**Working with South Gloucestershire Fostering Service**

**THE ROLE OF THE SUPERVISING SOCIAL WORKER**

**Information for social workers with a child or young person placed with a South Gloucestershire foster carer.**

[Sidebars are great for calling out important points from your text or adding additional info for quick reference, such as a schedule.

They are typically placed on the left, right, top or bottom of the page. But you can easily drag them to any position you prefer.

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**Supervising Social Worker**. All foster carers must have a supervising social worker, (SSW), by law. The SSW supervises the foster carer, usually on a monthly basis and checks on their practice. This is a safeguarding role because it ensures that the care offered promotes the best outcomes for children and meets Fostering Services Regulations and the National Minimum Standards. Fostering Services are regulated, and it is important that you work closely with the carer’s SSW. Fostering can be a very demanding and tough role, so apart from supervising the carers, the SSW also ensures that the foster carers have adequate support. This may include arranging practical support, psychological support or training. In some cases, having a break is important to be able to sustain the placement for a child, - either day-care or overnight stays. The SSW will talk to you about it and will want to do this in the most “natural” way, for example by using someone who is already well known to the child or the foster carers. Any regular overnight stays away from home will need to be discussed as part of the placement plan. Like the child’s social worker, the SSW’s role is primarily to meet the needs of the child in care by ensuring the family they are living with have the understanding, scrutiny, skills and support they need.

**The Placement Finding Officer** (PFO), looks through the list of any vacant foster carers when the child’s placement request form is received. It is really important that you do not approach foster carers direct yourself to make placements because you will not know all the current circumstances for that family, how many children they are approved to care for or whether, for example, there is a serious health matter or allegation against them at that time. The PFO identifies the carer’s SSW when the foster placement is suggested. In most cases the SSW is the key person working with you to set up the placement and agree the placement plan. They will know the fostering family well and can discuss the particular strengths of a fostering household with you taking into account the needs of all the people living there, including other children in care and the foster carer’s own children. When a new child might join the family, the PFO will link with all the social workers who have children placed with the foster carers. If you have a child in a foster home, you should expect to be consulted on what may be the impact of another child joining the foster family.

**Information**. The foster carer must be provided with the full information that is available about the child placed in their care. Risk assessments and placement arrangements will be informed by what is known about the child and so they should be regularly reviewed, and additional information provided as it comes to light. Your role as the child’s social worker is vital here.

**Placement Meetings**. It is a requirement under the Care Planning Regulations that a placement plan is drawn up before the child is placed with a fostering family. If this is not possible it must be done within five working days of the start of the placement. Placement meetings to draw up the plan should take place prior to, or at the start of the placement. These meetings should be chaired by the SSW working closely with you. The purpose of the placement and the tasks of the foster carer should be clear, - how will these carers meet the needs of this child? So, expectations about family time, transport, health and education should be specified. The SSW may be able to identify any additional support for the carer which will help to provide a good placement for the child and continue to meet the needs of other children in the family. Introductory visits by the child to the foster home should be part of the planning. The foster carer’s “Welcome to our Home” booklet should be available for the child before they move in.

**Delegated Authority**. The foster carer should be clear about what they are allowed and not allowed to do in the day to day care of the child. Regulations make it clear that birth parents should be actively involved in discussions about delegated authority, in addition foster carers should be supported in making decisions, even when things “go wrong”. “Effective delegation of decision making makes a huge difference in the lives of looked after children” (Annex 6 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations).

**Communication and expectations**. It is so much better for the child and young person when you work closely with the SSW. They can tell you about what is going on in the fostering household and the impact of any children living there. You should tell them about any developments in the child’s plan or circumstances which will make a difference to the home. Arranging joint visits from time to time really helps with open communication and understanding.

**Foster carer recording**. Foster carers should keep regular records on the children they care for, these are sent to you. It is important that you read these as you receive them. Sometimes you will have particular areas which you want a foster carer to record, e.g, for Court purposes, and these expectations should be made clear in the placement planning process. The foster carer will also be recording information and collating material which will be important for the child’s life story book and may give you a good insight into how the child is doing.

**Foster carer annual reviews**. It is a legal requirement that foster carers are formally reviewed at least annually. The review must include consultation with the children in care and their social workers. You will be sent notification on Mosaic of a consultation form to complete. Please make sure you do this. A copy will be given to the foster carers, so it is really important that any issues are dealt with as they arise.

**Raising issues, grumbles or concerns**. It is important that you raise any matters as soon as possible with the SSW so that together, you can decide the best way to address them with the carer or what other steps may be needed, Similarly, the SSW should raise any issues the foster carer may have. If matters cannot be quickly resolved, management advice should be sought. There is a clear policy about complaints, standards of care concerns and allegations against foster carers. This can be found on Tri-X.

**Foster carer training and development**. There is a full programme of training available for foster carers, some is mandatory. The SSW can arrange for any specialist training to be made available for a foster carer in order to understand and meet a child’s needs better. In addition, there are support groups run throughout the County to help carers learn more about on-going fostering and to give each other support. They have access to on-line policies and have to complete Personal Development Plans to demonstrate the impact of their learning on their fostering practice.

**Children and young people’s reviews**. The SSW should always be informed of all relevant meetings about the child which will involve the foster carer or the plan for the placement. The SSW may not always need to attend but it is important that they know what is happening so that they can consider additional support or training needs if required.

**Stability Meetings.** We know that children and young people are able to do so much better if their home life is stable and if they do not move placements. At the very first sign that things are not going well, please talk to the SSW. They can arrange a stability meeting to work as a team around the child or young person, listening to their views and the views of the foster carer. Very often, talking about the difficulties together helps find solutions, it may be that extra support can be put in place to make things better.

**Children moving on**. You should work closely with the SSW to ensure the foster carer has consistent and informed advice and support when plans are made to move a child on. This may be back to birth family, to an adoptive home or to independence. Foster carers may need help, for example, in considering what sort of on-going contact they may have with the child. These can be really sensitive times for all concerned and it is vital that everyone works together so that the child’s needs remain at the centre of all the planning and discussions.

**Team work**. The foster carer is a central person in the team around the child. With good communication and clear expectations, they will be more able to meet the needs of the child and achieve good outcomes. Together, with the child’s social worker, the SSW, the Virtual School, the Specialist Nurse and all other professionals, the foster carer plays a critical part in the child’s journey. We hope this leaflet has helped you understand how we can work with you to give every child and young person the very best opportunity to thrive in foster care.