

WORCESTERSHIRE
CHILDREN FIRST
Fostering



Worcestershire Children First Fostering

Recruitment, Assessment and Approval of Non-Related (Mainstream) Foster Carers

Contents

- 1. Introduction and Legal framework**
- 2. Recruitment**
 - 2.1 Smoking Policy
 - 2.2 Initial Enquires
 - 2.3 Information Calls
 - 2.4 Criteria for Foster Carers
 - 2.5 Information Visit
- 3. Skills to foster Course**
- 4. Assessment**
 - 4.1 Stage 1
 - 4.2 Stage 2
 - 4.3 Brief Report
- 5. Applicants who are already Foster Carers**
- 6. Fostering Panel**
- 7. Agency Decision Maker**
- 8. Appeals**
- 9. Following Approval**
- 10.Changes to The Fostering Household**
 - 10.1 New Partners

1.Introduction and Legal Framework

Worcestershire Children First Fostering (WCFF) is committed to providing a range of foster carers to promote the differing needs of the children and young people that it looks after on behalf of Worcestershire Children First (WCF). WCFF seeks to recruit foster carers regardless of their culture, ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation. It seeks to recruit foster carers who are able to provide a safe and positive environment where children and young people are nurtured and are happy healthy and safe.

Standard 13 of the National Minimum Standards (NMS) for Fostering 2011 sets out the expected requirements for recruiting foster carers and includes the principles that:

- People who are interested in becoming foster carers are treated fairly, without prejudice, openly and with respect.
- Prospective foster carers are prepared to become foster carers in a way which addresses the issues they are likely to encounter
- The assessment process is set out clearly to prospective foster carers
- Prospective foster carers understand why identity checks, relationship status and health checks, DBS, personal references and enquiries are undertaken about them and members of their household
- Prospective foster carers are considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets the child's development needs.

This policy sets out how WCFF will meet the expected requirements as set out in the NMS and Regulation 26 and 27 of the Fostering Regulations 2011 which should be read in conjunction with this policy.

2.Recruitment

WCFF is committed to recruiting foster carers who are able to meet the needs of the children in Worcestershire who are in need of a fostering placement. WCFF will prioritise applications from those prospective foster carers who are most likely to be able to meet the needs of those children.

WCFF has a diverse range of recruitment activities to both raise the profile of fostering and meet the need for placements and has a Recruitment Communications Strategy which is updated every year.

Foster carers are involved with the recruitment of new fostering households. They are actively involved in both recruitment events and the Skills to Foster training courses.

Information about becoming a foster carer for WCFF is also available by downloading the information pack from the website at worcschildrenfirst.org.uk or by calling the Freephone number 0880 282 158 and requesting a pack.

2.1 Smoking policy

WCFF recognises the serious potential health risks for children living in smoking households including the risks of second-hand or passive smoking.

It therefore has a policy of not placing children who are considered to be in the high-risk group with mainstream carers these are:

- Children under 5
- Children of any age with disabilities who have respiratory problems, e.g. asthma, heart problems or glue ear.

This will be discussed with those enquiring about fostering at the earliest opportunity. For further information please see WCFF's **Smoking and E-Cigarettes Policy for Foster Carers and Staff**

2.2 Initial Enquiries

All members of the public who make an initial enquiry by telephone, email or letter in relation to becoming a foster carer will be contacted by the Business Support Officer (BSO) Recruitment and Retention.

All enquirers will be treated as a potential resource and given a prompt response. They will be contacted to gather further information and for a general discussion about fostering. Anyone who enquires will be sent a copy of the WCFF information pack via e-mail and will be encouraged to read this and respond to progress their enquiry. This information pack will provide a basic understanding of the fostering role.

2.3 Information Calls

In Enquirers can respond as soon as they are ready, however we will contact the enquirer as a follow up within two weeks. This will be to gather further information and for a general discussion about fostering. Enquirers will be asked to provide preliminary basic information - numbers in the household, the availability of a separate bedroom for foster children, working hours etc. so that only appropriate enquiries are taken forward. In addition, a check will be carried out in relation to enquirers and all members of their household on Children's Services records. This is to check if the family has previously been involved with Children's Services.

