

Long term foster care For Children in Care

Procedure to support the arrangements for long term foster care

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This procedure is written in accordance with the Department for Education [‘Permanence, long term foster placement and ceasing to look after a child’ – Statutory Guidance for local authorities, March 2015](#). It reflects amendments to the [Children Act 1989: Care Planning, Placement and Care Review \(Volume 2\)](#).
- 1.2 This procedure is relevant to all social workers (including youth justice workers) involved in the long term planning and care arrangements for children and young people in care. It is equally important for fostering workers and Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO).

2. Context

- 2.1 The objective of long term planning is to ensure that children and young people have a secure and stable home to support them throughout their childhood and beyond, to provide a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging. The care planning processes required by the **second statutory looked after review** is for the care plan to set out the long term plan for the child/young person which is most likely to meet their needs. Long term foster care provides one such option.
- 2.2 Long term foster care can therefore be defined as:

‘A home where a child or young person is living with foster carers whose understanding, expectation and commitment is that the arrangement will continue into late adolescence with on-going support up until 18 years of age and into adulthood where required’.
- 2.3 Long term foster care can extend beyond the young person’s 18th birthday as a staying put or supported lodgings arrangement.
- 2.4 Long term foster care will usually be considered for older children where a plan of adoption or special guardianship is not appropriate. It will usually apply to children and young people who require long term care into adulthood and who may have significant relationships and contact with siblings or extended family members.

- 2.5 The decision to proceed with long term foster care will be recognition that rehabilitation is not an option at that time. Social workers will need to sensitively and carefully introduce and explain the long term foster care plan to the child/young person concerned who is likely to require reassurances about future and ongoing contact arrangements.

3. Referral and family finding procedure

- 3.1 The second Looked after Review should whenever possible identify the long term plan for children in care. Where rehabilitation, connected person's arrangements (including special guardianship) or adoption is not appropriate the review can make the decision that long term foster care is the long term plan.
- 3.2 Where it is known that the existing fostering arrangement cannot provide long term care, the social worker for the child should complete a **full referral** to the Placement Hub emailed to:
placementhubreferrals@warwickshire.gov.uk
- 3.3 The fostering social worker should support the existing foster carers to complete a **carers report** on the child, fully describing the child's needs and their experience of caring for the child on a day to day basis. This should also be forwarded to Placement Hub.
- 3.4 The Placement Hub will commence a search for a suitable placement through internal and external options as appropriate. The Placement Hub will also make enquires to determine whether potential long term carers are in the process of being assessed.
- 3.5 Where it is evident that a long term foster carer is not available in the foreseeable future the Placement Hub will identify a fostering family finder. The family finder will work alongside the social worker for the child/young person to secure a suitable home. Any costs associated with specific recruitment and family finding activities will be agreed and met by the relevant children's team.
- 3.6 Where required the social worker for the child/young person will be responsible for completing any additional profiles on the child and will arrange for photographs to be taken, obtaining the necessary consents for these.
- 3.7 The Central Fostering Services Team will be responsible for responding to any enquiries arising from specific advertising. This will

include supplying information, undertaking home visits and completing the foster carer preparation. The fostering service will need to ensure the timely allocation and completion of any fostering assessments.

- 3.8 The allocated family finder will record on the child/young person's electronic social care records actions relating to family finding activity and their outcome. These details can be reflected in court statements where required.
- 3.9 The Fostering Operations Manager – Quality and Performance, will maintain an overview of specific family finding activities and will monitor their impact and outcomes

4. Agreeing long term foster care with the current WCC foster carer

- 4.1 Throughout the planning process on a case by case basis the social workers involved will need to discuss and agree the appropriateness of the child's current foster carers providing long term care. Where ever appropriate the existing foster carer will be approached when the decision is long term foster care. The fostering social worker will also discuss the potential long term arrangement with social workers who have other children in the home in order to obtain their views about the proposed long term foster care.
- 4.2 When considering potential long term foster care the social worker for the child/young person will visit the foster carers with the carer's fostering social worker. The purpose of this visit is to ***consider the needs of the child and the capacity of the foster carer to meet those needs.***
- 4.3 Specific considerations to be discussed at this meeting/s include:
 - The child's needs and circumstances and their implications for fostering the child both in the short and longer term, together with an explanation as to why the child requires long term foster care.
 - Preparation for the child – what are the child's views and wishes;
 - The expectations of the foster carers regarding contact, their expected relationships with the child's family and significant others in the child's network;

