



Department
for Education

Foster care reform: proposed changes to assessment and handling of allegations of abuse

**Renewing fostering: homes for 10,000
more children**

Government consultation

**Launch date: 4 February 2026
Respond by: 17 March 2026**

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Introduction

This **consultation** focuses on changes to the assessment process and to the handling of allegations of abuse and standards of care concerns in foster care.

This is alongside the publication of our **action plan**, which sets out the steps we are taking to transform foster care and to increase the number of foster carers in England, so that more children can find loving homes.

We are also issuing a **call for evidence**. This focuses on areas where we want to gather further information from the sector about possible future reforms to the fostering system.

Who this is for

- Current and former foster carers
- Care experienced people
- Kinship carers
- Local Authority staff
- Independent Fostering Agencies
- Fostering panel members
- Organisations and charities who regularly engage with foster carers, and/or children and young people in foster care

We have also produced a version of this document for [children and young people in the care system](#).

Issue date

The consultation was issued on 4 February 2026.

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the team on fostering.CONSULTATION@education.gov.uk

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: coordinator.consultations@education.gov.uk, telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from [GOV.UK DfE consultations](#).

The response

The results of the consultation and the department's response will be [published on GOV.UK](#) in Summer 2026.

We may use computer based tools, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), to help review and summarise the responses we receive. These tools can assist us in identifying themes, grouping similar comments, and processing large volumes of information more efficiently. Any insights generated by AI are always reviewed by our analysis team, and all final conclusions are made by people. The use of these tools does not replace human judgment.

All personal data will continue to be handled securely and in line with data protection legislation.

About this consultation

We are facing a crisis in foster carer recruitment and retention, with risk of poor outcomes for children. A new rulebook is essential to deliver ambitious change.

An action plan, published alongside this consultation, sets out our ambitious for reform of the whole fostering system and the investment we will make in the next 2 years to begin to drive it. It also sets out the direction of travel on reforms to existing standards and guidance on fostering and care planning; we will consult on new versions of these down the line. At the same time, there are complex areas of practice which we want to change quickly to enable our reforms. Views from experts in the sector are crucial in shaping the way we take these forward at pace. We are therefore consulting to on changes we believe could improve processes in fostering to make them fair and proportionate, while ensuring strong safeguarding measures throughout. This consultation document makes two proposal(s):

Proposal 1: Amending the role of fostering panels and strengthening quality assurance standards within the assessment process

Proposal 2: Improving the handling of allegations and standards of care concerns

We would like to hear your views on our proposals.

These proposals relate to improved support for both children in foster care, as well as for foster carers themselves. They are interlinked; when good foster carers leave, children's lives are disrupted and relationships are broken. It also means that there are fewer loving homes available for children, with more children living in unsuitable homes that are less likely to meet their needs.

Alongside this consultation, we are also issuing a Call for Evidence on a range of issues, including two which are strongly related to the proposals in our Call for Evidence:

- **Issue 4: DBS and vetting checks for prospective carers**
- **Issue 5: Consistency in handling of allegations for those inside and outside of the care system**

Respond online

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit [DfE consultations on GOV.UK](https://gov.uk/consultationresponse) to submit your response.

Other ways to respond

If for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may request an alternative format of the form.

By email

fostering.CONSULTATION@education.gov.uk

By post

Fostering Placement Market Reform
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Deadline

The consultation closes on 17 March 2026.

Consultation Proposal 1: Amending the role of fostering panels and strengthening quality assurance standards within the assessment process

Background

Becoming a foster carer is a life-changing experience, which requires a significant level of personal commitment. Caring for a child, watching them grow and thrive, is deeply rewarding. We want to inspire a new generation of foster carers — but as we grow numbers, we must recruit people with the right values and skills so children receive the best possible care.

Assessing whether someone will be a good foster carer is a serious responsibility. It should be led by practitioners with the right expertise and clear accountability.

As part of the assessment process, foster carers are required by law to have enhanced DBS checks, in line with other roles engaged in regulated activity with children. Our call for evidence (Issue 4) includes questions on the current system of DBS checks and vetting for prospective carers, so that we can gather evidence on the suitability of these approaches.

