



TIME OUT
fostering

valuing individual needs

SECTION THREE

RECRUITMENT, ASSESSMENT AND APPROVAL OF FOSTER CARERS

2007

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The Approval Process

Following interest from a potential carer(s) Time Out Fostering will request some basic information. An introductory letter and an information pack about Time Out Fostering will be forwarded to the prospective carer together with a declaration of interest form. This will be done within two weeks. Contained in the information pack is:

- Basic information about Foster care and Support Care
- Basic information about Time Out Fostering
- Description of Foster Carer and Support Carer roles
- Specification of Foster Carer and Support Carer skills and abilities
- Equal Opportunity document
- Complaints Procedure
- Assessment and approval process
- Declaration of Interest

Once interest has been confirmed, a visit will be arranged to visit the home of the potential carer(s) within three weeks if possible with the applicant. The Social Worker will assess whether the carer(s) meet the necessary criteria. Once mutual suitability and understanding of shared values has been established, the Social Worker can forward an application form to the prospective carer(s) for completion. This form can be completed with assistance from the assessing social worker or by the prospective carer(s). The application form asks the potential carer(s) for detailed information about themselves and their household.

Once the application form has been received by Time Out Fostering the service manager will arrange a visit to the potential carer(s) to begin the process of obtaining the necessary references and checks (detailed below). Potential carers will have to sign a reference form to give consent to proceed. Next a Time Out Fostering service manager will allocate a qualified Social Worker to assess the prospective foster carer. The assessment will be carried out in compliance with the National Standards for Foster Care, and the BAAF form F. This is a searching process, the aim of which is to protect children.

The social worker will help to identify experiences and skills, which meet the competencies, needed to complete the Form 'F' assessment.

Regulation 27 schedule 3 requires that all Fostering Agencies gather the following information;

- 1) Full name, address and date of birth
- 2) Health details, personality, marital status, and details of current or previous marriage or similar relationships.
- 3) Details of other adult household members
- 4) Particulars about the accommodation
- 5) Religious persuasion, and capacity to care for a child from another religious persuasion.
- 6) Particulars of the children who live as part of the family.
- 7) Racial origin, linguistic background and capacity to care for a child from a different racial origin and/or linguistic background.
- 8) Past and present employment or occupation, standard of living and leisure activities and interests.
- 9) Any previous experience of caring for children
- 10) Skills, competencies and potential for capacity to care effectively for a child placed.
- 11) The outcome of any request or application made by him or any other member of his household to foster or adopt children, or for registration for child minding or day care, including particulars of any previous approval or refusal relating to him/her or any other member of his household.
- 12) The names and addresses of at least two persons who will provide personal references for the prospective foster carer.
- 13) The name and address of a family member who will provide references for the prospective carer(s).
- 14) In relation to the prospective foster carer;
 - Criminal Records Bureau enhanced check including the checking of the POCA (protection of children act) list to identify any recurring concerns that did not lead

to conviction and will inform POCA of any concerns regarding a member of staff that, though not leading to a conviction, that continue to cause serious concern

Statutory Checks

The Social Worker will assist the potential carer(s) to fill in the check forms, these will include:

- The Criminal Records bureau
- Department of Health
- POCA
- Social Services
- Medical – GP to declare the carer fit to care
- Other Relevant Agencies such as armed forces, NSPCC projects, other fostering agencies, registration units
- Work references
- References (carried out as an interview and documented later) these will be 2 personal referees (not friends or family, employers, health visitors & school) and one family.

Time Out Fostering will also need proof of identity.

Assessment

The allocated Social Worker will arrange times and dates for the assessment visits to take place. This will involve between 6-8 visits by the Social Worker to the prospective carer's home. The purpose of these visits is to meet and collate information about the household members, and to assess the prospective carer's knowledge and competence with regard to fostering. This information will then be used to complete the form 'F' assessment by the Social Worker. The Social Worker will assess whether the carer(s) meets the necessary criteria.

The Social Worker will then carry out an assessment of the prospective carer's pre and post approval training needs. Pre approval training "The Skills to Foster" will cover responsibilities pertaining to being a carer(s).

The Social Worker will assist the prospective carer to accumulate written evidence of their abilities with examples to demonstrate their appropriateness for being a carer(s).

If at any point in the assessment the prospective carer appears to be unable to meet the requirements, the Social Worker must inform their supervising manager. If it is decided that preparation, training and support cannot enable the prospective foster carer to meet the criteria, the prospective carer will be informed by the Social Worker within 48 hours. Potential carers must be given a clear explanation of the decision in writing.

