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Independent Visitor Service

Procedure

Appointment of an Independent Visitor

Applies to –

Looked After Children

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The following procedure is to ensure that all volunteers on the scheme will be

- a. Suitable for the role
- b. Appointed subject to safer recruitment
- c. Subject of specific matching considerations for children who require an Independent Visitor.

Referral process

Referrals can be made by-

Social Worker

Independent Reviewing officer

The young person

Children's Rights Officer

Any child or young person under the age 18 can be referred for an Independent Visitor. The local authority has a duty to appoint a person to be a child's independent visitor where it appears to them to be in the child's interest to do so. For example, a referral can be made for children where there is little or no quality contact with birth parents, or person with parental responsibility will be prioritised. At the point of placement planning it should be clearly outlined any actions in relation to appointing and advocate or an independent visitor. In the purpose of the advocate/visitor and how it will support the child or young person whilst they are a looked after child. The appointment will be considered as part of the development of the care plan or as part of a review of the child's case. Any decision not to appoint must be kept under review.

The child's wishes and feelings should be ascertained and an independent visitor will not be appointed if the child who has enough understanding to make the decision objects. The Independent Visiting leaflet is available and can be used by the social worker to explain to the child or young person how Independent Visiting works.

Referrals will be made using the Referral Form. The referral form will be sent to the Independent Visitor coordinator and the request recorded on the child's electronic file

with timescales for a response. This will ensure the social worker and child/young person will know what to expect and by when.

The child's leaflet explaining the scheme will be provided by the social worker at the point of completing the referral.

At point of referral the social worker must ensure that the child has a copy of the referral, has contributed to the referral should they wish to and where possible signed by the child or young person should they have capacity or enough understanding to do so.

Recruitment

Independent visitors can request an application through fiona.perry@leics.gov.uk or by telephone to the fostering recruitment desk.

The applicant will receive a job description and person specification as well as information about the role.

Once an application is received a home visit will be arranged by the co-ordinator.

The purpose of the home visit is to give the applicant a chance to ask questions about the role and to give the co-ordinator an opportunity to get to know you better, like your hobbies, interests, motivation and commitment to the role. One/two further visits maybe undertaken to gather information for the assessment report and to discuss relevant policies and procedures connected with the role. The coordinator will also need to discuss issues or concerns that have arisen via the checks.

Consideration about suitability will be given at this stage by the Independent Visitor coordinator.

The following stages outline the next steps:

1. An application form will be provided to the applicant to either complete at point of contact or submit at a later stage.
2. On receipt of the completed form by the coordinator checks will be initiated -
 - Enhanced DBS

- Two personal references .Referees will be contacted by telephone to confirm the written reference. One reference needs to be supplied from a professional (employer, colleague, teacher, lecturer).
- Local Authority checks will be completed together with any additional checks felt to be relevant based on the information provided. The applicant will be informed of any additional checks required and this will be recorded on the application.
- On receipt of the checks the coordinator will review and will either continue with the application or seek line manager advice.
- Further information may be required if the applicant declares a medical condition that may impact on the role.
- Proof of eligibility to work in the UK will be required.
- Driving Licence and car insurance as well as MOT for any vehicle that may be used will need to be seen prior to appointment as an Independent Visitor. This will be reviewed annually.

Once all the checks have been completed a formal interview will take place using the safer recruitment policy of Leicestershire County Council. However, the interview will not be overly formal as the Council acknowledges the applicant volunteer is offering the gift of time and not paid employment. Additional guidance for the recruitment of volunteers and the safeguarding responsibility can be found at <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/setting-up> and www.gov.uk

A Panel of managers will consider the assessment and recommendation. Thereafter, approval will be given by the Service Manager of the Fostering Service..

A decision will then be recorded on the electronic system, and the applicant notified by letter within 5 working days of the decision being made.

The pack that has been used to make the decision will be kept in the Volunteers electronic record.

Training

Following successful appointment Independent Visitors will be provided with training to ensure they fully understand the role and understand the safeguarding requirement of Leicestershire County Council.

The Independent Visitors handbook will also be provided.