Fostering services should identify a decision maker (usually referred to as the Agency Decision Maker - ADM), who receives the panel's recommendations and make decisions as required. The ADM role is set out in further detail in [guidance on the approval and assessment of foster carers](#), and then set out in more detail in standard 14 of the National Minimum Standards.

Fostering panels, established under the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, provide additional scrutiny to consider whether someone is suitable to foster and to make recommendations to the fostering service.

Panels must include a chair or vice-chair, a social worker with over three years' experience, and several other members. The chair of the panel must be independent of the fostering service provider.

The panel's core functions are:

- To consider applications from prospective carers for approval and recommend whether they are suitable to become a foster carer, and any terms on which that approval should be given.
- To review and recommend whether a person remains suitable to remain as a foster carer, and whether there need to be any changes to their terms of approval. Panels currently do this for a foster carer's first review, or if the fostering service has requested that the panel carry out a review at another stage.
- To consider any written representation made by a foster carer following a

fostering service decision not to approve them, or to terminate their approval. The panel can then make any further recommendations to the fostering service as appropriate.

- To oversee the conduct of assessments and monitor the effectiveness of undertaking reviews of foster carers, as well as giving advice or recommendations on any other matters or cases referred to the panel by the fostering service.

Panels do not make the decision about whether to approve the foster carer or whether to de-register them; the law reserves the right to make these decisions to the fostering service. Decisions made by fostering services are known as ‘qualifying determinations’ and can be taken to the Independent Review Mechanism when the carer disagrees with that decision.

Ofsted inspect the way Local Authority fostering services assess and make decisions about prospective carers through their [ILACS framework](#). This framework sets out a focus on the effectiveness of recruitment, assessment, training and support for foster carers.

Ofsted maintains oversight of independent fostering agencies through a combination of ongoing monitoring, inspections, and mandatory reporting requirements. This includes routine and follow up inspections under the [Social Care Common Inspection Framework](#) as well as additional visits when concerns arise, alongside repeated or supplementary checks – such as DBS checks – if new information questions a provider’s or manager’s fitness. Providers must notify Ofsted about serious incidents and certain organisational changes, some of which require approval before implementation, and they must also submit annual quality assurance reports demonstrating how they review and improve the care they provide.

Rationale

This consultation is seeking views from the sector on whether fostering panel requirements should be changed for the approval of prospective foster carers and for the first review of new foster carers.

Within local authorities, 59% of fostering assessments take over six months to complete, and 29% of assessments take over eight months¹.

Fostering hub data shows that prospective carers can wait weeks or even months for a panel meeting after their assessment report is completed. We know that the length and variable quality of the assessment process can cause people who might be excellent foster carers to disengage. In our upcoming updates to fostering standards and

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2024-to-31-march-2025> (underlying data)

guidance, we will set clearer expectations for recruitment and assessment to ensure effective timeliness. However, we also need to consider that processes add value, are proportionate and focus on what matters most: children's safety and positive outcomes.

Overly long assessments involving multiple practitioners add delay without improving quality. Ofsted data shows there were 4,430 newly approved households in 2024-25.² A delay of even one week for each household amounts to 4,430 cumulative weeks of fostering capacity deferred. While this represents only a small proportion of total annual capacity, it illustrates how small delays across the system ultimately affect how quickly children can be matched with carers.

Ofsted data shows that panels approve almost all applications that they consider – 98.6% in 2024–25 – indicating that panels almost universally mirror the original assessment by social workers.³ This raises questions on whether panels provide meaningful additional scrutiny. While some carers find the experience of panel positive, others find it daunting and, in some cases, discouraging. Carers also reflect that panels sometimes test skills that are less relevant to the fostering task, such as public speaking.

Panels can be especially burdensome for kinship foster carers. In these cases, the key issue is whether the placement serves the child's best interests, yet the panel process can feel intrusive and ill-suited to understanding complex family relationships in a short meeting. Prospective kinship carers may have already been identified as the most suitable carer following a family group decision making process, and therefore assessment will provide the necessary matching and support planning without the need for approval at fostering panel.

