

Fostering

Placements in Foster Care

The Trust Board has granted the Chief Executive of the Sandwell Children's Trust the authority to approve this document.

Placements in Foster Care

This procedure applies to all placements of children in foster care including placements with independent fostering agencies.

For placements of Looked After children with Connected Persons who are not approved foster carers at the start of the placement, see Placements with Connected Persons Procedure.

See Decision to Look After and Care Planning Procedure for procedures relating to the initial decision to look after a child, and the drafting and approval of the Care Plan and other essential documentation.

Children may also be placed in foster care having acquired Looked After status following a Remand to Local Authority Accommodation, see Remands to Local Authority Accommodation or to Youth Detention Accommodation Procedure.

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1. Consultation

At the point that it is determined that a placement may be required, and throughout the subsequent process of identification, planning and placement, the social worker must consult and take account of the views of the following people:

- The child;
- The child's parents;
- Anyone who is not a parent but has been caring for or looking after the child;

- Other members of the child's family who are significant to the child or who have a Contact Order in their favour in relation to the child;
- The child's school or the education service;
- The Youth Offending Service, if the child is known to them;
- Any other relevant person, e.g. nursery, health care professional, Children's Guardian.

The views of these people should be given by them, in writing, or should be recorded by the social worker. If the child's wishes are not acted upon, the reason should be given.

2. Placement Request

Where a decision has been made that a child requires a foster placement, the child's social worker should request a placement by contacting the Single Placements Team.

In making this request, the social worker will be asked to provide information about the child, the type of placement sought, the Care Plan, the date by which the placement is required, the likely length of time for which the placement is required and the expected level of contact between the child and parents. The social worker should also outline any risks associated with the placement.

The single placements team will check whether a placement is available from Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering that appears to be appropriate to meet the child's needs. If such a placement is available or if there is a possibility of a placement by the required date, the social worker will be advised accordingly.

If no appropriate placements from Sandwell Children's Trust - Fostering are available and the child requires a placement without delay, the single placements team will request approval from the Group Head Placements and/ or Service Director to search for a placement from a different provider. Where there is a child already in the proposed foster placement, contact should be made with the social worker for that child and where the child is from a different local authority, the consent of that child's local authority should be sought by the Single Placements Team.

3. Matching and Approval of Placement

The matching process should consider the child's needs especially regarding the following key areas:

- The child's education;
- The expectations around contact with relatives and friends;
- The child's identity/race/culture;
- The child's history;
- The child's behaviour;
- The child's health;
- The focus of the placement.

- The matching process should also consider the carer's availability and:
- Their experience;
- Their strengths;
- The family composition;
- The distance from the foster home to the child's school;
- Other children in the placement;
- The foster carer's children.

Once a potential placement has been identified, the child's social worker will liaise with the foster carer's supervising social worker to agree arrangements for the placement. At this stage, the social worker will also discuss the child with the prospective foster carer and share/clarify any risks associated with the placement with the foster carers and the supervising social worker. Wherever possible, the child's social worker should visit potential carers and as required consult with other professionals, prior to a decision about the appropriateness of a placement being made.

In relation to the sharing of bedrooms, each child should have their own bedroom unless the children are siblings who can share a room, infants can sleep in a cot in the carers' room. A bedroom sharing risk assessment must be completed.

When the placement is identified, the social worker will present the arrangements to their manager for approval.

If the placement is outside the foster carer's terms of approval or an exemption is required, see Exemptions and Variations to Foster Carer Approval Procedure.

If the proposed placement is not with Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering, the single placements team manager with agreement from the Group Head (Placements) / Service Director must approve the placement and a the Single Placements Team must draw up an Individual Placement Agreement with the fostering agency setting out the precise terms and conditions between the local authority and the agency in relation to the placement. Where the placement is with independent foster carers who live outside the local authority area, see also the Out of Area Placements Procedure.

NB In addition to the above approvals, in order to avoid placements that disrupt a child's education, the Nominated Officer must approve any change of placement affecting a child in Key Stage 4 except in an emergency/ where the placement is terminated because of an immediate risk of serious harm to the child or to protect others from serious injury - see Education of Looked After Children Procedure.

If the relevant manager approves the foster placement, the placement planning process can start - see Section 4, Placement Planning.

The social worker may then arrange an introductory visit to the proposed placement, with the child (if old enough) and parents (if appropriate).

4. Placement Planning

Before the child is placed, the child's social worker will arrange a Placement Planning Meeting after liaising with the foster carer and the foster carer's supervising social worker. The meeting will usually be held in the new placement. See also Placement Planning and Disruption Meetings Procedure.

Participants will include:

- The parent;
- The child (if appropriate);
- The foster carer;
- The supervising social worker;
- Any other relevant professionals, e.g. a representative from the child's school;
- Anyone else considered appropriate or who will have a role in the placement.

