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# Household Review of Approval Guidance

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Essex County Council

# **Household Review of Approval Guidance**

## **About this document**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Household Review of Approval Guidance</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Guidance for Supervising Social Workers and Foster Carers regarding the annual review of approval</b>
<b>Updated by</b>	<b>Rosemarie Cronin, CWDC Co-ordinator/Lucy Foster, Senior Household Reviewing Officer</b>
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## Version Control

Date Issued:	Version	Summary of Changes	Created by
March 2016	5	Added in information from The Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Volume 4: Fostering Services (July 2013) which impacts particularly on sign off of initial and subsequent household reviews	Rosemarie Cronin
March 2016	5	Updated timescales for first reviews to be undertaken within 8 months of approval to meet legal timescales for sign off	Rosemarie Cronin
March 2016	5	For postponement of reviews changed the initial discussion from SSW and service manager to SSW and team manager, with service manager needing to make final decision	Rosemarie Cronin
March 2016	5	Updated timescales grid for the household review process	Rosemarie Cronin
March 2016	5	Updated information to include electronic systems	Rosemarie Cronin
March 2016	5	Statement about minimal paperwork required for a review to take place	Rosemarie Cronin
March 2016	5	Added information regarding the HHRO's competing audit checks 6 months after the review to monitor completion of recommendations and actions	Rosemarie Cronin

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Section</b>	<b>Page(s)</b>
Introduction and Legal Framework	5
Process for Household Reviews	6
Reports/feedback that should be available for the review	8
Revision of Approval Process	9
Foster Care Reviews following complaints and allegations	10
The Quality Assurance role of the Household Reviewing Officer	10
Dispute Resolution for issues arising during the Annual Household Review	10

# **Household Review of Approval Guidance**

## **Introduction and Legal Framework**

Under the 2011 Fostering Regulations all foster carers are required to have a household review of approval at intervals of a minimum of every 12 months but they can be more frequent. In Essex the review meeting takes place in the carer's home and at a minimum this should involve all adult foster carers in the household, the supervising social worker and a reviewing officer for the fostering service. The Fostering Service has a duty to ensure that the welfare of children placed within the fostering household is safeguarded in Essex. The Household Reviewing Officers also have a quality assurance function within their role.

A number of areas should be considered at this time including the foster carer's professional development, support needs, and the views of all household members. The views of any children in care, the views of their social workers and IRO, as well views from education, health professionals and any other relevant professional should also be considered.

Regulation 28 of the Fostering Regulations 2011 states that:

- (1) The fostering service provider must review the approval of each foster parent in accordance with this regulation.
- (2) A review must take place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider considers it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year.
- (3) When undertaking a review, the fostering service provider must—
  - (a) make such enquiries and obtain such information as they consider necessary in order to review whether the foster parent continues to be suitable to be a foster parent and the foster parent's household continues to be suitable, and
  - (b) seek and take into account the views of—
    - (i) the foster parent,
    - (ii) any child placed with the foster parent (subject to the child's age and understanding), and
    - (iii) any placing authority which has, within the preceding year, placed a child with the foster parent.
- (4) At the conclusion of the review, the fostering service provider must prepare a written report, setting out whether—
  - (a) the foster parent continues to be suitable to be a foster parent and the foster parent's household continues to be suitable, and
  - (b) the terms of the foster parent's approval continue to be appropriate.
- (5) The fostering service provider must on the occasion of the first review under this regulation, and may on any subsequent review, refer their report to the fostering panel for consideration.

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering (2011), Standard 13 states that:

- 13.8) Reviews of foster carers' approval are sufficiently thorough to allow the fostering service to properly satisfy itself about their carers' ongoing suitability to foster.

13.9) Areas of concern, or need for additional support, that are identified between reviews are addressed. Such matters identified between reviews are addressed at the time they are identified, where appropriate, rather than waiting for a review.

In the Fostering Guidance 5.60 – 5.62, it states that:

Approval of all foster carers must be reviewed within a year of approval, and thereafter whenever felt necessary, but at least annually. The review must consider whether the foster carer and their household continue to be suitable. The fostering service must make whatever enquiries it considers necessary to inform this judgement which may include checks in relation to any new members of the household. Specifically, it must take into account the views of the foster carer, any child placed and the responsible authority for any child who has been in placement during the previous year. In practice, the latter will mean obtaining the views of the social worker for any child in placement since the last review (Regulation 28).

A written report of the review must be prepared, and in the case of the first review this must be presented to the fostering panel for a recommendation. If it is decided, taking account of any recommendation from the fostering panel if applicable, that the foster carer and their household continue to be suitable, then the foster carer must be notified in writing.

If the fostering service is of the view that the foster carer and their household are no longer suitable, or that the terms of approval should be amended, he must issue a determination and follow the procedures referred to in the section on the Independent Review Mechanism, above, before making a decision.

In addition to the above, **the Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Volume 4: Fostering Services (July 2013)**, made some changes and added some clarification regarding annual review of approvals

The amendments state the need for a social worker to assess a foster carers' capacity to care for particular categories of children at the approval stage, and re-assessment of the appropriateness of a foster carers terms of approval as part of the foster carer review process.

