



Post Approval – Supervision and Support of Foster Carers

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For details of Financial Support please see separate policy Financial Support to Foster Carers.

1. Introduction and Legal Framework

The Fostering Regulations 2011, Statutory Guidance for Fostering 2011 and the National Minimum Standards 2011 (NMS) all stress the importance of the role of foster carers as part of the wider team in helping to safeguard vulnerable children and promote good outcomes for children. The legislative framework around fostering requires a fostering service to ensure

it provides its foster carers with the supervision and support they and their families require to undertake the fostering role successfully.

The Fostering Regulations (Regulation 17) requires a fostering service to provide foster carers with training, advice, support, and information as appears necessary in the interest of children placed with them. It must take all reasonable steps to ensure that foster carers are familiar with and act in accordance with the policies that the fostering service must meet its statutory requirements.

Foster carers should be given all relevant information about the child to be placed with them including the Care and Placement Plan and any new information or plan should be shared with them.

The Statutory Guidance expands on the requirements set out in Regulation 17 and references the NMS Standards 20 and 21.

Fostering services should have a policy which sets out the way it supports foster carers this should include

- an allocated appropriately qualified social worker from the fostering service (the supervising social worker) who is responsible for overseeing the support they receive.
- practical and emotional support
- clear information about the criteria for making financial payments to them, including allowances, fees, and other expenses.
- supported to complete their Training Support and Development Standards (TSD) and maintain an ongoing training and development portfolio which demonstrates how they are developing the skills required of them.
- support groups for foster carers\ peer mentoring\ self-help groups should be encouraged and supported.
- breaks from caring to enable placements to continue.
- support to the sons and daughters of foster carers and other people living in the foster carer's household
- comprehensive information about the policies and procedures of the fostering service, including those relating to the handling of allegations, and about the support which will be offered to them in their role.

In addition to the requirements already set out above the NMS also require fostering services to

- Supports their foster carers to ensure they provide foster children with care that reasonably meets those children's needs, takes the children's wishes and feelings into account, actively promotes individual care and supports the children's safety, health, enjoyment, education and preparation for the future.
- Provide an effective out of hours advice and support service for foster carers.

- Ensure that foster carers have access to adequate social work and other professional support, information, and advice to enable them to provide consistent high-quality care to a child. This should include assisting them with dealing with partner agencies such as Health and Education.
- Provide a handbook to carers on approval which covers policies, procedures, guidance, financial information, legal information, and insurance details.
- Have a complaints process in place and keep records of complaints, outcomes, and actions to improve the service
- Have a system of good communication between the supervising social worker and the child's social worker and work effectively with them

This policy sets out how WF meets the requirements set out above. It applies to all foster carers whether non-related (mainstream), family and friends or those temporarily approved under Regulation 24. Information on financial support to carers is covered in a separate policy

Financial Support to Foster Carers

2. Supervising Social Worker

All approved foster carers will be allocated a supervising social worker. The allocated supervising social worker is responsible for supervising and supporting carers. The role of the supervising social worker is to:

- Ensure that the foster carer has all the relevant information regarding children and young people who are placed with them. This includes copies of the medical consent form, Placement Plan, Care Plan, Personal Education Plan, Health Assessments, and any updates to these.
- Ensure that the foster carer can meet the child's needs and that foster carers are working in accordance with the child's Care Plan.
- In agreement with the child's social worker chair the Placement Planning Meeting.
- Undertake support visits to carers and provide regular formal supervision in line with WF's guidelines.
- Provide emotional and practical support to the foster carers and their children.
- Support the carers at other meetings e.g. children's statutory reviews, Personal Education Plan meeting as required.
- Work with foster carers to ensure they have knowledge of and understand WF's policy and procedures and are working in line with them.
- Work with the foster carers to consider their future developmental needs and training requirements.
- Liaise with the child's social worker, partner agencies and any other person who is part of the team around the child to ensure there is good communication and effective working together.

- Carry out unannounced visits.
- Complete the Annual Review of the fostering household with the foster carers. (information on Annual reviews is found in WF's **Annual Reviews and Termination of Approval policy**).

