

Fostering Panel Cycle, Documentation, and timescales

Guidance April 2022.

Approvals - Foster Carers (Mainstream & Connected Persons)

- Prospective Foster Carers Report (Form F) or Connected Persons Assessment - with reference interviews/analysis attached. The interviews should be 1 separate document which contains the assessors overview and analysis of the review interviews conducted. The reference report should include separate headings for Previous Partners/ Adult Children/ Birth Children/ Employment/ Personal references Education etc.. (see template attached).

Please see *tri.x* [Assessment and Approvals of Foster Carers Procedure, Reference](#) for further advice relating to any risks or wavering of reference checks.

If references have not been returned, please provide evidence of attempting to further obtain these were deemed acceptable.

- Any confidential references or reports should be headed under a separate Confidential Section. (The Fostering Minutes will then provide a separate section for any discussion relating to this report.)
- Medical Adviser Comments
- Our Family leaflet (mainstream only)
- Any direct work completed with birth children and Children Looked After (in the case of Connected persons).

Evidence of the National Minimum Standards met and/or not met/ partially met is essential and should be explicit within the assessment report.

Verifying of identity checks

- Birth Certificate and marriage certificates must be verified, if applicants do not have access to these, at the earliest opportunity replacement documents must be requested and secured in order for full verification of identity. The Local Authority can request these documents if the prospective carers are unable to do so without significant delay.

Statutory Checks required prior to Panel Consideration:

- GP Medical and Medical Adviser Comments
- All household members over the age of 18 must have a DBS which has been completed by Cumbria County Council as part of the Stage 1 checks.

(please note that this includes any members living on foster carers property)

DBS of Household Members:

Legal advice 15.3.22 suggests that the following should be considered in the cases of members living on the foster carers property:

Family members or those living on the property, who may move freely within the main foster carer's house will require a DBS.

If the property is rented out privately to a non household considered member or as a holiday let then a risk assessment would need to be completed about the level of interaction/separation and then consider whether DBS is necessary.

DBS where applicant is unable to provide consent to check:

Coram Baff Advice: 25.1.22 suggests that When a DBS applicant is able to consent to a check, but unable to provide a conventional signature, a facility exists to allow them to make a cross or leave an impression of their fingerprint on the disclosure form, provided that this is witnessed by the person responsible for validating the identity of the applicant. The application must then be accompanied by a covering letter from that person explaining that the applicant was unable to sign his or her name. The cross or impression would then be treated as a valid and legal signature. However, if the DBS applicant is medically incapacitated to the extent that he or she is unable to sign the application form or meaningfully consent to the check, in most cases they would have a nominated person to look after their interests (usually appointed by the Court of Protection). The nominated person would need to provide evidence of their legal standing and could then sign on the applicant's behalf. Alternatively, if the applicant does not have anyone legally appointed to look after their interests, an affidavit could be produced to support the applicant's form.

- In the event the DBS is not clear a DBS Risk Assessment must be signed off by the Assistant Director.(Cause for Concern form)

FAILURE TO COMPLY TO THE REQUIREMENTS OUTLINED MAY RESULT IN THE ITEM YOU ARE PRESENTING TO THE FOSTERING PANEL BEING DEFERRED OR WITHDRAWN.

Papers Required for Matches for Permanence in Foster Care

Please note that Permanence Matches will only be considered for Long Term Approved Foster Carers. Any applications for Long term approval will need to be considered prior to a permanence match.

- Matching report
- Support Plan
- Permanence Panel minutes (agreeing the plan of long term fostering for the child/children)
- Business case agreeing finance if IFA placement.
- Form F (if carer approved less than 5 years ago)
- Last Foster carer review (FCR4)
- Child's Team Manager submission

- Carer's Team Manager submission

Please indicate in the report if SGO and or Adoption have been considered/ ruled out.

Foster Carer(s) Child Social Worker and Social Worker attendance at Fostering Panel.

PLEASE PROVIDE EVIDENCE THAT APPLICANTS HAVE SEEN AND SIGNED THE ASSESSMENT REPORT IN TIME FOR SUBMISSION TO PANEL (EITHER SIGNED BACK PAGE OR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT VIA EMAIL)

Negative Recommendations

As above for Approvals but also evidence of Fostering Network referral should be on file and Panel admin informed if they will be in attendance at panel.

