Surrey County Council Fostering Service -

Foster Carers ‘On-hold’ Guidance

**Version FINAL v3 Approved by Jo Rabbitte**

**Date: 18/05/2023**

# About this document

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| **Title** | **Foster Carers ‘On-hold’ Guidance** |
| **Purpose** | **This document provides guidance on how to support foster carers who either decide to place themselves ‘on hold’ or where they have been placed “on hold” by the service.** |
| **Updated by** | **Carol Norrington Beard** |
| **Approved by** | **Jo Rabbitte** |
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| November 2020 | Final v 1 | First Issued | Carol Norrington Beard |
| November 2021 | Final v1.1 | Terminology updated to clarify suspension | Carol Norrington Beard |
| May 2023 | Final v1.2 | Terminolgy updated and financial appendices removed. | Carol Norrington Beard |

#### Intended Audience

This document has been issued to the following people for Review (R) Information (I) and Review and Sign off (S). The Child in Need procedure is mandatory and must be shared with all staff and partners working with Children in Need and their families.

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| **Name** | **Position** | **S/R/I** |
| Jo Rabbitte | AD – Children’s Resources | S |
| All | Directors/Assistant Directors | R/I |
| Clark McAuley | Service Manager | R/I |
| All staff  All Foster Carers | Foster Association | I |

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## Foster Carers who Request to go ‘On-hold’

Foster Carers may decide for themselves that they would like a period of time when they do not foster any children and request to go on-hold. This may be as a result of a family illness, bereavement or to give the family time to take stock of personal circumstances. There may also be a range of other more practical reasons why foster carers wish to go on-hold.  If it is agreed that Foster Carers are to be placed on-hold, The Gateway to Resources Team must be informed immediately by the foster carer’s Supervising Social Worker (SSW). The steps identified within this guidance will enable carers to be confident that their “on hold” period will be protected and they will not be contacted by the service during this time (other than whereby agreed as detailed below). It will also enable the Fostering Service to have a clear understanding of when the carer may feel ready to offer care to another child and so will assist with the future sufficiency planning of the Fostering Service.

Before going “on-hold”, the Foster Carer and SSW will agree, in writing:

* The reasons for the “on hold” period.
* How long the carers will be “on hold” for and **a specific date agreed** as to when the carers wish to be contacted regarding new referrals. Nb. *Foster Carers should not normally be on-hold for longer than 12 months.*
* If the carers will continue to attend training/support groups.
* The agreed continuing arrangements for contact, support and supervision? Nb. *At a minimum, there should be telephone contact from either a duty worker, TM or the allocated SSW every 3 months where possible with notes of this contact being recorded on the carers file.*
* The agreed arrangements relating to the statutory requirements of annual reviews, unannounced visits and checks. If these requirements are due to go out of date during the “on hold” period, agreement will be reached as to how these will be best managed. *Ideally all checks and statutory timeframes will be brought forward in order to be completed prior to the “on hold” period commencing*. *If this is not possible, it will be expected that the annual review and unannounced visit will take place during the “on hold” period unless agreed by the Fostering Service Manager due to extreme circumstances experienced by the carer.*

