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Leicestershire

Policy regarding Foster carers On hold

Applies to- Fostering Service

Legal framework

This policy should be read in conjunction:

- **Fostering Services Regulations 2011**; including 17, Support, training and information for foster parents
- **Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards**; including 21, Supervision and Support of foster carers

1. Foster Carers that are taking a short break from their fostering role, will be termed as "On Hold". This means they are unavailable to care for a foster child at that current time.
2. The purpose of this policy is to make clear the expectations of the foster carer whilst 'on hold', and the service expectations of the Supervising Social Worker. This is to ensure that the carer remains suitable to resume fostering immediately following the period of being on hold.
3. This policy aims to elaborate on the implications where the decision for a foster carer to be "on hold" is made by the carer themselves, and those where the Fostering Manager has made that decision.
4. We acknowledge that there may be a number of valid reasons and circumstances which mean that a foster carer is unable to foster a child. Whilst below a list of possible examples, it is by no means exhaustive.
5. There are circumstances where both the foster carer and Fostering Manager feel it is appropriate for the carer to go on hold, such as;
 - Serious illness or a bereavement within the family:
 - A change in family circumstances such as a relationship breakdown
 - An extended break from the fostering role following the ending of a child's placement,
 - An extended break from the fostering role following the child 'moving on' to adoption or return home to birth family
6. There are a variety of reasons where the carer has chosen to go on hold, such as;
 - The foster family are moving home
 - An extended family holiday
 - Extensive home renovation
7. There are situations where the Fostering Service will place a carer on hold. In this situation the carer may be temporarily 'suspended' from fostering.
 - Child protection investigation following an allegation against the carer or member of the family (refer to Allegations policy)
 - A complaint or a serious concern about the standards of care being provided by a registered foster carer. Practice concerns that have been raised and further work and support is required prior to the foster carer resuming practice.

8. If a foster carer wishes to be 'on hold', they should first discuss this with their Supervising Social Worker.
9. A short report should be completed by the Supervising Social Worker and signed by the foster carer. The report will set out the reason for the foster carer being "on hold" and the timescale for the likely return. The report should be signed and agreed by the Fostering Manager, recorded as a Case Note and uploaded onto Mosaic. The Supervising Social Worker will advise TAC Duty and input this information into 'availability section' of Mosaic. The foster carer will be removed from the vacancy list with a suggested date of return.
10. It is recognised that the foster carer is still a registered foster carer and whilst a foster carer is on hold the Supervising Social Worker will continue to offer support and supervision. Unless otherwise agreed, the Supervising Social Worker will arrange a support call within 6 weeks of the carer being on hold. The Supervising Social Worker will visit the foster carers every 8-12 weeks, more frequently if required. The Supervising Social Worker should offer ongoing contact and consider any suitable support which may support a carers' return to the role. The Supervising social Worker should ensure it is still appropriate for the carer to be "on hold".
11. Whilst a foster carer is on hold there is an expectation that the foster carer should continue to keep up to date with core training, and complete additional training courses, albeit at a lesser rate. This includes completion of TSDs if the carer is on hold during their first year of fostering.
12. Whilst 'on hold' there is still the expectation that the foster carers' annual review will take place within the usual 12 month period, unless a shorter review timescale has been requested by ADM
13. When the foster carer is returning from a period of being 'on hold' the Fostering Team manager will make a decision as to whether an early review is required to evidence that the carer is still suitable to foster. If there have been significant changes within this period of time, a Review following changes in circumstances will be presented to foster panel.
14. LCC advises that a foster carer should not be 'on hold' for more than a period of 12 months, at which point there would need to be a review of their registration. The review should consider any

changes in circumstances, health, support network or anything that might impact upon their Terms of Approval. The review will include AH1 Health Assessment, and all the usual updated review documents (please ensure that DBS is up to date, and health and safety checks are completed in plenty of time)

15. If after 12 months the foster carers are still unable to return to the fostering role, a review should be presented to panel with a recommendation to de-register, with agreement that a carer would reapply at a future date if there was a further change in their circumstances and they became available to return to the fostering role. This is discretionary, and the Team manager *could* decide that a further period of being on hold is recommended. The Team manager will set timescales for a review.
16. Kinship carers that have been approved but have no connected child yet placed in their care are also termed 'on hold'. In this instance the carer is usually approved in the event of the child being unable to return to the birth parents at the conclusion of care proceedings. However, they are still recognised as registered foster carers and therefore the Fostering service has a duty to offer support and supervision. Once approved the Supervising Social Worker will make an introductory visit to the Kinship carer to complete the Foster carers' agreement and explain the role of the Foster carer. The Supervising social worker will complete visits every 8-12 weeks to offer support and to ensure the foster carer remains suitable to foster. At 6 months post approval, a decision will be made regarding the carers' continued registration. If the plan is still for the connected child to live with the Kinship carer the carer will be required to complete all expected training and address any Agency Decision Maker's recommendations supervised by the Supervising social Worker. If this is no longer the plan then the foster carer will submit a resignation letter which will be presented to foster panel.