



Practice Guidance for Foster Carers Annual Review

This guide provides clarity regarding the roles and responsibility for undertaking foster carer reviews within Bradford Council.

Foster Care Reviews - outline

Under Regulation 28 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 the foster carer review is a statutory process in which all foster carers must participate. The purpose is **to review the foster carer's approval to determine whether the foster carer and their household continue to be suitable to foster** and, if so, whether the foster carer's terms continue to be appropriate.

When prospective foster carers are formally approved, the Foster Panel Administrator will make a formal notification to the Safeguarding and Reviewing Service to advise of the foster carer's approval, at which point a FIRO will be allocated.

In Bradford, the Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (FIRO) chairs all foster carer reviews. The FIRO sits within the Safeguarding and Reviewing Service; independent to the Fostering Service.

The Fostering Service is required to ensure that all the preparatory work is undertaken and the FIRO will ensure that this is in line with Fostering Regulations namely -

- To seek and consider the views of the foster carer
- To seek and consider the views of any child placed with the foster carer (subject to age and understanding)
- To seek and consider the views of any placing authority which has within the preceding year, placed a child with the foster carer (in practice this means the views of the child's social worker)
- Make enquiries and obtain such information as they consider necessary.

The FIRO will chair a review meeting with the foster carer(s) and supervising social worker (SSW).

At the conclusion of the review process the FIRO will provide a written report that outlines whether the foster carer and their household continue to be suitable.

The foster carer review process closes at the point the Fostering Team Manager has signed off the review completed by the FIRO and is sent to be considered by fostering panel or directly to the ADM.

Frequency

To ensure that Foster Carer reviews are completed within regulatory requirements it is really important to timetable the work required. There is quite a bit of preparatory work to be undertaken by the SSW and the FIRO is required to ensure all documentation is reviewed and write a report to ensure the process is thorough.

Formal reviews of all foster carers must take place **at least annually** and be **completed within a year after approval and each year thereafter**.

It is good practice to schedule the first review at 11 months as this will allow time for reports to be written and the Team Manager to sign the review off before the date of the approval passes.

The date for the first foster carer review, should be agreed at the point of allocation of the FIRO. This date will be confirmed with the foster carers.

Thereafter, reviews should be scheduled in a pattern of every 11 months **following the last review meeting with the FIRO and at the point the Agency Decision Maker signs off the review**. This will require careful planning to ensure that meetings are arranged in a timely manner, without incurring additional administrative measures to monitor timeliness and allows for the fullest possible time to undertake the work. Essentially, it would be most useful to arrange the next review in or just after the review meeting.

The first annual Foster Care Review after approval must be presented to the Foster Panel. Thereafter it is the Fostering Service Managers, Team Managers decision or FIRO recommendation as to whether or not foster carer reviews attend panel or goes direct to the ADM.

- In Bradford subsequent annual Foster Carer Reviews will routinely be presented to Foster Panel/ADM every five years, so at Year 6, Year 11, Year 16 etc.

Reviews will take place more frequently in the event of a significant change in circumstances of a foster carer, for example:

- Where there are concerns about allegations, complaints or the standards of care provided by the foster carer - a review of the foster carer's approval is necessary or appropriate to safeguard the welfare of any child who has been placed with that carer.

- Where there are significant changes in the foster carer household (this may include new information i.e. findings from updated DBS's and/or health updates)
- Change of Approval - within the first annual review year.
- Change of Approval - Kinship carers would wish to foster mainstream children or be matched with further kinship children.
- Contested de-registrations whereby the Trust/FIRO has recommended de-registration, and this is not agreed by the carer(s).
- The FIRO has recommended the annual review returns to fostering panel and their reasoning is clearly outlined – for example, standards of care concerns not picked up by the service or procedures not followed, significant change of approval requested within the review.

Consultations to Be Undertaken before the Review

Maintaining an open dialogue between the SSW and the FIRO over the course of the year supports an effective review process. This particularly concerns any significant issues that arise or develop. This will ensure that reviews are undertaken at the right time.

The SSW will confirm arrangements with the FIRO and the Foster Carers. Consideration will be given, at this stage, to confirming an appropriate venue for the meeting to take place or for the meeting to take place on Teams.

The SSW will ensure that each foster carer in the fostering household is provided with a Foster Carer Review Report form to enable them to contribute fully to the review process. This report will be returned to the SSW, who will make this available to the FIRO two weeks in advance of the formal review meeting.

The SSW will complete a Supervising Social Worker's Review Report for the formal review meeting. This report will provide analytical evidence in line with the Fostering Standards gained over the course of the year and consolidate information obtained through consultation.

The SSW will seek and consider the views and experiences of the following:

- Any child/young person placed with the foster carer since the last review.

The SSW will consult with the child's social worker, to identify how to support the fostered child to share their views and experiences and to consider who is best placed to enable meaningful consultation.