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| 1.1 | A brief report containing all this information should be sent to the relevant Team Manager for comment and approval. This decision should be signed and placed on the foster carers file along with management oversight and an update to the case summary. The Gateway to Resources Team will be notified of the dates and a note will be made not to contact the carer regarding referrals until the agreed date. |
| 1.2 | If it is considered that the period of time being requested is unreasonable, i.e. over 12 months, the Supervising Social Worker and/or Team Manager should have a discussion with the Foster Carers about other alternatives, i.e. resignation or re-approval for a different type of fostering. |
| 1.3  1.3a | Where a family has been “on-hold' for longer than 12 months, or there is a significant change to the family circumstances, a Foster Carer review should be completed and consideration given to returning to Fostering panel before the carer(s) are deemed available for further fostering.  Where a foster carer is offering care under a Staying Put or Shared Lives arrangement and is unable to continue fostering alongside this, discussion will need to take place with the SSW regarding the timescales and most appropriate way to enable to the carer to return to fostering at a later date if they desire. Additional consideration should be given to the carers ability to offer EDT or respite care during this period if appropriate.  NB, *depending on time frames, if no fostering role is continued during this period, an updated fostering assessment may need to be completed at the point of returning to full time fostering.* |
| 1.4 | The Fostering Team Manager and Service Manager should be informed of any delay/postponement in a Foster Carer review being presented to Fostering Panel. |
| 1.5 | When a Foster Carer returns to fostering after a period of being on-hold, the Supervising Social Worker should ensure that a discussion is held to include the following issues:   * Is the Annual Household Review and unannounced visit within timescales? * Is a return to Fostering panel required? * Are any particular support services required? * Is increased visiting frequency and/or supervision required for the first 12 months? * Are the Foster Carers aware of any new procedures or processes that have been introduced while they have been away? * What skills level are they returning on? If the Foster Carer cannot demonstrate the appropriate skill level then consideration will need to be given, in discussion with the Foster Carer, of returning to fostering on a lower skill level; * Are there any outstanding training needs? |
| 1.6 | On returning to fostering, the Foster Carers details and any conditions to their return should be updated on LCS as appropriate. The Gateway to Resources Team must also be informed of any changes. |

## The Service placing a Foster Carer “on hold”

2.1 There may be reasons why the Fostering Service will consider placing a Foster Carer on-hold. It would usually relate to a significant change in the circumstances to the fostering household or following a significant event such as a standards of care concern or allegation.

2.2 If a carer is placed “on hold” following an allegation, Surrey County Councils Allegations, Standards of Care and Concerns Against Foster Carers/Supported Lodgings Carers/ Prospective Adopters & Foster to Adopt Carers policy and procedure will be adhered to in the first instance.

2.3 Any reason for a carers registration to be placed “on hold” should be fully discussed beforehand with the SSW, Team Manager and Fostering Service Manager and recorded on LCS.

The decisions for placing a carer on hold should be put in writing to the carer.

This will include:

* The reasons.
* The date of this decision and who has been involved in making it.
* The restrictions that will be placed on the carer and the reasons for these.
* What action the Fostering Service will be taking and expectations are being placed on the carer, for example, is medical information and guidance required from a family GP or Medical Advisor / Standards of care investigation being carried out.
* What outcome is to be achieved before a Foster Carer can resume fostering;
* What arrangements are to be put in place for continued supervision, support, Learning and Development
* Information regarding the provision of a Fostering Network Mediation and Advice Worker.
* How long the carer will be on hold.
* What financial arrangements will be made, if any, by the fostering service during the on hold period.

2.4 If a Foster Carer is put “on hold” following an allegation that is being investigated under Safeguarding procedures, clear guidance must be given to the Foster Carers, and members of their household, about ongoing contact with Looked-After Children who have previously left the home, or whose placements have ended as a result of the current enquiries.

2.5 Each situation will be considered on a case-by-case basis, but the needs of the child, and the prevention of disruption to their care plan, should be of paramount importance.

2.6 When deciding that a Foster Carer returns to fostering following a period of being on hold, all of the issues as outlined in [paragraph 1.5](https://walsallchildcare.proceduresonline.com/chapters/g_fc_hold.html#one_five) should be considered. The decision agreeing the return to fostering, along with any conditions, should be agreed by the Fostering Service Manager and recorded on LCS. The carers will be informed in writing of the decision, reasons and any conditions attached and given the opportunity to respond.

2.7. In all circumstances of a carers being placed “on hold”, Team Managers must prioritise and regularly review the ongoing Foster Carer circumstances within individual supervision with the Supervising Social Worker in order to avoid drift in decision making. Team Managers will be expected to present findings to Service Managers within their own supervision on a monthly basis.

2.8 Any subsequent decisions about resignation or de-registration should follow the

normal departmental policies and procedures and do not fall within these guidelines.