The completed form 'F' will be given to the service manager for agreement and signature in good time for the panel. The prospective carer will have access to the form 'F' excluding references. The information will be gathered in the prospective carer's own home, during the Skills to Foster training, at other appropriate settings such as playgroups or in Time Out Fostering premises. Evidence will be gathered by a variety of techniques e.g.;

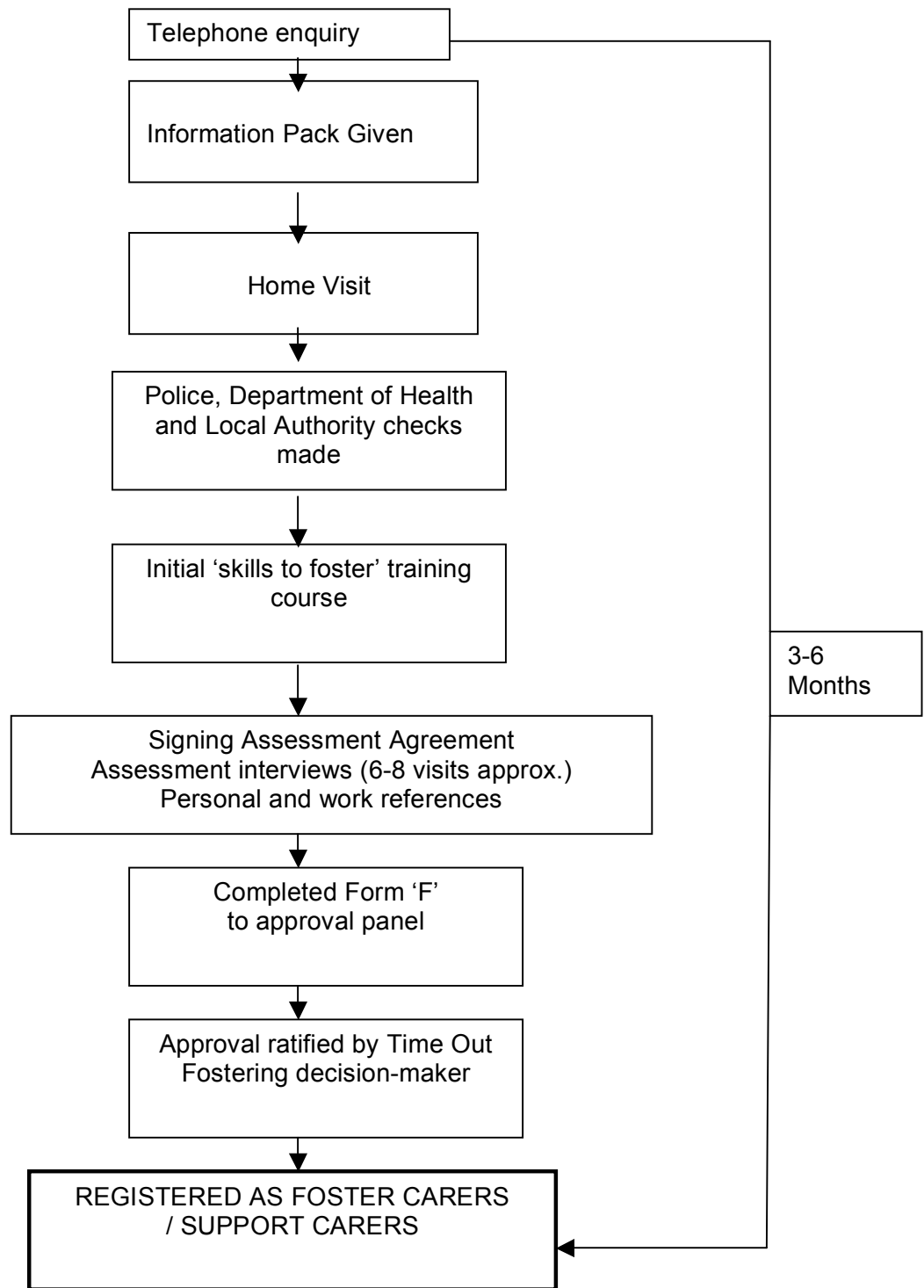
- Discussion about previous experience and skills
- Family history work such as ecomaps
- Statements from other appropriate adults who are aware of the applicants ability to care
- Case studies
- Role play
- During training

The Social Worker will invite the prospective carer to attend the panel meeting, inform the prospective foster carer about the panel, how it operates and what will be expected of them. The Social Worker will also attend the panel.

Following the panel meeting, the panel will present a recommendation, possibly with a conditional request for further work or information. The Social Worker will inform the prospective carer both verbally and in writing and arrange for any additional work to be done within an agreed timescale.

Summary of Approval Procedure

A summary of the process is as follows;



Appeals

If prospective carers are dissatisfied with the decision they can appeal. They must arrange to meet with the panel chair within 14 days of receiving the written decision.

The appeal of decision can go ahead only if there has been an error of fact or an issue of discrimination.

The appeal procedure should then be sent to the applicants.

Following a positive decision, a fostering agreement will be sent to the new carers. This will set out the procedures of joint working between Time Out Fostering and the carers.

