The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 sets out timescales for visits to Children in care.

**As part of our arrangements for supervising the child’s welfare we must ensure that social workers visit every child in care in accordance with the regulations, wherever the child is living.**

**As standard (minimum requirements)**

* Within one week of the start of any placement
* At intervals of not more than 6 weeks for the first year of placement
* Thereafter when the placement is intended to last until the child is 18, **and this has been formally agreed**, at intervals of not more than 3 months

**Exceptions**

If the child is **placed with parents** pending assessment, social work visits must take place at least once a week until the first Child in Care Review, thereafter at intervals of not more than 6 weeks.

If the child is **living with the parents under an Interim Care Order**, visits must take place at least once a week until the first Child in Care Review, thereafter at intervals of not more than 4 weeks.

If the child is **placed with parents under a Care Order**, within one week of the Care Order, thereafter at intervals of not more than 6 weeks.

If the child is **placed with a Connected Person with temporary approval**, visits must take place at least once a week until the first Child in Care Review, thereafter at intervals of not more than 4 weeks.

If the child is **in the care of the Local Authority but another person is responsible for the child's living arrangements** (e.g. where a child is placed in a Youth Offenders' Institution or a health care setting), within a week of the start/any change of living arrangements, at intervals of not more than 6 weeks for the first year; at intervals of not more than 3 months in any subsequent year.

When a child is **in short break arrangements**

a social worker must visit on the days the child is actually placed and within three months of the start of the placement. Thereafter at intervals to be agreed with the IRO and the child’s parents and recorded in the child’s care plan but not more than six months.

The child's social worker should also visit the child **immediately a complaint is received** from the child or from another person relating to the child concerning the standard of care they are receiving.

**On first receiving notification of an inadequate rating for Children’s Homes** in which we have Kent children and young people placed we must visit within one week of notification.

**If accommodation is provided to Care Leavers** under the relevant legislation, we must visit within seven days of accommodation being provided, and subsequently before the Pathway Plan is reviewed. At intervals not exceeding two months.

**Recently we have been challenged by children in care that Social Workers do not visit enough.**

**The above are minimum requirements and the Independent Reviewing Officer may ask for more frequent visits. Your Senior Managers (Director and Assistant Directors) all think it is good practice for a social worker to visit their looked after children on a monthly basis unless there is good cause. Social Workers should visit more regularly (weekly) in the first month. It is not enough to place a child, visit them in the first week and then not come back for 6 weeks.**

**In addition to visits in accordance with regulations we must ensure that the child is visited whenever reasonable requested by the child, the carer or parent or the person responsible for the child’s living arrangements.**

**Conduct of Visits - Who should be seen?**

Statutory visits to Children in Care should be undertaken by a qualified social worker. Some visits should be unannounced. The foster carers, parent or residential unit should be informed by the child's social worker at the time of placing that there will be occasional unannounced visits and the reason for this explained.

**Wherever possible, the child must be seen in private and alone, unless the child of sufficient age and maturity and refuses or the social worker considers it inappropriate.**

If this is not possible, a further visit must be made at short notice in order that the child can be seen alone and observed with the staff/carer. On some visits the child’s bedroom should be seen.

The child's social worker should on occasion take the child out from the placement (for example for a snack or a visit to a park) as this can strengthen the relationship between the child and the social worker and is also in the interests of child protection in that the child may feel more able to discuss issues that are of concern to him/her.

For Disabled Children, where appropriate, the social worker should be aware of the child’s communication passport. For children who are not able to communicate their views, the social worker should ensure that observations of the child are made in their placement and also in other settings, for example, school or clinic. Information and opinion should also be gathered from other professionals about their presentation.

For children whose first language is not English an interpreter or signer should be provided where appropriate.

The social worker should be aware of who else lives in the placement and they should know about changes in structure and composition as well as the relationships within the household or unit.

On some occasions, the social worker should also arrange to visit at times when all members of a household can be seen; or for children's homes, a significant number of adults and children.

Social workers must consider the balance of time spent with staff/carers and with children during a statutory visit. The social worker must prioritise their time with the child as opposed to the staff/carer. Issues raised by staff/carers can be discussed when a child is not present for example when they are at school.

