

## Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers

### 1. Recruitment

- There is ongoing general recruitment for foster carers who will be able to meet the needs of children in Sefton. There will also be targeted recruitment for foster carers able to provide specific types of placement such as step down from residential and parent and child.
- Our website and social media are in operation to attract new prospective foster carers.
- Prospective applicants can call a dedicated recruitment line and expect a call back within 24hours/one working day, email the department or attend information sessions held throughout the year. An expression of interest will be completed with the prospective applicant over the phone.
- A member of the recruitment team will complete an initial visit within five days of the contact by the fostering applicant and a formal application form will be completed if applicable.
- A dedicated team of recruitment personnel manage all enquiries for information about fostering in Sefton and send out information packs upon request.
- The assessment and recruitment team aims to respond to all enquiries within one working day of initial contact.

### 2. Assessment Stages

- Following the outcome of the initial visit, a discussion is held within 3 working days with the team manager as to whether the applicant can proceed to a **Stage 1 assessment**. This formal application includes an initial medical check, DBS, References and other relevant statutory checks. Following approval of the initial visit by the team manager the process will initiate the Stage 1 assessment. Where the applicant has been a foster carer within the preceding 12 months and was approved as such by another fostering service provider, a reference must be requested from that other fostering service provider. There is no requirement to also interview personal referees. However, additional verbal and/or written references **may** be sought from personal referees. If the previous fostering service, for whatever reason, does not provide a reference, interviews with two personal referees **must** be conducted.

In relation to Health, the applicants will be provided with the relevant medical form to fill in with their details and send to their GP with a covering letter requesting that the GP complete the Form and send it to the manager. On receipt the manager will pass the information to the Medical Adviser for comment.

Where the medical information suggests that the applicant may not be suitable for health reasons, this should be discussed in detail with the applicant(s) and withdrawal may be advisable at this stage. Additional advice may be sought from the Medical Adviser or the Medical Adviser may raise questions with the GP where this is appropriate. It may be necessary for reports from other health professionals also to be obtained and presented to the Medical Adviser and the Fostering Panel.

- Candidates can withdraw at any point. If the candidates are not considered suitable at the

completion of the stage 1 assessment, a letter confirming the outcome will be sent to them within 10 days of the decision being made. The applicants can access Sefton's complaints process if they feel they have been treated unfairly.

- If the Stage 1 assessment is agreed by the team manager as satisfactory the applicants are progressed to Stage 2 of the assessment. Statutory checks can sometimes take some time to be returned to the Fostering Service. So as not to cause any unnecessary delay, Stages 1 and 2 of the assessment may be run consecutively. If an assessment is terminated due to information gathered through Stage 1 checks, this constitutes a Stage 1 termination and applicants' recourse is through the council's complaints policy as described above.
- Stage 2 of the assessment includes attendance at a Skills to Foster training programme (preparation group). This is run as a minimum at least five times a year and is run on different times and days of the week to facilitate attendance. This course is run over 3 days. Applicants must attend all 3 days. Both applicants must attend if applying as a couple.
- The trainer facilitating the Skills to Foster course will produce a report on the interaction of the applicants during the preparation training which will contribute towards their overall assessment.

### **3. Assessment Stage 2**

- A comprehensive fostering assessment is undertaken using BAAF form 'F' guidance. All members of the household are seen individually as well as in a family group. This includes any children living in the home. The assessor will help to prepare any children in the home for becoming part of a fostering family.
- A minimum of three personal references are sought, one can be a family member and all referees must have known the applicant for at least two years.
- Ex-partners are contacted for a reference unless there has been significant domestic violence and there is evidence that the applicant would be in danger if we contacted the ex-partner.
- Adult children who are not living within the home are also contacted.
- The form F is shared with the applicant(s) so that they can make factual corrections and observations on the report prior to it being submitted to panel. Applicants will be asked to sign to say they have read their assessment.
- The assessing Social Worker receives regular supervision throughout the assessment and a formal mid-point review will take place between the assessing social worker and the team manager at the half way mark to monitor the progress of the assessment and consider the applicants' suitability.
- If at any time during Stage Two there are concerns about the applicants' suitability to foster, then a [Brief Report](#) may be prepared, notwithstanding that not all Stage 2 information has yet been obtained. The report is submitted to the fostering panel in the same way as for a full assessment report. (There is no prescribed length or format for a brief report.) If the panel and the Agency Decision Manager confirm that the candidates are unsuitable, the candidates have the right to make representations to the panel or to use the Independent Review Mechanism if they feel they have been treated unfairly.

