



Phoenix Community Care Ltd Foster Care Agency Policy & Procedure

0222 - Recruitment and Assessment of Foster Carers

Version	Written	Updated/ Review	Scheduled Review Date	Author/reviewer	Approving Body	Date Approved
1	2009	2009	2010	Gareth Hawkes	Board of Directors	
2		2010	2013	Angela Kelly	Board of Directors	
3		Oct'2013	Oct'2014	J A Coates	PCC Directors	5.2.14
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Scope

This policy applies to the recruitment and assessment of foster carers by PCC Foster Care Agency.

Purpose

This policy ensures that those who are interested in becoming foster carers will be treated fairly, without prejudice, openly and with respect. Furthermore, it ensures that PCC Foster Care Agency recruits foster carers who have the skills and ability to care for, and meet the needs of Looked After Children who require a foster placement.

Introduction

PCC Foster Care Agency is committed to fulfilling its duties and responsibilities as described in the statutory framework including:

- Fostering Service Regulations 2011 (Section 20, 26 & 27)
- Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011 (Standard 13 & 19)

Recruitment

PCC Foster Care Agency considers that the best form of recruitment is through word of mouth from current carers.

However, the agency also recruit foster carers using a number of other methods – through the PCC website, open days, opportunities within the local community, media adverts such as radio and publications – throughout the year.

The agency welcomes expressions of interest from persons irrespective of race, sexual orientation, religion, culture or disability, recognising that the children who require placements are not found in any one demographic group.

Prospective foster carers will be provided with timely and relevant information following their initial enquiry and will be kept informed about the progress of any subsequent application for approval.

Prospective foster carers will be prepared for the fostering task in a way which addresses, and gives practical techniques to manage, the issues they are likely to encounter. They will be helped to identify the competencies and strengths they have or need to develop. PCC Foster Care Agency will do this in a number of ways including the mandatory 3 day training course 'Skills to Foster' and contact with experienced foster carers.

The Assessment Process (See Appendix A)

Should a person express an interest in fostering for PCC Foster Care Agency, the Agency Administrator will send them a Foster Care Initial Enquiry Form.

When this returned, the applicants the Registered Person (RP) and the Team Manager (TM) will discuss the application and make a telephone call to them. This phone call will assess suitability and, where appropriate, a home visit will be arranged by the Team Manager or Registered person.

The home visit allows for a sharing of information and at this stage, there is no commitment on either side, allowing for the applicants and the agency to reflect on the information and for either side to withdraw their interest.

Within seven days of the visit an Initial Visit Report is to be completed and then given to the TM for discussion with the RP.

If the TM and RP agreement and the individual/s wish to proceed, the Recruitment Officer is informed and she will send out the Application Form to the individual/s. Once this is returned, the evidence for Stage 1 of the process can begin.

The PCC Foster Care administrator will follow up with the potential applicants **after three days** to check that the Application Form has been received and whether the applicants have any questions. Clarification about references can also be given.

The PCC Foster Care administrator will continue to contact the applicant every two weeks for a two month period until either the form has been returned or we are advised that the applicants do not want to proceed.

The Recruitment Officer will inform the SW and the Team Manager once the Application Form has been returned and Stage 1 of the process will begin.

PCC Foster Care will expect that the timescale between formal application (receipt of the Application Form) and presentation to panel will be within **eight months, unless there are clear and recorded reasons as to delay and which are agreed by the Team manager. These will be recorded by the manager on the agency database. Should the applicants need or request to go on hold this is recorded on the first page of the file on FT.**

Stages 1 and 2 may be carried out in parallel. This should be agreed with the Team Manager and Supervising Worker on receipt of the Application Form.

If Stage 1 and Stage 2 are begun concurrently, should the assessing Supervising Worker and the Team Manager make a decision that the applicant is unsuitable, this must be conveyed to the applicants within 10 days of all the Stage 1 information having been received. A decision after 10 days will require a report by the assessing social worker to be prepared for Fostering Panel. The Panel recommendation and the report will be taken into account when the ADM makes the qualifying determination.

