Recruitment and Assessment Procedure

Foster Carer Policies and Procedures · https://handbook.co.uk/docs/recruitment-and-assessment-procedure/

(Last reviewed 30/05/2025)

Underpinning Legislation:

1. Fostering Services Regulations 2011
2. Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
3. Placement of Children (General) Regulations 1991
4. Fostering National Minimum Standards, Fostering Services Regulations 2011
5. Children Act 1989, 2004
6. Vetting & Barring Procedures 2009
7. DBS Privacy Policy 2015
8. Equality Act 2010

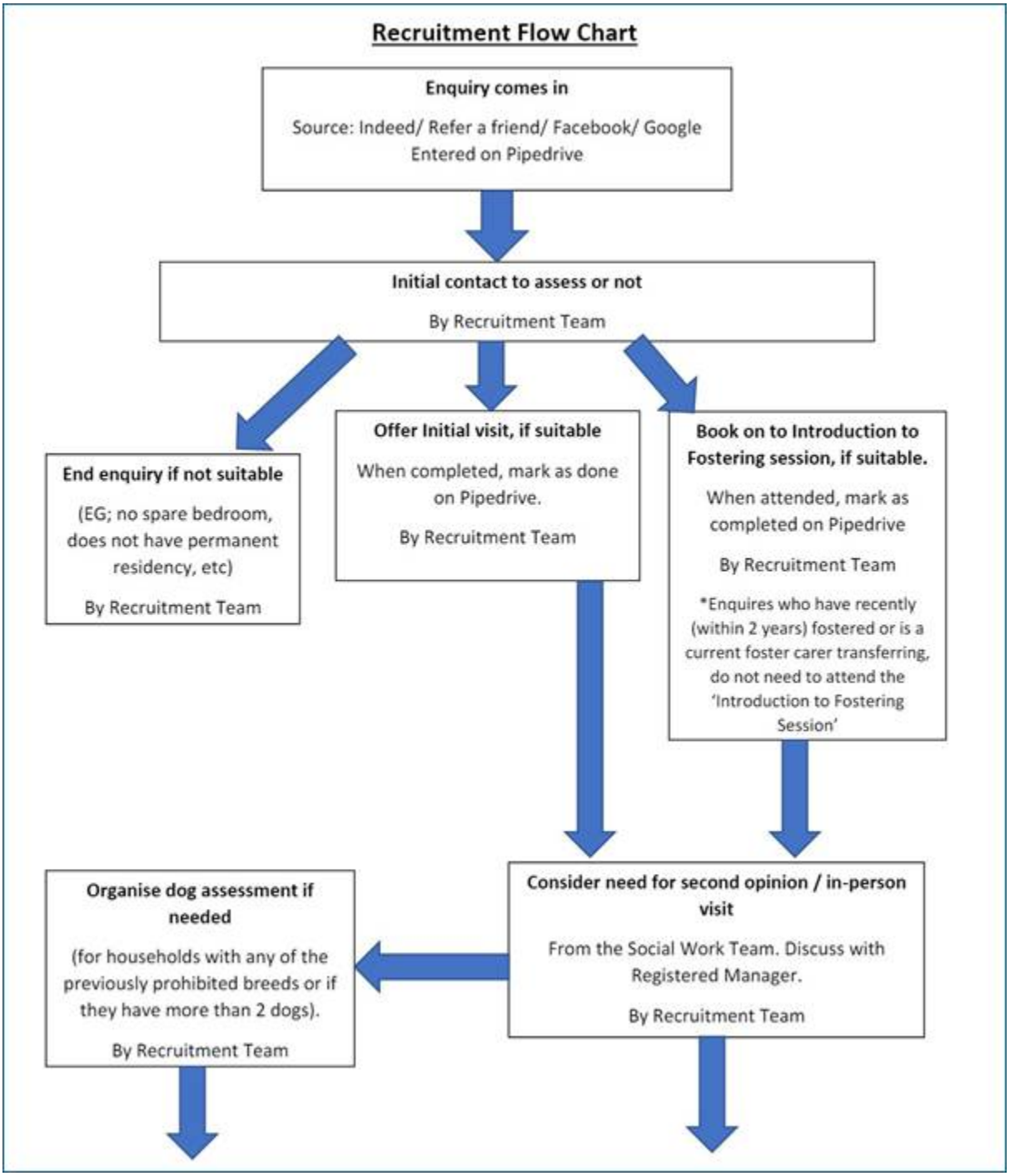
This procedure is designed to guide and encourage everyone who is interested in becoming a foster carer with any of the Positive Aspirations Group's agencies. It describes each step from the first enquiry through to a possible approval as a foster carer.