- Children of the foster carers who live in the fostering household

Children (this includes birth, adopted, SGO and/or stepchildren) of foster carers play an important part in the fostering journey and are often forgotten about. It is important that there is meaningful engagement with them to seek their views on living in a fostering household. The SSW should identify what they see as the challenges and positives as this can identify areas of strength as well as inform recommendations that need to be made to support the fostering household.

- Adult members of the fostering family, who may be in regular contact with the fostering household.

Foster carers may have adult children who reside at university or have left home but continue to provide support (formal or informal) to the foster carers. The SSW should ensure that they obtain their views so that their role is fully understood and contextualised.

- Back up carers/respite carers/child minders.

Back up carers/respite carers and/or childminders will be able to provide an overview of the support that is provided to the foster carers as well as provide insight into the child placed with the foster carers, therefore providing further overview on the progress that the fostered child is making in their foster placement.

- All children's social workers who have made a placement with the foster carer since the last formal review. This will include contacting a social worker from outside the authority where appropriate.

It is essential that the SSW captures the views of all the social workers for children placed with the foster carers for the duration of the review period. This is a legal requirement. The child's social worker effectively commissions the foster placement. The child's social worker has a crucial role in evidencing safeguarding responsibility. Additionally, the child's social worker is able to comment on the foster carers ability to work with partner agencies, birth family and participate in meetings.

If the SSW struggles to receive a written report, then it is entirely acceptable that they call the child's social worker and take their views verbally, completing the form (making it clear that the views were obtained verbally) and returning it to the child's social worker as confirmation of what was discussed.



In the event that the child's social worker outlines poor practice then the SSW needs to utilise support from their Team Manager to ensure that this information is responsibly provided by the child's social worker in a formal format to enable the issues to be fully addressed.

- The IRO for any child who has lived with the foster carer in the review period

The IRO has the overview of the fostered child's care plan. They are able to provide 'checks and balances' to information obtained for the review. IROs can be particularly useful in the event that the child's social worker's views are absent or limited as they will also be able to provide commentary on the foster carers ability to work within the child's care plan, work with partner agencies, birth parents and participate in meetings.

- Any other professional that the foster carers have worked with regularly, e.g. schoolteacher, health visitor

There are a whole host of professionals that work alongside each other to support a child's care plan. These can range from teachers, health visitors, Guardians, youth offending employees and CAMHs. Obtaining views from a variety of professionals makes the reviewing process more robust and consolidated in terms of evidence.

- The parent in a Parent and Child placement arrangement
- Routine consideration should be given to whether feedback can be sought from the birth parent of any child placed with the foster carer

The SSW will also determine, in consultation with the child's social worker, whether it is appropriate to consult with the birth parent of any child in placement to enable their views and experiences to be gathered. This discussion should also consider who is best placed to support the birth parent to provide this contribution.

It is essential that the SSW uses their review report to provide an update on foster carers ability to provide care to fostered children in line with their care plan and within their fostering registration. Additionally, any changes to the fostering household need to be addressed, including any updated risk assessments including safer caring, changes to the home conditions and pets.