The Regulations only allow for the approval of individuals as suitable to foster. Where two people will be sharing the care of a looked after child, the assessment of their suitability will be done jointly.

Where a single foster carer is considering taking a partner who will be sharing the care of any foster children, they must discuss this as soon as possible with their supervising social worker. The implications on their registration must be discussed as soon as possible and the SSW's line manager informed.

The partner should not have any care of a fostered child until they have been assessed within the required timescale.

Stage 1 of the assessment

The agency will gather the following information as soon as possible on receipt of the Application Form. The information forms Part 1 of Schedule 3 of the aforementioned legislation:-

- The applicant's full name, address and date of birth
- Details of the applicant's health, supported by a medical report
- Particulars of any other adult household members
- Particulars of children in the applicant's family, whether or not members of the household, and any other children in the household
- Particulars of the household's accommodation
- The outcome of any request or application made by the applicant, or any member of the applicant's 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(1), including particulars of any previous approval or refusal of approval
- The name and address of any fostering service that the applicant has been an approved foster carer for in the preceding 12 months
- Names and addresses of two persons who will provide personal references for the applicant
- In relation to the applicant and any other member of their household who is aged 18 or over, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Certificate
- Details of current, and any previous marriage, civil partnership or similar relationship
- The agency must consult the Local Authority in whose area the applicant lives, if this is different to the fostering service.

Checks will be carried out in line with the Fostering Services Regulations (England) 2011 and legislation issued in July 2013 and prospective foster carers will be informed as to why identity checks, relationship status, health checks, personal references and enquiries are undertaken about them and why DBS checks are made on them and adult members of their household.

Where an applicant has lived abroad, the agency requires that a police and/or government check is obtained.

Agency Practice regarding references

PCC Foster Care Agency takes the view that references over and above the number stated below may be necessary and may be sought on the agreement of the line manager.

The agency will interview at least two personal referees, chosen from a list provided by the applicant and prepare written reports of the interviews.

DBS checks on all adult household members must be carried out as soon as possible with the assessing worker verifying documentation.

If an applicant has been a foster carer in the previous 12 months, a written reference from their previous fostering service will be obtained. In this case, the agency will seek at least two personal references who will be interviewed and a written report completed.

If the previous fostering service does not provide a reference then at least two other referees will be interviewed.

If the applicant has previously fostered, PCC foster Care Agency will request as soon as possible, access to records about the applicant held by the fostering service which granted the approval, providing that the applicant consents. This access must be provided by the previous fostering provider **within 15 working days** of the request being received. This information can then be used to inform the assessment process.

PCC foster Care Agency will request a reference if an assessment by another fostering service provider has been started but not completed. If the fostering service provider does not feel able to provide a reference, then at least three other personal references will be sought.

At the latest, the decision about whether or not the applicant has successfully completed Stage 1 must be reached and the applicant informed **within 10 days** of all information having been received. The decision will be taken by the RP in discussion with the TM and the allocated worker. The applicant(s) must have written notification from the TM or RP informing them of this decision and giving full reasons for it. There is no right to representation should the decision not to proceed be taken.

However, the applicant does have a right to complain under PCC Foster Care Agency's complaints process if they are unhappy about the way in which their case has been handled.

Stage 2 of the assessment

If the agency is satisfied with the information gathered under Part 1 of Schedule 3, it will proceed to the second stage and the information required under Part 2 of the same Schedule.

- 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 or other children
- Skills, competence and potential relevant to their capacity to care effectively for a child placed with them

During the second stage of the assessment process, should the assessing worker believe that the applicant(s) would **not** make suitable foster carers, s/he will complete a **short** report on the applicant(s) suitability, based on the information thus far obtained. The report must set out details of the assessment and the reasons for considering the applicant unsuitable.

In the above circumstance, the applicant must be:

- Notified by the Panel Administrator that the report is to be sent to the agency Fostering Panel
- Provided with a copy of the report; and
- Given **10 working days** from the date of the notification to send their observations to PCC Foster Care Panel

The report will be presented to the Fostering Panel for consideration, along with any observations submitted by the applicant and any other relevant information.

