

Standards of Care

Introduction

The Fostering Service may have concerns about a foster carer, which may not warrant investigation under the child protection procedures but raise significant concerns about standards of care being provided. Standards of Care might include (and is not exhaustive):

- An incident of minor physical chastisement resulting in no injury;
- Inappropriate verbal chastisement;
- Issues regarding pocket money, other finances relating to the child (purchasing clothing on their behalf, or spending of benefits, such as DLA), general dietary issues, etc.
- Not meeting the child-focussed requirements of the Fostering Standards, such as working together with other professionals to meet the requirements of a child's care plan, inadequate supervision such as inadvertently allowing a child access to alcohol, prescribed medication, or unsuitable viewing of "adult" sexual material;
- Not enabling the Fostering Service to meet its requirements, as set out in the standards, such as regular non-attendance of supervision, poor attendance at training, lack of, or poor, carer recordings;
- Failure to take action to meet the standard requirements that a Fostering Service is required to undertake, such as provision of information in order to undertake a DBS check, or failure to make oneself available for a health assessment/medical.

Standards of Care issues should consider previous history of concerns and whether these are significant to an overall picture of risk. Any current or previous standards of care issues must be recorded under Allegations, or Complaints section of the recording system by the fostering service.

The Fostering Team Manager must be informed of any Standards of Care issues. In a situation where it is unclear whether the matter constitutes a formal allegation against a foster carer (as opposed to a standards of care issue) the Fostering Team Manager should consult the LADO who will discuss and advise on allegation-management threshold and where appropriate for management by the fostering team, an investigation will proceed. Where necessary, a professionals meeting may be called to consider information-sharing, process and focus of investigation.

The plan for enquiry will depend on the nature and seriousness of the concern.

Careful consideration should be given on a case by case basis as to whether the investigation should be:

- Conducted by the fostering social worker within the parameters of usual foster carer supervision;
- Dealt with by an experienced social worker from the fostering service who is independent of the foster carer; or
- Dealt with by the Fostering Team Manager. The Foster Carer can consult with independent advice such as that provided by The Fostering Network. In consultation with the Fostering Team Manager, the independent person offering advice might attend the Standards of Care meeting, but their availability, or lack of, should not prevent the meeting from being unduly delayed.

Standards of Care Meeting

These meetings are in place to ensure any serious and / or repeated concerns expressed by Looked After Children, Social Workers and others in relation to the care offered by Foster Carers are fully explored and a record is maintained. Concerns noted may lead the Fostering Team Manager to decide that a meeting is required to record the matter formally. The appointed team manager should be made aware of any standards of care arrangements. Note: all issues regarding standards of care are currently addressed with the Foster Carer by their Supervising Social Worker, without delay. Process The Fostering Team Manager will invite the foster carer to the Standards of Care meeting with a general outline of the concerns, or chronology. The Supervising Social Worker will usually be required to provide a report to the meeting, which will be shared with the foster carer beforehand. The Supervising Social Worker will explain the content of the report to the Foster Carer.

The Fostering Team Manager will usually chair the meeting and minutes will be taken.

Purpose

- To enable a full and open discussion on the identified concerns and identify a way forward. The potential outcomes to consider may be: additional training and/or closer supervision of the Foster Carers practice to support development. The Foster Care Review could be brought forward. Whether or not this happens, the next annual Foster Care Review Chairperson shall have access to the Minutes of the Standards of Care Meeting. A recommendation made to Fostering Panel. The Supervising Social Worker will ensure the detail of the recorded cause for concern/s within the Standard of Care meeting are detailed within their Foster Home Review report for the next Foster Care Review;
- Reason for meeting;
- Any previous concerns in relation to the Foster Carer;
- Sharing information;
- Work already undertaken to resolve the issue;
- Agreed actions, date and by whom;
- Decision about whether the Foster Care Review to be brought forward and the Agency's recommendation as to the Foster Carers continued approval. A copy of the minutes will be kept on the Carers Record and a copy will be given to the foster carer/s for their own record.