Following this discussion if the enquirer does not wish to proceed or the BSO rules them out because they do not meet a basic enquiry e.g. a spare room, the enquiry will be closed.

Otherwise the BSO will forward the enquiry to the Team Manager to allocate to a social worker for the Information Gathering Home Visit to be completed.

2.4 Criteria for Foster Carers

Individual and Joint - Applications will be considered from married couples, civil partners, unmarried couples or single people.

Religion - Applications will be considered from people of any or no religious persuasion.

Ethnicity - Applications will be considered from people of any race or culture.

Age - The minimum age for foster carers is generally 21 years. There is no specific upper age limit.

Gender - Applications will be considered from people of either sex and from same sex couples.

Sexual Orientation - Applications will be considered from people of any sexual orientation.

Income and Work Commitment - Applicants may be in work or not, but would need the flexibility to meet the needs of any children placed with them.

Health - Applicants will be required to have a full medical and their GP will be asked to comment on whether they are medically fit to foster.

Applicants are expected to positively promote a healthy life-style which will enable a child to reach his or her full potential. This would encompass attention to nutrition, exercise, routine and hygiene.

It is expected that foster carers will comply with nationally recommended alcohol consumption levels and that children's needs and safety will be met at all times.

Criminal Convictions - Applicants will not be considered if they or any adult member of the household has committed harm or an offence against a child which could pose harm to a child (as set out in the Fostering Regs 2011) unless the application is to foster a child who is already living with the applicant(s) or at least one of the applicants is a relative of the child. In these situations, the caution/conviction will not automatically preclude the application, but will be taken into account when assessing the suitability of the applicant.

Other convictions will not necessarily preclude an application, but this will depend on the seriousness of the offence and how long ago it was committed. Unless they are minor driving offences (dealt with by penalty points) all such cases will be referred to the Registered Manager who will decide whether an assessment will continue.

Accommodation - Applicants may own their own home or live in rented accommodation.

They will need living and sleeping accommodation appropriate to the number and ages of the children they are seeking to foster. Looked after children should not be expected to share a bedroom with applicants' own children or other looked after children that they are not related to.

It is important that the home environment is child-friendly, welcoming to children, safe and meets reasonable levels of hygiene.

All applicants will have a safety check on their home. This will include the outdoor space, animals (including the sleeping and toileting arrangements for any pet) and the holding of any firearms.

Child Care Experience - It is important that the applicant who is going to be the main carer has some experience of 'hands-on' care of children of the age group in which the applicants are interested.

Family Contact - All applicants must be prepared to facilitate contact between any foster child and his or her parents and significant family members.

Looked after Children - WCFE will only consider assessing applicants whose child was or is looked after in exceptional circumstances and any such enquiry will be referred to the Registered Manager to make a decision.

Children on a Child Protection Plan – WCFE will not consider applications from applicants whose child is the subject of a Child Protection Plan.

Employees - Any employee of *Worcestershire Children First Fostering* (WCFE) would not be able to be approved as a carer for the agency and would have to approach another fostering agency. Any enquiry from an employee of WCFE or a member of their family should be referred to the Registered Manager to consider whether there would be a conflict of interest in becoming an approved foster carer for WCFE. Consideration will be given to the role the employee has within the WCFE and they may be sign posted to another fostering agency.

If the enquirer withdraws, or WCFE decided not to proceed, the enquirer will be informed and the enquiry will be closed and the reason for this recorded.

2.5 Information Home Visit

During the information home visit the social worker will explore further the information already gained from the enquirer. It also gives the social worker the opportunity to view the home environment, especially the room or rooms that the enquirer is proposing to use for fostering.

The social worker will explain the role and responsibilities of becoming foster carers. The social worker will advise and answer the enquirer's questions and discuss the reasons children become Looked After (taken into care). The assessment process will also be explained. If the enquirer wishes to proceed, following this discussion, the social worker will create a record of the visit on the WCFF secure data base and send this to the Team Manager with a recommendation on whether the enquiry should proceed further.