2.1 Induction

Following approval foster carers will be allocated a supervising social worker who will visit them as soon as possible after their approval and before any child is placed. This is often referred to as a set up meeting and foster carers will be given copies of or details how to access electronically set up information on WF and WCC, useful documents and templates, copies of the Children's Guides and information on membership of the Fostering network. A set-up box is given which is a lockable box in which foster carers can keep confidential information on children placed with them.

During this first visit the supervising social worker will:

- Go through the Foster Carer Agreement with the foster carers making sure they understand and sign it.
- Provide foster carers with copy of or knowledge of how to access the foster carer handbook and relevant policies and procedures.
- Complete the supervision agreement, discuss with the carers the purpose of supervision, how this will be recorded and agree future supervision dates.
- Ensure that foster carers understand the financial support available, what will be paid automatically if a child is placed with them and what they will need to make a claim for.
- Discuss with carers what to expect regarding information about a child and check that they know what information they should be asking for when considering a placement.
- Discuss with the foster carer the expectation regarding recording and completion of incident forms.
- Ensure that the carers have the relevant telephone numbers of the supervising social worker, the relevant Team Manager, and the Emergency Duty Team.
- Discuss the possibility of putting the foster carers in touch with a more experienced foster carer as an additional support.
- Provide carers with the information about local support groups and how to access these.
- Arrange for ID cards for the carers to be completed.

During the first 6 weeks the supervising social worker will:

- Ensure that the foster carer understands the purpose of the statutory reviews for children looked after and their role within this.

- Draw up with foster carers their Household Development plan (please refer to **Training for Foster Carers**).
- Ensure that the foster carers have the appropriate TSD (Training, Support and Development) Standards induction workbook. This should have been provided during the assessment stage and the supervising social worker should start to discuss with the foster carers which standards they may have begun to meet during their assessment and what they will need to do to gain the knowledge and experience to enable them to evidence completion of the workbook.
- Ensure that the foster carers are aware of the foster carer complaint and compliment's procedure as well as the 'have your say' procedures for any comments, compliments or complaints for children and young people.

2.2 Support Visits

WF requires the supervising social worker to have face to face contact with the foster carers they supervise monthly unless otherwise agreed by the foster carer and the Team Manager.

This will normally be a home visit but may on occasion be at a child's review or another meeting where the social worker can discuss with the foster carer any support needs.

Between visits the supervising social worker should keep in touch through phone calls, emails, and text. The supervising social worker should provide the foster carers with their work contact details.

Any contact from a foster carer should be responded to as soon as possible and foster carers should be given details of who to contact if their supervising social worker is not available.

Home Visits should be recorded on the electronic record, using the Support Visit case note. Visits should have a clear purpose which is understood by the foster carer. The supervising social worker should record the discussion with the foster carer, any support issues or concerns relating to the child and agreed actions. Other face to face contact, telephone calls, emails and texts should also be recorded on the electronic record, using the fostering case note.

Joint visits with the child's social worker should be considered if the foster carer has raised any concerns or there are concerns about the child's placement. Discussing these together, with the child if appropriate, may help to resolve any issues at an early stage and support the stability of the placement.

Face to face contact every month should be agreed as a minimum (unless otherwise agreed by the Team Manager). This can be more frequent if requested by the foster carers and may

be appropriate, for example, when a child is first placed or there are issues regarding the child or young person.

For some foster carers monthly face to face contact may not be necessary, for example when a child is long term matched and in a settled placement or the foster carers only provide respite. With the agreement of the foster carers and the Team Manager the supervising social worker can have less frequent face to face contact. The expected frequency of contact should be recorded by the Team Manager as a management decision on the foster carer's record. It should not be less than the quarterly formal supervision visit.

WF accepts that fostering households may have a main carer and while they may be the carer that the supervising social worker has most contact with it is expected that when there is a second carer, who is less available due to work commitments, they will be available for meetings with the supervising social worker minimum four times between their foster carer annual reviews. As a minimum two of these meetings must be a foster carer supervision at least 6-monthly (see formal supervision 2.4).

2.3 Unannounced Visits

There is a regulatory requirement for fostering households to have a minimum of one unannounced visit per year. Unannounced visits are a way of WF getting a better understanding of the child's lived experience within the foster home.