The ADM will then make a determination about whether or not the assessment should be terminated, taking into account the recommendations of the Panel.

A Stage 2 assessment **must be** completed unless:

- The assessment is terminated following a brief report;
- The applicant withdraws from the process
- The applicant is deemed unsuitable as a result of Stage 1 of the assessment (where Stage 1 and Stage 2 have been carried out in parallel)
- It becomes apparent that the applicant or an adult member of their household has been convicted of, or cautioned for, a specified offence.

The assessment process will inform the prospective foster carers of:-

- The qualities, skills and aptitudes being sought or to be achieved;
- The standards to be applied in the assessment;
- The stages and content of the selection process and where possible timescales involved;
- The information to be given to the applicants.

6 Upon completion of Stage 2, the assessing social worker will complete a written report covering both Stages 1 and 2 of the assessment (currently the Form F report), with recommendations about the applicant's suitability to foster and any terms of approval.

The completed assessment will comprise of the Stage 1 checklist, any comments from the evidence arising out of Stage 1, and the Stage 2 report.

This assessment must be sent to the line manager **at least 6 weeks** before the due Panel date to allow for the report to be read, amended if necessary, and sent to the Panel Administrator.

As the assessment must be presented to Panel **within 8 months** of the application being received by the agency the SW must look to complete the report **within a six month period** to meet the above timescale.

Time must be allowed for the TM to undertake the second opinion visit.

A draft assessment must have been seen by the applicants prior to the Manager's visit and their observations will be collected by the Manager on, or after, the visit. For data protection reasons, the assessment will only be accessible for reading by the applicants for a period of **10 working days**.

Notification will be sent to the applicant by the Panel Administrator via email that the report is to be presented to the PCC Foster Care Fostering Panel, along with the report, and applicants will have **at least 10 working days** to send any other observations to the Foster Care Co-operative.

The full assessment report (Form F report) will then be presented to the Fostering Panel for consideration along with any observations submitted by the applicant and any other relevant information.

The assessment process is supervised by the line manager of the assessing social worker and all reports must be signed and dated by the applicants, the assessing social worker and the manager.

Internet checks on applicants

This agency has a responsibility to make applicants aware of the implications of their use of the internet.

Internet checks will only be carried out with the full understanding of the applicant. Consent to this check being undertaken will be given by the applicant in writing.

Should an applicant refuse permission for such a check, their assessment may be terminated.

PCC Foster Care Agency will offer advice as to how applicants can protect their privacy and security, along with any child placed with them, should they be approved.

This will include informing applicants of the importance of talking to family and friends about security settings on social networking websites.

The Family Safe Care Plan will now include a section on the use of social networking sites.

PCC Foster Care Agency will be open and honest with applicants about the checks that will be undertaken. Applicants will be advised that it is reasonable, proportionate and lawful for internet checks to be completed as part of the assessment.

8. Approval

Once a foster carer has been approved by PCC Foster Care Agency, they cannot be approved by another Fostering Service Provider until their original approval has been terminated.

Once approved, the supervising worker will visit the new carers to initiate the induction process. The worker will go through the Carer Contract with the carers so that they are clear as to the agency's expectations and what they should expect from the agency.

PCC foster Care Agency has an induction checklist which must be completed with the carers. This includes website access, recording and reporting and training requirements.

