



## **Placements with Foster Carers**

### **Initial Referral Process**

The Agency will only accept referrals for placements from Local Authorities.

Where a referral is made, the referring Local Authority should be requested to provide the following information:

- The purpose of the placement;
- The Care Plan, including any issues around contact;
- Time scales;
- Any risk assessments that have been prepared in respect of the child;
- A description of the child's wishes and feelings, and those of relevant others.

In the case of an emergency placement where it is not possible for the referring Local Authority to provide the above information at the time of the referral, they should be asked to provide as much information as is available and, if the placement goes ahead, they should be asked to provide full information within 5 working days of the placement being made, or at the point of the Placement Planning Meeting, whichever is soonest.

Any information that is not provided within the stated timescales should be re-requested, and if still not received, the request will be escalated within AFA. The reason for this response is to ensure all paperwork has been received, and that the child's needs are being met.

It is important for the Agency and in particular for the carer, to have all available information about the child and their family as this could hinder the carer in providing a safe environment for the child and others in the household.

### **Matching**

AFA is fully committed to offering carefully matched and planned placements for children. Qualified and experienced Placement Managers are mindful of the matching process throughout all stages of their work, which includes recruitment, assessment, approval, placement and placement management.

AFA Duty staff, in consultation with Placement Managers and in discussion with Local Authority Social Work staff (who know both the child and the Care Plan), will co-ordinate the matching process. These processes are recorded using the Agency's matching proforma document.

Regulation 17.3 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 states that:

“The Fostering Service provider must ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child’s care plan provided to the Fostering Service provider under regulation 6(3)(d) of the Care Planning Regulations”

Standard 15 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 is concerned specifically with ‘Matching’:

“The responsible authority has information and support from the Fostering Service which it needs to facilitate an appropriate match between the carer and child, capable of meeting the child’s needs and consistent with the wishes and feelings of the child, so maximising the likelihood of a stable placement.”

### **Matching considerations**

To ensure that a child or children are carefully and appropriately matched with a Foster Carer, AFA will initially consider what carers are able to offer, and the child who is the most appropriate match. This is covered in the Vacancy Information Document and shared with the Duty Consultants at the point that carers are identified as having a vacancy.

At the point of matching, AFA will take into account the following factors:

- The child’s own Care Pla and recent assessments of the child and their family (contact, education, health etc.);
- All appropriate information to be gathered from, and shared with, all relevant parties including matching reports and risk assessments;
- Written agreements to be produced that contain specific reference to matching;
- The child’s assessed racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and language needs, matching them as far as is possible, with the Foster Carer. Where full matching is not possible, consideration as to what extra support may be available in order to arrange an appropriate placement;
- Foster Carer’s specific support needs to compensate for any gaps in matching, including any specific training to be allocated;
- The dynamics between all children in the household will be considered carefully, and where appropriate fully discussed with social workers and other appropriate/relevant people;
- Siblings, wherever possible, should be placed together. Full consideration should be given to this unless the Care Plan and referral information clearly state otherwise;
- Wherever possible introductions should be arranged before the point of placement, so that the child and Foster Carer have the opportunity to express a view about the proposed placement. Where this is not possible (e.g. in emergency placements) as much information as possible needs to be shared with all concerned before a decision is made; and
- Profiles should be provided to assist the child in learning about the identified match, particularly in emergency placements.

The above is not an exhaustive list and will not necessarily cover every situation. It is crucial that all professional staff involved work together closely and share all relevant information, so that the best match can be obtained in relation to each placement.

## Recording Matching Considerations and Decisions

Details of the matching process, including the names and views of those consulted must be recorded on the child's file using the CHARMS system. There are various stages that should be recorded within this, including the matching process, discussion of the referral with carers, sharing of documents with carers and discussions with Placement Managers allocated to the individual carers, or Senior Management in their absence. All information will be collated as part of the Matching Proforma. Please see duty process and recording policy for more information.

In addition, discussions that have been had with any potential carers should be recorded on their files under Charms, to indicate if they have fully considered the matching process, and to clarify what information they have been provided with.



## Placement Process

### Placement Planning

Once a decision has been made to make a placement, a pre-placement planning meeting should take place between the Foster Carers, the Placement Manager and the Placing Local Authority. If appropriate the child and his/her family/significant others should attend. This meeting must consider and agree the detailed placement arrangements for the child. Where it is not possible to hold a pre-placement planning meeting, for example where the placement has to be made in an emergency, a placement planning meeting must take place within 5 working days of the placement being made. In some circumstances, this meeting may need to be completed virtually to ensure compliance with the time scale. However, face to face meetings should take place where possible.

Details of the requirements of the Placement Plan are set out in Schedule 2 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010; relevant statutory guidance is in Chapter 2 of the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review.