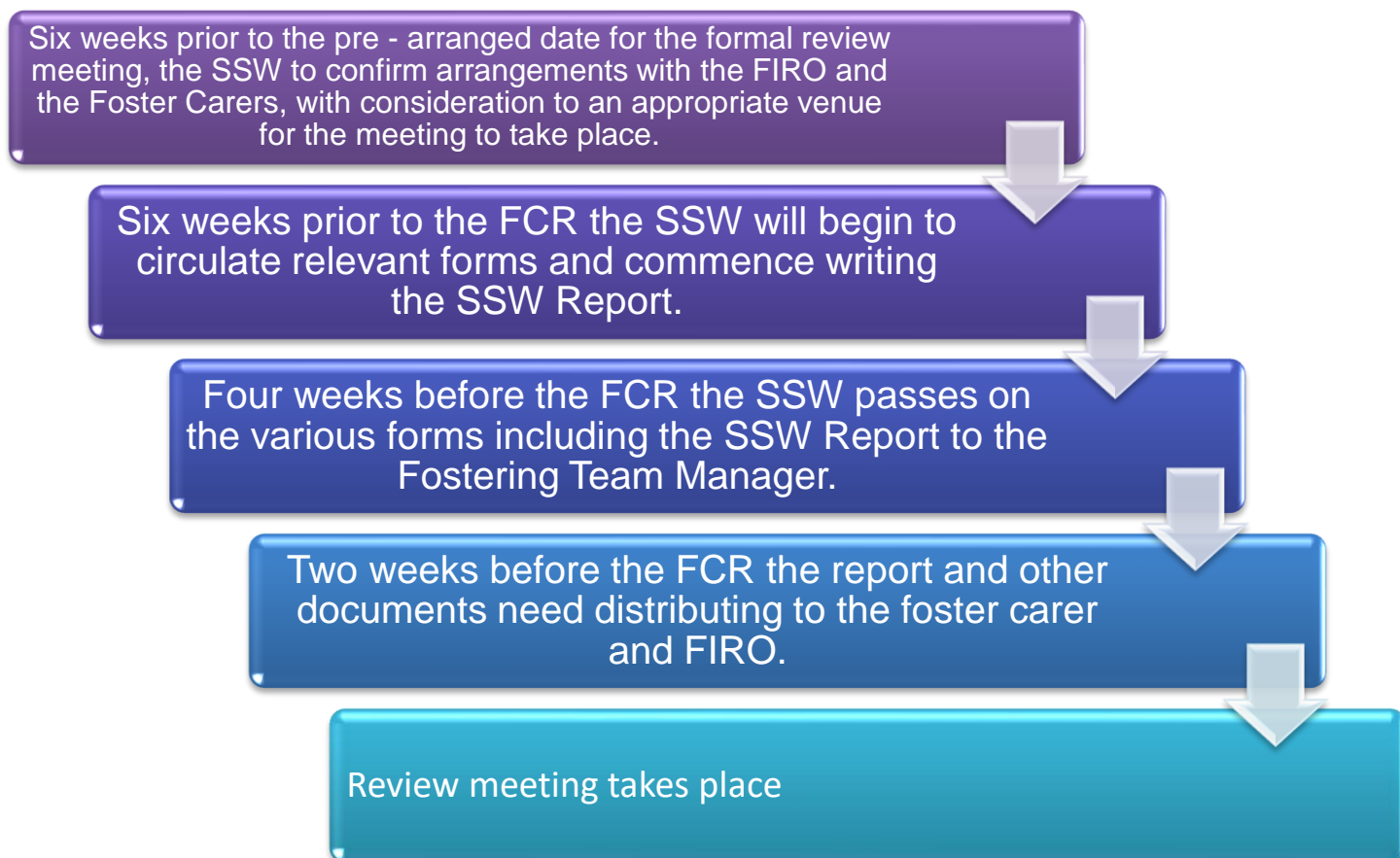
Disclosure and Barring Service checks should be updated every 3 years. Information should be updated in the SSW report.

Medical information and Local Authority checks should also be updated at least every 5 years unless there are health issues which require an earlier medical assessment. Information should be updated in the SSW report.

The review form should outline and address any findings from any placement disruptions meetings, provide overview on placements that have come to a natural end and outcomes from any allegations management investigations and/or investigations into standards of practice.

The report should also consolidate how any training has impacted upon the foster carers practice and should provide oversight on future training needs.

There should be correlation to the actions agreed from the previous review (or actions from Fostering panel/ADM) and recommendations for the coming year, confirming that the foster carers registration is appropriate and detailing the reasons for any amendments.



Formal Review Meeting

The review will include the foster carer/s, the SSW and the FIRO. The meeting will ordinarily take place on Teams unless the circumstances require consideration to a



neutral venue or at the foster carers home. This should be agreed between the SSW and FIRO prior to the meeting.

Prior to the review meeting the FIRO will be considering all the documentation that are provided by the SSW. In the event that documentation is not available then the FIRO will take necessary action to acquire these, this may include consideration to utilise the dispute resolution process.

As part of preparation for the review the FIRO will check to ascertain whether any exemptions were granted, or placements made outside the terms of approval for longer than 6 days.

The review meeting is where all the reports and comments are brought together and evaluated. This allows for reflection and development and provides an opportunity for the foster carers to share their experiences of the fostering service.

At the review meeting, the agenda as set out in the Foster Carer Review Form will be used which includes a robust evaluation of the foster carer's practice, an appraisal of the areas for development of the foster carer, their training needs, the foster carer's views of the fostering service and support provided, and any changes indicated to their terms of approval.

At the conclusion of the review meeting or within the FIRO minutes, a date will be set for the next annual review to ensure arrangements are in place to maintain statutory requirements.

Post Formal Review Meeting

The FIRO will complete a review report within 15 working days after the review meeting which will summarise strengths, concerns (if any) and areas for development; this will include any areas of difference of opinion or perspective. It will consider terms of approval and whether these need to be changed based on the skills and circumstances of the foster carer and appropriate levels of support. Any recommendations discussed with the foster carer will be recorded.

The FIRO will send their completed review report to the relevant fostering team manager, who will complete the Fostering Team Manager report which indicates whether the recommendations from the FIRO following the review meeting are accepted and agreed by the fostering team. The Fostering Team Manager signs off the review process within 4 weeks of the review meeting and forwards to either the Fostering Panel administration or directly to the ADM.