In addition this amendment makes clear that "Approval of all foster carers must be reviewed, and **a decision about suitability made, within a year of approval**, and thereafter whenever it is felt necessary, but at intervals of no more than twelve months.

The decision maker is also responsible for deciding whether a person and their household remain suitable to foster, and whether the terms of approval remain suitable, following each review of the foster carer's approval.

### **Process for Household Reviews**

In order to meet the legal timescales first reviews should take place within 8 months of approval. Subsequent reviews should be undertaken within 11 months of the previous review. In some circumstances an early review will need to be arranged and this includes:

- After the conclusion of a Section 47 investigation
- A significant change of circumstances within the fostering household
- If standards of care issues have arisen.

An early review can be requested from the foster carer, the supervising social worker or the household reviewing officer. If foster carers are offline or in other exceptional circumstances a household review can be postponed. In such circumstances this should be discussed between the household reviewing officer, the supervising social worker and the quadrant fostering team manager. It must be finally agreed by the quadrant service manager and recorded on the foster carers file by the SSW and the reasons given for the postponement.

As there are a number of people who need to be consulted as part of the review process it is important that the reviews are planned to allow for as much feedback as possible and also to meet legal timescales

<b>TIMESCALE</b>	<b>ACTIVITY</b>
8 weeks before review	Blank Checklist and Supervising Social Worker (SSW) report emailed to SSW from Business Support Administrator (BSA) for completion. To be returned, ideally, within one week of receipt.
6 weeks before review	SSW to have returned completed Checklist to HHR Shared Mailbox
6 weeks before review	BSA to send out feedback requests (to foster carers, members of household, independent reviewing officers (IRO's) health and education professionals, child's social worker (CCSW) etc.
5 weeks before the review	If not returned, BSA to send chase email for the completed <b>Checklist</b> to be returned <b>as soon as possible</b> , team managers to be copied in at this stage.
10 working days before the review	SSW report and feedback to inform the review to be returned to BSA. BSA's to chase any outstanding reports from SSW, IRO and CCSW.
1 week before review	BSA to send out to foster carer(s) the household review pack which will include all feedback. The pack will also be uploaded onto the carers electronic file for the HHRO and SSW.
1 week before the review	Household Reviewing Officers (HHRO's) to further request any outstanding reports from SSW, IRO and CCSW.
Up to 48 hours before the review	BSA will email any additional feedback received (password protected) to HHRO and SSW.
Within 15 working days	HHRO report should be completed on carers electronic file

of the review	and assigned to the SSW.
Within 1 month after Review	The SSW to share the review with the foster carer. This ideally should be done face to face but if the report is sent it should be sent by secure email/post .The SSW should record on the carer's file case note that the carer has seen and agreed with the review report and send the HHRO report back to the HHRO for their information. Any disagreements regarding information should also be recorded.
Feedback review post the review	BSA should upload any feedback received post the household review and inform the relevant SSW and HHRO.
Within 6 weeks after the report completed by the HHRO	SSW, foster carer and team manager should all have seen the report and any disagreements recorded.  First household reviews should be booked by the SSW into fostering panel and the decision by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) needs to be returned <b>within 12 months of approval date</b> . The BSA's to panel administrate the uploading of the decision onto the carer's electronic file.  For all <b>other reviews</b> the overall documentation to be read by an ADM and the decision letter is sent from the ADM to the foster carer regarding the outcome of the review. The SSW is responsible for ensuring that the letter is uploaded onto the carers electronic file.

### Reports/Feedback that should be available for the review

Some reports are completed via the electronic system e.g. IRO, SSW and CCSW reports. Other reports/feedback should be completed electronically via email if possible, but care must be taken to ensure that any confidential information is password protected. Upon receipt any information received should be uploaded onto the carer's electronic file.

No review should take place without the report from the SSW. It is also highly desirable that the report from the foster carer is also available but in exceptional circumstances a review may proceed without it.

Reports/forms that should be used for the household review process if applicable are:

- Supervising Social Worker's Report
- Foster carer(s) Report
- Independent Reviewing Officers Report

- Social Workers Report
- Parents Feedback
- Adult Household Members Feedback
- Education Professionals Report
- Health Professionals Report
- Other Professionals Report
- Foster Carer's children over 10 years Feedback
- Foster Carer's children under 10 years Feedback

In addition to this there should be end of placement feedback forms from foster carers and social workers of any children/young people who have left the placement during the review period

The household reviewing officer will also look on the electronic file of any children who are in placement at the time of the review to ascertain any views they have regarding the placement. These should have been gained through the child's statutory review process.

All available paperwork should be shared with the foster carer(s) prior to the review.

### **The Household Review**

The foster carers and the household reviewing officer should have received all the feedback reports available prior to the review.

If there are two carers in the household both should be present for the review if possible. If it is not possible for the second carer to be present they should have had an opportunity to read all the paperwork and give any feedback they may have regarding it. If the second carer is not available for one review then all attempts must be made to ensure that the next review is arranged at a time when the second carer can also be present.