If WCFF decides not to proceed, the enquirer should be informed of the reasons for this. The enquiry will be closed and the reason for this recorded.

Where the decision is to proceed with the enquiry the enquirers will be invited onto a Skills to Foster Course (STFC).

Foster Carers transferring from another fostering agency will not be required to repeat the Skills to Foster course. The circumstances of their current situation will be discussed and once this is accepted, if suitable, they will progress to the assessment stage, and invited to make an application.

3. Skills to Foster Course

WCFF uses the Fostering Network's **Skills to Foster** Course (STFC) and this is delivered by a social worker from the fostering team and a foster carer. WCF's Health and Wellbeing Team and a Care Leaver also contribute to the course.

The course is run frequently throughout the year, alternating between evenings, weekends and consecutive days to enable applicants to book on a course which suits them.

Unless they are already approved by another fostering agency all applicants will be required to attend this training. It is an integral part of the assessment process. Those facilitating the course will provide written feedback relating to the applicants for the assessing social worker. This information must be used in their assessment.

The objectives of the course are:

- To raise awareness and understanding of looked after children's needs and the key issues which need to be addressed by all foster carers;
- To assist prospective foster carers to consider more thoroughly the implications of fostering;
- To assist prospective foster carers to determine the type of resource they can offer to the children needing foster placements.

Where issues emerge during the training, the Team Manager may decide that it is not appropriate to proceed with an application. In this case, the applicants should be visited by a social worker to discuss the concerns and notified in writing of the decision. Advice should be given to explain the steps they may need to take in order to meet the criteria.

On satisfactory completion of STFC an application form and consent to statutory checks and references will be sent out to the applicants for completion. The completed application and consent form will then be passed to the Team Manager for a decision on whether the application will be accepted. If the application is not accepted the applicants will be notified in writing.

Applications that are accepted will then progress on to the Assessment Stage.

4. Assessment

The Fostering Regs 2011 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 the assessment of their suitability should be done jointly.

The assessment comprises two stages. Stage 1 gathers all the basic information about the prospective foster carers including the required checks and references. Stage 2 contains more detailed information about their history, present circumstances and their parenting experiences. The Fostering Reg 2011 Schedule 3 sets out what information needs to be gathered.

WCFF normally commences the two stages at the same time to avoid delay. In some circumstances such as when a prospective foster carer has a previous criminal history, or where the applicant has a medical condition which may impact on their ability to foster, Stage 2 will not be started until Stage 1 has been completed. The Team Manager will then make a decision on whether to proceed to Stage 2.

4.1 Stage 1

On receipt of the completed application form, consent to medical checks and authorisations for the statutory checks/references, WCFF Business Support staff will input the date of the application and details of the household members on the electronic records.

The following information must be obtained as soon as reasonably practicable relating to the applicant and other members of their household and family:

- Full name, address and date of birth;

- Details of health (supported by a medical report);
- Particulars of any other adult members of the household;
- Particulars of the children in the family, whether or not members of the household, and any other children in the household;
- Particulars of their accommodation;
- The outcome of any previous request or application made by them or any other member of their household to foster or adopt children, or for registration as an early years provider or later years provider under Part 3 of the Childcare Act 2006, including particulars of any previous approval or refusal of approval relating to them or to any other member of the household;
- If the applicant has, in the preceding twelve months, been a foster carer approved by another fostering service provider, the name and address of that fostering service provider;
- Names and addresses of the people who will provide personal references;
- Details of current, and any previous, marriage, civil partnership or similar relationship;
- The views of the local authority in whose area the applicant lives
- Where the applicant is currently approved as a foster carer by another fostering agency and consents, access may be requested to the relevant records compiled by that other fostering agency in relation to the applicant. That service agency must provide access within 15 working days of a request being received.

The following references and checks will be taken up:

From any **Local Authority or Health Trust** that the applicants have lived in the last 10 years. In some circumstances checks will be taken up for more than the last 10 years for example when the applicant or any member of their household has been known to Children's Services even though this was more than 10 years ago.

