

Guidance on Foster Carer - New Partner Procedures

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Author(s)/Owner: Fostering Service Management Team

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Implementation & Dissemination: This document will be circulated via email to the Fostering Service and shared with all relevant recipients by the most appropriate person. It will also be available in Corporate Parenting Docs For All

Superseded Documents: N/A **Equality Impact Screening** completed January 2026

Related Documents: This guidance should be read alongside *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)*, which sets out the multi-agency responsibilities for keeping children safe.

Document Link: [Guidance for FCs and practitioners](#) and [Fostering Resource Hub - Fostering and Adoption](#)

Version Control Log:

Date	Author	Version	Summary of changes
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Document Summary

This guidance is provided to ensure consistency in the assessment of a new partner of an existing single foster carer including kinship foster carer.

It is designed for:

- Practitioners and managers in the Fostering and Kinship services
- Foster carers including kinship carers
- Suffolk Fostering Panel – chairs, vice chairs, members and Panel Coordinators
- Agency Decision Makers for Fostering Panel

It covers considerations in relation to a new partner at different stages of the relationship and what processes may be involved at distinct times. There is an overview of the assessment process for the new partner as well as a specific focus on the requirements of the household review of the existing foster carer, for a significant change of circumstances. The guidance also outlines how the item will be heard at Fostering Panel and the ADM decision is made.

NOTE: This is a guide to practice and, like all 'guides', good judgement should be exercised in its application. There may be times, and in individual cases, when following the guidance requires some flexibility or a level of discretion is needed.

The term 'foster carer' includes anyone approved as a foster carer for Suffolk who would provide care to child in care including for a short break or emergency.

We will on request produce this policy, or particular parts of it, into other languages and formats, in order that everyone can use and comment upon its content.

Introduction

Foster carers may be approved when they are single and in time form a new partnership or significant relationship during their fostering career. Foster carers are entitled to have committed, intimate and personal relationships with others; and, while it is right that foster carers should have such relationships, there may come a time when they will be obliged, as foster carers, to follow certain processes.

If a prospective foster carer is single, their fostering assessment should explore what would happen should they form a significant relationship. Once approved, the Supervising Social Worker (SSW) should ensure that any newly approved foster carer including kinship foster carer is clear about their responsibility (within their foster carer agreement) to notify the fostering service where there is any substantial change in their circumstances which affects their fostering. This may include a significant relationship with a prospective partner.

This guidance aims to ensure consistency in the approach to sharing key information about those new relationships and when the assessment of a new partner takes place. It also aims to ensure that appropriate safeguarding steps are able to be taken as promptly as possible.

Legal Basis

There are two aspects to consider: 1) when a foster carer should inform the fostering service about a new relationship; and 2) when an assessment of a new partner will be needed.

1). Schedule 5: 2 (b) Fostering Regulations 2011 deals with *Matters and obligations in Foster Care Agreements*. It sets out the obligation on the foster carer to give written notice to the fostering service provider without delay, with full particulars, of: b) ii) *any change in the composition of the household; and* iii) *any other change in the foster parent's personal circumstances and any other event affecting either their capacity to care for any child placed or the suitability of the household*.

Within fostering, a new significant relationship may be seen as a major change of circumstances and any impact on children and others within the household needs careful consideration (Fostering Network 2022).

It is therefore helpful for foster carers to know at what point they must discuss an evolving new relationship with their fostering service. The discussion could include arrangements in relation to whether the prospective partner will stay overnight in the foster home, and the extent to which, if any, the new partner will be involved with the fostered children or young people. This enables safeguarding checks to be undertaken in a timely way.

2). Section 5.31 of the statutory guidance in England (DfE 2011a) sets out the issue of assessment as follows:

Where a single foster carer takes a partner who will be sharing the care of any foster children, they must discuss this with their supervising social worker so that agreement can be reached about any implications for their approval to foster and so the partner's suitability to foster can be assessed within an appropriate timescale.

When a decision has been taken that an assessment of the new partner is required, it will be appropriate to make a short-term agreement with both members of the couple about how things will be managed prior to, and during, the assessment period. For example, anticipated timescales for when the new partner will move into the home.

Practice

When a single foster carer is in a relationship with someone new, they will identify when the relationship has reached a level of seriousness and commitment that means it is appropriate to notify their fostering service about this. At this point, a discussion between the foster carer and their SSW can take place to decide what needs to happen next. It may be helpful, here, to identify the different stages of a relationship when different levels of 'assessment' should occur:

1. Initial stages of the relationship i.e. no contact with foster child(ren)

- a) There will be a period in any new relationship where it is unclear whether the relationship is going to be significant or even last; and, while the existing foster carer is in the early stages of exploring this, it will likely not be helpful to involve the fostering service.
- b) It is preferred that during such a period, where possible and in their best interests, any fostered children are not made aware of the developing relationship.
- c) At this stage the person the carer has met would not be visiting the fostering household to meet or share the care of foster children or be sleeping over.