The main purpose of the Placement Planning meeting is to share all the available information about the child with the Foster Carers and agree the contents of the Placement Agreement/Placement Plan, which will include confirmation of the following arrangements:

- Registration of the child with local health professionals (GP, Dentist & Optician) and arrangements for the child's health care (including the administration of medication). Any other health professionals involved will be informed of the placement by the Placing Authority and a decision made by the relevant Health Trust with regard to future plans for their continued involvement or move to a more local provision;
- Signed medical consent from the Placing Authority and parents if required;
- Plans for the child's schooling and educational needs, identifying the role of the Foster Carer in implementing the child's Personal Education Plan, Statement of Special Educational Needs (where applicable) and any additional educational support, etc. This should include the education arrangements for children under 5 and the training or educational requirements of those over 16;
- Regularity of visits from the Placing Authority's Social Worker. These should take place within one week of the placement being made and thereafter at least every six weeks (unless the placement is to last until the child is 18 in which case after the first year visits can be at least every three months);
- If appropriate, details of contact arrangements with family members/significant others (including whether the Foster Carer has delegated authority to make arrangements for the child's social visits to friends and relatives including overnight stays);
- Any specific cultural, religious or dietary needs of the child;
- Any behaviour management issues;
- Where the proposed placement relates to a young person whose plan includes leaving care, their preparation for independence should be recorded within their Passport to Independence. Arrangements should be in place for their preparation for independence including completion of a Pathway Plan;
- The steps that the Fostering Agency will take if reviews and visits do not take place within the designated timescales, for example contacting the child's Independent Reviewing Officer.

The Planning Meeting will also agree whether there will be a period of introduction for the child prior to the placement.

As well as providing the Placement Agreement/Placement Plan, the child's Social Worker should also be asked to provide as much information about the child as possible, for example:

- A chronology of significant events in the child's life;
- A copy of the Care Plan;
- A copy of the child's Health Care Plan (if available)
- Any other relevant information about the child. For example, recent Looked After Review reports, Pathway Plan, Personal Education Plan, Education, Health and Care Plan, reports from specialists or therapists.

An important aspect of the Placement Planning meeting is consideration of Delegation of Authority. Please see the separate policy for further information.

### **Placement preparation**

It is AFA's aim to make moving a positive experience for each child/young person. Whilst appreciating it is an apprehensive and stressful time, the Agency will endeavour to minimise the effects for each child and help them to settle into their new home as effortlessly as possible.

Once the placement has been identified, the Placement Manager should ensure that the child has a copy of the Children's Guide which gives details of the Complaints Procedure. A copy of the complaints procedure should also be provided to parents or those with parental responsibility.

Wherever possible, arrangements should be made for the child, parents or carers and the Social Worker to visit the foster home prior to the placement. If this is not possible, arrangements may be made for the carers to visit the child and parents or carers, or as a minimum, for information about the Foster Carers, including their profile, to be sent to the child.

If none of these arrangements can be made, for example where the child is being placed in an emergency or at short notice, extra care must be taken in case the child is frightened or confused. The information described above should be provided to the child as soon as possible after the placement.

### **Introductions**

Wherever possible there should be a period of introductions between the child and the Foster Carers. This should involve the child receiving information about the foster home, including a profile of the Foster Carers and members of their household. A meeting between the child and the carers, preferably at the foster home, is an opportunity for an initial introduction during which the child can become familiar with the house and household. This would ideally include an overnight stay.

Throughout the introduction process carers will discuss issues with the child regarding routines within the placement; information about bedtimes, meals, visitors, pocket money, school, privacy and the overall expectations regarding behaviour in the placement. Equally, the child is encouraged to discuss their views and what expectations they have of the Foster Carers, in an effort to resolve any uncertainties/concerns at the outset and to reinforce transparency and honesty to the child.

Children coming into placements will receive a Welcome Box which will include, among other things, information about advocacy, bullying etc.

### **Looked After Reviews and the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer**

Looked After Reviews, sometimes called 'Statutory Reviews', are convened and conducted by the Placing Authority. The Fostering Agency will play their part in these reviews through the Foster Carers and/or the Placement Manager, by providing information and, if appropriate to do so under the Placing Authority's procedures, attending the meetings. LAC reviews are formal meetings, chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The purpose of the Looked After Review is to:

- Ensure that appropriate plans are in place to safeguard and promote the overall welfare of the Looked after Child in the most effective way, and achieve permanence for him or her within a timescale that meets his or her needs;
- To monitor the progress of the plans and ensure they are being progressed effectively;
- To make decisions, as necessary, for amendments to those plans to reflect any change in information and/or circumstances.

The review should also take account of the child's Placement Agreement/Placement Plan and any other plans or strategies (e.g. behaviour management strategy), ensuring they are up to date or that arrangements are in place to update them.

Looked After Reviews should be convened at the following intervals:

- The Initial Looked After Review should be conducted within 20 working days of the child becoming looked after;
- The second Looked After Review should be conducted within three months of the Initial Looked After Review;
- Subsequent Looked After Review should be conducted no more than six months after any previous review.

