**Household Review of Approval Guidance**

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# **About This Document**

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| Title | Household Review of Approval Guidance |
| Purpose | **Guidance for Supervising Social Workers and Foster Carers regarding the annual review of approval** |
| Updated by | **Nicola Ogidan Team Manager for Household Reviewing Officers** |
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# **Version Control**

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| March 2016 | **5.0** | **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 | **5.0** | **Updated timescales for first reviews to be undertaken within 8 months of approval to meet legal timescales for sign off.** | **Rosemarie Cronin** |
| March 2016 | **5.0** | **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 | **5.0** | **Updated timescales grid for the household review process.** | **Rosemarie Cronin** |
| March 2016 | **5.0** | **Updated information to include electronic systems.** | **Rosemarie Cronin** |
| March 2016 | **5.0** | **Statement about minimal paperwork required for a review to take place.** | **Rosemarie Cronin** |
| March 2016 | **5.0** | **Added information regarding the HHRO’s competing audit checks 6 months after the review to monitor completion of recommendations and actions.** | **Rosemarie Cronin** |
| November 2022 | **6.0** | **Updated timescales grid for the household review process, p.3/4** | **Sally Say** |
| November 2022 | **6.0** | **Added information on Undertaking a review at short notice, p.6** | **Sally Say** |
| November 2022 | **6.0** | **Amended information regarding completion Outcome Household Reviews in line with the Policy for managing allegations, standards of care concerns and complaints, p.8** | **Sally Say** |

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| November 2022 | **6.0** | **Updated information on quality assurance role to reflect introduction of Contact and Monitoring form, p.7** | **Sally Say** |
| November 2022 | **6.0** | **Added a section on Dispute Resolution for Issues arising from an Annual Household Review, p.8** | **Sally Say** |
| November 2022 | **6.0** | **Added a section on Resolution of Formal Disputes, p.9** | **Sally Say** |
| February 2023 | **6.0** | **Amended information on undertaking reviews at short notice, p.6-p.7** | **Nicola Ogidan** |
| February  2023 | **6.0** | **Added information on Anti-racist practice, p.3** | **Nicola Ogidan** |

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# Introduction and Legal Framework

* 1. 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.
  2. Several 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.
  3. 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 –
4. make such enquiries and obtain such information as they consider necessary 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
5. seek and consider the views of -
6. the foster parent,
7. any child placed with the foster parent (subject to the child’s age and understanding), and
8. any placing authority which has, within the preceding year, placed a child with the foster parent.
9. At the conclusion of the review, the fostering service provider must prepare a written report, setting out whether –
10. the foster parent continues to be suitable to be a foster parent and the foster parent’s household continues to be suitable, and
11. the terms of the foster parent’s approval continue to be appropriate.
12. 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.
    1. 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.
  1. 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 consider 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, they must issue a determination and follow the procedures referred to in the section on the Independent Review Mechanism, above, before making a decision.

* 1. 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 carer’s 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.

**1.6 Anti-Racist Practice**

The household reviewing service always aims to take an anti-racist approach to practice.  This means that the service seeks to:

* Challenge racial discrimination and address systems and privileges that can facilitate or uphold racism
* Speak up and challenge attitudes and practices that perpetuate racism
* Support the enhancement of racial, ethnic, and cultural identity
* Employ cultural humility to understand cultural needs and enhance cultural expression, for example being curious to gain a greater knowledge and understanding of various cultural needs to ensure these are fully addressed for children in care.

# Process for Household Reviews

* 1. 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.
  1. An early review can be requested from the foster carer, the supervising social worker (SSW) or the household reviewing officer (HRO). 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 HRO, the SSW 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 several 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 to meet legal timescales.