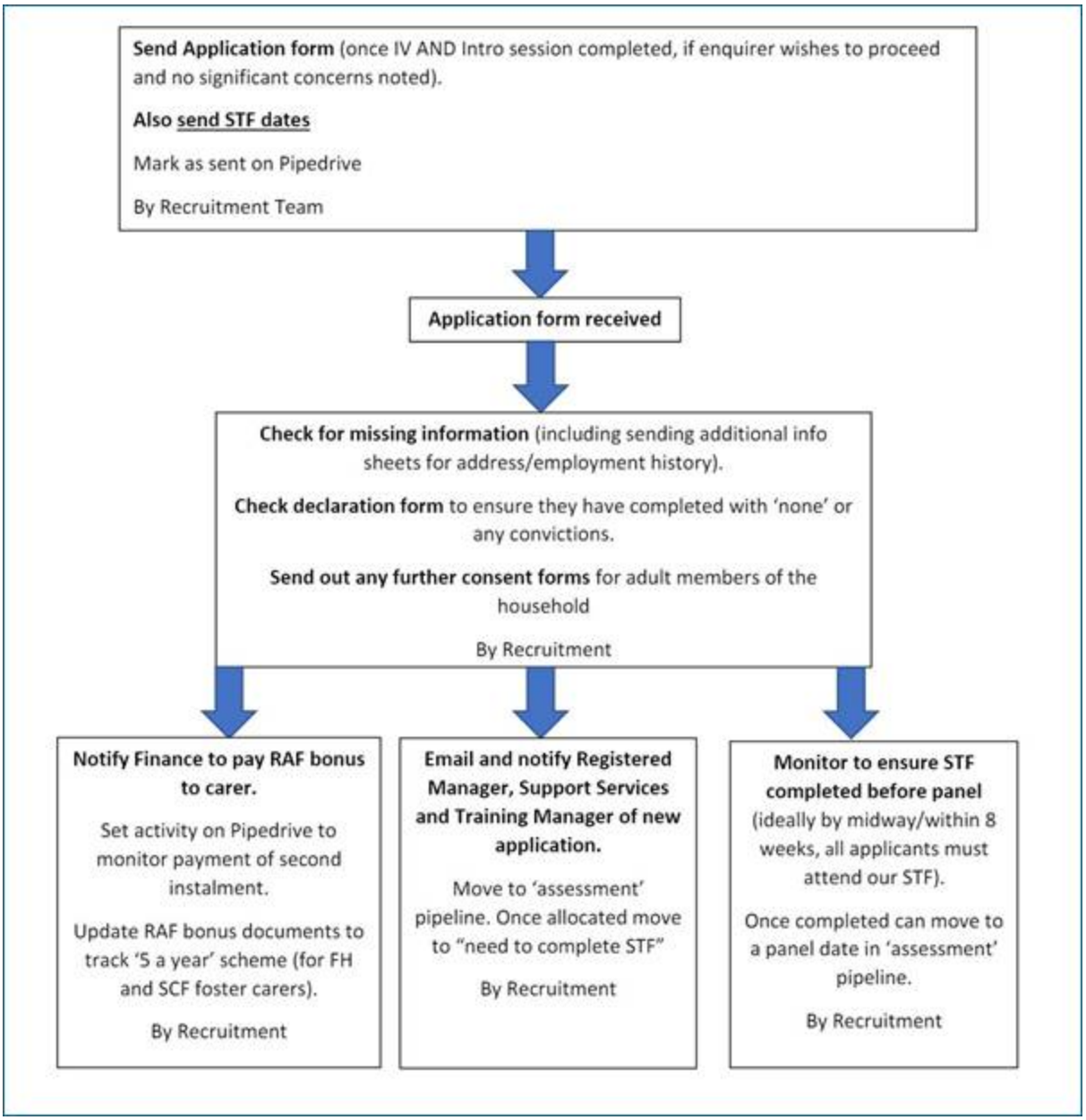
Please read this procedure alongside the Positive Aspirations Group's Recruitment and Assessment Policy.