The purpose of the first Placement Planning Meeting is to finalise the Placement Plan. This will involve a discussion of the child's needs to ensure careful matching, including the child's personal history, religious persuasion, cultural and linguistic background and racial origin, contact arrangements, as well as the child's health and education needs and how these are to be met. It will also include the arrangements for registering the child with local health professionals (GP, dentist and optician).

In addition, the placement planning meeting will consider the type of introduction process required, for example whether arrangements should be made for the child, parents and the social worker to visit the foster home and/or whether it may be appropriate to have an introductory overnight stay. Children should be able to visit the foster home and talk in private with the carer. If this is not possible, arrangements may be made for the carers to visit the child and parents; or for information about the foster carers to be sent to the child and/or the parents, for example about routines in the foster home, bedtimes, meals, visitors, pocket money, school, privacy and the overall expectations in relation to the child's behaviour within the home.

For children placed in foster care, the Placement Plan should cover the following issues (in addition to those for all placements set out in the Decision to Look After and Care Planning Procedure):

The type of accommodation to be provided and the address;

Where the authority has, or is notified of, Child Protection concerns relating to the child, or the child has gone missing from the placement or from any previous placement, the day to day arrangements put in place by the appropriate person (placement provider) to keep the child safe a risk assessment may be undertaken to include;

The child's personal history, religious persuasion, cultural and linguistic background and racial origin;

Where the child is accommodated:

The respective responsibilities of the Trust and parents/anyone with Parental Responsibility;

Any delegation of responsibility by parents/anyone with Parental Responsibility to the Trust and /or the foster carer(s) in relation to the following matters (and identifying any of these matters on which the Trust/parents/persons with Parental Responsibility consider that the child may decide):

Medical and dental treatment;

Emergency medical aid;

Education;

Leisure and home life;

Faith and religious observance;

Use of social media;

Any other matters upon which the local authority/parents/others with parental responsibility consider appropriate.

The expected duration of the arrangements and the steps to bring the arrangements to an end, including arrangements for the child to return to live with parents/anyone with Parental Responsibility;

Where the child is aged 16 or over and agrees to being provided with accommodation under Section 20 Children Act 1989, that fact.

The circumstances in which it is necessary to obtain in advance the Trust's approval for the child to take part in school trips or overnight stays;

The Trust's arrangements for the financial support of the child during the placement;

The obligation on the carers to comply with the terms of the foster care agreement.

The meeting also provides an opportunity to ensure that the foster carers have a copy of any relevant court order and that full information is shared with them about the child's needs and any risks associated with the placement.

Except in emergency placements, the Placement Planning Meeting should be held before the placement. Where this is not possible, it should be held within 5 working days of the placement.

The child's social worker will complete and arrange for the circulation of the Care Plan and Placement Plan to the child, parents and foster carers before or within 5 working days of the placement.

At the time of the placement, the foster carers should also be given any additional information about details of the child's day to day needs which are not covered by the Placement Plan but are important to ensure that the carers are in the best possible position to help the child settle in the new placement, for example any particular fears at night-time or the child's favourite toys.

The child's social worker must provide the child and the parent with written information about coming into care, including information on using the Complaints Procedure.

In addition, the social worker should ensure that any other information about the placement that is available for the child is obtained and given to him/her.

In all cases, the child should be accompanied to the placement by the social worker and helped to settle in. Suitable luggage should be used and a child's belongings must not be transported in bin-bags or other inappropriate containers.

5. Notification of Placement

The child's social worker will update the child's electronic records with the details of the placement and ensure that notification is sent to the finance section to trigger payments to the foster carer. The notifications should be before the start of the placement, wherever possible, or within 5 working days.

Notification of the placement will also be sent by the child's social worker to the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children, the Education Service, Independent Reviewing Service, the relevant local Children's Services (if the placement is not in the area of the Trust) and the child's GP.

The child's social worker will notify all family members consulted and involved in the decision-making process of the placement.

The child's social worker must also notify the allocated Independent Reviewing Officer or, if it is the first placement, the Independent Reviewing Service. This notification will trigger the appointment of an Independent Reviewing Officer if it is the first placement, who will organise a Looked After Review.

These notifications must be made in writing, advising of the placement decision and the name and address of the person with whom the child is to be placed.

The child's social worker should also notify - preferably in writing but it may be verbally - all those involved in the day to day arrangements for the child, including nursery/school and any health professional or YOT worker actively involved with the child.

It will be necessary for the foster carer to ensure the child is registered with a GP, Dentist and Optician.

In relation to a first Looked After placement it will also be necessary for the social worker to liaise with the Designated Nurse for Looked After Children to arrange an Initial Health Assessment - see Health Care Assessments and Plans Procedure for further details. The social worker must also contact the child's school or the Virtual School with a view to the completion of a Personal Education Plan - see Education of Looked After Children Procedure.

