Annual Review of Foster Carers

Foster Carer Policies and Procedures · https://handbook.co.uk/docs/annual-review-of-foster-carers/

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Regulation 28 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 requires fostering services to review the approval of Foster Carers within a year of approval, and thereafter whenever necessary but at intervals of not more than a year. A written report of the review must set out whether the Foster Carer and their household continue to be suitable to foster and, if so, whether the terms of their approval continue to be appropriate. The first review must be referred to the fostering panel to make a recommendation.

Regulation 28 also gives Foster Carers the right to make representations to the fostering service or to refer to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) within 28 days of any qualifying determination issued by the fostering service.

National Minimum Standard (NMS) 20.6 sets out that reviews should include an appraisal of a carer's performance, consideration of training and development needs and a review of the carer's personal development plan. Standard 13.9 emphasises that areas of concern or need for additional support that are identified between reviews should be addressed at that time and should not wait until a planned review.

Assessment and approval of Foster Carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4 (July 2013) provides statutory guidance regarding reviews and terminations of approval.

Changes to a Foster Carer's Terms of Approval: The Amendment to the Children Act 1989 Guidance & Regulations Volume 4 Fostering Services, July 2013 (pages 5, 15, 18) states that a Review is not necessary in order to change a Foster Carer's approval terms. Please refer to the PA Group Changes to Terms of Approval Procedure, when a change of approval is being requested, either planned or emergency and falls outside of the Foster Carers Annual Review cycle.

Introduction

The Foster Carer review is a statutory process in which all Foster Carers must participate. The purpose is to review the Foster Carers' approval to determine whether the Foster Carer and their household continue to be suitable to foster and, if so, whether the Foster Carer's terms continue to be appropriate. This process must be thorough and conducted with respect, allowing the agency to be confident that the Foster Carers continue to be able to provide safe, nurturing, and supportive care for looked after children.

The review considers the work of the Foster Carer over the past year and is evidenced by reports from looked after children, including birth children, and other professionals involved in the child's life. The Supervising Social Worker should engage in ongoing, open, and supportive conversations with Foster Carers throughout the year, discussing any concerns or difficulties as they arise, so that the contents of the review report are not a surprise.

The review process also provides Foster Carers with an opportunity to reflect on their successes and challenges, including the impact fostering has on their family life and wellbeing. It offers a space for Foster Carers to express their needs, discuss the quality and effectiveness of the support and training they have received, and to collaboratively suggest improvements or additional resources the agency could provide to better support their fostering role.

Frequency of Reviews

The first Foster Carer review must take place no later than six months after the date of the first placement, or not more than one year after approval, whichever is sooner. Subsequent reviews must occur annually, or sooner if serious concerns arise that warrant an early review.

An early review will usually be necessary in circumstances including, but not limited to:

- Following an allegation or serious complaint,
- A significant change in the composition of the household,
- Any significant event that impacts fostering,
- A serious concern, such as a new offence.

Foster Carers are responsible for promptly notifying the fostering service of any changes in household composition or circumstances that may affect their fostering capacity. If a Supervising Social Worker

becomes aware of an unreported change, they must inform the Team Manager to ensure timely review and support.

Fostering Services Regulations 2011 R28 (2) states: “A review must take place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider consider it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year.” This regulation underscores that reviews must not be delayed. Even during ongoing investigations—such as for allegations or Standards of Care concerns—the scheduled review must proceed within the required timeframe. A note should be added to advise the panel and/or decision-maker that an investigation is ongoing and that findings will be brought to panel once complete.

Once investigations conclude, an additional review of the household’s suitability may be necessary, based on the information gathered. In cases where an allegation is unfounded and the review closely follows the investigation, an addendum report to the last annual review may be sufficient. The decision regarding this will be made collaboratively by the Supervising Social Worker, Team Manager, and, where appropriate, the Registered Manager.

In some circumstances, when the foster carer annual review coincides with an ongoing investigation, the Registered Manager may decide that it is in the Foster Carers’ best interests for the annual review to be completed by the SSW *without* a review meeting and without a full Fostering Reviewing Officer’s report. In this instance, the Registered Manager or Team Manager would complete a short internal review, providing the rationale for this decision, which would then be presented to panel along with the SSW review, for noting. A full annual review would then be completed once the investigation was concluded and all three reports would be heard at the next available panel. This decision can only be made by the Registered Manager.

Role of the Fostering Panel

The full annual review, including the Fostering Reviewing Officer’s report from the review meeting, must be submitted to the Agency Decision Maker for a decision, regardless of whether it is first presented to the fostering panel for recommendation.

Reviews that must be considered by the Fostering Panel for a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker include:

- The first review following approval;
- Every third review thereafter;
- A review following an investigation into an allegation or serious complaint, whether proven or unsubstantiated;
- Where there is a recommendation for a significant change of approval;
- Where there have been significant changes in the Foster Carer's circumstances;
- Where requested by the Panel or Agency Decision Maker for an early review.