Who should use this document
All staff members within the Positive Aspirations Group, and any independent social workers or other independent professionals who carry out initial visits or deliver Skills to Foster and Introduction to Fostering training for the group, should use this document. Anyone completing a Form F Assessment—whether employed by the Positive Aspirations Group or working as an Independent Social Worker—may also refer to this document.

Positive Aspirations Group Procedure for Recruitment of Prospective Foster Carers
The Recruitment Team will mainly use the initial response procedure, which is set out in the flowchart

below:


Recruitment Flow Chart
Enquiry comes in
Source: Indeed/ Refer a friend/ Facebook/ Google
Entered on Pipedrive
Initial contact to assess or not
By Recruitment Team
End enquiry if not suitable
(EG; no spare bedroom, does not have permanent residency, etc)
By Recruitment Team
Offer Initial visit, if suitable
When completed, mark as done on Pipedrive.
By Recruitment Team
Book on to Introduction to Fostering session, if suitable.
When attended, mark as completed on Pipedrive
By Recruitment Team
*Enquires who have recently (within 2 years) fostered or is a current foster carer transferring, do not need to attend the 'Introduction to Fostering Session'
Consider need for second opinion / in-person visit
From the Social Work Team. Discuss with Registered Manager.
By Recruitment Team
Organise dog assessment if needed
(for households with any of the previously prohibited breeds or if they have more than 2 dogs).
By Recruitment Team



The Registered Manager or Assessments Manager will reply to the Recruitment Team's email to confirm that they have accepted the application form.
At the same time, they will ask Support Services to start the Stage 1 checks and request that the prospective foster carers are added to the training invitation list.

On occasion, a foster carer who is already approved with the Positive Aspirations Group may need their assessment and Form F to be changed or updated. The agency policy states:
• An "assessment update" happens when only the household's address and/or phone number changes.
• A "re-assessment" is required when an approved foster carer is reviewed because of a significant

change in circumstances.
Please refer to the policy for more details.

The Positive Aspirations Group procedure for oversight of Form F Assessments

The group's goal is to ensure that every prospective foster carer experiences a thorough and supportive assessment process that meets the Group's Recruitment Policy. We want each applicant to work with a qualified and experienced assessing social worker, who will complete a comprehensive fostering assessment using the agency's own Form F template (based on the Coram BAAF version).

The Recruitment Manager will manage and oversee all assessments.
Please note that Independent Social Workers (ISWs) are commissioned when needed and may choose whether to accept independent assessment work.

If an approved single carer enters a relationship and the new partner is regularly in the home for extended periods or is planning to move in, a new assessment of the carer and their partner as a couple must be completed. Please see the Positive Aspirations "New Partner" policy for full details and follow the process below as you would for a new application.

Sometimes foster carers who are already approved with the Positive Aspirations Group need their assessment and Form F to be revised. The agency policy states:
• An "assessment update" occurs, for example, when only the household's address and/or phone number changes.
• A "re-assessment" takes place when an approved foster carer is reviewed because of a significant change in circumstances.

For an assessment update that involves only a change of address and no other changes, the revised Form F will not be taken to panel.

During a re-assessment, the Form F will be updated to show the changes (usually, but not always, by the family's Supervising Social Worker). The revised Form F will be presented to panel and the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) so they can decide whether the household is still suitable for fostering. When a re-assessment is carried out, additional checks may be completed depending on the situation. The Supervising Social Worker/assessor, Team Manager and Assessment Manager will work with Support Services to decide which checks are appropriate for the family's specific circumstances.

Transferring fostering families

Positive Aspirations Group policy states that a prospective foster carer who is already fostering for another service follows the same process as an applicant with no fostering experience, except that they do not have to attend an information session. As part of the process, the Positive Aspirations Group will request a reference and access to the foster family's file at their current agency. The file will be reviewed by either the assessing social worker or the Assessments Manager.

