

**Fostering Sufficiency Practice Guidance: Notice to a BCT Foster Care Placement**

**Introduction**

Children are matched with a foster carer for permanence when an assessment has determined that it is the most suitable placement to meet the child’s needs until adulthood and beyond. This decision will have been made jointly with the multi-agency group around the child and will have been endorsed by the Agency Decision Maker. Being matched for permanence with a foster carer provides a child with stability, which is critical to enable them to feel safe and secure, to be able to attach and to have a sense of belonging and to be able to engage and aspire. There will, however, be times, when a decision is made to serve notice to a long-term placement. This may be served by either Birmingham Children’s Trust area team staff or by the fostering service (independent fostering agency).

When the decision has been made to end a placement, it is essential that the notice period is carefully managed and that everyone involved understands the reasons for the decision.

There may be times where due to a high level of significant concern (harm/abuse /quality of care) provided by the foster carer that the decision to end the placement quickly (without the notice period being served).

Any concerns regarding risks or unmet needs must have been shared with the foster carers and a period given to establish if any remedial actions or work could be undertaken with the foster carers to address the issues. When this does not happen, it can result in a chaotic ending which may be harmful to the child and negatively affect their relationship with the adults responsible for them and with any future care givers. The impact on foster carers should also not be underestimated. They report feeling despondent with the process, sharing a view there has been no “duty of care”. This dissatisfaction sometimes leads to foster carers leaving the fostering sector altogether.

Good practice guidance is designed to support the professionals involved in the Team Around the Child (TAC) to work together to ensure the notice period is managed effectively and efficiently, placing the needs of the child at the forefront of the process.

**Principles**

Foster carers undertake a unique role. Fostering has a significant impact on every part of a foster carer's life and their families and loved ones are affected by the work they do. People may decide to stop fostering for a number of different reasons, but feeling unsupported and unheard by fellow professionals, including those working in partner organisations, is one reason why some carers choose to end their fostering careers.

No one makes the decision to end a placement lightly. For foster carers, the ending of a placement can be a particularly difficult, emotional and stressful experience which can impact on their decision to continue fostering. When a placement comes to an end, a key principle is ensuring that foster carers feel heard and supported and in particular that they are adequately informed of developments during the notice period.

The degree to which a child is involved in decisions will be dependent on their age, understanding and in some cases the specific circumstances under which their placement is ending. As far as possible, children should be aware of why they are unable to remain with their carers and they should also be involved in the process to identify a more appropriate, and well-matched care giver. For many children, having to move on will be a traumatic experience. A child whose placement is ending should feel listened to and supported. Children should be content that they have the information and time they need to prepare for a new placement.

**Process to be followed**

When concerns have been highlighted regarding a long-term placement there should be a joint visit between the Fostering Supervising Social Worker and child’s Social Worker to the foster carer to discuss the concerns so to allow them the opportunity to take actions to address the concerns.

If following the visit, the concerns remain unaddressed the child’s Social Worker or Supervising Social Worker should request a sustainability meeting to establish if there is anymore that the multi-agency group can provide to address the areas of concern.If a stability meeting is held the IRO should be informed and advised of outcome.

Where this does not lead to change, the child’s Social Worker should provide the foster carers with a letter giving them notice of the intention to end the placement in a period no shorter than 14 days. The letter should detail the reasons why the placement is ending and should also include what would need to change in order for the placement to continue. The letter should advise the foster carer of their right to seek legal advice and/or support from independent agencies BFCA and Foster Talk if they disagree with the decision.

During the notice period there should be regular visits to the placement by both the Supervising Social Worker and child’s Social Worker to establish whether any of the changes have been made. If they have then the sustainability meeting should be reconvened, and the decision made whether the placement can be maintained. If, however changes have not been made then the placement will end on the date noted in the letter.

Ending a placement in an unplanned way, particularly with short notice, will always be a last resort, however sometimes this is necessary when there are safeguarding concerns. Before a decision is taken to end a long term, matched placement there should be a discussion between the respective Heads of Service for Fostering and the Area Team to ensure all alternate options have been fully explored to support and sustain the placement.

**Arrangements for escalating concerns**

Delays in progressing with an action on the agreed plan may increase risk to the placement, foster carers, and ultimately the delay may harm a child. Where there are concerns about any delays, use of the escalation process should be promoted in order to get the plan moving in the best interests of the child. The escalation would be through the HOS (Fostering and Area) involving the respective Assistant Directors if required.

**Maintaining relationships**

Moving to live with new carers and/or in a different setting will be a difficult and traumatic time for a child. Some children will benefit from having some form of ongoing contact with their foster carers after they leave them. This can be particularly important in enabling a child to settle and feel safe in their new placement. The transition process should keep this in mind and consider what can be done to support these relationships.

A referral for an Early Endings Learning Meeting (disruption meeting) need to be made when it’s a long-term placement that has had notice served.