2. The person the foster carer has met becomes a visitor to the foster home.

- a) At some point, the foster carer may decide the time is right for the prospective partner to visit the home while the foster children are present. Consideration will be given as to how children will be made aware of the carer's new relationship and how the prospective partner would be introduced to them.
- b) Whilst the foster carer may wish to advise their SSW of the developing relationship, it is not a requirement at this point, because the prospective partner will not be staying overnight or having sole care of the children.
- c) However, where a relationship is progressing into a more stable relationship or partnership, foster carers will need to ensure that their potential partner is aware of the need for statutory checks to be undertaken on persons who might join the household or be a regular overnight visitor. Where this looks likely, it is important that foster carers inform their SSW who can then support them to explain the checks and be available to answer any queries that may arise.

3. New partner stays overnight at the foster home when the foster children are in placement

- a) As above, when the foster carer decides that they wish for their new partner to stay overnight, when the foster child(ren) are present, they must inform their SSW before this happens so that relevant statutory checks can be undertaken in a timely way as they can take a little time to obtain. These checks are:
 - i. Local Authority checks
 - ii. An enhanced DBS disclosure.

NOTE: At this point, the new partner must be given a copy of the SCC CYPS Privacy Notice, so they know we are holding and storing their information, including within LiquidLogic systems.

- b) The social worker, for any children cared for, will need to be made aware that the foster carer has formed a new significant relationship and that checks are being undertaken.
- c) Whilst the new partner may continue to visit the foster home before the outcome of the checks is known, the foster carer must supervise the new partner's contact with fostered children during this time.
- d) The outcome of the statutory checks must be known before any overnight stays take place, when the fostered child(ren) are present.
- e) Once the checks are in place, as well as overnight stays, the foster carer may wish to involve the new partner in child care responsibilities (as per delegated authority).
- f) The foster carer and their SSW must update the Family Safer Care Plan to reflect the new arrangements and ensure the overnight visitor understands safer care in relation to the foster child(ren).
- g) The SSW will give the new partner information about the allegations/ complaint procedures.

NOTE: Failure to inform the fostering service that a prospective partner is staying overnight or involved in childcare responsibilities, so no safeguarding checks have been possible, will be considered as a standard of care concern.

4. Where it is proposed that the new partner will join the fostering household

- a) Consideration needs to be given as to what the new partners role is likely to be within the fostering household and when they will move into the home; they may, for example, spend significant periods of time staying over before moving in permanently.
- b) At this point, before the new partner moves into the fostering household, they will be supported to make an application to foster.
 - i. For mainstream foster carer, the SSW will make a 'referral' to the RAM Team for a fostering assessment to be completed.
 - ii. For Kinship Care, the SSW for the existing carer may complete the new partner assessment themselves or it may be allocated to a different social worker within the team, decided on a case-by-case basis.
 - iii. It is recommended that, in normal circumstances, the SSW for the existing foster carer does not undertake the assessment of the new partner. This is to facilitate objectivity and impartiality.
- c) The SSW will be responsible for the household review aspect of the process which must consider the impact of the new partner on the household.
- d) Ideally, the new partner will not move into the foster home until remaining statutory checks including personal and other references have been completed.

- e) The fostering assessment will, ideally, be presented to Panel before the partner moves into the household (fully) or within a maximum 6 months of them moving in.
- f) If the new partner moves into the foster home before their approval as a foster carer, the service needs to satisfy itself that this is safe and appropriate to do so and ensure that their assessment so far has informed this requirement.
- g) There is no requirement to re-do the Health and Safety Check unless the existing carer has joined the new partner in their home.
- h) The Family Safer Care Plan must be updated to reflect the new partner living in the home and any caring responsibilities they may have.
- i) As for all prospective foster carers, the new partner will need to attend the Skills to Foster Training prior to the completion of the fostering assessment. For Kinship carers, the new partner will be required to attend Introduction to Kinship training during assessment
- j) The new partner is required to complete the Training Support and Development Standards (TSDS) within 12 months of approval or 18 months for kinship carers. They will also need to complete mandatory training.

Additional comments on assessment

When undertaking a full assessment of the new foster carer, this will need to be done in the same way as it would for any other prospective foster carer in terms of compliance with Regulation 26 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (as amended), including all the required checks and references. It is entirely appropriate to use Form F for that purpose, and the various guidance materials will be relevant. For a new partner joining a kinship fostering household, the kinship assessment tool would be equally appropriate.

It is important to make clear that the assessment of the new applicant is in the context of them wishing to foster alongside the existing carer as part of a couple, and this information should be set out clearly in the “pen picture” in the Form F/Kinship Assessment, and throughout the assessment report.

There is no legally defined timeframe for a new partner assessment, that differs from any fostering application: that is, a maximum eight months from application to Panel hearing for mainstream foster carers; or a maximum 24 weeks for kinship foster carers. However, it makes sense to complete the assessment as soon as possible; especially if, as is recommended, the new partner is waiting for full approval before moving in. It is suggested that the assessing SW should work towards approval of the new partner within 4 months from application to approval.