To respect other agencies and follow the Fostering Network Transfer Protocol, when a foster carer approved by another agency contacts the PA Group we will talk with them about transferring, but we will not start an assessment until they have given their current agency notice of their intention to resign.

If the family is moving between agencies within the PA Group, we will use the information we already hold, including the current Form F, to support a smooth transfer while remaining compliant with the Fostering Regulations and the National Minimum Standards.

Once panel gives a positive recommendation, the family will submit their resignation to the PA agency with which they are currently approved and will transfer as soon as the ADM for the new agency agrees with the panel's recommendation. Within the PA Group, a family transferring internally does not have to wait 28 days, as would be required if they were moving from an agency outside the PA Group.

Initiating Pre-panel Training

The Recruitment Manager will inform the Training Coordinator, who will contact the applicant with:
• Details of the PA training programme
• Information on which mandatory courses must be completed before panel
• Links to all agency e-learning sites and guidance on how to set up an account

The assessor and Recruitment Manager will check with the applicant and the Training Coordinator to ensure that all required courses are completed before the assessment is presented to panel.

It is important that the birth children in fostering families receive clear information about fostering. While the assessor will spend time with birth children during the assessment, Positive Aspirations also offers a Skills to Foster course designed especially for them. All birth children aged 8 years and over will be invited to attend. This course does not need to be completed before approval.

Allocation of Assessor

The Recruitment Manager will choose a suitable assessing social worker, who may be a Positive Aspirations Group staff member or an Independent Social Worker. The choice will be based on:

• The complexity of the case

• The social worker's availability and capacity

• Their particular strengths and assessment style

Allocation of Assessment

Once the assessing social worker (staff member or Independent Social Worker) has been identified, they should review all available information, including:

• the home-visit report

• any video tour of the home (if available)

• any second-opinion visit notes

• the application form

The Recruitment Manager will then:

• open a file for the prospective foster carer on the ISW desktop

• complete the allocation template and send it to:

• the assessor

• Support Services

• file the allocation template in "Manager's Notes" within the prospective foster carer's folder

• add all documentation, templates and relevant information to that folder

Allocation Call to Assessing Social Worker

The Recruitment Manager will call the assessing social worker to discuss the case in more depth and confirm the agreed timescales.

Once an assessment has been allocated, this must be recorded on the agency tracker.

Communication with the ISW and Sharing of Information

All Independent Social Workers (ISWs) undertake assessments on a secure ISW desktop, and all written communication must be sent from their Positive Aspirations Group ISW email account—not personal email addresses.

Documents should be saved on the ISW desktop rather than emailed; an email can then alert colleagues that action is required.

The assessing social worker is expected to stay in regular contact with the Recruitment Manager—at least once every fortnight for a general update and immediately if any concerns arise, so that a plan can be agreed.

Communication with the prospective foster carer

The Recruitment Manager must remain in regular contact with the prospective foster carer. A call should be made at allocation to:

- explain the assessment process
- say when the assessor will make contact (including the assessor's name)
- outline the areas that will be explored
- explain the level of personal information that will be discussed

The conversation should also cover:

- emails they will receive from Support Services about required checks
- the importance of responding promptly
- the expectation that they will attend mandatory training during the assessment

The prospective foster carer should be reassured that:

- we will keep in touch regularly to check that everything is progressing well
- while we aim for a positive outcome, either party can withdraw from the process at any time

The Recruitment Manager should speak with the prospective foster carer at least every two to three weeks to review progress.

Review of Checks

A named member of Support Services applies for all checks, except landlord consent, which the Recruitment Manager requests (landlord details are provided in the application form).

For full details of potential checks, see the Support Services procedure for applications and assessments.

The Recruitment Manager must also ensure that checks are under way for everyone in the prospective foster carers' support network.

Support Services will save completed checks on the ISW desktop as soon as they are received.

Feedback from the Skills to Foster course will be shared with the assessor promptly, and any development areas should be discussed with the prospective foster carers.

The Recruitment Manager will monitor the progress of all checks and follow up quickly if delays could affect the panel deadline.

When a prospective foster carer is already known—through a local-authority check or a DBS disclosure—a risk assessment must be completed.