#### 4. Approval

- The assessing social worker prepares the applicant(s) for attending Sefton's fostering panel.
- The assessment report, together with any written observations or representations, is submitted by the assessing social worker to the **Fostering Panel**. The assessment will have been quality assured by the team manager and the panel advisor prior to presentation at panel.
- The assessing social worker will attend the Panel meeting, together with the applicants if they so wish. The decision to attend rests with the applicants and a wish not to attend will not prejudice consideration of their application.
- The Panel will consider the reports together with all the supporting documentation, and make a recommendation to the Decision Maker regarding the suitability of the applicant for fostering.
- The recommendation, with reasons, will be recorded in writing and, where approval is recommended, the category of fostering, any limitations of the approval to named children (for example in the case of a Connected Person Foster Carer) or conditions as to the age range or number of children to be placed in the foster home, will also be specified.
- Where the applicant does not attend the Panel meeting, the social worker undertaking the assessment will advise the applicant of the Panel recommendation within one working day of the Panel meeting. This will be verbally, by telephone or, where appropriate, a home visit.
- The panel's recommendations as to approval are then passed to the Agency Decision Maker to make the final decision. The performance standard here is to make the decision within seven working days of receiving the minutes from the panel chair. Where a [Brief Report](#) has been submitted to the fostering panel, the Agency Decision Maker will, taking into account the fostering panel's recommendation, make a determination about whether to terminate the assessment or whether the full assessment should be completed.
- The decision is sent to the applicant(s) within seven working days of it being made.
- If the Agency Decision Maker does not agree for the applicants to be approved, they are notified in writing. They will then have 28 days to make representations to the panel or use the Independent Review Mechanism.

#### 5. Representations / Independent Review Mechanism

- If at Stage 2 of the assessment process, the Agency Decision Maker gives a [Qualifying Determination](#) that he/she proposed not to approve the applicants as foster carers, the applicant will be advised that if he or she wishes to challenge the decision, they have to submit representations within 28 days of the date of the written notice of the decision to the Agency Decision maker. In addition, as an alternative, they may exercise the right to apply to the Secretary of State to request a review of the decision by an Independent Review Panel under the [Independent Review Mechanism](#). Any such application must be made in writing within 28 days of the decision and supported by reasons.
- The foster carer will not have the right to request a review by an Independent Review Panel if he or she is regarded as disqualified as a result of a conviction or caution for a specified

offence – see [Persons Disqualified from Fostering Procedure](#).

- Where it is decided at Stage 1 of the assessment process that the applicant is not suitable to become a foster carer, there is no right to have the case reviewed under the Independent Review Mechanism.
- If no written representations or notification of a request for a review are received within this period, the Agency Decision Maker will decide whether or not to approve the applicant as a foster carer (following a full assessment) or continue the assessment (following a Brief Report).
- If written representations are received within the period, the Panel Adviser will arrange for the reports and other documentation to be reconsidered by the Panel, taking into account the written representations, and make a new recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker (see [Designated Managers, Agency Decision Maker](#)).
- The Panel Administrator will advise the applicant within 7 days of the date of the Panel meeting when they can attend and their written representations will be considered.
- In these circumstances, applicants who wish to attend the meeting of the Fostering Panel can arrange for a friend or supporter to accompany them.
- After considering the representations, the Panel will make a recommendation, which the Decision Maker will consider before a final decision is made.
- If the decision remains not to approve the application, the manager will arrange for the applicants to be informed verbally within 2 working days. Written notice of the final decision, together with reasons, must be sent to the applicant by the Panel Adviser within 7 working days of the Panel meeting. Information about the Complaints Procedure must also be sent. A copy of the report to the Panel, the Panel's recommendation and the decision, with reasons, must be retained on the applicant's case file.
- If the applicant decides to apply for a review via the Independent Review Mechanism, the relevant Panel reports, any new information obtained since the Panel meeting, a record of the decision made and reasons, a copy of the written notification of the decision and a copy of the Panel minute, if different, will be sent to the IRM within 10 working days of their written request.
- The Independent Review Mechanism is operated by BAAF on behalf of the Department for Education. The applicant and two representatives of the fostering agency will be invited to attend the Independent Review.
- After considering the representations, the Independent Review may make a recommendation, which the Agency Decision Maker will consider before a final decision is made.
- Written notice of the final decision, together with reasons, must be sent to the applicant within 7 working days of the receipt of the Independent Review recommendation.

## 6. After The Approval

- Once approved, the administrative staff will enter the foster carers' approval details, including their first review date, on the Fostering Register database (see [Section 7, Register of Foster](#)

[Carers](#)) and update the electronic records. They will also send notice of the outcome to all agencies consulted during the assessment and approval process.