A Looked After Review should also be convened:

- As soon as practicable where a child is moved from one placement to another on an unplanned basis or a significant change in the circumstances of a child suggests his/her placement is no longer appropriate.
- At the request of the Independent Reviewing Officer;
- If a significant change to the child's Care Plan is proposed;
- Where, as a result of a social work visit, the assessment is that the child's welfare is not being adequately safeguarded and promoted;
- Where the Placing Authority is proposing to no longer provide accommodation for the child.

If Looked After Reviews are not arranged or conducted as set out above, the Placement Manager will initially raise concerns with the child's Social Worker. If matters are not resolved, s/he will contact the child's IRO independent Reviewing Officer.

### **Preparation for the Review**

When arrangements are made to conduct a Looked After Review, the Placement Manager should collaborate with the child's carer(s) and compile a progress report for the child's social worker in time to circulate the report before the review date. (Please see separate guidance on how to complete these reports). The report will be forwarded to those attending prior to the date of the meeting. The Foster Carer should also collate relevant information, including dates of health and other appointments, as well as any key information relating to the child or young person within the last 6 months.

Children should be encouraged and supported to complete a review questionnaire or prepare their own report/letter for the review.

If it appears to be necessary or the child requests it, an appointed advocate such as an Independent Visitor should be asked to accompany the child to the Review meeting.

At the Looked After Review meeting, the child's risk assessment should be discussed and updated as appropriate, this will allow for contributions from other professionals, to ensure the updated risk assessment is completed with all the information available. For children 10 and over, a Child Sexual Exploitation toolkit will also be completed alongside a risk assessment. Any amendment to a risk assessment or toolkit will be documented on the Agency's forms and placed on the child's electronic record (CHARMS), with copies sent to the Local Authority Social Worker and anyone, for whom it has been agreed at the review, should have access to the information. Any changes in the perceived risk can then be considered with the carer in order to update the safer caring policy.

## **Ending Placements and Placement Moves Within the Agency**

Placements will not be ended by the Agency for reasons other than:

- The end of the placement is within the child's Care Plan, Placement Plan or Pathway Plan;
- To protect the child;
- To protect other members of the household;
- In an emergency where other more suitable arrangements to maintain the placement cannot be made.

If the Placing Authority is proposing to end the placement for reasons other than those stated above, the Agency will inform the child's Independent Reviewing Officer.

Whenever a placement move is being considered the wishes and feelings of the child must be obtained and considered. Where their wishes and feelings are not being observed, the reasons for this must be explained. Children should not move placements until they have had a chance to express their views and given an explanation of the reason/s for the move that they can understand.

If a move to another carer within the Agency is being considered, this will be treated as a move to a new placement.

If a young person is approaching 18 and there is a view that the placement should continue, this can be explored further and, if it is in the child's interests, it may be possible for the placement to continue post 18 under Staying Put arrangements.

Foster Carers will be encouraged wherever possible to maintain contact with placed children and young people who have moved on.

## **Disruption meetings or end of placement processes**

When a placement ends prematurely, a disruption meeting will normally be convened to review the child's case history. This is a decision to be made by the placing Local Authority. Ideally a disruption meeting should take place as soon as practicable and within 28 days of the placement ending, subject to liaison with the Local Authority. The notes of the meeting should be kept on the child's record.

The purpose of a disruption meeting is to examine various elements of the placement in order to understand the sequence of events leading to the disruption and learn lessons from what has occurred. This will:

- Help the child by understanding his or her needs better;
- Improve practice by understanding what went wrong;

- Recognise all the positive work and good experiences for the child, amongst all the difficulties;
- Support everyone involved and help them carry on and recover;
- Demonstrate that disruption is never the fault of one or two people or the result of a single factor; it is invariably the outcome of a whole series of connected factors.

Regardless of whether a disruption meeting takes place, AFA will undertake its own internal process by completing a Placement Ending Report to review the placement ending with the same objectives as a disruption meeting. This is a crucial stage to look at the matching process – i.e. the assessment of the child’s needs and presentation at the time of seeking a placement to see how accurately these were understood, the assessment of what the Foster Carers could offer and the support they were given in understanding and providing for the child’s needs. The meeting will also look at the child’s introduction to the placement and any other relevant issues relating to the placement.

Where appropriate, the Placement Ending Report will be shared with the placing Local Authority as is relevant to the consideration of matching for other children and young people.

### **Connected Policies or Guidance**

<b>Name of Policy / Guidance</b>	<b>Relevant for</b>
Delegated Authority Policy	Foster Carers and Placement Managers
Expectations of Foster Carers Behaviour	Foster Carers, Placement Managers and Senior staff
Foster Carers Handbook	Foster Carers and Placement Managers
Education Policy	Foster Carers and Placement Managers
Supervision, Support and Training Policy	Foster Carers and Placement Managers
Preparing for Independence and Staying Put Policy	Foster Carers and Placement Managers
Placement Manager guidance	Placement Manager and Senior staff

**Updated May 2020**