Where applicants have recently moved to the UK (within the last 10 years) checks, where possible, may be taken up from the countries that they have previously lived in.

DBS check on all members of the household over 18. Where the applicants have lived abroad the equivalent of a DBS check will also be undertaken from the relevant country. When the DBS check contains information, records of cautions or convictions this will not necessarily preclude an application but should be discussed with the applicant and a Disclosure Report completed. This will be sent to the Team Manager

for their recommendation and then forwarded to the Registered Manager to make the final decision on whether the application should still proceed. Information that has been obtained from the DBS may only be retained on the applicant's file for a limited period and should be destroyed when a decision is made on the application. The Team Manager should note on the file the date and reference number of the DBS check, that the Disclosure and Barring Service information has been destroyed and that the information led to a particular view, without citing the information itself.

Health - 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 comment on their fitness to foster. Where there is a need for the applicant to undergo any further tests/checks this will be referred to the Fostering Panel's Medical Adviser. Any comments or advice given by the Medical Adviser or the applicants GP must be taken seriously by the applicants and will be addressed with them during the assessment process. It may be necessary for reports from other health professionals to be obtained and if the application proceeds be presented to the Medical Adviser and the Fostering Panel. Where the medical information suggests that the applicant may not be suitable for health reasons, this should be discussed in detail with the applicant and withdrawal may be advisable at this stage.

Education – where the applicant has school age children, the school will be contacted for information on the applicant's ability to promote a child's education.

CAFCASS

Probation

Employment - A written reference must be obtained from each applicant's current employer regardless of the applicant's occupation. In addition, where the applicant has frequently changed jobs, WCFF may take up additional references from past employers. Reference will also be sought from any employment where the applicant has worked with children or vulnerable adults (paid or voluntary). Where the applicant is self-employed consideration should be given to taking up a reference from an accountant or client.

Previous Partner - A written reference will be sought from any previous partner that an applicant has parented children with, this may include birth children or non-related children. References may also be sought by the fostering provider from any previous partner where this is deemed necessary. In some instances, a written reference may need to be followed up by an interview. Any decision not to take up a previous partner reference should be agreed by the Registered Manager.

Personal References - applicants will be asked to provide the names of four non family and two family referees. Written references are sought from these six referees and two of the non-family referees will be selected for interview along with the 2 family referees. The referees should have known the applicant for at least five years. All referees should be people who know the applicants well in a personal capacity and who are able to comment on the applicants' suitability to foster. Where there is a joint application, referees should know both applicants, or additional referees will be required.

Previous Applications to foster or adopt - Where the prospective applicant has made a previous application to foster or adopt, the relevant agency will be asked to confirm in writing the outcome of the application and provide a written reference.

Previous approval as a foster carer - Where the applicant has previously been a foster carer and was approved by another fostering service provider, a reference must be requested from that other fostering service provider.

If any information obtained from the references and checks leads to a decision by the Fostering Agency Decision Maker that the applicant is not suitable to become a foster carer, the applicant must be notified in writing with reasons. The Fostering Agency Decision Maker may reach this decision before all this information has been obtained but notification of any decision not to proceed must be given within 10 working days of all the information being obtained. The applicant has no right to make representations about the decision, or to have their case reviewed under the Independent Review Mechanism.

The applicant must be informed that they can complain via WCFF's complaints process if they are unhappy with the way in which their case has been handled. The complaints process should address whether or not the applicant's case has been handled in a reasonable way, rather than the question of the applicant's suitability to foster.

Where all the information set out above has been obtained and notification has not been given within 10 working days that the applicant is not suitable, then the assessment must continue or where Stage 2 was not started concurrently, proceed to Stage 2.

4. 2 Stage 2

Following the application being accepted the assessing social worker will draw up a written agreement with the applicant setting out the dates for the assessment visits. Where the application is from a couple, the assessing social worker will interview couples individually and together and ensure the children of the applicant or other significant members of the household are seen alone.