Although the minimum requirement is at least once a year WF expectation is that there will be a minimum of at least 2 unannounced visits per year. This requirement better reflects the changing compositions of fostering households and will allow WF to better monitor the experience of children.

During the visit the supervising social worker will speak to any member of the household who is present and the looked after child unless this would not be appropriate.

Further guidance on the procedure for unannounced visits can be found in WF's **Unannounced Visits Policy**.

2.4 Formal Supervision.

WF require foster carers to be supervised at least quarterly. It accepts that fostering households may have a main carer and while they may be the carer that the supervising social worker has most contact with it is expected that when there is a second carer who is less available due to work commitments they will be present for supervision at least every 6 months.

On allocation of a foster carer the supervising social worker should discuss with the foster carer the purpose of supervision and complete a supervision contract.

Supervision should be a supportive and enabling two-way process to:

- Ensure the foster carer understands how they contribute to the Worcestershire County Council (WCC) services for Children.
- Enable foster carers to contribute effectively to the plans for the children for whom they are caring.
- Provide appropriate monitoring and feedback on the foster carer's work to ensure National Standards for Foster Carers are fully met.
- Complete personal development plans for each household, which are linked to their training and their annual review.
- Support foster carers by providing advice or making this available from elsewhere as appropriate.
- Give foster carers an opportunity to raise any problems and make sure they are addressed appropriately.
- Acknowledge the challenges and demands that the fostering tasks make on foster families and ensure appropriate support is available.
- Recognise and address any difficulties the foster carer's own children or other household members may be experiencing arising from fostering.
- Assist foster carers to work in an anti-discriminatory way that respects and promotes individual differences.

The supervision episode on the electronic records should be used by the supervising social worker to record supervision. The supervision template sets out the agenda and covers:

- Matters arising from the last supervision and whether agreed action have been completed.
- Child/ren in placement. Each child should be considered individually even when they are siblings. Their health, cultural, educational, leisure, contact needs and any support needs should be discussed. The supervising social worker should have knowledge of each child's Care Plan, Personal Education Plan and Health Assessment and should have had a recent discussion with the child's social worker for their view on the child's placement.
- Each child's Safe Caring\Individual Risk plan should be discussed to ensure that it still reflects the needs of the child. Any new risks should be considered and where risk had diminished this should be acknowledged.
- Personal issues for the foster carer or members of the fostering household e.g. effect of a child's placement on the foster carer's own family, illness, bereavement, work issues and what support can be provided.

- Training/development issues for the foster carers and family. The supervising social worker should discuss with the foster carer any training that they have undertaken since the last supervision and what impact if any this has had on their role as a foster carer and their care of looked after children. There should also be discussion of the ongoing training needs of the foster carer and this should relate to the needs of the child they are caring for or to developing their ability to offer placements to a wider range of children when this is appropriate. Timescales for any training to be completed should be agreed with the foster carer and recorded as an action.
- Any support needs expressed by the foster carer and how they will be met.
- Any financial issues.

Foster carer's recording should also be reviewed by the supervising social worker who should sign the foster carer's records. The recordings on the child completed by the carers should be collected and uploaded onto the child's file.

Supervising social workers should see the children of foster carers or other members of the fostering household and should at a minimum, if appropriate, meet with them separately to discuss the impact of fostering on them as part of the foster carer's annual review.

Once completed the supervision episode should be sent to the Team Manager for oversight and a copy should be provided to the foster carers. A signed copy of the signature page of the supervision template should be uploaded into documents to evidence that the foster carer has seen the record of supervision and any differences between the supervising social worker and foster carer should be noted.

Supervision records should be used to inform the foster carer's annual review.

2.5 Foster Carer Chronology

The supervising social worker will keep a foster carer chronology which will record any significant events for foster carers and whether this has an impact on them, other members of the house including any children they are looking after.

Significant events may be events directly related to their fostering but also personal events such as bereavement or illness. Although the chronology should identify any concerns and areas of development it should also record positive achievement of the foster carer and their household so that it presents a balanced overview of their fostering career.

2.6 Cover Arrangements if Supervising Social Worker is Absent

If a supervising social worker is going to be absent from work for a prolonged period (for example due to illness) it is the responsibility of the Team Manager to contact the foster carer and discuss what measures will be put in place to support them doing their social worker's

absence. As a minimum formal supervision should be completed and the foster carers should be given a named worker to contact.