Assessments already involve multiple layers of practitioner oversight, including assessing social workers, senior managers, and ADMs. As registered and regulated social workers and senior members of staff of inspected services, ADMs have the authority and responsibility to ensure that assessments identify suitable foster carers, and that they can make clear decisions about carers who are not suitable to foster.

When responsibility is spread across too many stages and actors, ownership may become unclear, creating delays. In the worst cases overlapping and unclear responsibility can create risk for children because accountability is eroded. We must ensure that responsibility and accountability in decision making in fostering is clear and hold services and decision makers to account through Ofsted.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2024-to-31-march-2025> (underlying data)

³ Calculations do not take into account the number of applications withdrawn by applicants or services, or the number of applications that remain in progress. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2024-to-31-march-2025> (underlying data)

At the same time, there is a question whether the administration of fostering panels takes up resources (both in terms of time and money) could be used more effectively within other parts of the service, for example, in providing greater levels of support to existing foster carers.

There is continual oversight of foster carers after approval. All Children in Care have a social worker who is responsible for ensuring the child in question has the right carer or placement and the right support and has to visit the child regularly. All approved foster carers have a named social worker (a supervising social worker) who supervises and supports foster carers so that they can provide safe, high-quality care to children. Supervising social workers hold planned supervision meetings with foster carers and also carry out at least one unannounced visit per year to each fostering household. They can also increase the supervision of these visits where necessary. Supervising social workers identify where standards of care may be falling short, and work with foster carers to address this, and to report and escalate those concerns where required. While supervising social workers should aim to work with foster carers to address these issues, if these concerns persist, or are serious, they may recommend convening a foster care review to reconsider suitability and terms of approval.

In such cases, we recognise the need for a clear and transparent process for addressing standards of care concerns or following an allegation of harm against the foster carer. A decision to deregister or alter the terms of approval of an existing carer, particularly where that decision would result in the termination of a fostering placement, requires an opportunity for the issues to be discussed openly and fairly. We have set out further details on how this process should work within Proposal 2 of this consultation (Allegations and Standards of Care).

Foster carers who disagree with service decisions about their approval (in stage 2 of the application process) or who believe that these decisions have been made unfairly, will continue to be able to escalate the issue to the Independent Review Mechanism. This is in line with the [Independent Review of Determinations \(Adoption and Fostering\) Regulations 2009](#). We do not propose amending this process.

Proposal

We propose removing the requirement for fostering panels to make recommendations for initial assessment of foster carers and for the one-year annual review process. We would also remove the requirement for panels to oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering service provider.

These decisions will be made by the Agency Decision Maker in the fostering service without the need for a panel, with a clear line of accountability through inspection for the decisions made.

We instead propose setting out clearer quality assurance expectations within our statutory guidance and updated National Minimum Standards. This would ensure that

quality assurance is embedded within the assessment itself, rather than in a single set-piece panel meeting at the final stage.

As set out in our action plan, we intend to rewrite our fostering standards and guidance. We will consult on these changes as soon as practicable in the coming months. Our changes to National Minimum Standards and guidance will set out expectations on best practice and clearer quality assurance expectations as part of the assessment process.

For example, this will set out that expectations that assessments should build in opportunities for second opinions throughout the initial assessment process, to provide opportunity for peer review and challenge. This will also include clearer expectations on the role of the Agency Decision Maker to ensure that the quality of their decision making is sufficiently robust and that they are accountable for the decisions that they make. This will include an expectation on Agency Decision Makers to make use of their professional networks (for example, with Agency Decision Makers from other fostering services, or within fostering hubs or regional care co-operatives) to secure external challenge on more complex decisions.

Question 3 of this consultation seeks further views on other ways that we can strengthen quality assurance in the assessment process.

Question 4 of this consultation seeks views on ways that we can strengthen expectations on the role of Agency Decision Makers, to set out in updated standards and guidance.