If there is a difference of professional opinion at this stage, the Team Manager and FIRO will meet to try to identify a resolution. Any changes to the recommendations,



discussed at the review meeting, will be communicated to the foster carer by the FIRO. However, there will occasions when the FIRO makes a different recommendation to the Fostering Service, and this will be presented to Fostering panel and/or ADM.

A copy of the FIRO review report will be sent to the foster carer by the Safeguarding and Reviewing service. The foster carer should have the opportunity to put their views on the recommendations in writing to be presented to the Fostering Panel or the ADM when all of the Review documentation will be considered.

Presentation to the Fostering Panel or Agency Decision Maker (ADM)

Foster carer review reports and documentation must be presented to the Fostering Panel on the foster carer's **first** review for a recommendation and then to the ADM for approval.

This is also required on a subsequent five yearly cycle, so at Year 6, Year 11, Year 16 etc.

This process must also be followed where significant changes to the foster carer's circumstances or the termination of the foster carer's approval are recommended, or for foster carer reviews following a standards of care concern or an allegation process.

This process may also be followed where any circumstances exist which, in the opinion of the FIRO/ADM require consideration by the Fostering Panel. This may include, for example, a situation where an updating Disclosure and Barring Service check reveals a new concern about the foster carer or a member of the household.

Whether presented to the Fostering Panel or not, the foster carer review reports and documentation will be presented to the ADM for a decision as to whether the foster carer remains suitable to foster and whether the terms of approval remain suitable. Where it has been presented to the Fostering Panel, the ADM will consider the Panel's recommendation.

In all circumstances, the ADM will make a clear record of the deliberations and approval, and this signed document will be authorised on LCS.

After the Fostering Panel/ADM including Mid-way Review

The SSW will inform the foster carer(s) in writing or verbally of the outcome of the ADM.

A copy of the review forms and a record of the outcome of the review will be retained on the foster carer's case file.



There will also be a Mid-Way review after 6-months between the FIRO and the SSW. This meeting will be arranged by the FIRO directly with the allocated SSW. The purpose of this meeting is to consider the FIRO's action points alongside the Advice to Service by the panel and/or ADM. The FIRO will upload the outcomes from this meeting within case notes on LCS.

Proposal to Terminate Foster Carer's Approval (whether mainstream or kinship)

Please Note: Where the termination of approval of a foster carer is being considered, liaison with the placing children's social work team by the fostering service should take place as soon as the need to consider termination has been identified.

Where, as a result of a review, the termination of a foster carer's approval is proposed, written notice of the proposal and the reasons must be sent to the foster carer within 7 days of the ADM decision and he/she must be advised that if they wish to challenge the decision, they have the opportunity to challenge the Qualifying Determination decision by either requesting an alternate fostering panel and new ADM consideration or to request a review by an Independent Review Panel under the Independent Review Mechanism as set out in procedures under [6. Representations/Review Procedure](#).

Notification/representations will need to be received by the Panel Administrator within 28 days of the date of the notice of the Qualifying Decision being sent to the carer(s). The Panel Administrator will then notify the foster carer within 7 working days of the date when the Panel will reconsider the matter. (See [Information about the Independent Review Mechanism for Foster Carers](#)).

The foster carer will **not** have the right to request a review by an Independent Review Panel if they are regarded as disqualified as a result of a conviction or caution for a specified offence.

If no written representations or notification of a request for a review are received within the period, a final decision to terminate can be made.

If written representations are received within the period, the matter must be referred to the Fostering Panel for further consideration. Foster carers wishing to make representations in person to the Panel may be accompanied by a friend or supporter. Where a foster carer wishes to make representations in person, the Panel Chair may consider the Panel meeting as a smaller quorate sub-group.

The Panel will make a recommendation in relation to the foster carer and a final decision will be made by the ADM considering any fresh recommendation made by the Panel.



Written notice of the final decision, together with reasons, must then be sent to the foster carer within 7 working days of the decision.

Where the approval is terminated, the ADM, in consultation with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) will decide whether to refer the former foster carer to the Disclosure and Barring Service for inclusion of the carer's name on the Children's Barred List.

For Connected Persons (kinship placements) where a child/young person is removed from the placement following an allegation the SSW should ensure that there is a review process to conclude the outcomes of the allegation and confirm the plan to terminate the registration.

Foster carers will remain allocated to a FIRO until confirmation of the termination of approval is received. Should there be any delay in achieving this then the FIRO will utilise the challenge and resolution process (See challenge and resolution process)

Resignation by Foster Carers

The independent Safeguarding and Reviewing Unit should be advised of the Foster Carer's resignation/deregistration, so the FIRO is aware of the change and cancel any planned review date.

Foster carers will remain allocated to a FIRO until confirmation of the termination of approval is received. Should there be any delay in achieving this then the FIRO will utilise the challenge and resolution process.