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| Timescale | Activity |
| 9 weeks before review | Blank Checklist and Supervising Social Worker (SSW) report triggered on Mosaic to SSW from Business Support Administrator (BSA) for completion. |
| 6 weeks before review | SSW to have returned completed Checklist. If not returned, BSA to send chase email for the completed **Checklist** to be returned **as soon as possible,** team managers to be copied in at this stage. |
| 6 weeks before review | BSA to send out feedback requests to foster carers, members of household, IROs, health and education professionals, child’s social worker (CSW), adoption social worker, MHC, other professionals etc*.* |
| 15 working days before the review | SSW report to be completed.  SSW to chase any outstanding reports from IRO and CSW. BSA to upload/attach feedback to HRO report on Mosaic.  HRO to monitor feedback and support SSW in chasing missing feedback. |
| 5 working days before review | BSA to send review pack electronically, including attachments to foster carer(s) and to copy in SSW. |
| 5 working days before review | BSA to send SSW email if report incomplete, copy in HRO and team manager, and request this is completed shared with the foster carer prior to the review. |
| Up to 48 hours before the review | BSA to alert SSW and HRO to any additional feedback received and for this to be shared with foster carer. |
| Within 15 working days of the review  i) | HRO report should be completed on carers electronic file. Request 2 assigned to the SSW. |
| Within 6 weeks of completion of HRO report.  ii) | SSW to read HRO report and add comment. SSW to share report with foster carer(s) for comment. SSW to complete Request 2 and send Request 3 to HRO.  HRO to complete Request 3 and send Request 4 to fostering team manager.  Team manager to add comment and send Request 5 to ADM. If carers are returning to Panel Request 5 is not required. |
| Feedback received after the review. | BSA to upload any feedback received after the household review meeting and inform the relevant SSW and HRO. |
| Within 6 weeks after the report is completed by the HRO and 1 week after the ADM decision. | SSW, foster carer and team manager should all have seen the report and any agreed amendments recorded. ADM letter regarding the outcome of the review which includes the current approval to be sent to carer(s).  ADM letter to be uploaded onto to carer(s) electronic record. |
| Within 6 weeks after the report completed by the HHRO | SSW, foster carer and team manager should all have seen the report and any amendments 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 within 12 months of approval date. The BSA’s to panel administrate the uploading of the decision onto the carer’s electronic file.  For all other reviews 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. |

# i) and ii) are likely to change as Mosaic and processes are updated.

# Reports or Feedback that should be available for review

* 1. Reports from the IRO, SSW and CSW are completed using Mosaic forms on the carers record. The report from carers are completed using Citizen Space, a link is embedded within an email from HHRShared.Mailbox@essex.gov.uk: <https://consultations.essex.gov.uk/business-support/foster-carer-feedback-version-2> Once feedback is received this is attached to the HRO report document and shared with the carer prior to the review meeting. A review should not take place without a report from the SSW. It is expected that the report from the carer is also available but in exceptional circumstances a review may proceed without it.
  2. Reports/forms that should be used for the household review process if applicable are:

1. Supervising Social Worker’s Report
2. Foster carer(s) Report
3. Independent Reviewing Officers Report
4. Child’s Social Workers Report
5. Parents Feedback (or carer feedback for carer to carer respite) – short breaks
6. Adult Household Members Feedback
7. Education Professionals Report
8. Health Professionals Report
9. Other Professionals Report (inc’ Mental health Co-ordinators, Clinical Psychologist, Therapeutic Fostering Team, Family Time worker, Adoption social worker, etc)
10. Foster Carer’s children over 10 years Feedback
11. 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 HRO will also look on electronic records/ of any children who are living with the carer at the time of the review to ascertain any views they have regarding their experience of living within the fostering household e.g. statutory visits, Life Plan, etc. child’s view and recorded

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

## 3.1 The Household Review

3.1.1 The carers and the HRO should have received all the feedback reports available prior to the review.

3.1.2 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 meeting, then all attempts must be made to ensure that the next review meeting is arranged at a time when the second carer can also be present.

3.1.3 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.

3.1.4 During the review the HRO 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 their care, this will also cover matters such as, has the carer received the delegated authority paperwork and other relevant paperwork in connection with the children, their experience of the fostering service, learning and development, impact of fostering, etc.

