

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN: INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

Why we look after children

Safeguarding and Social Care believe that usually, children do better when they live at home, and we aim to work with parents to help them care for their children so that families can stay together.

However, sometimes children cannot live at home with their parents and need to be looked after by us. This may be because:

- Their parents are ill or temporarily unable to look after their child for some reason
- The child has no parents or anyone else to care for them
- There are serious concerns about the way the child is being cared for by their parents.

Our legal duty

- Safeguarding and Social Care have a duty to make sure children living in Camden are safe and that they are being well-cared for and this may mean looking after a child for a time by placing them with a foster carer.
- Normally, we will only look after your child if you agree to this, but if we have a lot of concerns about your child, we may go to court to get a care order that gives us the right to look after them.
- We have to carry out an assessment on your child to find out their needs and how best to meet them. This information will help us decide whether we need to look after your child and where the best place is for your child to live.
- We have to make sure that your child is living in a safe, comfortable home and that the people who are caring for them have been approved as suitable to care for children living away from home. Where possible, we will try to place the child in a foster home in Camden or nearby.

- We also need to make sure your child is receiving the right care, is attending school and receiving health and dental care, and has an opportunity to carry on with any hobbies or activities they enjoy.
- We will always try to place your child with a foster family that has a similar background to you and your child, and make sure that anyone caring for your child lets them keep up with their religious and cultural practices.
- When deciding where your child will live, we must consider whether there is anyone known to the child, a relative or friend (known as a kinship carer), who may be able to look after them on our behalf.
- We will always ask you if there is anyone who you would like the child to live with. Your social worker may offer to organise a family group conference so that you and your family can plan for the child's care; you can ask your social worker for details of this.
- We must make sure that your child is safe in their foster home. To do this, we must visit them regularly and give them an opportunity to say how they feel about living away from home and how they are being cared for.
- We have to make sure you see your child regularly (known as contact) while they are living away from home. Sometimes, we may need to limit contact but we will only do this if we think we need to make sure your child is safe.
- We will make sure that your child has an independent reviewing officer who is not involved in your child's case but will check that any plans and decisions we make about your child's care and their future are in your child's best interests.

Your rights and responsibilities

- If we have to look after your child, we will always tell you the reasons why and consult you about plans for your child. You have a right to tell us your views on your child's care, and we must take these into account when making our decisions.
- If you agree to us looking after your child, you will keep all rights and responsibilities (known as parental responsibility) and we will need to consult with you about major decisions about your child's care.
- If we look after your child because they are subject to a care order you will share parental responsibility with us, but we will still need to keep you informed about your child's care.
- You have a right to know what are our long-term plans for your child's care; your child's social worker should give you a copy of your child's care plan, which sets out how long your child will be in care, how their needs will be met by their carer and what you need to do so that your child can return home.
- You have a right to know where your child will be living unless we have concerns that this may put your child at risk.
- It is important that you give us information about your child such as routines, health issues, schooling, so that we can pass this information on to the person who will care for your child.
- You have a right to attend any meetings and reviews about your child, and we will make sure that you are invited to these.

Complaints and concerns

If you are not happy with any aspect of the service you or your child is receiving, or you are worried about the care being given to your child, you can speak to your child's social worker who will try to help you resolve any problems. If not, the social worker can explain Camden's complaints procedure and put you in touch with our Complaints Unit.