• Support Services will save the Positive Aspirations Group risk-assessment template on the ISW desktop and prompt the assessor to complete it.

• The Recruitment Manager will review local-authority information to identify topics that need further exploration and, if necessary, arrange a file read at the local authority.

• The Recruitment Manager (sometimes with the Registered Manager) will decide whether to pause assessment work until additional information is gathered, to avoid unnecessary expense.

The agency treats very seriously any failure to provide significant information—such as undisclosed convictions or previous local-authority involvement. Each situation is considered individually, and, if the assessment continues, the matter is explored in depth, taking account of context and timescale.

Stage 2 of the assessment is sometimes completed before all checks or referee interviews are returned. Positive Aspirations Group does **not** present assessments to panel “subject to checks”; all checks must be satisfactorily completed before listing for panel.

Referees

The Positive Aspirations Group has clear guidance on who may act as a referee, how many references are required and how many will be interviewed. Please see the Recruitment and Assessment Policy for details.

Midway Meeting

All ISWs and Positive Aspirations social-work staff must complete assessment work on the secure desktop. This allows the overseeing manager to review progress at any time and address any concerns promptly.

About half of the assessment should be written up one week before the midway meeting so that the overseeing manager can review it.

The midway meeting usually covers:
• a review of outstanding checks so prompts can be issued—for example, medicals or DBS applications
• Note: if the applicant has not applied for DBS or arranged their medical by the midway meeting, the assessment will be paused until this has been done
• the assessor's overall view of the prospective foster carer
• identified strengths
• identified vulnerabilities
• any concerns, whether they can be managed and how
• topics requiring deeper exploration to prepare the foster carers

• progress on the household safer caring policy
• progress with mandatory training and any household training needs
• confirmation of a suitable support network and progress with related checks
• a review of timescales and whether they remain realistic
• clarity about triangulated evidence and any emerging themes
• progress on the welcome book

The written record of the midway supervision meeting should be saved on the ISW desktop under "Manager's Notes" and sent to HR for the ISW/Registered Manager's file. This evidences supervision and adherence to agency standards.

Case Notes

Case notes and relevant emails should be saved under "Manager's Notes" on the ISW desktop; they will later be stored on the prospective foster carer's file after approval.

Welcome Book

Positive Aspirations Group believes every child joining a foster family should have information about that family beforehand to help reduce anxiety. The family and assessor will therefore create a welcome booklet to share with the local authority, which will pass it to the child. The booklet should:
• be written in child-friendly language

• include photos of the house, the child’s bedroom and the neighbourhood
• include photos of the family
• contain the family’s living-together agreement (house rules)

The welcome booklet must be submitted to panel alongside the assessment report and checks.

Submission

A Form F submission date is normally set three and a half months from allocation, with panel one month later. These timescales may be adjusted for complex assessments or to accommodate holidays.

Assessing social workers understand that meeting timescales is essential for thorough quality assurance and for Support Services to prepare the panel agenda.

Deadlines

The Recruitment Manager will set a final-report deadline that allows time for in-depth quality assurance; the report may be returned to the assessor for clarification or additional detail. Quality assurance includes a full review of all checks, personal data and narrative.

If a submission deadline or panel date is likely to change, the agency tracker must be updated, and the Recruitment Manager must notify Support Services so they can adjust the panel agenda.

Stage 1 and Stage 2

Support Services send a letter that explains the Stage 1 and Stage 2 process to the prospective foster carers as soon as the Recruitment Manager confirms that the application form has been accepted.

When every check has been returned and the assessing social worker has finished all referee and ex-partner interviews, the assessment moves into Stage 2. The Recruitment Manager then notifies the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) and sends the Stage 2 letter and Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) information to the prospective foster carers. The Assessments Manager or ADM should speak with the prospective foster carers first to explain the letter’s purpose and offer reassurance.

Pre-Panel

When the assessment is complete, the Assessments Manager must:

1. Clearly label and save the report in the applicant’s > assessment > 9. Form F Assessment folder.
2. Tell Support Services to list the assessment for panel.
3. Telephone the prospective foster carers to confirm the panel date.
4. Contact the assessor to confirm the panel date.