Applicants Withdrawal from Assessment.

If a Foster Carer Applicant decides to withdraw from the Fostering Assessment at any point, the Assessment will cease following receipt of their withdrawal correspondence. This should be in a written format and should be placed on file. The Fostering Panel Admin should be notified that this item will no longer be required to be listed at Fostering Panel.

The Fostering Panel will not note this item, this is not required by regulations or guidance.

Brief Reports

If, at some point during stage 2, the agency decides that the applicant is unlikely to be suitable to foster and **they do not wish to withdraw**, a brief report may be prepared and submitted to panel. (See Appendix 1 for further info)

Fostering Panel have two options when presented with a brief report:

1. We can request the full assessment is completed and presented to the Panel
2. Or recommend that the applicant is not suitable to be a foster carer.

Please see *tri.x* [Assessment and Approvals of Foster Carers Procedure](#) or more info.

A Brief Report should provide a clear negative recommendation that the applicant is not suitable to be approved and the reason why completing the full assessment will not change the outcome or recommendation.

Evidence of the National Minimum Standards met and/or not met/ partially met is essential.

Evidence of Fostering Network referral should be on file and Panel admin informed if they, along with the applicants will be in attendance at panel.

THE APPLICANT MUST BE PROVIDED WITH A COPY OF THE BRIEF REPORT AND PROVIDED WITH THE OPORTUNITY TO RESPOND AND TO ATTEND THE FOSTERING PANEL IN THE SAME MANNER AND TIMESCALES AS THEY WOULD IN THE EVENT A COMPLETE REPORT WITH A NEGATIVE RECOMMENDATION WERE BEING PRESENTED TO THE FOSTERING PANEL. (10 working days ahead of submission to panel)

Please note that in all cases of assessment an applicant can waver their rights to have access to the assessment 10 working days before paperwork is submitted to panel but this must be provided in writing by the applicant.

Foster Carer Reviews

All Foster Carer First Year reviews are required by regulations to be presented to Panel within 12 months of their approval.

Panel/ ADM may request that a first review is returned earlier, please consider the minutes/ decision carefully.

Review Paperwork:

- **Team Manager submission**
- **Previous Fostering Panel Minutes or Agency Decision (evidence of current approval)**
- **All FCR documents (FCR 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12)**

The First foster carer review should aim to be conducted no later than between 6-9 months after approval to ensure this timescale is met, unless specifically requested for an earlier review.

It is not anticipated that any First Year Statutory Review of Approvals will be missed. In the event that due to exceptional circumstances a Foster Carer Statutory Review of Approval has been overlooked the following review must be presented to panel with a note explaining the reasons that the first year has been missed. This should be countersigned by a manager within the fostering service.

Foster Carer reviews presented at panel require to be presented within 6-8 weeks of the foster carer review occurring.

We understand that this timescale can often be difficult to meet due to unforeseen reasons so in exceptional circumstances a review can be heard within 12 weeks of the foster carer review however an Addendum is required providing the following details.

- The reasons why the review is being heard out of the 6-8 weeks' timescale.

- Details of any changes, for example any changes within the fostering household, support network, child's care plan.

Any significant changes following the review, irrespective of the timescale, should be provided in a separate addendum with management oversight. Where applicable, this may also require IRO oversight and updated FCR 6 and 8 contributions.

Please liaise with the Panel adviser if you are not sure.

RETROSPECTIVE OR MULTIPLE FOSTER CARER REVIEWS CAN NOT BE CONSIDERED BY THE FOSTERING PANEL

Review Cycle:

6.1.6 Review and Termination of Approval of Foster Carers Section 1 states Formal reviews of foster carers will take place at least annually

Cumbria's Fostering Service requests that Foster Carer's 3rd Year reviews are returned to Panel and ADM.

The 3rd Year review to return to panel is triggered from the date of the 1st year review.

Please note that for any missed 3 year reviews the next annual review should be returned to panel with a note explaining that the 3rd year cycle had been missed.

Cumbria's Fostering Service also requests that a review following concerns/ allegations is also presented to fostering panel.

