
Principles Governing the Transfer of Foster Carers 2015 - England

This document is supported by key stakeholders across the Fostering Sector in England and is to be read in conjunction with the Transfer of Foster Carers Protocol England (2014) <http://www.fostering.net/all-about-fostering/resources/england/transfer-foster-carers-protocol-england-2014#.VFo229gqWp8>

1)

The Fostering Network recommends that good practice should be adhered to in respect of fostering services (local authority) and independent fostering providers (agencies) facilitating and managing the transfer of foster carers. We would proactively encourage all fostering providers to conduct their business in line with an ethical code of practice that has the needs of children at its heart.

In the past decade the fostering sector has grown exponentially; currently there are just over 80,000 looked-after children in the UK. In England 51,340 children (78 per cent) live in foster families.

The fostering sector comprises a range of service providers across local authority services and independent fostering agencies. As the sector has evolved, the requirements on provider services have been both to uphold good practice in respect of the care of children and to satisfy the requirements of commissioning and contracting frameworks.

2)

The primary consideration in all transfers must be that “the welfare of the child is paramount” as enshrined in the Children Act 1989. Essential requirements of good child centred practice are that children have a care plan that has assessed their needs and that placements are secured with foster carers who can best meet those needs i.e. the child and the carers are carefully “matched”, and that placements are not made outside of foster carers’ terms of approval. The child’s permanence plan governs the provision of consistent high quality care, evidences robust matching procedures and guards against unplanned endings.

3)

The parties to this document believe that financial factors should not determine a placement move. The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4 and the Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (NMS) 15.3 . ‘Once placed, a child is not removed from a foster carer who is willing and able to continue caring for the child, unless that is in their best interests, taking the child’s current wishes and feelings into account, and decided (other than in an emergency) through the child’s care planning process. If a placement move occurs in an emergency the fostering service informs the responsible authority within one working day.’

4)

The principles of the transfer protocol recognise that all foster carers have the right to freedom of movement between fostering services.

However, fostering providers should not intentionally entice or persuade foster carers to transfer to a new service in an unethical manner (contrary to the outcome relating to NMS 25) or such that it impacts on placement stability for a child (contrary to NMS 15.3 and the statutory guidance contained in The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4 paragraph 3.5).

The welfare of children must be the determining factor governing “freedom of movement”. The transfer protocol 2014 states that “All fostering services should be committed to the active recruitment of people new to fostering” (Transfer Protocol Principles 1.5). Whilst not putting obstacles in the way of foster carers who wish to transfer to a new fostering service, providers should not target their resources to attract existing foster carers to move

to a different service since this does not expand the availability of placements. Financial incentives should not be the key factor influencing a foster carer's decision to transfer:

If existent foster carers are considering a transfer to another fostering service the following points should be addressed by the new service:

1. What are the benefits to children placed, or who may be placed in the future?
2. What are the implications of foster carers moving to another provider with a child in placement? (See transfer protocol Section 5).
3. What are the key reasons/motivations for the foster carer to transfer?
4. What are the benefits to the fostering sector?
5. What are the financial implications to the fostering sector?

We would suggest that these key questions are considered in both the short and the long term with the foster carers and a written evaluation of the points discussed prepared to avoid any detriment to children in placement.

This guidance is supported by:

Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS)

British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF)

Fostering through Social Enterprise (FtSE)

Foster Care Co-operative

Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers (NAFP)

The Fostering Network