- The foster carer's relationship with the child, where applicable, length of placement and the child's relationships within the family and wider community and the progress the child has made within the placement;
- The parameters of delegated responsibility to the foster carer – whether the option for special guardianship or adoption might be a future option or something the local authority would like the foster carers to consider in due course;
- School issues – what are the short and longer plans – would a school move be justifiable if the arrangement is to go ahead and when this should happen bearing in mind the child/young person's age and year group;
- Transitions – what from the child's past will the foster carers need to keep going such as the maintenance of friendships, leisure pursuits and activities, including religious requirements;
- Specific training, support, learning or development needs for the foster carer/s to enable them to meet the child/young person's needs fully in the short and longer term;

- 4.4 The decision to pursue long term foster care with a particular foster carer should be discussed between the social workers involved and the IRO and recorded as part of the review process. Where this has occurred it is expected that a decision is made that the arrangement can be long term within **3 months** of the review.
- 4.5 However where the proposed plan for long term foster care does not progress as planned and is reconsidered, then the rationale for the change of plan will be recorded in the child's review and revised timescales will be introduced for securing an alternative long term foster carer.
- 4.6 If the current carers are not to be pursued as long term carers, the reasons for this needs to be clearly set out in writing to the carers and shared with the child/young person as appropriate. This should also be recorded on the electronic social care record for the child/young person with explanations provided. However consideration should be given as to how the carers can support both the family finding processes and child/young person in their eventual move.

5. Long term foster carer approval

- 5.1 With the agreement of the operations manager the social worker for the child/young person and fostering social worker should send the following paperwork to the relevant service manager:
- Care plan for the child in care;
 - Placement plan;
 - Foster carers most recent Annual Review;
 - [Matching Report and Support Plan Report](#);
- 5.2 The [Matching Report and Support Plan Report](#) should also outline the foster carer's capacity to meet the child/young person's needs both now and in the future and should also identify likely support and services required to ensure long term stability. ***This report must also be signed by the foster carers indicating their explicit agreement to act as the child/young person's foster carer until the child/young person ceases to be in care.*** The signed report is to be retained on both the child/young person's and foster carer's case records.
- 5.3 Where long term foster care is agreed by the service manager this will be entered as a key decision by the service manager on the child's electronic social care record and the status should be changed to long term foster care on the electronic social care record at the same time.
- 5.4 The service manager will also confirm the decision in writing to the foster carer and child/young people as appropriate and through the child's social worker to the birth parents. The IRO will also be advised by the child's social worker that agreement has been given.
- 5.5 Where the foster carer's approval category needs to be presented to the Fostering Panel to enable the proposed match to proceed, the fostering social worker is to complete an extended Foster Home Performance Review. This should be presented to the fostering panel and agency decision maker respectively. Where the prospective foster carers have not completed the Long Term Fostering Preparation Training the fostering social worker will ensure that the foster carers complete this training, ideally before their Foster Home Performance Review is presented to the fostering panel.

6. Independent Sector Provider Foster Carer

- 6.1 Where a potential foster carer has been identified with an Independent Fostering Agency (or other Local Authority) the social worker for the child should visit the foster carers with the agency fostering social worker or family finder and have full discussions as detailed in 4.3 above.
- 6.2 The child's social worker must check and confirm placement costs through [Market Management](#) and ensure that the operations manager is in agreement to the proposal proceeding.
- 6.3 At the matching stage the same paperwork is required as for WCC placements, however in addition it must be confirmed **in writing** by the Independent Fostering Agency that they support the proposed match and can provide the required support as detailed in the Matching Report/Support Plan. This documentation will be retained on the child/young person's case record.

