

Foster Carer Reviewing Officer

Dispute Resolution Process Practice Guide

The Foster Carer Reviewing Officer (FIRO) has a duty to monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to ensuring children are safe and that foster carers are well supported, as well as appropriate actions being undertaken in response to allegations. Dispute resolution is an integral part of the FIRO role. Informal and formal resolution form part of the same continuum of resolution.

The child should remain central to the dispute resolution process.

Ideally resolution processes are there to resolve any problems at the lowest level and as quickly as possible. Through the process the FIRO should be able to demonstrate to children and foster carers that they are taking action on their behalf and they should be able to evidence their own work in resolving the issue.

FIROs should, where possible, work in collaboration with a supervising social worker to ensure that each fostering household they review achieves, over the period of their registration, the best possible outcomes for children.

FIROs, like all the other professionals involved with a child in care, want the best for children. There are however occasions when there is a disagreement over how the service is best achieving this. There may also be times when needs identified for a foster carer are not being met or when recommendations made at reviews are not implemented either wholly or in part and this affects the children in their care.

When there is a difference of opinion the FIRO should attempt to resolve the issue directly with the supervising social worker and, if necessary, their team manager. Where the FIRO cannot resolve the issue, within a reasonable time period, this is a dispute between the FIRO and the supervising social worker. At this point, the FIRO should start the Dispute Resolution Process (DRP).

Where appropriate the foster carer should be informed that they are seeking resolution to a problem on their behalf and for the child in their care and they should be kept informed of how the resolution is progressing.

FIROs should exercise their discretion and judgement when considering the level at which they are disputing and whether they are attempting to resolve this as part of the informal or formal process.

Before starting the DRP, the FIRO should ensure that he or she has exhausted all the informal channels of communication, such as speaking directly with the supervising social worker to resolve the issue in dispute. The FIRO may also want to discuss the issue with the team manager of the FIRO Service as a way of seeking a second opinion on the issue in dispute.

Whatever the FIRO decides he or she should always bear in mind the need to prevent delay or drift and the FIRO should always therefore make a prompt decision on whether it is in a looked after child's best interests to start the DRP.

The DRP is based on 3 stage alert process in LCS, known as Foster Care Reviewing Officer Dispute Resolution – see guidance below. The focus of the process should be to seek resolution that is appropriate to the needs of the foster carer who is supporting a child in care.

All information is recorded on the foster carer's file and therefore FIROs need to be considerate of language that is used as part of their dispute resolution process.

When a supervising social worker has concerns regarding an FIROs practice or professional behaviour, this should be discussed with their team manager. Any concerns or issues identified need to be shared with the FIRO team manager and a resolution agreed. Any outstanding issues of disagreement need to be raised by a service manager. This process is not to be recorded on the foster carer's file.

Bradford Foster Carer Reviewing Officer Resolution Process

This process is to standardise the communication when an FIRO is concerned about case management issues, progress with the supervision of a foster carer or an escalation of risk.

It is always expected that the least formal approach will be taken but the process indicates the steps that can be taken if progress is not made and / or if the right conversations are not happening. If the concerns indicate that the child / children are at immediate risk of significant harm the appropriate action needs to take place and each stage need not be followed in sequence.

Pre – Foster Carer Review Preparation

The work that happens before the review is vital in ensuring that the review is restorative and the foster carers are in the very best position to fully participate. The following issues will be considered by the (Supervising Social Worker) SSW and the Foster Carer Reviewing Officer (FIRO).

Feedback will be given through the QA form which will be completed over the lifetime of the review process.

Appropriate preparation for the review / consultation with the child in care / previous recommendations followed up / interpreter arranged

Expectation is that the supervising social worker's team manager will ensure that the statutory tasks and necessary paperwork will have been undertaken prior to the Foster Carers Review



Concerns about progress of the plan or escalation of risk

It is expected that the SSW alerts the FIRO to any escalation of risk during the lifetime of the foster carers registration.

When the FIRO has any identified issues/concerns, the FIRO and the SSW responsible for managing the **Foster Carer** should have a phone conversation and reach some agreement about the issues / concerns and any actions that are needed to take place to address these.

The FIRO will record this on LCS as **“FIRO Dispute Resolution Stage 1”** – the Dispute Resolution will be sent to the SSW TM.

There is an expectation that the TM will respond to this Dispute Resolution within 5 working days to acknowledge the issues/concerns identified and confirm that actions agreed have been completed.

The FIRO will case note that a Dispute Resolution Stage 1 has been issued and concluded.

Request for meeting

If no resolution (or if communication has not happened) and the concerns remain, these should be briefly outlined in an email to the Fostering Service Manager (FSM), with a copy to the SSW and TM requesting a meeting. The meeting should be chaired by the FIRO Team Manager.

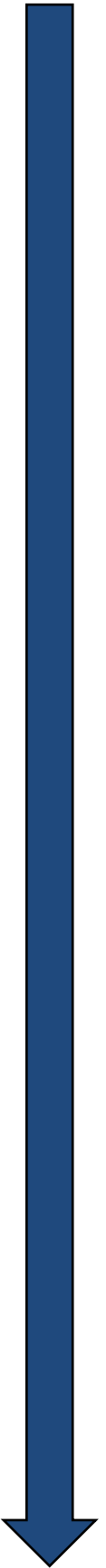
The FIRO should record this on LCS as **“FIRO Dispute Resolution Stage 2”**.

There is an expectation that the FSM will confirm the date of the meeting via the **“FIRO Dispute Resolution Stage 2”** process within 5 working days.

The meeting should be attended by the FIRO, FSM, and the fostering team manager.

A summary of the meeting will be recorded by the FIRO Team Manager on LCS in **“FIRO Dispute Resolution Stage 2”**.

The FIRO will case note that a Dispute Resolution stage 2 has been issued and FIRO TM will case note conclusion concluded.



Notify Head of Service

If no resolution has been achieved from the meeting undertaken in “**FIRO Dispute Resolution Stage 2**”, these should be briefly outlined in an email to the Head of Service (HoS), with a copy to the FSM, SW and TM requesting a meeting. The meeting should be chaired by the Safeguarding and Reviewing Service Manager.

The FIRO should record this on LCS as “**FIRO Dispute Resolution Stage 3**”.

There is an expectation that the HoS will confirm the date of the meeting via the “**FIRO Dispute Resolution Stage 3**” process within 5 working days.

The meeting should be attended by the FIRO, Safe Guarding and Reviewing SM, Fostering SM and Fostering HoS.

The FIRO will case note that a Dispute Resolution stage 3 has been issued and the Safeguarding and Reviewing SM will case note conclusion concluded.

Independent Legal Advice/Referral to Ofsted

In the event that the Dispute Resolution process has not been successful, the Foster Care Reviewing Officer will consider whether to seek Independent Legal Advice.

At this stage, the Foster Care Reviewing Officer should consider whether the outstanding concerns should be notified to Ofsted, given that the fostering provision is a regulated service.

If no resolution has been achieved from the meeting undertaken in ‘FIRO Dispute Resolution 3’, and either or both of the above options are considered necessary, the intention to take these actions within 3 working days, should be briefly outlined in an email to the Head of Services, with a copy to the Fostering Service Manager, fostering supervising social worker and fostering team manager.