2020- 2021 Foster Carer Reviews directly considered by the ADM in the COVID-19 Pandemic:

In 2020-21 practice was amended due to the Covid 19 pandemic and ADM was directly receiving some 3rd year and change of approval reviews, this was to help manage panel capacity.

In line with regulations, It is suggested that where direct ADM decisions have been made within this period on 3rd year and change of approvals, unless ADM has specified that the review should return to panel the following year, the ADM will count as panel and therefore reset the 3rd yearly cycle.

We have taken into account best practice but also consider panel capacity and trust in the robust ADM decision making during this period.

Review following concerns/ allegations

Please ensure that the LADO process has been considered and a referral made if applicable ahead of panel, the outcome of the LADO process must be included in the report. Please also indicate the rationale for the LADO decision and what action plan and conclusion the department has also reached.

Please submit the LADO Minutes which will be considered by the Panel Adviser.

Review following significant change in circumstances: to be updated.

Review Paperwork:

- Team Manager submission
- Previous Fostering Panel Minutes or Agency Decision (evidence of current approval)
- All FCR documents (FCR 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12)
- Addendum if required.
- LADO minutes and outcome following an allegation/ concern.

Foster Carer and Social Worker attendance at Fostering Panel.

Foster Carer Applications:

Fostering Panels are held regularly: 2x monthly but also additional panels are available when the service requires.

Foster Carer applicants are under no absolute obligation to attend fostering panel however it is considered an essential part of the process that the Assessing Social Worker and Foster Carer, if a single applicant, or Foster Carers in a joint application do attend.

Connected Persons Applications: We also require the allocated Child's social worker to attend fostering panel in these cases.

Any exceptions will be at the discretion of the Agency Adviser/ Service Manager and Panel Chair.

Only in exceptional circumstances will the Fostering Panel make a recommendation regarding the suitability if the applicant(s)/ Social Workers do not attend.

Foster Carer Reviews:

Foster Carer attendance at Fostering Panel is recommended. It provides a two- way communication about a foster carers progress with any children placed, clarification of issues of concern and consideration of any type of service development.

Fostering Panel acknowledge there may be situations where both foster carers cannot attend fostering panel, we would firstly recommend that consideration is given to obtain another panel date to accommodate the carer. If this is not achievable in some circumstances Fostering Panel will consider items with one foster carer, following discussion with the Panel Adviser/ Chair

In exceptional circumstances following consultation with the Panel Adviser/ Chair the Panel may also consider hearing an item without a foster carer present, although this is inadvisable and should be in exceptional circumstances.

Social Worker attendance: This is required

Attendance for Permanence items:

Fostering Social Worker, Child Social Worker, Foster Carer(s) will be required to attend fostering panel.

The Child/ Young person who is being considered for Permanence may request to be in some way part of the fostering panel, For Young People this may be attending a part of the fostering panel.

Cumbria County Council's Fostering Service wish to promote this attendance in an appropriate way. The Child SW, Fostering SW should liaise with the Panel Advisor/ Admin if attendance is requested by the young person in good time ahead of fostering panel.

Attendance re: Foster Carer Reviews following concerns:

Single Foster Carer:

Attendance would be required at Fostering Panel

Joint Foster Carers:

Attendance of both carers would be required at Fostering Panel.

Social Worker attendance: This is required

Resignation Following Concerns:

The Foster Carers should have the opportunity to attend Fostering Panel should they wish to, when their resignation with concerns is being noted. If Foster Carers attend, as should the Social Worker.

Any exceptions will be at the discretion of the Agency Adviser/ Service Manager and Panel Chair.

If an alternative social worker/ manager is attending on behalf of the allocated worker for any of the above items it is essential that they have a thorough understanding of the case to answer any panel queries.

Please alert the Panel Adviser if at short notice there is any changes to attendance at fostering panel so consideration can be given to hearing the item or withdrawing.

Deferment and Withdrawals of Fostering Panel Items:

Deferment and Withdrawals of Fostering Panel Items prior to Fostering Panel:

Social Workers, Team Managers and relevant support staff in liaison with the Fostering Panel Adviser, should try to prevent cases booked for the Fostering Panel being deferred, by carefully scrutinising all reports prior to submission. On occasions the Panel Adviser may have to withdraw a case if insufficient information, evidence or analysis has been provided. This decision will be made in consultation with the relevant social worker and/or their manager.