Updated standards will also inform changes to the ILACs and SCCIF inspection frameworks and raise the bar on expectations of services through a clear and powerful accountability mechanism.

We propose to keep the requirement for a panel to be involved in reviewing a foster carer's ongoing suitability to foster, where a decision to de-register or alter a carer's terms of approval is being considered.

Alongside this, we want to get views from the sector about our existing regulations and the suitability of these for this tailored role. For example, we want to hear:

- Views on whether the overall number of panel members required to conduct panel business is appropriate;
- Views on the type of experience or qualifications that panel members should have; and
- Views on the level of independence that panel members should have from the fostering service.

Questions:

9. To what extent do you agree that fostering panels provide value that is proportionate to the time and resources required to operate them?

Select one from: Strongly agree; Agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree; Strongly disagree; I don't know.

If desired, please explain your responses (Free text).

10. What would you see as the advantages or disadvantages of removing fostering panels from initial assessment and the first annual review process? **(Free text).**
11. What changes (if any) would you seek to make to standards and guidance to ensure that effective quality assurance takes place throughout the assessment process? **(Free text).**
12. If panels were not required for approvals, how would we strengthen the role of the Agency Decision Maker or other processes to ensure objectivity and rigour? **(Free text).**
13. To what extent do you agree with the proposal to maintain the use of panels for recommendations on possible deregistrations of foster carers?

Select one from: Strongly agree; Agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Disagree; Strongly disagree; I don't know.

The following questions relate to panels that make recommendations on possible deregistrations of foster carers.

14. What are your views on the number of panel members that should be required to conduct panel business? **(Free text).**
15. What are your views on the type of experience or qualifications that panel members should have? **(Free text).**
16. What are your views on the level of independence that panel members should have from the fostering service **(Free text).**
17. What other changes to the requirements for panels that make recommendations on possible deregistrations of foster carers would improve the process? **(Free text).**
18. Are there other mandated parts of the fostering approval process that should be changed to clarify responsibilities, ensure robust checks and speed up approvals? **(Write in)**

Consultation Proposal 2: Allegations and standards of care

Please note: as well as this consultation proposal, we are also calling for evidence on the consistency in handling of allegations for those inside and outside of the care system (Issue 5).

Foster carers and their families make a significant commitment to the children and young people in their care. The vast majority of children in foster care are provided with safe, loving homes. But we must not shy away from the fact that abuse does happen in foster care, and it is vital that we listen and act. We must ensure that children are protected from harm and ensure that any allegations of abuse or neglect are investigated thoroughly.

At the same time, we know children sometimes say things about their parent or carer because they are angry, don't feel heard or as a reaction to past trauma. Sometimes people in a child's life, for example a parent, make allegations out of genuine concern about their child, and at other times they do so to express their desperation, anger and grief. Discerning between the two takes great nuance and skill.

2014 research showed that both abuse, and false allegations of abuse, co-exist within foster care⁴. A large proportion of cases are also classed as 'unsubstantiated', meaning that there is insufficient evidence to either prove or disprove the allegation⁵:

In a sub-sample of 85 local authorities, while only 26 per cent of all allegations were confirmed, only 30 per cent were proven to be unfounded. The remaining 43 per cent of allegations were unsubstantiated due to a lack of evidence⁶.

Official statistics also show that in the year 2024-25, 2,860 allegations of abuse were made against foster carers. Approximately 30% of allegation investigations were referred to the fostering panel for review, with 52% resolved with no further action, and 17% monitored for an agreed period⁷. 59% were coming directly from children and 41% were coming from people connected to them⁸. Allegations can range in severity, covering both allegations of sustained physical or sexual abuse, through to allegations of one-off incidents following an argument.