Social workers should provide feedback to staff/carers regarding their visit. Meetings involving a child e.g. Child in Care Reviews, do not in themselves constitute a visit, unless time is taken outside of the meeting to talk with and spend time with the child.

**Purposeful visiting**

The purpose of the visit is to ensure the placement continues to promote the child's welfare and in particular:

* To give the child the opportunity to express his or her wishes, feelings and views;
* To advise, assist and befriend the child and to ascertain who they would turn to in times of difficulty;
* To ensure that the child understands why they are in care and ascertain their views about the plans for their future given their age and understanding;
* To promote an effective relationship between the child and social worker with particular reference to the role of the social worker as a link with the child's history and birth family;
* To identify daily routines including getting up and going to bed, meal times (including whether the children in the placement all eat together), the arrangements for washing and whether the child is provided with privacy and support that is relevant to his or her stage of development;
* To identify arrangements for holiday and leisure time including playing games, access to clubs, cultural and sporting activities;
* To identify what special arrangements are made to meet any needs that arise from their culture, religious or heritage including communication, diet and skin/hair care;
* To observe the child with the staff/carer/parent and to analyse parenting styles and the promotion of the child's self esteem;
* To monitor the standard of care offered by the placement including the physical standards, house rules and behaviour management strategies;
* To identify whether there are toys or games to play with and the access that the child has to them;
* To monitor how the contact arrangements with family members and friends are working and to discover whether these are promoted within the home;
* To consider the child's sleeping arrangements such as room sharing, display of personal belongings and the physical state of the room.
* Has the child got clean clothes that are stored appropriately?
* To identify any areas where additional support is required;
* To evaluate whether the placement is helping to achieve the objectives of the child's Care Plan, with particular reference to whether the placement is meeting the educational, health and social development needs of the child. Where it is a long-term/permanent placement, the social worker should observe whether there are signs that the child is an integral part of the family such as whether they are included in photographs on display;
* To carry out specific casework tasks with the child, for example carrying out a programme of life story work;
* To identify whether older children are encouraged to play an increasing part in their own care such as laundry, food preparation and the purchase of food, clothes and budgeting;
* To identify the arrangements for the child to get support with school work, do homework (including where appropriate, access to a computer)and visit a library. Do the carers attend parent's evenings?
* To identify whether the child knows about the complaints procedure and the availability of advocacy services;
* To monitor that the Child Health Record is stored safely, is up to date and is accessible to the child as appropriate to the child's age and understanding.

Social workers visiting children with disabilities and/or complex health needs should also consider the following:

* Whether practices that are being employed are appropriate and do not compromise the child's safety e.g. the method of lifting a disabled child;
* Does the carer have sufficient equipment i.e. bath chair/hoist, etc?
* Who arranges the child's health appointments and who attends? For children in residential placements in particular, is there consistency of worker?
* Is there clear written information re the administration of medication?

**It will not be possible for a social worker to gain all the information listed above in one visit but they must try to obtain a holistic view of the placement. Plan your visit and seek key information.**

When visiting children in residential settings the social worker should read the running sheets to gain an understanding of recent events and also to identify any themes highlighted in the recording for example, behaviour and staff strategies for managing situations.

**Recording**

The social worker should record each visit stating clearly:

* Who was seen;
* Key purpose of the visit;
* Whether the child was seen and if not why not;
* Whether the child was seen alone;
* The child's views, wishes and feelings, and their understanding of their care plan given their age and understanding. Where possible this should be recorded in their own words;
* Any comments made by the child or the staff/carers/parents;
* Any achievements by the child as well as any matters of concern or difficulties;
* Any observations on the child’s welfare and the success of the placement;
* Any work undertaken with their child as well as the child’s response to that work.
* Any requirements for action.

**Consequence of visits**

**If, as a result of a visit, it is the social worker's assessment that the child’s welfare is not adequately safeguarded and promoted by the placement, the IRO must be informed and the child’s case must be reviewed.**

**Geoff Gurney**

**Interim Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting, September 2015**

**Email me if you found this procedure in a nutshell helpful.**