The Fostering and Adoption Service Managers, the Agency Adviser and the Chair have the option to defer a case before Panel.

Guidance for Panel members:

If a Panel member has concerns about the adequacy of a report prior to a Panel meeting and considers the item should be deferred s/he should contact the Panel Adviser to discuss their concerns.

Please email: laura.worthington@cumbria.gov.uk

15.3 Deferment at a Panel Meeting

On occasions during the Fostering Panel a deficit in information, evidence or analysis that was not clear before an individual contribution is made or a pattern or theme may emerge from collective discussion. This could lead to a case being deferred at a Panel meeting. (This is why a Fostering Panel functions with a variety of different professionals' perspectives which contribute to the quality assurance role).

If during the Panel's initial consideration of the case, serious concerns arise about the adequacy of a report in terms of insufficient information, evidence, or analysis, the panel member may express that they are not in a position to make a recommendation and request that the item is deferred. The Chair will gain a view of all members before a decision is made on deferring the item.

If the majority of the Panel consider deferring the case, each member will be asked to clarify their reasons for doing so.

The Chair, Panel Adviser and Minute taker will then leave the meeting and invite the applicants into a waiting room. Here the Chair and Panel Advisor will explain briefly to the applicants/carers and supervising social worker and manager (if present) that the item has been deferred for further information to be obtained.

There may be some occasions when, prior to the Panel deciding to defer an item, members may wish to try to clarify certain queries or issues with the supervising social worker and their manager within the Panel meeting.

On such occasions, prior to this discussion, The Panel Adviser ask the supervising social worker and/or manager to join the meeting.

The Panel Advisor will keep track of time and update/ inform the applicants/ Foster Carers that some points need to be clarified before considering if panel are able to invite them in to hear the item.

If the verbal responses the supervising social worker and manager give to the Panel's queries are sufficient to fully answer the concerns raised, the Panel Advisor will then invite the applicants/ carers into the panel.

The minutes will include any advice to agency re: the report.

Updates on Checks:

DBS:

tri.x [Review and Termination of Approval of Foster Carers Procedure, Updates on Checks](#)
States:

Disclosure and Barring Service checks should be updated every **3 years and if necessary**, a review of the foster carer's approval should be carried out immediately to take account of any new information.

See Persons Disqualified from Fostering Procedure.

If the Fostering Service learns that a Foster Carer or Foster Carer Support in the household has been charged with or found guilty of an offence then a review of approval should take place and a new DBS should be obtained and verified ahead of the item being presented to Fostering Panel.

Medicals:

Whilst there is no statutory time interval, as good practice medical information should also be updated at least every **3 years** by writing to the foster carer's GP. In the event of any serious concerns about the foster carers health, a review of the foster carers approval should be carried out immediately.

As Good Practice the Medical Adviser's comments should be sought where there are any existing health needs or changes in the carers health. This report must be received prior to submission to fostering panel.

Papers Required for Matches for Permanence in Foster Care

- Matching report (to include the foster carers contribution)
- Support Plan
- Permanence Panel minutes and Agency Decision
- Business case agreeing finance if IFA placement.
- Form F (if carer approved less than 5 years ago)
- Last Foster carer review and Agency Decision
- Child's Team Manager submission
- Carer's Team Manager submission

- If a Recent disruption/ unplanned ending has occurred (within the last 2 years) please submit the minutes and ensure the matching report includes reference to this and learning evidenced.
- If a previous disruption has occurred, please ensure this is referred to in the report and learning evidenced.

PLEASE ENSURE THAT THE FOSTER CARERS APPROVAL HAVE BEEN APPROVED AS LONG TERM CARERS AND THE APPROVAL EXTENDS TO THE CHILD YOU ARE SEEKING TO MATCH

Resignations

- Resignation letter from foster carers
- Resignation report
- Resignation Acknowledgement Letter from Team Manager

Please note Resignations cannot be heard unless formal correspondence via email/letter has been received and dated from the foster carer tendering their resignation.

A Foster Carers approval is terminated with effect from 28 days from receipt of foster carers resignation.

Regulation 25 – Extension Request

- Eight Week Extension Report (via ICS)