⁴ [Keeping children safe: allegations concerning the abuse or neglect of children in care - York Research Database](#)

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2024-to-31-march-2025>
(underlying data)

⁶ [Keeping children safe: allegations concerning the abuse or neglect of children in care - York Research Database](#)

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2024-to-31-march-2025>
(underlying data)

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2024-to-31-march-2025>
(underlying data)

By their nature, allegations are often complex and must be thoroughly investigated. Investigations, by their very nature, are intrusive and deeply sensitive. Ofsted data shows that allegations are taking too long to resolve. While our guidance suggests that 80% of allegations should be resolved within one month, Ofsted data suggests that only around 45% of allegations are resolved this quickly.⁹ 28% of investigations take more than 10 weeks to resolve¹⁰, and we frequently hear examples of cases that stretch into several months, or even years, before resolution. In this period, children and carers can be left in limbo.

Rationale

We believe our guidance on allegations needs updating to ensure that investigations are proportionate, timely, and fair. It is also crucial that we maintain robust child protection standards.

We have heard from a wide range of stakeholders that the current allegations process is not working well enough for children or foster carers. While it may sometimes be necessary to move children, we hear that this often happens as an automatic response, disrupting the child and all other children in the fostering household. The heightened sense of risk, and urgent pace of decision-making during an allegation can mean that children's voices are lost, and children can find themselves unsure why they, or other children in the household, have been moved. We hear that once removed from a foster carer's home, children rarely return, even when allegations have been found to be unfounded or unsubstantiated.

Young Person

"I was taken from my foster family, no one told me why and I was moved to another city without even packing my own bags. When I asked to go home, they said there had been an allegation made by another child. I loved my foster mam, but I never saw her again, I just wanted to go home to her, and no one would listen to me."

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The allegations process needs to be thorough, and sometimes (rightly) results in foster carers being considered unsuitable to foster. However, we also know that good foster carers find the process so bruising that they often choose to leave fostering altogether after an allegation, including those that result in an 'unfounded' or 'unsubstantiated'.

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2024-to-31-march-2025> (underlying data)

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/fostering-in-england-1-april-2024-to-31-march-2025> (underlying data)

¹¹ Consultation event with young people carried out by The Fostering Network, 2023

When good carers deregister, children's lives are disrupted and there are fewer loving homes available for them.

Foster carers report that the way allegations are handled causes great distress for them and their family, including foster children.

Foster Carer

"An allegation was made 2 years ago - we were paid for some of this time but it stopped without explanation, 2 years later we have still not had the final Review - this is severely affecting our mental health."

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Carers have told us that they are not informed about the nature of the allegation made against them or who made it, that the fostering social worker or service stops communicating with them, and that they are not offered the independent support that they should receive. Carers also talk of the financial implications when a child has been removed from their care during an (often lengthy) investigation.

The existing guidance ([Children Act 1989: Fostering Services, paras 3.68–3.81](#)) sets out expectations for handling allegations, but practice varies widely. We hear concerns about:

1. Escalation: Some issues are escalated too rapidly rather than seeking to de-escalate at an early stage. This can result in the police being involved unnecessarily, significantly prolonging investigations.
2. Delays: Investigations take too long, leaving carers and children in limbo.
3. Placement disruption: Children are frequently moved during investigations, causing disruption to them and others in the household, even when risk could be managed in other ways.
4. Lack of effective support: Carers often feel isolated and unsupported by their service and are not provided with the independent support that they should receive.
5. Transparency: Carers do not always see reports written about them or have the opportunity to respond before decisions are made.
6. Information sharing: Carers report facing long periods without communication from the fostering service, as well as a lack of detail on the allegation itself. This causes significant anxiety.

Sector research suggests that just over a third (34%) of carers undergoing allegations do not intend to continue to foster after the investigation concludes.¹³ Based on the current numbers of foster carers who face an allegation, that means that we estimate

¹² A foster carer in Foster Talk's Allegation Report 2024

¹³ [Foster Carers Speak Out - FosterTalk Allegations Survey 2024 - FosterTalk Foster Carers Membership](#)

between 800-1000 carers deregister following the allegation process each year. This number will include a subset of carers who are not suitable to foster.

We recognise that too often, bruising experiences of unfounded and unsubstantiated allegations drive good foster carers away, depriving children of a stable, loving home and exacerbating the pressure on the system. Moreover, the fear of prospective allegations on their private life and career can discourage people from becoming a carer in the first place, again worsening pressure on the system as a whole.

