**Unannounced visits to foster carers**

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# **About This Document**

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| Title | Unannounced visits to foster carers |
| Purpose | **Policy for supervising social workers making unannounced visits to foster carers**  |
| Updated by  | **Julie Macer-Wright Fostering Service Manager**  |
| Approved by | **Fostering Board** |
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# **Version Control**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Date Issued | Version | Summary of Changes | Created by |
| September 2015 | **3.0** | Reviewed and no changes required | Rosemarie Cronin |
| July 2018 | **4.0** | Added information to say the unannounced visits will be undertaken by team members other than the allocated SSW where possible | Rosemarie Cronin |
| July 2018 | **4.1** | Added information regarding the unannounced visit not continuing should neither of the carers be present at the time of the visit | Rosemarie Cronin |
| August 2018 | **4.2** | Clarified more detail of areas of the carers home that will be looked at during an unannounced visit | Rosemarie Cronin |
| October 2018 | **4.3** | Included that team managers are responsible for ensuring the unannounced visit is undertaken if the allocated worker is off work | Rosemarie Cronin |
| March 2023 | **5** | Changed expectation that visits must be undertaken by a different SSW. Added requirement that visits must be random to avoid them taking place just prior to HHR | Julie Macer-Wright  |

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# Introduction and Legal Framework

* 1. Unannounced visits are expected to be undertaken within the fostering household a minimum of once a year. The main purpose of these visits is for the supervising social worker to check that the home environment that the child or young person is living in is of a good enough standard and consistent with the rest of the home.
	2. National Minimum Standard 21 is about the supervision and support of foster carers. In this it is stated that “Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year.”
	3. This is further reinforced in paragraph 5.67 of the Fostering Guidance (2011) which states “Every foster carer should be allocated an appropriately qualified social worker from the fostering service (the supervising social worker) who is responsible for overseeing the support they receive. It is the supervising social worker’s role to supervise the foster carer’s work, to ensure that they are meeting the child’s needs, and to offer support and a framework to assess the foster carer’s performance and develop their skills. They must make regular visits to the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year.”
	4. Fostering Guidance (2011) paragraph 3.82 states that “The Fostering service must have a written health and safety policy, which should be covered in the assessment and training of foster carers. Foster carers should be supported to ensure that their homes are free of avoidable hazards, in keeping with family life. Every foster home must be visited without appointment by a supervising social worker of the fostering service at least once a year, as a check on the standards of care being provided.
	5. National Minimum Standard (10.5) “The foster home is inspected annually, without appointment, by the fostering service to make sure that it continues to meet the needs of foster children.

# Essex Policy

* 1. The allocated supervising social worker must ensure that their carer receives **a minimum of one** unannounced visit within every 12-month period. Additional unannounced visits are encouraged as good practice.
	2. Unannounced visit may be undertaken by another team member who is not the allocated supervising social worker of the foster carers.
	3. The supervising social worker should timetable unannounced visits randomly to avoid them becoming, by default, planned and expected preparation for the household review.
	4. If the supervising social worker is on long term leave the team manager is responsible for ensuring that the unannounced visit is undertaken by an appropriate member of staff within the 12-month period of the previous one.
	5. At the unannounced visit all areas of the home should be seen, including the kitchen cupboards, fridges, bedrooms, the children in care’s wardrobes and mattresses, gardens and any garden buildings.
	6. The checks should consider:
* Health and safety throughout the home.
* The wellbeing of all children in care within the home.
* Whether standards are consistent throughout the home e.g. the bedroom of children in care are of the same standard as other bedrooms with the home or food stored for children in care is of the same standard as food for whole family.
* The presentation of the home, carer and children is like that experienced or described during planned supervision visits
* Any bedroom sharing arrangements are fully assessed and remain appropriate
* If any children are sharing a bedroom it should be checked that a bedroom sharing assessment is completed and up to date.
	1. If neither of the foster carers are at home when the unannounced visit is undertaken then the visit should not be continued, even if other household members are at home. It should be recorded that the visit was attempted but a further unannounced visit will need to be undertaken
	2. If the foster carers are not at home and the looked after child or young person is home the SSW should check what the arrangements for supervision of the child or young person are appropriate.
	3. If it is not possible for the SSW to see all areas of the home and undertake appropriate checks a further unannounced visit should be completed.
	4. If the SSW visits and does not get an answer a note should be left for the carer to say the SSW has called and this should be recorded on the fostering file.
	5. The SSW should complete the unannounced visit on Mosaic and this should be authorised by the team manager. A copy should be given to the foster carer in the next supervision visit and should be recorded that the carer has received this and if there are any areas of disagreement this should be recorded on the unannounced visit form.
	6. Any issues arising from the unannounced visit should be addressed at the time of the visit and reinforced at the next supervision session.