The SSW should also be present at the review and if for any reason this is not possible the team manager or an appropriate representative should attend.

During the review the household reviewing officer will discuss the carer's experience of fostering during the review period and any feedback received. This will include the children who have been or who are in placement and this will also cover matters such as, has the carer received the delegated authority paperwork and other relevant paperwork in connection with the children in placement.

### **Revision of Approval Process**

If following a review, a change to the foster carers terms of approval is proposed, a Revision of Approval Summary Report and Agreement is in place, which sets out in writing any additional support needs and how these will be met. If the foster carer is in agreement with the change of approval, then the change can be immediate upon the decision of the Agency Decision Maker and this avoids the need to wait for 28 days to make the change. This has enabled foster carers to change their approval range and the Service to ensure the most appropriate terms of approval are in place in good timeframes.

## **Foster Carer Reviews following complaints or allegations**

Household reviews will be called early where there has been a section 47 (Children Act 1989) enquiry or serious standards of care relating to the care of the children placed. These reviews should take place within 28 days of the conclusion of the Section 47 process and there are definable outcomes. In these circumstances the review will need to be presented to the Essex Fostering Panel early.

An early review may also be called early following a standards of care investigation. This will be a decision that will be made in consultation with the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) and the fostering service (see safeguarding policy).

## **The Quality Assurance Role of the Household Reviewing Officer**

In addition to the planned reviews Household Reviewing Officers will be asked to chair reviews that are requested early due to Category A incident or complaints. It is expected that the HHRO will also respond to requests for early HHR's within the allegation management procedure timescales, within 28 days of the conclusion of Section 47, Standards of Care or complaint about a foster carer.

In addition to Chairing Reviews the HHRO Team are also second auditors in the monthly file audits that are undertaken by team managers.

Household reviewing officers also undertake 6 monthly audits on their household reviews to monitor that recommendations have been followed through by the supervising social worker and the foster carer. The HHRO will raise outstanding issues with the SSW and copy the team manager in.

## **Dispute Resolution for Issues arising during an Annual Household Review**

### **General principles**

It is anticipated that in the vast majority of cases, the Fostering Service and the Household Reviewing Officer (HHRO), in negotiation with the operational managers responsible for the child or the foster carers, will be able to resolve issues of concern in relation to the service received by a child in care or a foster carer. Informal challenge, through a face-to-face discussion between professionals, focusing on the needs of the child, is normally sufficient to resolve the issue.

The role of the Household Reviewing Officer is key, where issues have been raised at the foster carer's annual household review and remain unresolved.

When a Household Reviewing Officer has concerns they will usually discuss these, in the first instance, with the Team Manager: the HHRO will record this on the child's record as a case note. This will be considered as an informal 'issue for resolution'. Should this discussion not be possible or not resolve the matter, a Formal Dispute will be raised by the HHRO by contacting the operational manager, asking for a response and a proposed action plan.

If this is not successful, the formal dispute will be escalated up through the management structure in order to reach resolution. The operational team manager is responsible for ensuring

any dispute, all efforts to reach resolution, and the satisfactory conclusion is recorded on the child's record.

### **Concerns that might trigger a dispute**

HHRO disputes will be triggered when a shortfall in corporate parenting is identified to be negatively impacting on the outcomes for the child in care. This may include a breach of statutory regulation or guidance, or a breach of the Essex Pledge to its children in care, or to foster carers.

The types of impact are likely to be:

- Statutory requirements not being met in relation to foster carers and the fostering service generally
- Poor outcomes for children due to poor practice
- A delay in achieving reunification or permanency, and overall application of the care plan
- The child's human rights, and right to a legally compliant service, being impeded

When an HHRO raises a dispute it will be sent to the Team Manager, Service Manager or Director of Local Delivery according to the seriousness of the matter, and usually followed up by a telephone call or meeting initiated by the HHRO.

The reason for the dispute will usually be categorised as one of the following:

- Failure to implement previous household review decisions
- Statutory visits to a child not being undertaken
- Failure to progress a care plan, permanency or reunification planning
- Any area of poor professional social work practice

### **Resolution of Formal Disputes**

Disputes should be resolved within 20 working days of being raised formally by the HHRO. Therefore the operational response to the dispute is usually required within 2-3 working days. However depending on the seriousness of the concern and/or the practicality of resolution, it is at the discretion of the HHRO to vary the timescale at each stage of the process.

Once the written response is received from the operational manager, the HHRO will decide whether the matter has been satisfactorily resolved. **Should an action plan be agreed, at any stage, the formal dispute will be considered to be resolved.** However, the HHRO will monitor that the action plan has been implemented and may reactivate the dispute if it has not.

If the matter is not resolved the dispute will be escalated to the next level of management within the operational structure, with a timescale suggested by the HHRO for resolving the dispute.

Disputes that have not been resolved are escalated through the operational line management structure until the Executive Director for People Operations is notified in writing by the HHRO, setting out the concerns and attempts made to resolve them.

All information will be collated, analysed and reported on by the Lead Household Reviewing Officer.