



FOSTER CARERS ACCOMMODATION POLICY

A Foster Carer's home must be an environment where children can develop and grow in a safe and healthy way. Carer's accommodation must be homely and nurturing.

It is not the expectation of Hertfordshire County Council that Foster Carers maintain their home in 'showroom condition', nor should the carers' properties be 'palaces'. All things being equal, children will usually identify better with homes and areas that reflect where they have been raised.

It is important for the SSW to clearly set out the standards that the Fostering Service expects from Foster Carers from the earliest stages of their initial assessment. Thereafter it is a question of monitoring the maintenance of those standards.

Foster Carers are responsible for ensuring that their homes are safe and healthy environments for the children they look after. The home should be clean and free from hazards, appropriate to the expected ages of any children placed. Equally as important is the need for the home to feel warm and to have a nurturing atmosphere. This can be difficult to quantify but is something that most people can associate with. There should be no obvious Health and Safety issues. A Health and Safety check will be completed prior to approval and revisited annually. Health and Safety checks must be up to date and all recommendations carried out prior to children been placed.

A Foster Carer's approval is at risk if at any stage they fail to meet the standards set out in this policy.

It is important for the Fostering Service to be notified of any shortfalls to enable an accurate and up to date risk assessment to be conducted. Such an assessment could put measures in place to reduce the risk.

Hertfordshire County Council appreciates that there will be times when home improvements need to be undertaken. Any repairs or improvements must be undertaken in a way which does not compromise children's safety and appropriate measures need to be in place for more major building works. Please seek guidance from your SSW. If the accommodation has had significant repairs or improvements an additional Health and Safety check will need to be undertaken.

The following minimum requirements must be met at the Carer's main home and any secondary residences:-

All homes used for fostering should be in a generally good state of repair, be warm, welcoming and friendly. They should be environments where children are safe feel safe and which promotes their emotional and physical well being.

Age appropriate books, games and toys should be available to children within the property.

The numbers of children that the home can accommodate must take into consideration any existing household members, any likely changes to the household for example, children returning from university, and the home's overall ability to accommodate everyone. This means not just looking at the number of bedrooms, but the size of communal areas of the house as well.

This should include the number of toilets, showers and bathrooms. It may even be as basic as asking if the dining table can seat all of the household members at the same time. "Children should live in foster homes which provide space to a suitable standard." (Department for Education, 2011)

Bedroom Sharing

Standard 10.6 of the National Minimum Standards Fostering states that "each child over the age of three should have their own bedroom. If this is not possible, the sharing of a bedroom is agreed by each child's responsible authority and each child has their own area within the bedroom. However before an agreement is reached in regard to children over three sharing a bedroom a risk assessment must be undertaken by the SSW in consultation with the child(ren)'s social worker

Before seeking agreement for the sharing of a bedroom, the fostering service provider takes into account the following

- The individual/special needs of any child placed need to be taken into consideration in making any arrangements.
- Whether or not there is a history of bullying.
- Consideration needs to be given as to whether or not any of the children have been sexually abused or exhibited any inappropriate sexualised behaviour.
- The wishes and feelings of the children need to be taken into account.

However, there may be circumstances where, having assessed the risks, it is concluded that sharing a bedroom is the best way to promote the child's welfare. For example, a child may have made clear that they would find it comforting to share a bedroom with their sibling, or they are in an existing settled placement where they share a room. Or the foster carer who may have less space than another carer would nonetheless best meet the child/rens needs.

The decision-making process and outcome of the assessment must be recorded in writing where bedroom sharing is agreed.

If it is proposed that siblings are placed where bedroom sharing is necessary then a risk assessment should be completed by the carers' supervising social worker in conjunction with the child's social worker. This risk assessment is completed using form CS0252F2 and discussed with the foster carer. A copy

of the completed form should be signed by the supervising social worker, Practice manager and Group Manager, Fostering. A copy should be sent to the child's social worker, the carer and the Group Manager and a copy also needs to be kept on the carers' file.

In exceptional circumstances, and for time limited periods, these minimum requirements can be waived.

HCC accommodation policy (below) assumes that any relevant risk assessments regarding bedroom sharing have been completed prior to placement.

Accommodation Policy

Professional judgement should apply in the following circumstances and the fostering services in conjunction with the child/ren's Social Worker and the Brokerage Team must be committed to ensuring all children in the placement are safeguarded.

Babies under 12 months

Babies can share a bedroom with Foster Carers until the age of 18 months (or sooner if they have outgrown their cots). If there is no additional bedroom available, Foster Carers should be approved for placements up to the age of eighteen months but children should be under ten months old at the time of placement. Care planning can be subject to delay and the baby may be at risk of requiring another placement.

1- 6 year olds

Depending on the size of the bedroom, a maximum of three children (of either gender) if related can share a bedroom. Children under 6 should not be placed on the top bunk if bunk beds are used.

6-11 year olds

Depending on the size of the bedroom, two children of any gender (with a maximum of three in exceptional circumstances) can share a bedroom if related. A child aged 6 and over may use a top bunk bed.

Age 11 plus

Unless the children are siblings of the same gender, Children Looked After who are of secondary school age would be expected to have their own bedroom and sufficient space to study.

In any circumstances, consideration will be given to the current and previous relationship between any siblings and their own views and feelings. This is essential if there is any risk of bullying or sexualised behaviour.

General Guidance Regarding Bedroom Sharing

It is not best practice for Foster Carers' own children and Children Looked After (of any age) to share a bedroom. Foster Carers are only recruited if they are able to offer a dedicated spare bedroom. It is not acceptable for Children Looked After to share a Foster Carer's bedroom (with the exception of babies)