As part of the assessment process applicants are expected to complete the e - learning provided by Worcestershire Children First Fostering on:

Children's Safeguarding 2018

Equality in The Workplace

Faith and Belief

The Fostering Regs 2011 (Schedule 3) sets out the information to be obtained at Stage 2 of the assessment. There are no specific regulatory requirements about the way in which assessment information must be collected or presented to panel. WCFF uses the CoramBAAF Form F. The assessing social worker must consider and evidence whether the applicant is suitable to be a foster parent and whether the applicant 's household is suitable for any child.

The following information relating to the applicant and other members of the household, together with any other relevant information must be obtained:

- Details of personality;
- Religious persuasion, and capacity to care for a child from any particular religious persuasion;
- Racial origin, cultural and linguistic background and capacity to care for a child from any particular racial origin or cultural or linguistic background;
- Past and present employment or occupation, standard of living, leisure activities and interests;
- Previous experience (if any) of caring for their own and other children;
- Skills, competence and potential, relevant to their capacity to care effectively for a child placed with them.

The assessing social worker will record all appropriate factual information and address issues including the applicants' understanding of the following areas:

- Child rearing;
- Caring for children born to someone else;
- Contact between children and their families;
- Helping children to make sense of their past;
- Sexual boundaries and attitudes;
- Awareness of sexual and other forms of abuse;
- Health and health promotion;

- Promotion of education;
- Approaches to discipline;
- Awareness of how to promote secure attachments between children and appropriate adults;
- Standards of living and lifestyles;
- Experiences of disability and attitudes to disability;
- Awareness of equal opportunities;
- Understanding and dealing with young people's behaviour including encouraging children to take responsibility for their behaviour and helping them to learn how to resolve conflict.

The list is not exhaustive - other issues relevant to the individual applicant and his or her family may need to be addressed. The skills and personal qualities that need to be evidenced will be different according to the type of fostering the applicants propose to undertake e.g. babies and toddlers, short term or long term fostering.

As stated above the assessing social worker may contact the previous partners of the applicants (taking care not to disclose confidential personal information about the applicant). Where there were any children of the relationship or where children were cared for jointly, the social worker must arrange to interview them face-to-face wherever practicable. All adult children of the applicant living away from home will also be interviewed.

Applicants will be encouraged to be actively involved in contributing towards the assessment to evidence their capabilities and to support their application.

The foster home will also be thoroughly checked to ensure it provides appropriate and safe accommodation for the child, as well as safe transport.

A risk assessment must be conducted in regard to pets and a firearms questionnaire will be completed.

On completion of the assessment report a copy should be given to applicants and they should be invited to make any observations in writing within 10 working days.

At the end of the 10 working days, (or when the applicant's observations are received, whichever is sooner), the report, the applicant's observations on that report, if any, and any other relevant information obtained, must be sent to the Fostering Panel Business Support Officer who will book it into Fostering Panel. Applicants will be informed of the date, time and venue and information on the panel will be sent to them.

The Fostering Panel must make its recommendation on the application within eight months of the applicant making the fostering enquiry.

4. 3 Brief Report

If during Stage 2 of the assessment information comes to light that the applicant is unlikely to be suitable to foster, the Team Manager can make a decision that the assessing social worker should produce a brief report to the Fostering Panel. This report will set out details of the assessment completed to that point, and the reasons for considering the applicant/s are unsuitable.

The applicant must be:

- Informed that a brief report is to be presented to panel
- Be provided with a copy of that report
- Be given 10 working days for them to provide any observations on the report and these should be shared with panel.

In making a decision on whether the assessment should continue the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) must take into account the brief report, the observations of the applicant and the recommendation with panel.

If the ADM decision is that the fostering assessment should not continue this is called the **Qualifying Determination** and the applicant can appeal. The appeal process is set out in Section 8

5. Applicants who are Approved Foster Carers with another agency

WCFE are happy to accept enquiries from foster carers who are already approved by other fostering agencies. If these proceed to the assessment stage the applicant will not be asked to complete the STFC. Once their application is approved, they will proceed to the assessment stage. As with applicants new to fostering Stage 1 and 2 will usually be completed concurrently.