Content of Review

The review should include the following documentation and information:

- The Supervising Social Worker's report.
- A current health and safety check of the foster home.
- Details of updated checks, including:
  - Medicals for carers every three years, unless required earlier due to medical concerns.
  - DBS checks for anyone aged 18 or over who is a member of the household, all members of the Foster Carers' Enhanced Support Network, and regular visitors to the fostering household. DBS checks are renewed every three years. For the definition of regular visitors, please refer to the Household Safer Caring Policy.
  - Local authority checks every three years for all members of the household and Enhanced Support Network.
  - The Foster Carers' personal development plan, including an appraisal of training and development over the past year.
  - The fostering Household's Safer Caring policy reviewed annually, or if any significant change in household.
  - All individual child safer caring policy for looked after child(ren) currently placed, reviewed within the last six months and following any incidents.
- Reports wherever possible from all those involved, including:
  - The Supervising Social Worker.

- The Foster Carer.
- Any other adults closely involved with the foster children.
- The carers' sons and daughters (subject to age and understanding).
- Any children currently in placement and those who have left the placement during the last year, including those placed for respite care (subject to age and understanding).
- The birth parent(s), if appropriate.
- The child's school.
- Social workers for all children placed at any time during the past year.
- Any other relevant person.

- The report of the Foster Carers Independent Reviewing Officer (FIRO) following the review meeting.

The Supervising Social Worker or the child's social worker should support children in completing feedback forms or obtaining verbal feedback if necessary, particularly for younger children. Foster Carers should generally not assist children with feedback to ensure children feel safe to express their genuine views about their placement. For younger children, the Supervising Social Worker or child's social worker should provide their observations in the child's voice wherever possible.

Before the Review Meeting

The completed Supervising Social Worker's report should be reviewed and quality assured by the Team Manager prior to being shared with the Foster Carer. The Foster Carer must receive a copy of the full report in advance of the review meeting to enable adequate preparation.

Positive Aspirations Central Support Services will appoint a Fostering Reviewing Officer (FRO) to chair the review meeting. The FRO should receive all relevant review documentation at least five days before the meeting, allowing sufficient time to read the reports and discuss any clarifications with the Supervising Social Worker to plan the review effectively.

Review Meeting

The review meeting should be held in the Foster Carer's home and attended by the FRO, Supervising Social Worker, and both carers where applicable for joint fostering approvals.

The review should provide a comprehensive, collaborative assessment of the carer's fostering over the past year and the quality of support they have received from the agency. It should include:

- A respectful discussion of the report contents, with attention to any areas of difficulty as well as examples of good practice.
- A review of the placements the carer has had, assessing their appropriateness in relation to the carer's approval, skills, and capacity.
- An evaluation of training attended by the Foster Carer and discussion of future training and development needs.
- The Foster Carer's assessment of the quality of agency support and suggestions for improvements or additional support.
- An inspection of the accommodation, including the child's bedroom, ensuring it meets the needs of the foster children.
- A discussion of any recommendations the FRO intends to make and an agreed plan of action specifying responsibilities for implementation.

The FRO will write a report following the meeting, including observations about the standard of care provided by the Foster Carers, the adequacy of agency support, and concluding with recommendations and a suggested action plan.

Foster Carers must be provided with a copy of the FRO's report and are required to sign it before it is submitted to the fostering panel or Agency Decision Maker.

Consideration by Panel and Agency Decision Maker

If the procedures require the report to be considered by the fostering panel, the Supervising Social Worker must submit the paperwork to Positive Aspirations Central Support Services, who will schedule a panel date. Positive Aspirations Central Support Services will inform the Supervising Social Worker of the date and send an invitation to the Foster Carers to attend.

The Panel will make a recommendation based on the written report and the discussion at the panel. If the Agency Decision Maker, taking the panel's views into account, decides that the carer continues to

be suitable and that the terms of approval remain appropriate, a letter confirming the continuing approval will be sent to the Foster Carer.

The Agency Decision Maker must make their decision within seven working days of receiving the panel minutes. The Foster Carer must be informed verbally within two working days and in writing within five working days. For review reports presented directly to the Agency Decision Maker, the same timescales apply.

A copy of the review documents, the Agency Decision sheet, and panel minutes (where applicable) must be kept on the carer's electronic file.

Qualifying Determinations and Appeals

If the review results in a qualifying determination to terminate or change the carer's terms of approval, the Foster Carer has the right to follow the representations procedure or request a review from the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). Any appeal to the IRM must be made in writing and received within 28 days from the date of the qualifying determination decision.

De-registration of Foster Carers

While Positive Aspirations values and supports each fostering family, there are circumstances where de-registration may be necessary, including:

- When carers have not fostered for an extended period with no indication of returning to fostering in the near future.
- Where there is an irretrievable breakdown in the working relationship between the foster family and Positive Aspirations or its associated agencies.
- Where the outcome and recommendation of a Standards of Care investigation is for de-registration.
- When the recommendation of a foster home review is for de-registration.
- If the foster family has taken action that brings Positive Aspirations or its associated agencies into disrepute.

Positive Aspirations will communicate openly and sensitively with families in such situations, clearly explaining decisions and providing opportunities for discussion. Families will also be informed about the dispute process and given copies of reports destined for the Panel in sufficient time to make informed decisions.

Important Note

Positive Aspirations Group does NOT consider, approve, or re-approve Applicants or Foster Carers on a ‘Subject to’ basis. ALL checks and information must be up to date, satisfactory, and fully documented in the paperwork submitted to the panel or Agency Decision Maker before any decision can be made.

Right to Appeal

A Foster Carer has the right to appeal any decision made. Appeals must be submitted in writing within 28 days from the date of the qualifying determination decision.