All Independent Visitors are expected to complete the following. -

Prior to matching-

LCC 40-minute online course called Essential awareness in Safeguarding for Children and Adults

Within 6 months of starting the role-

LCC 1-day Essential Awareness in Safeguarding for Children and Adults (this follows on from the online course)

It is the responsibility of the coordinator that the completion of the above is recorded on the Independent Visitor's records. And will be discussed at the coordinator's supervision with their line manager.

All Independent Visitors receive the Fostering Training Manual and dependent on their learning needs in relation to the young person they are matched with further training can be provided. For example, working with children with special needs, equality and diversity.

The young person-matching

The c will meet the child/young person following a referral and engage with the young person to ascertain their hobbies and interests as well as their consent for an independent visitor to be appointed. This will be recorded on the referral and their consent sought including signature if possible.

The c stays in touch with the young person until a match has been found. This will be reviewed via the child's review of arrangements meetings and made explicit within the placement plan as to what is required and whether needs have changed. It is the responsibility of the Social Worker to record the status of the referral within the review of arrangements document. It is the responsibility of the IRO to review and consider any relevant actions or information that needs to be recorded in the review of arrangements to ensure that the child's needs will be met.

Once the relevant training has been completed a three-way meeting with the Independent Visitor, child/young person and the c will take place.

This will be an opportunity for the young person to express their views and discuss what they would like from the visitor. When it is identified from both the young person and the visitor that they wish to proceed then the match will be ratified.

The details of what will be provided e.g. activities and how often will be recorded within the child's file and reflected within the placement plan.

From this point onwards, the Independent Visitor will make contact arrangements themselves with the carers for the young person. The detail of how often and the activities must be agreed via the person who has delegated authority for the child e.g. the registered home manager or foster carer.

Independent Visitors could if it was deemed appropriate be matched with more than one young person, but they would be expected to visit the individuals separately. In this situation each young person's needs must be considered and the visitor reminded of confidentiality with respect to each young person.

The planned activities/interaction with the young person must all be risk assessed and a risk assessment completed for each activity and provided to the person who has delegated authority and to be logged on the child's record by the child's social worker. Where the activity is considered high risk by the social worker the activity will not take place.

A child or young person should not be in the care of an independent visitor for more than 8 hrs or overnight. Only in exceptional circumstances will this be agreed by the Assistant Director or their nominated person.

Expenses/Mileage

The Independent visitor can recover expenses from the local authority, not exceeding £40 per visit. Each Independent Visitor will submit a monthly expense form to cover mileage and out of pocket expenses incurred such as for activities and refreshments. Forms are sent to the coordinator. These will then be considered and then processed by the finance team. Expenses are paid by electronic bank transfer.

Supervision and support

Once matched Independent Visitor's will be provided with supervision:

- Following the match being approved an individual supervision session, over the telephone is arranged at approximately six weeks by the Independent Visitor Coordinator;
- Six monthly formal group supervision is provided;
- Informal supervision will be given by the Independent Visitor Coordinator at any time the Independent Visitor requires this.

Supervision will be recorded, and any issues will be raised with the coordinator's manager. Any safeguarding concerns will immediately be raised with the Fostering Service line manager or a manager within First Response.

Expectations and boundaries

a. Commitment to the child/young person

The expectation is that the Independent Visitor will commit to at least one-year support for the child/young person. The Independent Visitor should see the child/young person no less than monthly. Visits should be approximately two/three hours. All visits must be formally arranged, and details of proposed venue also provided with timings.

b. Social Networking sites

The Independent Visitor will not contact or 'befriend' the young person through any social media site including using texting or messaging. Any indication that this has taken place will be an immediate suspension pending further enquiries.

c. Photographs

Photographs of the child/young person can be taken with their consent but cannot be shared through any social media site or with any third party. They should only be shared with the young person or their carer through a device or printed off and given to the child/young person or their carer. Leicestershire hosts an online memory box for all children in care. The foster carer can arrange for the photo or memorabilia to be uploaded to this site.