3. Child's Social Worker

Although the foster carer's main support will be their supervising social worker the child's social worker also has a part to play in supporting the placement.

Each child placed will have an allocated social worker who will visit the child on a regular basis in line with the Care Planning Regulations 2010. Along with the supervising social worker they have a responsibility to provide information to the foster carer on the child and update this if new information becomes available.

When visiting the child, they will want to speak to the child alone if the child is of an age and understanding for this to happen. The social worker should also speak to the foster carer on a regular basis and provide them with a contact number.

4. Training

Foster carers are expected to complete their Training, Development and Support (TDS) portfolio within the required timescale i.e. 12 months post approval for mainstream carers and 18 months post approval for friends and family and friends' carers. For family and friends' carers approved under Regulation 24 the 18 months approval timescale commences once they have been fully approved.

Foster carers should be able to provide evidence for their TDS portfolio through their day to day role as foster carers. Supervising social worker should support carers to identify tasks they have undertaken which meets the criteria for the standards. WF can provide additional support through a foster carer mentor or workshops if this is required.

WF has a wide ranging and extensive training programme for foster carers. It is based on an annual needs analysis that foster carers are asked to contribute to. The programme includes both mandatory core courses which all foster carers must complete and developmental courses which support carers to further develop their skills and knowledge in caring for looked after children. The programme for the year is sent to foster carers and contains details of the courses and how foster carers can book a place.

The supervising social worker will discuss with a foster carer their training needs and develop a Fostering Household Development Plan. The completion of the mandatory core courses is linked to WF Payment for Skills Policy, foster carers need to be aware of this. Fostering Household Development plans need to consider completion of the core courses in timescales to allow foster carers to progress through the Payment for Skills levels.

There is also an expectation that foster carers will continue to develop their skills and knowledge and maintaining a Payment for Skills level is dependent on them evidencing that they are committed to doing this.

Further details of the training requirement for foster carers and the criteria for gaining and maintaining skills levels can be found in the **Training and Payment for Skills Policy**.

The supervising social worker should be discussing and reviewing the foster carers training needs with them:

- On approval including discussing any training needs identified during the assessment process.
- In formal supervision.
- In preparation for the foster carer's annual review.
- Where it has been identified that the foster carer requires training to meet the needs of a specific child.

WF will work with partner agencies to provide training, for example, when children have health needs which require the foster carer to have specific knowledge or skills.

It will also commission training outside its training programme when it has been identified that this is required for individual carers or a group of carers.

5. Sons and Daughters and Other Household Members.

WF recognises the important contribution that sons and daughters and other household members make to the fostering role. They will be seen, as part of the assessment of the foster carers and their views sought.

When considering placing a child in the foster home consideration will be given to the impact that they may have on other household members

During the foster carer's supervision, the supervising social worker will discuss the well-being of all members of the household and if there are any concerns how these can be addressed and what support needs to be put in place. This may include the supervising social worker doing some direct work with a household member.

Supervising social workers will meet with members of the household as part of the foster carer's review and may seek their views at other times as appropriate.

WF will celebrate the contribution of sons and daughters including organising events during the annual national sons and daughters' month and ensure that they get the recognition they deserve.

6. Respite and Holidays

WF recognises the impact that caring for a child with complex needs can have on foster carers and their families. To maintain the child's placement, foster carers may need breaks from caring for a particular child or breaks between children being placed.

The need for these should be discussed by the foster carer with their supervising social and the likely impact on any child in placement should be considered.

Foster carers can take up to 28 days holiday (this includes breaks between children being placed). For those children with more complex needs it may be agreed that there should be regular breaks for them and the carers. For information on what payments foster carers will receive in each situation please refer to WF's **Financial Support to Foster Carers Policy**.

7. Integrated Services for Looked After Children (ISL)

ISL is a multi-agency team of social care and health practitioners that sits within Worcestershire County Council (WCC) and support foster carers and looked after children.