3.1.5 The first review is usually scheduled 8 months after the initial ADM approval. Once the HRO report is completed, including comments by the SSW and fostering team manager, the carer will be invited to attend Fostering Panel for continued approval recommendation which will then be sent to ADM for a decision.

3.1.6 Fostering panels, as an independent body, are expected to maintain oversight and monitor the quality of carers and the fostering service and to ensure carers are getting all they need to continue to deliver high quality care to children and young people in care. As best practice, carers will return to Panel every 5 years, following the same process as after the first review.

**4. Undertaking a review at short notice**

**4.1** A child may be placed in an emergency with local authority carers who have been approved in accordance with the 2002 Regulations, even if the terms of approval are not consistent with the placement. However, the placement **must** not exceed six working days at which time the placement must end, **unless** the terms of the carer’s approval have been amended to be consistent with the placement.

**4.2** If a child is placed with carers in an emergency outside of the carers approval and it is identified the child is likely to remain beyond six working days a short notice review of approval must take place i.e. within six working days, to lawfully allow the child to remain with the carers. If a short notice review of approval does not take place and the child remains beyond six working days this will become an unregulated placement.

**4.3** In order to meet the timescale the reviewing officer will review the available information and feedback, which should include the SSW feedback, foster carer feedback, the views of the child, and CSW feedback, in order to make a recommendation regarding the proposed revision of approval.

**4.3** The HRO will need to be satisfied that sufficient information of an acceptable standard is provided for the revision of approval to make an informed and confident recommendation on changing the terms of approval of the carer. The needs and demands of the fostering service provider should not disproportionately influence the thinking of the HRO about what is achievable and in the best interests of the child/ren placed. Consideration should be given to change of approval for a named child rather than a general increase in number as information provided may be limited than would normally be available for a review.

**4.4** On completion of the revision of approval process, the HRO recommendations and all other documents need to be presented to the ADM for a decision.

* 1. After the short notice review the HRO, SSW and foster carer may decide to keep

the review date agreed at the last annual review as this will offer an opportunity to review and monitor the change of approval in the shorter interim period.

# 5. Completion of Review Actions from the Household Review

**5.1** Within the review meeting actions will be agreed providing clarity of responsibility and timeframe for the completion of agreed actions. The HRO is expected to monitor the actions resulting from the review at least six months after the review meeting and to follow up any incomplete actions accordingly. The HRO will evidence their work through completing a Contact and Monitoring form. SSWs may record the completion of review actions within case notes if appropriate, and send a case note alert to the HRO. Fostering team managers have the opportunity to monitor the completion of agreed actions in the supervision of SSW’s.

**6. Revision of approval process**

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

# 7. Foster Carer Reviews following complaints or allegations

**7.1** 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 placed 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.

**7.2** An early review may also be called following a standards of care investigation/assessment. This will be a decision that will be made in consultation with the LADO (Local Authority Designated Officer) and the fostering service (see policy for Managing Allegations, Standards of Care, Concerns and Complaints).

# 8. The Quality Assurance Role of the Household Reviewing Officer

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

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

**8.3** HROs undertake 6 monthly audits on their household reviews to monitor that recommendations/agreed actions have been followed through by the appropriate person. The HRO will raise outstanding issues with the SSW and copy the team manager into any correspondence.

# 9. Dispute Resolution for Issues arising during an Annual Household Review

## 9.1 It is anticipated that in most cases, the Fostering Service and the Household Reviewing Officer, 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.

* 1. The role of the HRO is key, where issues have been raised at the foster carer’s

annual household review and remain unresolved.

* 1. 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.

* 1. 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.

## 10. Concerns that might Trigger a Dispute

**10.1** HRO 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.

**10.2** When a HRO 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 HRO.

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.

## 11. Resolution of Formal Disputes

**11.1** Disputes should be resolved within 20 working days of being raised formally by the HRO. 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 HRO to vary the timescale at each stage of the process.

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

**11.3** 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.

**11.4** All information will be collated, analysed and reported on by the Household Reviewing Officer Team Manager.