d. Family/Friends

The child/young person should not be purposely introduced to partners, family or friends of the Independent Visitor. This is because they will not have been subject to the same clearances as the Independent Visitor. The child/young persons should not be taken to the Independent Visitor's home or any household belonging to a friend or family member of the Independent Visitor or other location to meet family/friends. If there are plans to incorporate a visit to the family home / introduce family members, this can only be undertaken with the consent of the I/V Co-ordinator / Child's social worker.

e. Pets

An independent visitor may wish to take their dog out when seeing a young person or visits horses that they own. Whilst this may be positive for the young person caution will need to be taken with pets. Some children have inherent fears of animals and any introductions needs to be child lead. Given the risks that animals pose any introduction needs to be discussed with the Independent Visitor Coordinator initially and a risk assessment will need to be undertaken. In respect of dogs – a dog risk assessment would need to be completed before the dog could be brought on any visit with the child. Any other pets will be 'risk assessed' prior to decisions being made about this. The views of the young person should also be obtained as to whether they wish to meet the pet.

f. Medication

Independent Visitors are not insured to give medication for children/young people. If a child/young person needs medication, they need to either be returned to their placement for this to be given or they need to be old enough to manage their own medication. **However, in a medical emergency the IV will seek immediate medical attention via 999**

g. Special Occasions

The independent visitor may wish to take the young person out for the whole day as a one off. This must be arranged in advance with the carers and consider the above. Details of proposed activity and venue must be provided to the carers.

h. Contact Record

A brief record should be provided about the visit, the child's name should not be identified within this as this record will not be stored on the child's file and if emailed will not be secure. Therefore, the Independent Visitor should put their name as the identifying detail.

i. Safeguarding

The Independent Visitor may encounter a situation where the child/young person either discloses something that has happened or there is a significant incident during the visit. If the child/young person discloses physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect this needs to be reported. It cannot be kept a secret and the child/young person needs to be made aware of this. If the child/young person makes a disclosure about their carers the child's social worker or First Response Children's Duty Out of Hours service must be contacted, and advice sought prior to returning the child/young person to their carers. If the child/young person does not tell you who the abuser is, you need to establish whether it is safe for them to return to the placement. If there is a significant incident whilst on a visit you may not need to inform Out of Hours, but you should inform the carers so that they can support the child/young person following [this](#).

j. Looked After Children (LAC) reviews

The child/young person can request that the Independent Visitor attends their LAC review; they should only attend with the young person's consent. The Independent Visitor should agree with the child/young person what they will share prior to the review.

k. Confidentiality

Volunteers may become aware of confidential information about the child/young person they are matched with and other children/young people. Volunteers should not disclose this information or use it for their own or another benefit without the consent of the party concerned.

l. Change of circumstances for Independent Visitor

Independent Visitor's should inform the Independent Visitor Coordinator if there are any changes in their circumstances that would impact on their suitability for the role. For example, any criminal convictions or cautions or period of ill health.

j. Use of Personal Car

The Independent Visitor must ensure their car is safe for the child, has an up to date MOT, and is covered by tax and insurance and you have advised the insurance company he or she will be transporting Looked after Children. It goes without saying that an Independent Visitor should be a safe driver. The Independent Visitor must give the foster carer or social worker in the children's home the car registration number and telephone number in case of an emergency.

k. Alcohol & Drugs

Independent Visitors should not consume alcohol or illegal drugs at any time whilst in the company of young people or be intoxicated in any way; they should also actively discourage children or young people from such use.

Independent Visitors must not offer to buy, give or lend cigarettes, tobacco, lighters or cigarette papers to young people at any time and Independent Visitors are asked not to smoke in front of the children/young people.

m. Money and gifts

Over time, the Independent Visitor will build up a close and trusting relationship with a child or young person. It is still important that he or she remember that they remain vulnerable. As such, gifts or money should not be given directly and only in agreement with the carer and child's social worker. We advise that should the independent visitor wish to do so, that gifts are given at key points in a child or young person's life like during the festive season, birthdays, graduation celebrations.

n. Referral to advocacy or children's rights services

Children's Rights Officers work for Leicestershire County Council and the child can ask them to:

- help them understand their rights and make sure they are being treated fairly
- give them information, help and advice
- attend meetings with them and speak on their behalf
- help them get legal advice
- advise them if they wish to make a complaint about the Children and Family Services or help them with something they are unhappy with
- help stop things that shouldn't be happening to them
- make sure they are listened to by their carers

Children won't get into trouble for contacting a Children's Rights Officer and they'll keep the information they give them private and confidential.

