultation with:
- Foster carers
 - Children placed with foster carers and their responsible authority (unless, in the case of a fostering agency which is a voluntary organisation, it is also the responsible authority)
- 8.36.6 Regulation 43 requires independent fostering agencies to notify relevant persons if any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 8 takes place (See 8.36.14).
- 8.36.7 While Regulations 42 and 43 apply to independent fostering agencies rather than local authority fostering services, the IOW will nevertheless take these into account when designing and delivering quality assurance systems.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 8.36.8 The aims and objectives of the IOW's fostering service quality assurance programme are as follows:

Aims

- To provide a quality service in which service user feedback and self-evaluation is a constant and valued process
- To ensure that accurate information is available to inform the work of the service and secure the successful delivery of aims and objectives of the service

Objectives

- To ensure that foster carers provide high quality placements that meet the assessed needs of children placed with them
- To ensure that supervising Social Workers monitor the work of foster carers and provide appropriate support
- To ensure the work of the service continues to meet:
 - Its aims and objectives
 - The requirements of children needing foster placements
 - The requirements of the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards and associated Regulations
- To ensure that managers are aware of the demands being made on the fostering service

- To ensure that managers are aware of the resources available and needed to meet actual and projected demand
- To ensure that resources are used effectively to meet the demands placed on the service
- To ensure that management data is available to assist with reporting on the Government's Performance Assessment Framework indicators

THE QUALITY ASSURANCE PROGRAMME

8.36.9 In order to demonstrate that the IOW is delivering a well managed and high quality foster care service, the Team Manager of the Fostering Team will ensure that an annual report is prepared for members that as a minimum shows that the following performance indicators have been met:

- Feedback on placements is routinely sought from children, their birth parents and Social Workers and foster carers (Standard 11.1)
- Complaints by or against foster carers are dealt with promptly and clear resolutions reached in accordance with the IOW's Complaints and Representations Policy
- Team Managers audit and countersign foster carers' files on a regular basis (Standard 25.3)
- The Fostering Panel receive management information about the outcome of foster carer's annual reviews on an annual basis (Standard 30.6)
- Management information systems are in place that provide regular and accurate data on:
 - The numbers and range of children placed and projected to need a placement
 - The numbers and range of foster carers available
 - The actual and projected turnover of foster carers
 - Foster carer recruitment, assessment, approval and review (Standard 16.6)
 - Potential and actual placement capacity
 - Foster carer training needs and activity, including the effectiveness of training received (Standard 23.9)
 - Training undertaken by staff and the effectiveness of the staff training programme (Standard 19.5)

- Frequency of contact between supervising Social Workers and foster carers including unannounced visits (Standard 22.6)
- The circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in foster care (Standard 9.5)
- The educational attainment of children placed with foster carers and the numbers excluded from school (Standard 13.6)

8.36.10 This report must also be presented to the Fostering Panel and made available upon request to:

- Any person working for the purposes of the fostering service
- Any foster carer or prospective foster carer of the fostering service
- Any child placed with a foster carer by the fostering service
- The parent of any such child

8.36.11 In producing the report the Team Manager will seek and take account of the views of:

- Foster carers
- Children placed with foster carers
- Staff working for the fostering service

REGULATIONS 42 AND 43

8.36.12 Although applying to independent fostering agencies rather than local authorities, the IOW recognises the contribution that the monitoring and notification requirements of Regulations 42 and 43 can make to the delivery of a high quality fostering service.

8.36.13 The IOW will therefore put in place systems to monitor the matters set out in Schedule 7, these being:

- Compliance in relation to each child placed with foster parents, with the foster placement agreement and the responsible authority's plan for the care of the child
- All accidents, injuries and illnesses of children placed with foster parents
- Complaints in relation to children placed with foster parents and their outcomes

FOSTER CARE

- Any allegations or suspicions of abuse in respect of children placed with foster parents and the outcome of any investigation
- Recruitment records and conduct of required checks of new workers
- Notifications of events listed in Schedule 8
- Any unauthorised absence from the foster home of a child accommodated there
- Use of any measures of control, restraint or discipline in respect of children accommodated in a foster home
- Medication, medical treatment and first aid administered to any child placed with foster parents
- Where applicable, the standard of any education provided by the fostering service
- Records of assessments
- Records of Fostering Panel meetings
- Duty rosters of persons working for the fostering agency, as arranged and as actually worked
- Records of appraisals of employees
- Minutes of staff meetings

8.36.14 The notification requirements of Schedule 8 are shown in the table below.

Column1 Event:	Column 2 To be notified to:					
	Commissio n	Responsibl e authority	Secretary of State	Area Authority	Police	Health Authority
Death of a child placed with foster parents	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
Referral to the Secretary of State pursuant to section 2(1)(a) of the Protection of Children Act 1999 of an individual working for a fostering service	Yes	Yes				
Serious illness or serious accident of a child placed with foster parents	Yes	Yes				
Outbreak at the home of a foster parent of any infectious disease which in the opinion of a registered medical practitioner attending the home is sufficiently serious to be so notified	Yes	Yes				Yes

FOSTER CARE

Allegation that a child placed with foster parents has committed a serious offence		Yes			Yes	
Involvement or suspected involvement of a child placed with foster parents in prostitution	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	
Serious incident relating to a child placed with foster parents necessitating calling the Police to the foster parent's home	Yes	Yes				
Absconding by a child placed with foster parents		Yes				
Any serious complaint about any foster parent approved by the fostering agency	Yes	Yes				
Instigation and outcome of any child protection enquiry involving a child placed with foster parents	Yes	Yes				