7. Post approval, future statutory reviews and visiting

- 7.1 Post approval the Placement Plan (and Individual Placement Agreement where applicable) will need to reflect the changed status. The decision that long term foster care has been agreed should be recorded in the placement plan. A statutory review will be held to confirm that the long term plan has been achieved and to consider the most appropriate arrangements for future reviews and statutory visiting requirements.
- 7.2 The frequency of statutory visiting should be determined by the circumstances of each case. Visits must take place whenever reasonably requested by the child/young person or their foster carer. However, where the child/young person is placed with a new long term foster carer, they should be visited within one week of the start of the arrangement, and thereafter at intervals of not more than six weeks for the first year. Visits in subsequent years must take place at intervals of not more than six months, where the child/young person has agreed to be visited at this minimum frequency.

- 7.3 Where long term foster care has been in effect for more than a year consideration can be given at the statutory review as to whether it is necessary to hold a meeting as part of each review process or annually. The consultation, information gathering and review process will however continue on a six monthly cycle. The social worker for the child, with the agreement of their operations manager, should consult with the IRO and the child/young person in reaching a decision about whether they should hold a review meeting or manage the review as a consultative process. This should be recorded as a key decision on the child's electronic case record.
- 7.4 Where the decision is that the review process will not include a meeting the IRO must consult fully with all relevant individuals including the child/young person in order to inform the review of the child's case. The full review paperwork, including consultation documents will need to be completed by the social worker and a timeframe set for completion of the review process. The IRO will produce a record of the review. The record of the review must reflect the wishes and feelings of the child/young person, their parents and others who hold parental responsibility, and the view of the foster carers. The record should reflect that a meeting did not take place.
- 7.5 A formal review meeting should take place annually as a minimum and where a foster carer is excluded for any part of the planning and decision making process a written explanation of the reasons should be given and recorded. The foster carer's views should be sought through other means in such circumstances. A statutory review must be held when reasonably requested by the child or their carers.

8. Disruptions and monitoring arrangements.

- 8.1 When long term foster care arrangements disrupt a Disruption Meeting will be convened in line with Disruption Procedure.
- 8.2 The countywide [Through Care Panel](#) will maintain an overview of long term outcomes for children and young people in care. Through reports it will monitor the activities to secure long term foster care, timescales, blocks to planning and securing suitable foster carers as well as learning from disruptions.

9. Further information

[Care Planning and Decision Making Guidance](#)
[Placement Hub Briefing](#)

Appendix A – Matching report and support plan

LONG TERM FOSTER CARE – MATCHING REPORT AND SUPPORT PLAN	
Child's name and date of birth:	
Name(s) of prospective long term foster carers:	
Name and contact details of social worker/s completing this report:	
Explain how the foster carers will meet the child's/young person's needs in the long term.	
Describe the health and educational facilities which exist in the prospective carer's locality to meet the needs of the child/young person.	
Outline the preparation completed with the family to prepare them for long term foster care. What date did they complete the Long Term Foster Care Preparation Training or is this planned?	

Summarise the views of any children or other adults in the household, and details of the preparation work which has been carried out in respect of the proposed arrangement;

What is the foster carer's motivation to provide long term foster care and what are their expectations?

Provide details of contact arrangements, to include the frequency, persons involved and responsibilities for arranging and reviewing contact arrangements;

Outline any specific support services that are required for the long term foster carer and the arrangements for these to be delivered, by whom and when.

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I/we agree with the contents of this Matching and Support Plan Report and give my/our explicit agreement to act as (insert child's name) foster carer until she/he ceases to be cared for by the local authority.

Signed

Foster carer/s

Date

**Signed:
Child's Social Worker**

Date:

**Signed:
Team Manager**

Date:

**Signed
Fostering Social Worker**

Date:

**Signed
Team Manager (Fostering)**

Date:

Note: Where the proposed long term foster carer is an IFA carer please attach a supporting letter from the Fostering Agency outlining the reasons why they are in support of the arrangement and the services that they will be providing to the carer in both the short and longer term.