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| Manual: | Foster Carers Handbook; |
| Title: | Responsibilities of the Fostering Service (CC/005/6) |
| Last Reviewed: | 04/12/2014 |
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INTRODUCTION

Children and Adult's Service is part of Durham County Council, which has a series of duties and responsibilities under the Children Act 1989. In relation to children looked after, Section 22 of this act specifies the duty to:

- Safeguard and promote the child's welfare;
- Make such use of services available for children cared for by their own parents as appears reasonable;
- Ascertain the wishes and feelings of:
 - The child,
 - The parents,
 - Others with parental responsibility,
 - Other significant people regarding decision about the care of the child.
- Give due consideration to the child's religious persuasion, racial origin and cultural and linguistic background.

Statutory Visits

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 set out the following minimum requirements for the Social Worker to visit a foster child:

- A visit during the first week of placement;
- Visits at 6 weekly intervals during the first year;
- Visits at 6 weekly intervals in subsequent years unless the placement is a permanent placement until the young person is 18: in these circumstances the intervals must be no longer than 3 months;
- A visit at any time whenever reasonably requested by the child or foster carer.

This is the minimum requirement and it is likely, particularly during the early stages of placement, that the child's Social Worker will be visiting more frequently. The visiting pattern will be agreed at the pre-placement meeting or within 72 hours of an emergency placement.

The Regulations require that:

- The child is seen alone at each visit (unless the child, being of sufficient age and understanding to do so, refuses, or due to the child's age and understanding);
- The Social Worker writes a report on the visit after each visit.

There are a number of reasons for the visits:

- To support the development of a good relationship between the child and their social worker;
- To work with the child towards achieving the plan;
- To assess how far the plan for the child is being achieved;
- To ensure the child's welfare is being safeguarding and promoted;

- To give information and advice to the foster carers;
- To monitor the contact arrangements;
- To monitor the child's educational and health progress;
- To identify further help/support that may be needed.

Foster carer's need to be aware that the child's Social Worker and Fostering Social Worker are required to see the child's bedroom occasionally; that sometimes these Workers, will call unannounced; that sometimes the Social Worker will want to call when all members of the household are at home; that the Social Worker will want to see the child alone (perhaps outside the foster home).

The Social Worker should not neglect to visit because the placement is going well. If the Social Worker is failing to comply with the statutory minimum visiting requirements, the carer must discuss this with the child's Social Worker and the Fostering Social Worker.

The above visiting requirements do not apply to pre-planned short breaks under section 20(4) of the 1989 Act. The Care Planning, Placement and Review Regulation 48 allows for a series of placements in the same foster home to be regarded as a single placement if:

- No single placement lasts more than 17 days; and
- The total duration of the placements does not exceed 75 days in any period of 12 months

In these situations the requirements are that visits must take place at regular intervals, agreed by the IRO and child's parents and recorded in the child's short break care plan.

- The first visit must take place within 3 months of the first placement day;
- Then visits should be at intervals of no more than 6 months.

The Fostering Service – support and supervision of foster carers

The Fostering Service National Minimum Standards 2011 set out in Standard 21 the standards to be achieved in relation to the supervision and support of foster carers and these are set out in Appendix 1

Fostering Panel

Fostering Panels are made up a group of professionals and lay people, including a foster carer from another area.

Fostering Panels consider:

- The suitability of each application by prospective carers;
- Recommend terms of approval and consider any significant change in circumstances;
- Termination of approval;
- Whether permanent fostering is in a child's best interests;
- Matching of children and carers for permanence;
- Applications made by Family and Friends following their temporary approval as foster carers under Regulation 24 of The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- The first Annual Review, every third Annual Review and any Reviews where there have been concerns raised about the quality of care given or the continued suitability of the carer.

Applications for approval are presented to the Panel by the Fostering Social Worker who conducted the assessment. The full Home Study report (Form F), excluding reference reports, will have been shared with the applicant prior to panel. Applicants are invited to attend Panel.

The Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker to consider all information and make a final decision in relation to approval. All decisions will be notified to the applicant in writing and in person.

Foster Care Agreement

If an application is approved, the carer must agree and sign a Foster Care Agreement and Task Payment banding agreement.

Foster Carer Register

Children and Adult's Service are required by law to keep a register of all foster carers living in County Durham. This includes foster carers:

- Who are approved by DCC Children and Adult's Service;
- Who are approved by other local authorities;
- All foster carers approved by Children and Adult's Service, but who live elsewhere.

This is not a public register and is only accessible to members of Children and Adult's Service, Elected Members, OFSTED and any person authorised by the Secretary of State.