The Recruitment Manager also prepares the applicants for what to expect on panel day. This conversation may cover areas the overseeing manager thinks the panel might explore and is a chance to reassure the applicants. The overseeing manager should also talk with the assessing social worker about panel expectations and likely questions.

The assessment report—without written or verbal references and without third-party checks—must be shared with the prospective foster carers before panel so they can point out any factual errors. This version of the Form F should be saved in Assessment > 6. Managers Notes. Prospective foster carers may correct factual details only; they cannot influence the assessor’s analysis.

The following documents must be sent by the Assessment Manager for signatures; to the Applicants, the Assessing social worker and the Assessment Manager, where applicable. The documents must be returned signed and dated by all before being added to a panel, to ensure all have read and agree with the documents:

1. Final signature page of the Form F.
2. Health & Safety Checklist.
3. Pet Checklist or Dog Assessment, if applicable.
4. Household Safer Caring Policy.

Panel

When the Assessments Manager is satisfied that all required information and explanations are in place, they confirm with Support Services that the report and supporting documents are ready for panel:

1. This confirmation must be given at least two weeks before the panel date.

Support Services prepare the documents and, seven calendar days before the panel meeting, use Dropbox to give panel members and the ADM secure access.

Detailed minutes are taken during the panel session, typed up and sent to the panel chair and Registered Manager for checking. Once finalised, the minutes are sent to the ADM so they can make the final decision.

Please see the Support Services and Panel procedures for more detailed guidance.

Ending of an Assessment

If prospective foster carers choose to withdraw, they confirm this in writing to the Recruitment Manager, who will:

1. Send a letter confirming the end of the assessment and the stage reached.
2. Complete the “end assessment” template and forward it to Support Services.
3. File the letter and template in Manager’s Notes.
4. Update the agency assessment tracker.
5. Update Pipedrive with the reasons (for the Ofsted dataset).
6. Archive the folder on Drive.

Applicants who withdraw may reapply within six months. If the Recruitment Manager considers their previous assessment positive and the applicants confirm in writing that nothing has changed, the original paperwork may be reused.

If the Positive Aspirations Group ends an assessment, the decision is made with the Recruitment Manager, Registered Manager and assessing social worker. The Recruitment Manager speaks with the prospective foster carers about the decision. See the Recruitment and Assessment Policy for guidance on information sharing and appeals.

End Assessment Letter/Template

When an assessment ends in Stage 1 or Stage 2, the Recruitment Manager will:

1. Telephone the prospective foster carers to explain the decision.
2. Send a letter confirming the end of the assessment and the stage reached.
3. Complete the “end assessment” template and forward it to Support Services.

4. File the letter and template in Manager’s Notes.
5. Update the agency assessment tracker.
6. Update Pipedrive with the reasons (for the Ofsted dataset).
7. Archive the folder on Drive.

If Stage 2 information shows the applicants are unsuitable:

1. Explain the reasons clearly and confirm them in writing.
2. Share a short report (usually written by the assessor with comments from the Assessments Manager) with the applicants and panel.
3. Give the applicants an opportunity to respond; include their views in the panel papers.
4. Invite the applicants to attend panel.
5. Send panel’s recommendation to the ADM for a decision.
6. If the decision is not to proceed, tell the applicants how to appeal to the IRM.

If panel or ADM defer a recommendation to approve, the Recruitment Manager explains the reasons to the applicants and ensures any extra work is done quickly. If the decision is not to approve, the Assessments Manager tells the applicants and explains how to appeal within the agency or to the IRM.

Post-Approval

Once the ADM approves the applicants, the Recruitment Manager will:

1. Telephone the foster carers to share the news.
2. Explain the induction process.
3. Email all Positive Aspirations Group colleagues involved in induction.
4. Check Pipedrive for any referral or finder’s fee.
5. Make any needed amendments to the Form F.
   5a. Make changes promptly and tell Support Services so the revised version can be sent for signature.

See the Induction Policy and Procedure for more details.

Form F versions to keep on file

1. Full PDF with all signatures saved in FC/1. Info for new placements and uploaded to Agency Base.
2. Full Word version saved in FC/1. Info for new placements/archive/form f.
3. Redacted copy (no references or checks) saved in FC/8. Assessment/6. Manager Notes.