Records compiled by another fostering service can be used to inform the new assessment of the applicant's suitability to foster. WCFE will contact the applicant's agency and request access to the following information:

- The report of the original assessment of the person's suitability to foster (if it is considered by the body requesting the information to be recent enough to be relevant);

- A copy of the report of the last review of the individual's continuing suitability to foster and any other review report considered useful to understanding the person's current suitability to foster or adopt;
- Details of any concerns about standards of practice and what if anything is being done/has been done to address them;
- Details of allegations made against the foster carer or their household members; and
- Any other information considered to be relevant to the assessment of the person's suitability to foster/adopt.

The agency may be willing to provide this information in writing. If they are not, then the assessing social worker must visit the agency and read the foster carers files. A telephone call is not sufficiently robust.

Request for access to this information must be accompanied by the written consent of the applicant agreeing that their current agency can share the information required. As the information is being requested to support the applicant's application to foster, only information about the individual should be shared.

Information on other parties in the foster carers record will need the consent of those parties for it to be shared. This includes young people where they have sufficient understanding to consent. If they do not have sufficient understanding, then a person with parental responsibility can consent on their behalf.

If consent is refused, a fostering agency should consider whether the information is a cause for concern and impacts on the foster carer's suitability to foster. The fostering agency has a duty to share such information even without consent.

In some instances, checks and references may not need to be taken up again. For example, past employer references or previous partners references and interviews where there has been no contact since the reference was taken up, may satisfy the assessing social worker, and it may not be necessary to repeat the reference or interview.

If the applicant has been a foster carer in the previous 12 months and information on personal references is shared by their current fostering agency there is no requirement to interview their personal referees. However, the fostering service (WCFF) can seek verbal and/or written references from personal referees, in addition to the fostering service's reference, if they choose to do so. If the previous fostering service does not provide a reference, for whatever reason, interviews with two personal referees must be conducted.

In all other ways the process will follow that set out above.

6. Fostering Panel

The applicants and assessing social worker will attend the Panel meeting. Applicants should be fully prepared by the assessing social worker as to the procedure prior to their attendance.

The Panel will consider the reports together with all the supporting documentation and make a recommendation to the Agency 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 Family and Friends Foster Carer) or conditions as to the age range or number of children to be placed in the foster home will also be specified.

7. Agency Decision Maker

The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) will make a decision as to the suitability of the applicant, based on the reports presented to the Fostering Panel and the minutes detailing the Panel's recommendation. Where the decision is to approve the applicants as foster carers, the ADM will specify the terms of the approval i.e. the number and age range of children to be fostered, the type of placement and any specific inclusions/exclusions. Applicants can be approved for more than one placement category i.e. short term, long term, respite, emergency and parent and child.

The decision must be made within 7 working days of the recommendation and panel minutes being received by the ADM and must be recorded, together with reasons.

Applicants will be given verbal notification of the decision within 2 working days and written notice of the decision, with reasons, signed by the ADM, within 5 working days of the decision.

Upon approval, foster carers will be asked to sign a Foster care Agreement and issued with ID to enable their role as a foster carer to be verified.

8. Appeals

If ADM proposes not to approve the applicant as foster carers either as a result of a full assessment or a brief report being presented to panel, they will set out their reasons for this decision and this is known as the **Qualifying Determination**.

The applicant will be given verbal notification of this within 2 working days of the ADM proposing not to approve and written notice of the decision, with reasons, signed by the ADM, within 5 working days.

The written notice will advise applicants how to appeal. There are two ways of appealing:

1. Applicants will be advised they have a right to submit representations to the ADM within 28 days of the date of the written notice of the decision by the ADM. In those circumstances the ADM will refer the matter back to Fostering Panel asking them to review their recommendations taking into consideration the representations made by the applicant.
2. Or, they may exercise the right to apply to the Secretary of State to request a review of the decision by an Independent Review Panel set up under the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). Any such application must be made in writing within 28 days of notice of the decision and supported by reasons. Applicants will be advised in their written notice of the contact details of the IRM. 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

Applicants must choose between making representations to the ADM or applying to the IRM. They are not able to do both. Applicants will also be given details of the Independent Advice and Mediation Worker who they can contact for support.