The child may ask his or her Independent Visitor to help them contact the Children's Rights Officer. The Independent Visitor can do this by phoning 0116 305 6302 or by emailing childrensrights@leics.gov.uk.

Health and Safety

Considerations are made during the matching process around any risks that the child/young person or others may pose. Independent Visitor's will be informed prior to matching of any known areas or persons that may cause a risk. The risk assessment checklist will be completed with Independent Visitor prior to matching. Independent Visitor's will be given the Out of Hours telephone number. Independent

Visitor's should tell the carer where they are going to and what time to expect their return.

Age limits

Referrals will be accepted for any child/young person where it deemed appropriate under the age of 18. This is to encourage a long-lasting relationship, there will be specific instances where will consider a match above this age range on a need led basis. Matches will continue to be approved up to age 21, unless agreed otherwise, as there is an acknowledgement that between 18 and 21 is a vulnerable period for care leavers.

Review

All matches will be reviewed. This will initially take place after the first visit informally and then formally take place after six weeks and then every six months. Formal reviews will include a visit or telephone call to the child/young person (depending on age and communication needs) to ensure they are satisfied with the match and complete feedback. Feedback forms will be sent to the carer, Independent Visitor, Social Worker & the Independent Reviewing Officer. The information will be collated and if the child/young person and the Independent Visitor continue to be satisfied with the match, this will continue to be supported.

As well as reviewing the match the role and provision of the Independent Visitor will be fully considered within the child's review of arrangement and any changes will be recorded on the child's plan.

Endings

All formal arrangements will cease following the young person's 21st birthday, unless agreed otherwise. If the Independent Visitor and young person wish to remain in

touch they can do this as an informal adult friendship, but this will not be formally supported. Matches that continue post 18 will be supported and advice will be given around boundaries and expectations as the young person is moving into adulthood. If the Independent Visitor is not adhering to the boundaries and expectations set out above, we have the right to immediately end the match. This will take place with a conversation with the child/young person and the Independent Visitor and then a formal letter will be sent out to all involved. This will also be reflected within the child's review of arrangements and any change to the plan will be recorded in the review by the IRO.

Planned Endings

The match might end due to, for example, you or the child moving away, or changes in personal circumstances that will prevent you from continuing your role.

Endings are always difficult, but there are things that you can do to finish on a positive note. You might want to celebrate the time together with an event such as a special meal or outing.

Some children find it difficult to know how to react when something good is coming to an end. Sometimes they might act out of character or in a destructive way and put the relationship that you have built up at risk. This is not unusual, and not meant as a personal slight. Reassure the child and give positive messages, maybe even a parting letter saying how much you have enjoyed your time together that they can look at later.

Unplanned Endings

In every situation the child or young person's experience remains the priority. Where unplanned endings allow, the Independent Visitor will be supported by the co-ordinator to have a goodbye or final communication with the child or young person. The child's wishes

need to be considered i.e. if they do not wish to have a goodbye, this should be respected. The child's social worker is ultimately responsible for the child and should agree to the ending plan. Where the unplanned ending does not allow for a final visit or communication, the co-ordinator, the carer and child's social worker will agree how and when the child will be informed and ensure the child is appropriately supported.

Complaints about treatment or serious concerns about the service

A member of the Independent Visitor Scheme is expected to be available to the Independent Visitor, to try to resolve any problems. When this fails to resolve issues or concerns, the Independent Visitor may raise this as a formal complaint.

Independent Visitors can report issues of concern to:

Contact details

Name: Complaints

Phone: 0116 305 7422

Email: complaints@leics.gov.uk

Address: Leicestershire County Council
County Hall
Glenfield
Leicester
LE3 8RB

Referral Form – See Forms