Reviews

There is a legal requirement that foster carer's approval must be reviewed at least annually. The Review will generally be conducted by the Fostering Social Worker in consultation with Social Workers and children who have been placed in the preceding 12 months, birth family comments, children who are currently in placement and their Social Worker comments and comments from significant others.

Your Fostering Social Worker will then submit a report to the Independent Reviewing Officer which will have been shared in advance. The Independent Reviewing Officer will chair the Review Meeting and write a report, which will include recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker.

You will also be asked to consent to an updated police check and medical.

Notices to other Local Authorities

If a foster carer lives outside County Durham the Agency has a duty to inform the local authority in whose area they live, in the following circumstances:

- To identify the arrival or departure of any child placed with you;
- To ask for references when apply to foster;
- To notify of your approval as foster carers;
- To ask for comments at reviews of your fostering approval;
- To notify of outcome of your review of approval;
- To ask for you to be included on their Foster Care Register;
- To ask for a copy of their exemption procedures to the usual fostering limit;

- To ask for a copy of their Representations/Complaints procedure;
- To notify of your termination of approval.

If the carer lives outside County Durham and then moves to another area we are also required to inform both local authorities.

Removal of a Child

The Agency has a legal duty to remove a child from a placement if that placement is no longer considered to be safeguarding or promoting the child's welfare e.g. if the child is at risk of significant harm. If this situation arises, the child's Social Worker will talk to the foster carer and the child, so that the placement end causes the least possible disruption to the child. Such an unplanned ending will result in a review of your approval as foster carers.

Termination of Approval

Termination of approval can occur because a foster carer decides they no longer wish to continue fostering. In this situation the carer should write to the Fostering Team Manager who will arrange for the Fostering Social Worker to discuss this. Once a formal letter of resignation is received the termination of approval is automatically effective from 28 days after the receipt of the notice. It cannot be withdrawn. The information is then notified to Panel to inform its monitoring role.

The Agency is also legally required to terminate a foster carer's approval if it is no longer satisfied that the foster carer and the household are suitable. If serious concerns have arisen the Fostering Social Worker will discuss these with you. A Review of the foster carers approval will be conducted by the Independent Reviewing Officer or, if there are safeguarding concerns this review will be presented at the Fostering Panel. A recommendation will be made in all instances to the Agency Decision Maker who will consider all information. The foster carer will receive a letter giving:

- The reasons for the Agency Decision;
- The date it will take effect;
- Details of the Representations Procedure including the Independent Review Mechanism.

Where a Fostering Service recommends a termination of approval a foster carer may apply to another Agency who will, with their consent, request a reference from any previous Fostering Service. The previous Fostering Service will share all relevant information including safeguarding issues and Agency Decisions.

Fostering Service National Minimum Standards (England) 2011

Standard 21 – Supervision and Support of Foster Carers

Outcome: Foster carers receive the support and supervision they need in order to care properly for children placed with them

The fostering service supports their foster carers to ensure they provide foster children with care that reasonably meets those children's needs, takes the children's wishes and feelings into account, actively promotes individual care and supports the children's safety, health, enjoyment, education and preparation for the future.

The fostering service ensures foster carers understand the nature and level of support which will be provided to them by the fostering service.

There is an effective out of hours advice and support service for foster carers.

Peer support, foster care associations and/or self help groups for foster carers are encouraged and supported.

Foster carers are provided with breaks from caring as appropriate. These are planned to take account of the needs of any children placed.

All foster carers have access to adequate social work and other professional support, information and advice, to enable them to provide consistent, high quality care to the child. This includes assistance with dealing with relevant services, such as health and education. Consideration is given to any help or support needed by the sons and daughters of foster carers.

The role of the supervising social worker is clear both to the worker and the foster carer.

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. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. The frequency of meetings for short break foster carers should be proportionate to the amount of care provided. Foster carers' files include records of supervisory meetings.

The supervising social worker ensures each foster carer he or she supervises is informed in writing of, and accepts, understands and operates within, all Regulations and standards and with policies and guidance agreed by the fostering service.

On approval, foster carers are given information, either a handbook or electronic resources, which cover policies, procedures (including with regard to allegations), guidance, financial information, legal information and insurance details. This information is updated regularly.

Current and prospective foster carers are able to make a complaint about any aspect of the service which affects them directly. Records are kept of representations and complaints, how they are dealt with, the outcome and any action taken. These records are reviewed regularly so that the service's practice is improved where necessary.

There is a good system of communication between the fostering service social workers and the child's social worker. The fostering service social workers understand the role of the child's social worker and work effectively with them