7.1 Health and Well Being Team

The team works together with others involved with the child, to support carers to provide stable placements. This can include direct work with children and carers and liaison with Child Adolescent and Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

Every Looked After Child has an initial health assessment undertaken by a paediatrician. Following the initial health assessment children under 5 have a six-monthly review health assessment undertaken by the child's health visitor. School age children (over 5) have an annual review health assessment undertaken by a Specialist Nurse for Looked After Children based in the ISL service.

7.2 Green Fingers

The Green Fingers 'Healthy Care In Action' project provides children with the opportunity to access group activities with other Looked After Children to improve their health, well-being and social skills.

- Green Fingers sessions run on a fortnightly basis and are open to young people aged 3-16. The sessions provide a safe and nurturing environment for the young people to discover things about themselves and the world around them, learn new skills and express themselves.
- Arts sessions run fortnightly on Thursday evenings and allow young people the opportunity to be creative in a safe and supportive environment.
- Music sessions run fortnightly with the aim of helping young people improve their music skills.

- Summer Activities Programme.

Information on Green Fingers is included in the foster carer set up details and events are advertised in the Foster Carer's Quarterly newsletter.

8. Consolidation meetings

WCC holds Consolidation Meetings where there is a risk that a child's placement may break down. WF will ask for a consolidation meeting when it recognises that a child's placement is fragile and additional support may be needed.

These meetings are chaired by senior managers from WCC and allows the relevant people to discuss the challenging areas and decide on strategies of how these could be managed which may include additional support to the foster carer.

9. Out of Hours Support

An out of hours support service is provided to foster carers by WCC's Emergency Duty Team (EDT). EDT can be contacted by Foster Carers on 01905 768020 Weekdays: 17.00-09.00 Weekend: 16.30 Friday-09.00 Monday.

Calls are taken by experienced social workers who can discuss with foster carers what action if any is needed.

10. Foster Talk

All Approved WCC Foster carers have membership of Foster Talk.

Telephone 0344 800 3880.

Membership provides foster carers with unlimited access to a range of services, information, discounts to family activities and events. It also provides the whole of the fostering households with legal protection insurance in the event of an allegation.

Services included and set out at the following link,

<https://www.fostertalk.org/virtual-pack/>

- 24 Hour Legal Advice Line
- Arrest & Interview Assistance
- Tax/Accountancy/Benefits Support Line
- General Fostering Advice Helpline
- 24 Hour Counselling Support Line

- 24 Hour Medical/First Aid Advice
- Education Support Helpline
- Personal Finance Advice – Mortgages, Pensions, Savings etc
- Quarterly FosterTalk Magazine
- Monthly “SmallTalk” e-newsletter
- Discounts on lifestyle products and services

WF will give Foster Talk details of a foster carer on approval and will send them their membership pack.

Advice and Mediation Worker

WF also has a contact with Foster Talk to provide an independent Advice and Mediation worker (telephone 0344 800 3880). They can provide independent advice to foster carers on all aspects of the fostering role and will help, support and mediate on their behalf if the foster carer find themselves in dispute with WF, subject of an allegation or WF is recommending Fostering Panel and Agency Decision Maker to consider a termination of foster carer’s approval.

11. Other Support

11.1 Nursery Fees\Additional Activities

In exceptional circumstances WF will help fund a nursery place or additional activities for a child. If foster carers need this, they should discuss it with their supervising social worker who will then take the request to the Team Manager and if necessary, the Registered Manager.

WF would not normally place a child with mainstream carers who require the child to attend nursery on a regular basis. Carers will be expected to be accessing any free provision that the child is entitled to.

Although a holiday allowance is paid foster carers are expected to budget for other holiday/ activities (including school) from their weekly allowance. Any request for additional funding for activities must clearly set out why this is needed and how it will benefit the child.

11.2 Practical Support

Practical support to foster carers such as funding for ironing and cleaning when the needs of the child are such that the foster carer requires this support will be considered by the fostering service. Funding will be agreed for a time limited period by the Team Manager.

11.3 Quarterly Newsletter

WF publishes a quarterly newsletter to foster carers “Togetherness” which contains information for carers on foster carer events, upcoming training and support groups and developments within the service.

11.4 Leisure

On request ISL's Community and Leisure worker will provide foster carers with details of activities and clubs for children in their area.