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 by the ADM within the period, the Panel Adviser will arrange for the reports and other documentation to be reconsidered by the Fostering Panel, who taking into account the written representations, will make a new recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker (Fostering).

The Panel Administrator will advise the applicant within 7 days of the date of the Panel. The applicant should attend this meeting where their written representations will be considered.

In these circumstances the applicant can arrange for the Advice and Mediation Worker, friend or supporter to accompany them.

After considering the representations, the Panel will make a recommendation, which the ADM will consider before a final decision is made.

If the decision remains not to approve the application, the ADM 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 within 5 working days of the ADM decision. 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 refer the matter to the IRM, the relevant Panel reports, any new information obtained since the Panel meeting, a record of the decision made and reasons, and a copy of the written notification of the decision, if different, will be sent to the Independent Review within 10 working days of their written request.

The applicant, and if they wish the Advice and Mediation Worker, friend or supporter and two representatives of WCFF 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.

9. Following Approval

Once approved the foster carer will be allocated a supervising social worker who will visit and request that the foster carer sign the Foster Care Agreement between WCFF and the foster carer.

The Foster Care Agreement will contain the following information:

- a. The terms of the foster carer's approval;
- b. The support and training to be provided to the foster carer;
- c. The procedure for the review of the foster carer's approval;
- d. The procedure for placements of children;
- e. The procedure for making representations and complaints;
- f. 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;
- g. The requirements in relation to confidentiality and internet usage;

- h. The procedures for behaviour management and unauthorised absences of children placed with the foster carer including the ban on corporal punishment;
- i. The procedures for informing the supervising social worker of the child's progress, the administration of medication and any significant events relating to the child;
- j. The need to give 28 days' notice in writing of they wish to cease fostering or for a child's placement to end
- k. The need to allow access to any child or young person placed with them by a representative of WCFF or WCF if requested
- l. The need to allow access to Ofsted if requested.

The foster carers will be given two copies for signature and will retain one signed copy. The other will be kept on the foster carers' file, together with the report and supporting documents presented to the Fostering Panel, a copy of the Panel's recommendation and a copy of the approval decision.

New foster carers will also be given information on how to access 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. They can request a hard copy, but they will be informed that the most up to date version will be available on WCFF's website.

Information about training and local foster carer support groups will also be provided.

The supervising social worker will continue to provide support and supervision to the foster carer up to, during and after all placements. (Please see **Supervision and Support to Foster Carers**)

WCFF is required to keep a register of all approved foster carers which will contain the following information

- 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;
- The name, address, date of birth of each Connected Person with whom a child is placed under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and who has been granted temporary approval as a foster carer, together with the date and terms of the temporary approval.

Once approved, the foster carers' approval details will be entered on the Fostering Register database.

10. Changes to The Fostering Household

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.

Where new members are joining the fostering household, this should be discussed with the supervising social worker prior to them joining the household. A DBS will be required on any new member of the household who is aged 18 years or older, and an assessment at the appropriate level will need 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 is a child or a vulnerable adult for whom the foster carer will have a caring or support role, an assessment may be required to demonstrate how the foster carer proposes to meet the needs of all those in the household.

Failure to inform the supervising social worker that there has been a change in the foster carer's household may lead an immediate review of the foster carer's approval and a suspension of the foster carer's approval may have to be considered until that review has taken place.

10.1 New 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. Therefore, the usual recruitment process of initial information gathering and suitability will be followed. If the team manager is satisfied the individual should progress, a full Form F assessment of his or her suitability for this role will be completed. The same procedure for this assessment will be carried out as for any foster carer application and it will be presented to the Fostering Panel and the ADM in accordance with the preceding paragraphs of this policy.

There will be no presumption that any such assessment will be approved.

IF the new partner has become a member of the household before the assessment procedure has been completed a Disclosure and Barring Service enhanced check must be carried out, and a risk assessment must also be completed to determine the level of additional checks

required. 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.