Negative Assessment

If, during the course of the assessment of the new partner, information comes to light or concerns arise about their suitability to foster that may result in the assessing SW being unable to recommend approval, this must be acted upon promptly.

There will need to be discussions between the assessing social worker, the (existing) foster carer and their SSW to agree a way forward.

If the assessment is in Stage 2 of the process, then as per Fostering Regulations 2011 26(3), a 'brief report' will be compiled setting out details of the assessment done and the reasons for considering the applicant unsuitable for approval. This will then be presented to the fostering panel for consideration, along with any observations submitted by the applicant and any other relevant information.

The agency decision maker (ADM) must take account of the recommendations of the Fostering Panel. If they agree that the applicant should not be approved, they will issue a qualifying determination. At this point, the applicant can apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) to have their case reviewed.

Panel process

The approval of a new partner as a foster carer constitutes a significant change of circumstances of the existing foster carer and the fostering household. Therefore, a household review of the existing carers' approval must be undertaken.

The review of the existing carer and approval of the new partner will be considered as a **single, joint item**.

The key document for Panel is the Household Review. The assessment of the new partner will be completed as for any prospective foster carer, using the most appropriate assessment tool, and this will be 'attached' to the Review report alongside other documents that are required to satisfy the review and the approval aspects.

There is **no requirement** to 'update the existing carers' Form F as the review report will do that.

The **LCS Foster Carer Review Form** must be used as the review will also 'count' as annual review and this will ensure the system updates the carers' record.

- Section A completed as usual; this is a data record including statutory requirements for the existing foster carer since the last review e.g. updates on any statutory checks (3 yearly), Supervision visits, Unannounced Visit, Learning and Development and Children cared for etc.
- Section B will need to explore:
 - the new partners' role in the fostering household
 - the (potential) impact of their presence on household members including the fostered children.
 - how the new partner will support the existing foster carer and any specific fostering tasks they may undertake
- Section C1 can be used to gain the existing carers' views about the period since their last review and also the changes they see the new partner brings.
- Sections D and E should be gathered as usual, using whatever methods are most appropriate e.g. with regard to the age and understanding of the children
- Sections F and G will be needed for any children cared for since the last review, and these should also reflect the Child(ren)'s SW and IRO views of the new partner joining the household.
- Section H should reflect the recommendation to reapprove the existing carer and approve the new partner as a member of the existing fostering household.

At Panel

Panel will hear the item as a 'joint item' (taking up a longer slot on Panel) as it does currently but with one set of minutes, not two.

Panel will prepare the item as it would for any case, identifying the strengths of both the existing carer and their new partner, and of the fostering household as a whole.

Any worries will be discussed and questions prepared accordingly. There may be questions directed specifically to the existing carer and, separately, to their new partner; and/or they may be asked something jointly.

As always, the Panel Chair will advise the existing foster carer, their partner and attending social worker(s) about the questions to be asked and they will be permitted a little time to discuss these and their responses.

Where the assessing SW (of the new partner) and supervising SW (of the existing carer) both attend the Panel, the Chair will ask them individually for their introductions and any updates, before moving on to ask the questions as planned. These will be asked concurrently, in whichever order is deemed most appropriate.

Panel may take time for a separate conversation or may be able to deliver their recommendations and reasons, without the need for a discussion.

Panel will be considering both the approval of the new partner and reapproval of the existing carer and will deliver the recommendations together.

However, the minutes and ADM decision sheet must clearly state that there are **two tasks** being considered:

- Approval of XXX as new partner joining the fostering household of [existing carer]

AND

- Reapproval of [existing carer] following a significant change in household.

The ADM can then make 'collective' but distinct decisions as necessary.

In the unlikely event that the ADM decision to approve the new partner is negative, consideration will need to be given to the implications for the existing carer and the ADM may wish to delay their decision until the couple decide on their next steps.

Next Foster Carer Review

Regulation 28 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (as amended) requires that the approval of each foster carer is reviewed '*not more than a year after approval*' and then '*at intervals of not more than a year*'. If an existing foster carer is joined by a newly assessed partner, this requirement for review remains unchanged.

In considering this issue, it is important to note that the next review after the approval of the new partner will need to be conducted as a joint review of both foster carers, as if they had been approved at the same time and fostered together from the outset.

The review will also need to be presented to the fostering panel because it will be the first review after approval for the new foster carer.

References

Department for Education (DfE 2011a) – *The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations: Volume 4 - Fostering Services*; published [online] at: [Fostering Guidance - MASTER](#)

Department for Education (DfE 2023) – *Working Together to Safeguard Children* – published [online] at: [Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance](#)

Fostering Services [England] Regulations 2011 – Schedule 5 - published [online] at: [The Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations 2011](#)

Regulation 28 - published [online] at: [The Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations 2011](#)

Fostering Network (2022) – Practice Information Note – Foster Carers and New Partners; published [online] at: [pin_new-partners_february-2022-1.pdf](#)