- The foster carer will be allocated a supervising social worker, - see [Supervision and Support of Foster Carers Procedure](#). The allocated supervising social worker will read the Assessment report and the supporting documentation presented to the Panel and the references. She/he will liaise with the assessing social worker to discuss the assessment and arrange a joint visit as part of the handover of the case. This should take place within one week of their approval. The foster carer should sign a Foster Care Agreement which contains the information the foster carer needs to carry out his or her functions as a foster carer effectively, ensuring that the foster carer understands its contents.
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- The foster carer will be given two copies for signature, and will retain one signed copy. The other will be kept on the foster carer's file, together with the report and supporting documents presented to the Panel, a copy of the Panel's recommendation and a copy of the approval decision.
- The Foster Care Agreement will contain the following information:
  - The terms of the foster carer's approval (if any);
  - The support and training to be provided to the foster carer;
  - The procedure for the review of the foster carer's approval;
  - The procedure for placements of children;
  - The procedure for making representations and complaints;
  - The requirement to inform the fostering service of any change of circumstance, address or in the household composition, or of any registration as a childminder or application to adopt or of any offence;
  - The requirements in relation to confidentiality and internet usage;
  - The procedures for behaviour management and unauthorised absences of children placed with the foster carer including the ban on corporal punishment;
  - The procedures for informing the supervising social worker of the child's progress and any significant events relating to the child;
  - The need to give 28 days' notice in writing of they wish to cease fostering;
  - The need to allow access to the [Regulatory Authority](#).
- New foster carers will also be given their personal copy of the Foster Carer's Hand-book, which contains information about fostering in the local authority and covers policies, procedures, guidance, legal information and insurance details. Information about local foster carer support groups will also be provided.

- The foster carer(s) must sign confirmation of receipt. The signed and dated confirmation of receipt will be placed on their file.
- Foster carers will be assisted by their supervising social worker to produce a Safe Caring Policy and Fire Plan.
- The supervising social worker will continue to provide support and supervision to the foster carer up to, during and after all placements - see [Supervision of Foster Carers Procedure](#) and ensure that they understand the need to undertake DBS and other checks and assessments on any new member of the household (see [Section 8, Changes in the Foster Carer's Household](#)) or Circumstances - and the need to repeat DBS (unless they have subscribed to the [Disclosure and Barring Service Update Service](#)) and medical checks on themselves every three years (unless there is an issue or concern that requires an earlier check) - see [Review and Termination of Approval of Foster Carers Procedure](#).

## 7. Register of Foster Carers

- A register of all approved foster carers will be maintained by the fostering service containing the following particulars:
  - The name, address, date of birth, sex and ethnic origin of each foster carer;
  - The date of approval and of each review of the approval;
  - The category and current terms of the approval.
- Once approved, the administrative staff will be informed and will enter the foster carers' approval details, including their first review date, on the Fostering Register database.

## 8. Changes in the Foster Carer's Household or Circumstances

- The supervising social worker will ensure that any newly approved foster carer is clear about his or her responsibility to notify the fostering service before any change in the composition of their household occurs or where there is any significant change in their circumstances which affects their fostering, for example any new relationship, pregnancy or bereavement.
- If the supervising social worker discovers that there has been a change in the foster carer's household without prior notice, the manager must be informed and an immediate review of the foster carer's approval must be convened - see [Review and Termination of Approval of Foster Carers Procedure](#). In these circumstances, a suspension of the foster carer's approval may have to be considered at the review.

## 9. Foster Carer's Partners

- Where the proposed new member of the household is a partner of the foster carer, there will be a presumption that he or she will have a part to play in caring for any child in the placement and therefore a full assessment of his or her suitability for this role must be completed before the partner moves into the foster home. The same procedure for this assessment will be carried out as for any foster carer applicant and it will be presented to the Fostering Panel and the Decision Maker (Fostering) in accordance with the preceding paragraphs of this chapter. There will be no presumption that any such assessment will be approved.



- Pending the completion of the full assessment, where the foster carer wishes his/her partner to stay overnight before the full assessment is completed, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) enhanced check must be carried out, and a risk assessment must also be completed to determine the level of additional checks required, before agreement to overnight stays can be given. The risk assessment should take account of, amongst other things, the number and ages of the children in the placement, their views about the foster carer's partner, the significance and stability of the relationship (including how long they have known each other) and the foster carer's history of fostering. Any agreement to overnight stays must be endorsed by the Service Manager.

#### **10. Other members of the household**

- Where a foster carer proposes that any person will join the household, notice must be given before this occurs in sufficient time to enable a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) enhanced check to be carried out on the relevant person and an assessment at the appropriate level to be undertaken before the change in household composition occurs. The required detail of the assessment will depend on the extent to which the new member of the household will undertake a caring role in relation to any child placed. Where the new member of the household will play a part in caring for the child in the placement, consideration will be given to the need for a full assessment as for any new partner of the foster carer. Otherwise, the assessment will be considered at a Foster Carer Review which should be convened to consider the change in the foster carer's circumstances - see [Review and Termination of Approval of Foster Carers Procedure](#). This will determine whether any change to the foster carer's terms of approval is required and if so, a report to the Fostering Panel will be prepared.

For Exemptions to the usual limit of three children and Alterations or other Extensions to Approval, see [Exemptions and Extensions/Variations to Foster Carer Approval Procedure](#).