6. Support and Monitoring of Placements

The child's social worker must visit the child in the placement within one week of the placement and then, at a minimum, every six weeks during the first year, thereafter

every six weeks (three months if the placement has been long term matched and this frequency of visiting is deemed appropriate. Social Worker Visits to Looked After Children Procedure.

The foster carer will also receive support and supervision from their supervising social worker. - see Supervision and Support of Foster Carers Procedure

A Looked After Review should be convened where:

The child is, or has been, persistently absent from the placement;

The placement provider, parents or area authority are concerned that the child is at risk of harm; or

The child so requests, unless the Independent Reviewing Officer considers that the review is not justified.

The Independent Reviewing Officer will visit the child as deemed appropriate in order to maintain a working overview of the child's plan and placement.

See also Looked After Reviews Procedure.

7. Ending of Placements

When the placement ends, the child's social worker must update the child's electronic records and notify the finance section so that payments to the carer/provider will cease. The social worker will also send copies to those notified when the placement was made.

All written information on the child, which the foster carer holds, should be transferred to the supervising social worker for transfer to the child's social worker.

Where appropriate, the foster carer should be asked to complete an end of placement report.

Children must, when they leave the home, be helped to understand the reasons and be supported with the transition - including return home and independence.

Foster carers must be supported to maintain links with children who leave their care, where appropriate.

Where the placement ends in an unplanned way, consideration should be given to holding a Disruption Meeting - see Placement Planning and Disruption Meetings Procedure.

8. Temporary Approval as Foster Carers of Approved Prospective Adopters

A person who is approved as a prospective adopter may be given temporary approval as foster carer for a named Looked After child where the local authority consider that this is in the child's best interests.

Before giving such approval, the Trust must:

Assess the suitability of that person to care for the child as a foster care; and

Consider whether, in all the circumstances and taking into account the services to be provided by the responsible authority, the proposed arrangements will safeguard and promote the child's welfare and meet the child's needs as set out in the Care Plan.

The temporary approval period expires when:

The placement is terminated by the Trust;

The approval as a prospective adopter is terminated;

The prospective adopter is approved as a foster carer;

The prospective adopter gives 28 days' written notice that they no longer wish to be temporarily approved as a foster parent in relation to the child; or

The child is placed for adoption with the prospective adopter.

9. Long Term Foster Placement

See LAC Permanence Strategy

Where it is the case that the most appropriate route to permanence is long-term foster care, the regulations set out the arrangements for making such a placement, including:

That foster care is the plan for permanence and is recorded in the child's care plan, (Reg 5(a));

That the foster carer has agreed to act as the child's foster carer until the child ceases to be looked after;

That the responsible authority has confirmed the nature of the arrangement with the foster carer(s), the birth parent and the child; and

The child and foster carer have a clear understanding of the support services they will receive to promote the placement.

The assessment and planning process for long-term foster care should address the child's current needs and likely future needs, and the capacity of the foster carer to meet these needs now and in the future. The length of placement will vary according to the child's age and the long-term plan for the child, including the transition to adulthood. These factors must all be taken into account in planning for support and services where long-term foster care has been identified as the plan for permanence for a child at a Looked After Review.

Before deciding to place a child in a long-term foster placement, (whether or not this means moving to a new carer) the ability of the identified long-term foster carer to care for the child both now and in the future should be assessed. The support and services which will be needed to ensure that the placement is stable, secure and meets the child's needs should be identified taking into account the carer's previous fostering or other childcare experience, family configuration (including placement of other children under fostering arrangements), existing relationship (if any) with the

child, knowledge and skills and capacity to care for the child long term under a fostering arrangement.

It is imperative that the foster carer fully understands and explicitly agrees to the longterm commitment they are making to the child [regulation 22B (2)(f)]. A record of the discussion of these matters including the outcome should be made as part of the assessment process.

The decision to place a child in a long-term foster placement with a particular foster carer should be discussed and recorded as part of the review process. This decision should then be recorded in the placement plan and agreed and signed by the foster carer [regulation 9(3)].

Where it is agreed that the child will be placed in a long-term foster placement, this should be communicated clearly to the foster carer, the child's parents or any other person who is not a parent but has parental responsibility and the child. (Reg. 2(1)).

Where the decision has been taken that the plan for permanence is long-term foster care and the child is in an existing foster care placement, it may be that the carer and (where appropriate) the child want the existing foster placement to be the long-term foster placement. Such a proposal should be considered in a reasonable timescale taking into account the existing relationship between the child and the foster carer, the length of time in placement, the child's relationships with the foster carer's wider family and community. Consideration should also be given to the progress the child has made in the placement, recorded through the case review process.

There may be circumstances where it is not considered appropriate to assess the ability of the current foster carer as the long-term carer for the child. In these instances, the reasons for this decision should be clearly set out in writing to the foster carer. This decision should also be communicated to the child where it is appropriate to their age and understanding.