This procedure takes between three and six months to complete. Once approval is agreed the process of matching a child or young person to the household will begin. A written agreement will be signed by carers and Time Out Fostering prior to the placement starting.

Reviews and Terminations of Approval

Written in accordance with Section 29 of The Foster Care Regulations 2002.

Time Out Fostering is committed to maintaining the high quality of care offered to young people and the high quality of support offered to foster carers. Reviews are an essential part of this continual process. Part of the foster care agreement includes agreement to comply with yearly reviews.

Reviews will take place not more than a year after approval, and will be initiated by the social worker responsible for supervising the family. Reviews can take place at more frequent intervals if requested by the Time Out Fostering Panel, the fostering family or any interested party.

Reviews should be carried out as soon as possible following any significant change in family circumstances, e.g. moving house, bereavement.

In the interests of quality assurance and objectivity, the review shall be carried out by a social worker who does not supervise the family.

The reviewing social worker will make such enquiries and obtain such information as is considered necessary on order to recommend whether the family continues to be suitable to act as a foster parent, and that the household continues to be suitable.

The social worker will seek and take into account the views of-

- (i) the foster carer (s)
- (ii) any child placed with the family (according to age and understanding)
- (iii) any responsible authority which has within the preceding year placed a child with the foster carer(s)

The aim of the review is to seek open and honest discussion around issues related to the families' fostering experiences, identifying successes, difficulties and training needs.

Checks will be updated on the following basis:

CRB	3 years
POCA	3 years
MEDICAL	3 years
HEALTH & SAFETY	1 years

At the conclusion of the review the social worker will prepare a written report, setting out whether, in their opinion-

- (i) the person continues to be suitable to act as a foster carer and the household continues to be suitable: and
- (ii) the terms of the approval continue to be appropriate

The report shall be referred to the Fostering Panel for consideration on the occasion of the first review, and on any subsequent review if appropriate.

The Decision Maker for Time Out Fostering will consider the recommendations of the Reviewing Social Worker and of the Panel.

If, it is decided that the family and household continue to be suitable, and that the terms of the approval continue to be appropriate, the Decision Maker will inform the family of the decision in writing.

If, taking into account any recommendations made by the Reviewing Social Worker and the Fostering Panel, the Decision Maker is no longer satisfied that the family and household continue to be suitable, or that the terms of the approval are appropriate, they will-

- (i) Inform the family in writing that the Agency proposes to terminate, or revise the terms of approval, together with the reasons,
- (ii) Invite the family to submit any written representations within 28 days of the date of the notice.

If, the Decision Maker does not receive any representations within the specified period, they may finalise their decision.

If representations are received,

- (i) the case will be referred to the foster panel for consideration
- (ii) the Decision Maker will make a decision, taking into account any recommendations made by the panel

As soon as practicable, the Decision Maker will inform the foster family in writing, **either-**

- (i) that the family and the household continue to be suitable, and that the terms of the approval continue to be appropriate
- (ii) that the approval is terminated from a specified date, and the reasons for the termination,
- (iii) the revised terms of the approval and the reasons for the revision

A foster family may give notice in writing to Time Out fostering at any time that they no longer wish to act as a foster family for them, whereupon the approval will be terminated with effect 28 days from the date the written notice is received by the agency. The agency and the family should give high priority to the needs of any young people placed with the family, to ensure that termination of approval does not adversely affect the young person.

The Decision Maker will ensure that copies of any written notice referred to in this policy is given to the responsible authority for any child placed with the family.

Foster Panel

A panel is made up of approximately eight people from different areas of expertise in fostering, health, education and social work. Within the panel there is a chairperson, an administrator, representatives from Time Out Fostering, and independent members.

Time Out Fostering's panel is currently made up of eight local people with a wide breadth of experience in fostering, children, families, health, education, mental health, equal opportunities, law and behavioural difficulties.

The purpose of the panel is to meet and consider each applicant for approval and recommend whether or not a person is suitable to act as a carer for children placed through Time Out Fostering. When the panel recommends approval of an application, they should also recommend the terms on which approval is given. All prospective carers will have been assessed by a social worker before coming to panel. Panel members will be given this information (form F) in good time before the meeting. The assessing social worker and the prospective carers attend parts of the panel meeting.

Approval

Following the panel meeting, the agency Decision Maker will make a final decision regarding approval. The carers will be notified of this decision in writing, with details of the approval criteria.

Foster Placement Agreement

A foster placement agreement is a contract that is signed by the foster carers regarding the placing of a child in their care. It is usually drawn up and signed before a placement begins, however with emergency placements this may be delayed whilst the document is prepared.

Register / Record keeping

Time Out Fostering keeps a register of all carers who they approve and place children with. This is in strict accordance with the regulations. Records are also kept on approval of foster carers' notice of approval, copy of signed terms and conditions letter, review reports, placements and information from thirds parties regarding the carers approval or termination. Local Authority personnel can inspect these records on application.