

## **Children's Services**

### **Procedure for Changes in Fostering Approvals**

#### **1. Purpose**

This procedure sets out the means by which any approved carer is able to change their approval status. It has been based on information from CoramBAAF and should be read in conjunction with the core procedures *Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers* and *Review and Termination of Approval of Foster Carers* in the Children's Services Procedures Library.

#### **2. Connected Persons who wish to become mainstream Foster Carers**

- 2.1 Connected person foster carers may have a very positive contribution to make depending on whether the agency is able to make use of the fostering 'offer' – e.g., the type of fostering they are offering, age range of children they wish to consider (and could be matched/placed alongside currently fostered child/ren), whether they have a spare bedroom etc. The flexibilities that the statutory guidance offers when assessing connected foster carers in terms of accommodation, age/health etc., won't apply if they wish to foster unknown children, and the agency will need to consider this in the additional work required to review approval with a view to widening their terms of approval.
- 2.2 If the agency is reviewing a connected person foster carer's approval with a view to them fostering other children, the legislation allows them to 'make such enquiries and obtain such Information' as they consider necessary when undertaking the review. Given that a connected carer's suitability has usually only been assessed in terms of a particular child or children, this may need to include further preparation, assessment as to their skills, competencies and suitability to foster children with a range of unknown needs/backgrounds, and consideration of the terms of approval that may be appropriate. CoramBAAF's Form FR (foster carer review) provides the template to be used for this review.
- 2.3 The Fostering Social Worker will start the review documents and update the sections where necessary.
- 2.4 'Historic Context' section will contain the information regarding the reason for the request to change approval.
- 2.5 'Summary' section will include any additional information that panel will require to make the decision to change the carers approval to mainstream. This will include (but not limited to) information relating to their skills, competencies and suitability to foster children with a range of unknown needs/backgrounds.

2.6 The review process will continue with presentation to panel, panel recommendation and final ratification from the ADM.

### **3. Foster carers who Separate**

3.1 Even though they foster jointly, each foster carer of a couple is approved in their own right. Therefore, if a couple separates each continues to be an approved foster carer in their own right; given the significant change in circumstances, this will generally prompt a review of the approval of each of them.

3.2 If either of the foster carers no longer wish to remain approved, they can be invited to resign, otherwise the agency will review their approval and decide on their continued suitability (with or without panel recommendation assuming this is not the first review).

3.3 Rather than a full Form F (re)assessment, a review of approval is needed if one of the couple intends to continue fostering, as above, considering the change in circumstances, single status, finances, support network, consideration of terms of approval etc. A review of approval can be as extensive as the agency considers necessary, and though agencies may call this a 'reassessment' there is no such regulatory concept, and it is in fact a review of approval.

3.4 Form F is not intended for foster carer reviews. CoramBAAF licences a format for undertaking foster carer reviews – Form FR Fostering Review (England) – and a completed review using this paperwork will provide considerable information to show how foster carers have developed and progressed or other changes since their assessment and approval.

3.5 The standard review process set out in the [Flowchart for Fostering Reviews](#) should be followed. This will only need to be presented to fostering panel if it is the initial or 3-yearly review.

### **4. New Partner**

4.1 When a single foster carer finds a new partner, this can create some challenges for the foster carer themselves, and for their fostering service. The statutory guidance in England (Department for Education, 2011a) sets out the issue as follows: "The Regulations only allow for the approval of individuals as suitable to foster. However, where two people will be sharing the care of a looked after child, whether they be a couple or any other partnership, the assessment of their suitability should be done jointly. Where a single foster carer takes a partner who will be sharing the care of any foster children, they must discuss this with their supervising social worker so that agreement can

be reached about any implications for their approval to foster and so the partner's suitability to foster can be assessed within an appropriate timescale "

- 4.2 For some foster carers, they will have a partner who lives outside of the foster home and does not wish to get involved in the fostering task. Others will very much want to become a part of a fostering household and will be keen to be assessed in order to become a foster carer.
- 4.3 When a single foster carer is in a relationship with someone new, they will need to identify when the relationship has reached a level of seriousness and commitment that means it is appropriate to notify their fostering service about this.
- 4.4 It is important to be clear that the assessment being undertaken is in relation to the new partner and not the existing foster carer. There is no such thing in the fostering legislation as a "re-assessment", and the existing foster carer will retain their fostering status until such time as they resign, or their approval is formally changed or terminated under Regulation 28 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (as amended).
- 4.5 Assessment of the new partner will take place as [Assessment and Approvals of Foster Carers](#) using the form F document.
- 4.6 When using Form F for such an assessment, it is not appropriate to name the existing foster carer as an applicant, as they are not applying to foster, but are already an approved foster carer. However, it is important to make clear that the assessment of the new applicant is in the context of them wishing to foster alongside the existing carer as part of a couple, and this information should be set out clearly in the "pen picture" at the beginning of Form F, and throughout the assessment report. Some sessions will need to include the existing carer otherwise it will not be possible to assess their existing relationship. The new carer may bring new and significant people into the original carer's support network, and how the children will be cared for may change as the new carer brings their own approach to childcare.
- 4.7 The existing carer should attend panel with the prospective carer to allow panel the opportunity to explore the proposed new fostering arrangement. However, it is important the focus of panel is predominantly on the new partner not the existing carer. Both partners should agree to this approach and joint attendance at panel.
- 4.8 Approval given by the ADM should agree their joint approval and replace the existing carers single approval status.
- 4.9 Regulation 28 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (as amended) requires that the approval of each foster carer is reviewed 'not more than a

year after approval' and then 'at intervals of not more than a year'. Therefore, following joint approval, the initial review will need to be timed from the existing carers last review and then yearly thereafter.

#### **5. Where a child is in placement**

In all change of approval cases, where there is a child in placement a professionals' meeting should be convened to include the child's/children's Social Worker to ascertain if the placement can continue and what, if any extra support is required.