

Procedure Regarding Reviews for Children Looked After (CLA) and Schedule of Social Work Visits

Context

The legal framework underpinning this protocol is:

- I. The Children Act 1989
- II. The IRO handbook
- III. Permanence, long-term foster placements and ceasing to look after a child. (Statutory guidance for local authorities) 2015
- IV. The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations. Volume 2. 2015

Findings from research with Children Looked After by the Local Authority frequently make reference to children wanting to be 'treated like other children' and find visits from their Social Worker(SW) intrusive and embarrassing. Also that meetings - such as Child looked After Reviews - to be unnecessary as their needs are being met in their placement and questioning if such arrangements need to be discussed in a formal meeting, often in front of people they do not know or people they do not know well.

In an effort to be more child centred the recent guidance - Permanence, long-term foster placements and ceasing to look after a child (Statutory guidance for local authorities, March 2015) gives 'permission' to Local Authorities to review the frequency of reviews and visits from their allocated SW to children/ young people in agreed long term placements.

The guidance addresses how the 6 month Child Looked After review is conducted. This is applicable regardless as to whether the placement is with Merton foster carer(s) or IFA foster carer(s).

It is noted that in regard to the principle of reducing the level of intrusion that is experienced by some children / young people as a result of their LAC status, there is no corresponding guidance in respect of reducing the frequency of PEP meetings. The requirement is for these to be held termly, and in Merton one of these meetings is a virtual meeting. Children/ young people are able to participate in their PEPs.

The Procedure

'A Long Term Fostering/ permanent placement means one that the match of the child / young person with the foster carer(s) has been formally approved by Merton's fostering / adoption panel. This is applicable up until a child/ young person is 14'.

Child Looked After Reviews (CLA review)

1. At the end of every CLA review the date is agreed for the next Review in 6 months.
2. When a child/young person has been in placement for a year after being matched at panel and is settled, achieving and happy and the department believes the carer(s) are able to meet that child/ young person's needs, consideration can be given to reducing the frequency of reviews. There may be some exceptional circumstances when consideration to reducing the frequency of reviews could be given prior to a child/ young person being in placement for a year after being formally matched at the fostering panel.
3. This consideration should take place prior to the next review. The SW should consult with the child/ young person, foster carer(s), Supervising Social Worker (SSW), school, virtual school team, health and others as appropriate.
4. Prior to the next review the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) and Team Manager (TM) will liaise about the proposal for face to face meetings to be reduced to once a year. The TM will have already had these discussions with their Service Manager (SM).
5. The IRO will discuss the proposal at the review meeting, obtain formal agreements from child/young person and others and confirm this as a decision of the review.
6. Practical arrangements for the 'virtual' review will be agreed such as consultation with the child/young person and other relevant people.

(Permanence, long term foster placements and ceasing to look after a child 4.27a)

Where the decision has been taken that the review process will not include a meeting, the IRO must ensure that full consultation with all the relevant individuals, including the child, has taken place to inform the review of the child's case"

It should contain an accurate and comprehensive record of the meetings, which constituted the review, and of the views of all those who attended or who were consulted as part of the review process- the review record should also reflect the review process for a long term foster placement where a meeting did not take place"

7. The child/ young person's preference of the medium through which contact with the IRO should occur, must be discussed. For example whether this maybe by e- mail, phone, text, or a visit, according to the age and understanding of the child/ young person.
8. The date of the 'virtual' review and the next face to face review meeting in a year will be decided at the review.

9. The review must also formally record the child/ young person's wishes in regard to their participation in their PEP.
10. The dates of the 'virtual' and face to face review will be recorded in the LAC calendar.
11. The virtual school team should be formally informed of the review arrangements for the relevant child / young person.

Visits by the allocated Social Worker

When a child/ young person is living in an agreed long-term/ permanent placement and is settled, achieving and happy and the department believes that the carer(s) are able to meet that child/ young person's needs, a discussion will be held between the SW, their TM and their SM about the frequency of visits to the child. There will also need to be a discussion with the child/ young person's carer, Supervising Social Worker (SSW) and IRO about the appropriateness of reducing the frequency of scheduled visits by the SW.

1. The matter of the frequency of visits should be addressed as part of the support framework for the placement when the child/ young person is matched with the foster carer(s) at panel. This may include a proposed trajectory as to how it is envisaged the frequency may change over time.
2. The frequency of visits should be considered as part of the review process and may be changed pending the agreement of the SM, irrespective or in parallel with, any decision to change to 6 month 'virtual' reviews.
3. If it is felt that the child can be visited at a frequency of no less than every 3 months, the Social Work team will get agreement from the SM in the relevant team / service about the proposed plan.
4. The plan will need to be ratified in the child's next Child Looked After Review.
5. If the SW is due to be on leave at the time of the next scheduled visit they must visit earlier. Due to the reduction in visits it is important that there is continuity and consistency of staff visiting to assess the progress and validity of the placement and so the duty SW should not do the visit instead of the allocated worker.
6. The arrangement will be on a case by case basis.
7. It is the prerogative of the SW team to increase the frequency of visits to the child/ young person should this be necessary.