

Kent County Council

Foster Carer Review Policy

Kent Fostering Service

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Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Context & Purpose	3
3. Foster Carer Review Timescales	3
4. Fostering Panel	4
5. Consultation Required	4
6. Review of the Staying Put role	5
7. Review Meetings	5
8. Fostering Review Officer's Report and Recommendations	5
9. Changes of Approval	5
10. Completing Foster Carer Reviews	6
11. Foster Carer Review Process Flowchart	7

1. Introduction

This Foster Carer Review Policy provides an overview of the legislation regarding foster carer reviews and provides practice guidance on issues relating to the review of Kent foster carers' suitability to foster.

The practice guide is informed by legislation, regulation, statutory guidance and the National Minimum Standards (England) as follows:

- Children Act 1989
- The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Assessment and approval of foster carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services July 2013
- Staying Put: Arrangements for Care Leavers aged 18 Years and Above 2013

Regulation 28 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations (2011) sets out the requirement for the Fostering Service to review the approval of each foster carer and the timescale for reviews, the consultation which must form part of the review process and what should happen after the review is completed.

The fostering regulations make no distinction between foster carers, therefore all the regulations, and the information in this practice guide relates to both mainstream foster carers and Connected Persons foster carers.

2. Context & Purpose

Foster carer reviews within the Kent Fostering service are chaired by the Fostering Review Team. This is a team of Senior Social Workers who provide an independent assessment of foster carers' suitability to continue fostering whilst also providing a quality assurance function to the service.

The purpose of the Foster Carer Review is defined by the Fostering Services (England) Regulations (2011) as; to review whether the foster parent continues to be suitable to be a foster parent and the foster parent's household continues to be suitable.

3. Foster Carer Review Timescales

In line with legislation, all foster carers will have their approval reviewed and a recommendation made about their suitability to continue to foster within a maximum of one year (12 months) from the date of their initial approval. For the purposes of the first annual review, the date of their initial approval is accepted to be the date of the Agency Decision Maker's (ADM) decision to approve. For Connected Persons Foster Carers this is taken from the ADM date of their full fostering approval.

The date a foster carer review is completed, is the date the review meeting takes place with the Reviewing Officer.

In subsequent years, a foster carer review must be held at intervals of not more than one year but can be held whenever the fostering service considers it necessary, for example, to consider a change of circumstances, change in terms of approval or to consider progress/change where there have been concerns identified.

Other factors to consider regarding Annual Review dates

- Where a foster carer is formally 'On Hold' or 'Suspended', their annual review should still be held within 12 months, even if this is during the period they are 'On Hold' or 'Suspended'.
- A foster carer review should still be held if it is due when there are outstanding allegations, complaints or Standards of Care issues under investigation.
- Where an existing foster carer has a reassessment, the Review should be held 12 months from the date the ADM agrees ongoing approval unless recommended to be held sooner.

4. Fostering Panel

The first review following initial approval and the first review following a joint assessment and approval with a new partner must be presented to the Fostering Panel.

A review where there has been a significant change of circumstances should also be presented to the Fostering Panel. For example, where new children under the age of 18 who are not fostered (i.e. new birth children, adopted or private arrangements), have joined the household during the year under review, then this should be presented to the fostering panel.

Where there are concerns regarding Standards of Care, a discussion will need to take place with the Support Team Manager and Head of Fostering to decide if this and the review should be presented to the Fostering Panel.

It is the decision of the Fostering Service as to which other reviews are presented to the fostering Panel.

5. Consultation Required

In accordance with Regulation 28 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations (2011), a foster carer review must take into account the views of the foster carer, any child placed with the foster carer (subject to the child's age and understanding), and any children's social worker which has, within the preceding year, placed a child with the foster carer.

In addition to the requirements outlined within Regulation 28, the review will also seek to consider the views of all household members.

Consideration should also be given to the views of birth family, Independent Reviewing Officer/s and any other professionals who may have worked with the family during the period under review. Where carers provide respite or short-break placements, the child's main foster carer's may also be consulted with.

It is the responsibility of the Fostering Social Worker to ensure that the relevant feedback is requested and is included within the report.

6. Review of the Staying Put role

In cases where Foster Carers are offering Staying Put arrangements, this will also be considered as part of the review.

Where carers have no availability for fostering due to a Staying Put arrangement but intend to return to fostering following the end of this arrangement, their approval should continue with no changes to their approval criteria where the fostering service agrees this is appropriate. This is in line with the legal guidance, Staying Put: Arrangements for Care Leavers aged 18 years and Above (2013). The carers availability will need to reflect that they cannot accommodate foster children for the period the young person is staying put.

7. Review meetings

The Foster Carer Review meeting will normally take place in the foster carer's home and be attended by the carer, their Fostering Social Worker (or another member of the support team in extenuating circumstances) and chaired by a member of the Fostering Review Team.

Where two people are fostering as a couple, they are both approved as foster carers, therefore both of their suitability to continue to foster must be considered. Both foster carers are required to attend their annual review meeting and be involved in the annual review process.

8. Fostering Review Officer's Report and Recommendations

At the conclusion of the review, a written report will be provided to the foster carer/s. The report should make a clear recommendation regarding whether the foster carer/s and their household continue to be suitable to foster and whether their terms of approval remain suitable or require changing. Other recommendations may also be proposed to support ongoing approval.

9. Changes of Approval

Where a change of approval is recommended the report should provide evidence of the reasons for the proposed change and evidence of the foster carer's ability to meet the new or proposed terms of approval. The report should also take account of any support needs resulting from the change and how these will be met.

Where a change of approval is recommended that does not involve a significant change in circumstances and the foster carer(s) agree(s) to the proposed change, the report will be sent to the Agency Decision Maker for their decision. The review would not need to be presented to the Fostering Panel.

Where a foster carer is not in agreement with proposed changes to their approval, this should be presented to the Fostering Panel for further independent oversight.

Where changes are being recommended because of significant changes in circumstances then this should also be presented to the Fostering Panel.

Changes that do not involve a significant change in circumstances could include: a change in age range, where a carer is approved for permanency specific to a young person who is no longer fostered with them, a reduction in the number of children approved for or a change from permanence to task-centred or respite only fostering.

10. Completing Foster Carer Reviews

Following the completion of the Foster Carer review the Foster Carer should receive written confirmation of the approval recommended

Foster carers will be offered a period of 10 working days to read and comment on the review report.

Foster Carer Review

Process Flowchart

