

## **Message from Yvette Stanley, Ofsted National Director Regulation and Social Care, 22 May 2020**

To children's social care providers and local authorities:

It was lovely to see all your tweets about Foster Care Fortnight and particularly to read all the stories from foster carers and, even more importantly, from children concerning their experiences. We all hope that the spotlight on the great role and impact of being a foster carers leads to an increase in applications in the coming months.

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### **Independent visits to children's homes under Regulation 44**

We have continued to receive queries about independent visitors to children's homes. The Department for Education (DfE) provided guidance when they amended this regulation in their [guidance for children's social care services](#).

The role of the independent visitor is as important now as it ever was. Children may not be going to school, they may have limited contact with their families and they will not be seeing their friends. Their social workers, advocates, counsellors or other professionals may not be visiting and/or visiting less frequently and/or not visiting in person. Their only contact with people may be through the phone or social media. Their routines will be disrupted, and they may be anxious.

The independent visitor has an important safeguarding role for children, when their access to other independent people may be limited. Independent visitors can still carry out their visits on site, if they are able to, and can safely practice social distancing. The change to regulation 44 of the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 provides greater flexibility during this period, where this is necessary. This amendment means that providers should use reasonable endeavours to ensure that an independent person visits the children's home at least once each month. This means technology may be used to carry out the visit virtually without going to the home in person. When a safeguarding concern has been identified, there must be a balance between following Public Health England guidance and safeguarding children's welfare, which may include an actual visit.

The regulation change also recognises that in some circumstances visits may not happen in the usual timeframe. Where this is the case, registered providers and registered managers should think carefully about what this means for their service and try to ensure that the next visit is at the earliest opportunity. Providers must be able to demonstrate what reasonable efforts they have made to facilitate such a visit.

As the DfE guidance sets out, the visit should continue to cover the aspects set out in regulation, including speaking to children and their families as far as is reasonably practicable and come to a conclusion that the children are effectively safeguarded and their well-being is being promoted. It is not sufficient to only have a discussion with the manager as part of an independent visit. This does not meet the requirements of the regulation.

## **Making online applications to register as a children's social care provider**

As part of our work to improve our digital services we have developed new online forms for those who are applying to register as social care providers. We are now at the stage where we will start to use the new forms, and you will not be able to access the existing Ofsted Online children's social care application forms SC1, SC2 or SC3 from 27 May 2020.

The replacement forms and guidance for these will be available on GOV.UK on the page '[Becoming a children's social care provider](#)'.

## **Sending notifications and reports to Ofsted – research**

Also as part of work to improve our digital services we are carrying out research with social care providers on how we can improve their experience when contacting Ofsted and submitting notifications, information and reports to Ofsted. We would like to ask social care providers if you would like to get involved in our research programme. More specifically we are aiming to understand:

- your experience when contacting and submitting information to Ofsted, your needs you expect us to fulfil and any issues you face.
- understand your views on how we can improve our 'Contact' services, so that they meet your needs more effectively.

We will show our appreciation for those who are involved in the research by gifting a £40 'Love 2 Shop' Shopping Voucher.

Our research programme begins in May 2020. We hope you will get involved because your involvement will really help us improve how social care providers submit information to Ofsted, so it is easier and provides a much better user experience.

If you would like to get involved or find out more about our research please email [socialcare@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:socialcare@ofsted.gov.uk).