**Practice Guidance for Past Partners, New Partners, and Separating Partners**

This practice guide provides clarity around the expectations for seeking information about past, new, and separated partners of applicants for both kinship and mainstream fostering assessments and for approved foster carers.

**Legislation, Regulatory Framework and Statutory Guidance:**

Fostering Services Regulations 2011

National Minimum Standards 2011

**Guidance Purpose:**

Foster for Bradford will endeavour to seek information that will benefit the comprehensive nature of a prospective foster carer’s assessment. This includes contacting and interviewing past/previous partners, where possible. This is inclusive of married and unmarried partners.

Further, approved foster carers who are single may form new partnerships which may result in a change to the fostering household. All new relationships should be disclosed to the Trust as soon as practicable and a careful assessment to review the impact on the fostering role should be undertaken by the supervising social worker.

Other foster carers may also experience separation or divorce whilst fostering. This will constitute a significant change of circumstances and should be considered by the FIRO and fostering panel at the carers’ next annual review.

**Past Partners:**

The assessing social worker should contact a previous partner if any of the following apply:

* They have lived together.
* They have had a relationship that has lasted 2 years or more.
* They have had children together or shared the care of children.
* The previous partner is still part of the applicant’s support network.
* An issue has arisen in the assessment and the previous partner may be able to assist with clarification.

There may be circumstances whereby the previous partner **should not** be contacted. If the applicant discloses any form of domestic violence during the relationship or harassment following separation. This information should be assessed, and a decision should be made by the Team Manager as to whether the previous partner should be contacted. The assessing social worker should endeavour to acquire alternate substantiating evidence to the applicant’s claims in order to validate the decision not to make contact. This will include third party information from another source who was aware of the nature of the relationship.

Where an ex-partner cannot be found, or does not reply to a reference request, a decision by the Team Manager should be requested, as to whether further enquiries should occur. This decision should be recorded as management oversight.

The number of attempts made including dates and method to contact a previous partner should also be recorded in the fostering assessment and the third party information gathered should be analysed accordingly by the assessing social worker.

**New Partners:**

An approved foster carer must inform the agency of the following:

* Any change in their personal circumstances that has the potential to impact on their fostering role.
* Any intended change in the composition of their household

In collaboration with their supervising social worker, the foster carer should review their safe caring policies and a discussion/agreement, in relation to the new partner being introduced to any fostered child/young person, should be made.

Where the new partner is likely to meet a fostered child/young person, the foster carer must not leave the child/young person unsupervised. The Individual Safe Caring Plan should be reviewed with the new partner and an opportunity for the supervising social worker to meet the new partner should be made.

If the new partner is visiting the fostering household regularly then consideration to an enhanced DBS and LA check(s) should be made. Consideration should also be given to informing the child’s social worker.

**Overnight stays:**

Any plans for overnight stays should be discussed with the supervising social worker. A risk discussion should be undertaken which should include sleep arrangements and the fostered child’s thoughts and feelings to the proposal. This discussion should be recorded in the foster carer’s supervision record. An enhanced DBS and an update to the Individual Safer Caring Plan must be carried out if regular overnight stays are expected.

**Moving into the fostering household:**

Before a new partner moves into the fostering household a full risk assessment and all statutory checks must be carried out. These should include personal references, ex-partner, and employment references. The new partner must meet with the supervising social worker to discuss the role of fostering and an assessment of their understanding and extent of involvement must be undertaken. This discussion and assessment must be included in the foster carer’s supervision record.

As this is an intended significant change of circumstances, an early foster carer review should be called to inform the FIRO and fostering panel of the change of circumstances. The approved carer and new partner must be made aware of the need to formally update the fostering assessment and re-present to panel within an agreed timeframe.

The new partner should not move into the fostering home UNTIL the recommendations of the FIRO and panel members regarding continued approval of the approved carer have been ratified by the ADM.

**Other new members of the household:**

Where a foster carer proposes that any person will join the household, notice must be given to the agency before this occurs so the relevant checks can be undertaken including an enhanced DBS. A full risk assessment must be undertaken and recorded in the foster carer’s supervision record.

**Separated/Divorced Partners:**

There is an expectation that foster carers should inform their supervising social worker of any significant difficulties in the foster carers’ relationship. Where separation is likely the information needs to be considered carefully and a planning meeting with the child’s social worker should be called as soon as practicable. The living arrangements for the fostered child/young person must be a priority and an agreement of arrangements should be made.

A foster carer annual review should be called so the FIRO and fostering panel are made aware of the significant change of circumstances and to consider each foster carer’s suitability to continue to foster (if this is something they would like to do). The supervising social worker’s report should include an assessment of how each individual carer will meet the needs of children as single carers moving forward.

The recommendations should progress to the ADM for consideration.