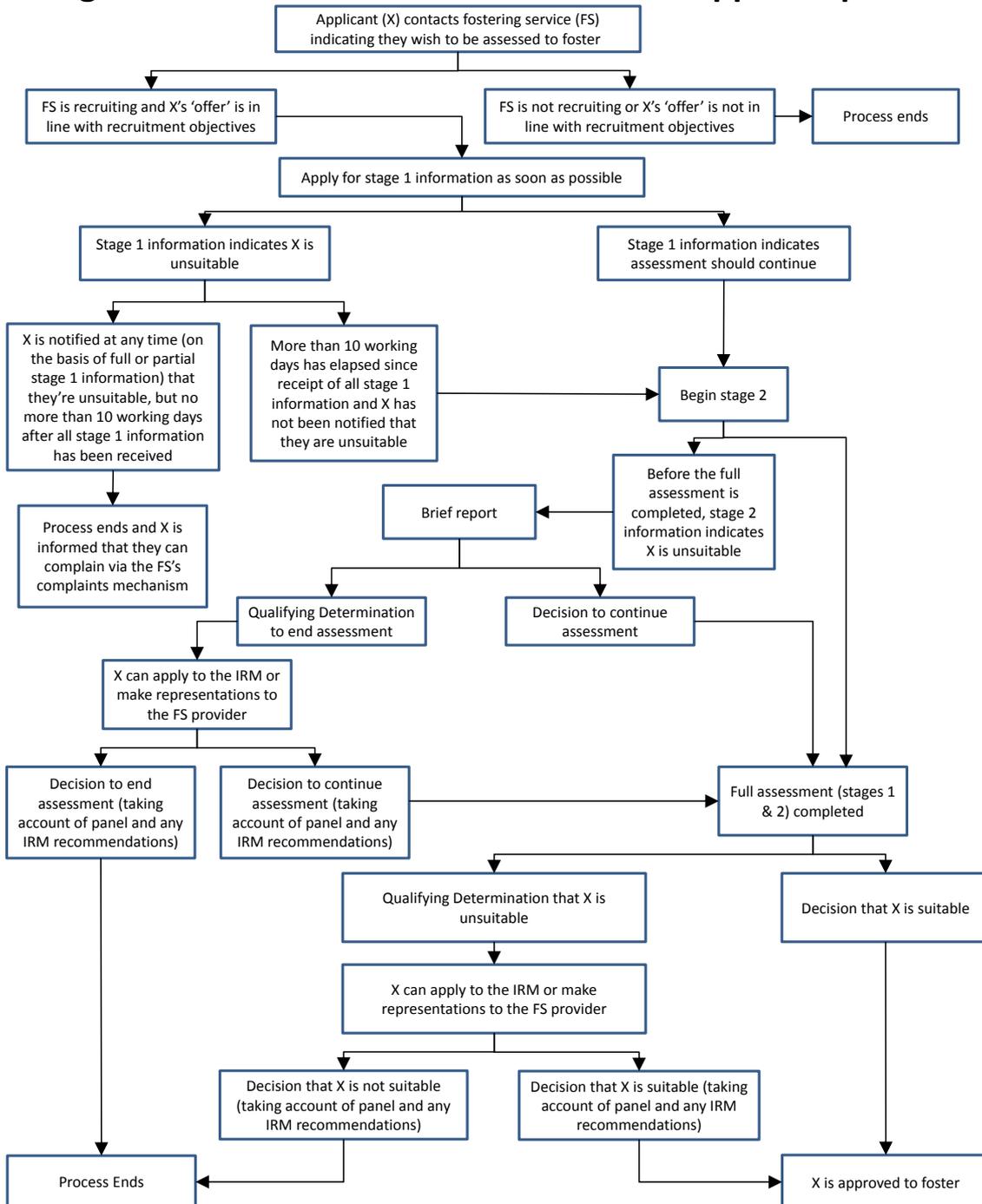
The foster carers will be invited to the next carer induction course where they will have an opportunity to meet with senior, administrative and specialist staff.

The carers will be invited to the next support group to meet colleagues and other carers.

PCC Foster Care Agency carers will be issued with an Identity card by the agency to enable their role as foster carer to be verified.

Appendix A

Stages 1 and 2: Foster carer assessment & approval process



NB - This diagram illustrates how stages 1 & 2 of the assessment process fit together. It is not intended to cover all actions a FS must undertake as part of the process - FSs must refer to the regulations and statutory guidance for this information. It should be noted that at any point in the process applicants (1) can withdraw, in which case the process ends; and (2) can complain to the FS (and must be informed of their right to do so if they are turned down in stage 1).