

Visits to Looked after Children

Frequency of visits

- Visiting requirements differ according to the type of placement.
- The child should be visited within one week of the start of the child's first placement and within one week of the start of any subsequent placement.
- Thereafter, the child must be visited at intervals of not more than six weeks for the first year of any placement. **In Lancashire good practice is for this to be at intervals of not more than four weeks.**
- Visits during subsequent years must also take place at intervals of not more than six weeks unless the placement has been formally agreed as a permanent placement which is intended to last until the child is 18; in those circumstances, the intervals between visits in the second and subsequent years of placement must not be longer than three months.
- Where the child is placed in a long-term foster placement, the child should be visited within one week of the start of the placement. Thereafter, the child must be visited at interval of not more than six weeks for the first year of the placement.
- Visits during subsequent years must take place at intervals of not more than six months, where the child, being of sufficient age and understanding, has agreed to be visited at this minimum frequency.
- However, the frequency of visits should always be determined by the circumstances of the case and the authority must arrange a visit whenever reasonably requested by a child or foster carer regardless of the status of the placement.

Placements with a temporarily approved foster carer or a child living with parents under an interim care order

- Where a child is placed under regulation 24, or where an interim care order has been made in respect of that child under section 38 of the 1989 Act, and the child is still living with the parent, the child must be visited at least weekly until the time of the first review. Subsequently, visits must take place at intervals of not more than four weeks until the carer is approved under the 2002 Regulations or the final hearing has been completed in care proceedings.
- These frequencies reflect the potentially greater vulnerability of a child who has been placed with a carer before the assessment of that person's suitability to care for the child has been completed or where the child continues to live with a parent in circumstances where the responsible authority has concerns about a possible continuing risk of the child suffering significant harm.
- These visits will allow the social worker to assess how the relationship between the child and parent or carer is developing and identify at an early stage where there may be concerns about a child's welfare.

A child placed back with parents

- Where a care order has been made in relation to a child under section 31 of the 1989 Act and the child is placed back home with parents under regulation 18, the child must be visited within one week of the making of the care order and then at intervals of no more than six weeks. **In Lancashire good practice is for this to be at intervals of not more than four weeks.**
- A child placed back home with parents before the assessment is completed (under regulation 19) must be visited at least weekly until the time of the first review and subsequently at intervals of not more than six weeks (**in Lancashire good practice is at intervals of not more than four weeks**) or until the completion of the assessment under regulation 17.

A child in care where accommodation is not provided by the responsible authority

- Where the child is in care but is in living arrangements made by another person, such as a sentenced child in secure accommodation or a young offender institution, s/he must be visited within one week of the start of the living arrangements and within one week of any change to those living arrangements. Subsequently, visits must take place every six weeks for the first year (**in Lancashire good practice is at least every four weeks**) and at intervals of not more than three months in any subsequent year.

Additional visiting requirements

- The responsible authority must also ensure that the social worker visits the child outside the statutory minimum intervals set out above when reasonably requested to do so by the child, the child's carer or the person responsible for the child's living arrangements.
- A visit must also be made within one week of receiving a notification under section 30A of the Care Standards Act 2000 when the children's home in which the child is currently placed is referred to in that notification.
- Visits should not be neglected because a placement is going well. The ongoing review of the care plan requires that visits take place at least as often as the 2010 Regulations require. This helps to ensure the social worker is equipped to identify and help with any difficulties because care has been taken to establish a relationship with a child and foster carer, and it helps to assess long term situations fully. There are some circumstances where more frequent visits above the minimum will be necessary. For example, where the role of the child's parents is changing, the child's needs have changed, or perhaps because a lone foster carer supervising social worker has not been allocated. There will inevitably be periods in any placement when a child's carer or the placement may be under particular stress.
- The social worker must visit the placement if there is any proposal to remove the child from the placement where there are concerns about welfare.
- Please note: statutory guidelines for the timescales of visits are about setting a legal minimum, not about good practice or the needs of children and young people. The individual circumstances of a child or young person may mean that visits do need to be more frequent and this should be agreed and recorded within the care plan / home placement agreement.