Great practice also exists in the system, with the immediate physical risk and emotional risk of a placement move are weighed up carefully, with ample support for the child, carer and their family throughout a swift and proportionate process.

Foster Carer

“My SSW [supervising social worker] at that time was an amazing lady and she contacted me very often to ensure I was OK and to offer supervision as often as I wanted it.”

14

We must improve the level of consistency of support that children and carers receive through the process, ensuring that children are safeguarded and foster carers are treated with dignity throughout the process.

Proposal

We will soon be consulting on an updated set of National Minimum Standards and fostering guidance, to set out a simpler rulebook for fostering that puts trusted relationships first. This will include new sections on the handling of allegations and standards of care concerns.

In advance of that process, we want to seek views from the sector on the proposed changes to allegations practice below. Feedback from the sector will then be incorporated into our draft versions of standards and guidance for further consultation.

The Department already sets out policy on the handling of allegations in paragraphs 3.68 to 3.81 of the [current fostering guidance](#), while standard 22 of the [National Minimum Standards](#) also focuses on handling allegations.

The below proposals show the three areas where we plan to strengthen current guidance and standards:

¹⁴ A foster carer in Foster Talk's Allegation Report 2024

1. Setting out clear distinctions between allegations and standards of care concerns

We propose to use the definitions below in amended guidance:

An allegation of harm is when a foster carer is alleged to have:

1. behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child
2. possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child
3. behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates they may pose a risk of harm to children
4. behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children

Allegations should be reported to the local authority through the usual referral mechanism to ensure the child in question can be appropriately safeguarded, with a section 47 assessment launched if needed. They should also be reported to the local authority designated officer (LADO). As with any instance of suspicion a child may be coming to harm, it is right that agencies refer in their concerns so that practitioners can triangulate information from the past and from different agencies, along with contextual information about the child, to make a judgment about the potential level of risk. Reporting concerns into the LADO ensures that data can be appropriately collected and any pattern of concerns can be spotted regarding people in positions of trust, like foster carers.

To ensure that the LADO role is delivered consistently and effectively, we will review the sections of 'Working together to safeguard children' that cover the role of the LADO when we next update the guidance. We will continue to work with the sector on any further developments, including exploring the development of a LADO handbook.

A **standard of care concern** relates to concerns that do not meet the threshold above, but where a foster carer may not be meeting the expected standards of care as outlined in fostering regulations and guidance.

Standards of care concerns do not need to be treated as a formal investigation but should be raised, discussed and addressed through the existing relationship a service has built with the carer. For example, if a foster carer behaves in a way that makes the fostered child feel different and isolated from other members of the family, a fostering service should have the relationship, skills and resources to explore this with the carer. This could include working with them to consider the behaviour in question, make changes, and to avoid similar issues in future. In some cases it may lead to deregistration but as a result of not meeting standards of care.

2. Providing support for children and carers who are experiencing an allegation

We are planning to introduce the below elements to upcoming standards and guidance on foster care:

- A. It is sometimes necessary to remove a child from a fostering placement following an allegation of harm. However, moving children following an allegation is a significant decision that will disrupt the child and all other children in the household, and can cause trauma in its own right. Such decisions should be taken carefully, with a holistic assessment of risk that considers the wider context of the child, their history, and the history of their relationship with the carer. Local authorities should consider whether there are other ways of mitigating and managing the risk before automatically deciding to move a child from a placement. For example, this could include providing additional temporary support to the household to prevent placement breakdown.
- B. Any decision to move a child from a fostering placement during an allegation investigation should be signed off by a senior safeguarding leader within the service.
- C. The voice of the child is particularly important when an allegation has been made, and ensuring their views are heard should be considered a priority when making decisions on how to respond. This is particularly relevant for allegations that originate from a third party, which accounted for 41% of allegations that were made in 2024-25. Children who are involved in an allegation of harm against a foster carer should also always be reminded of their right to an advocate.
- D. Fostering services should consider the effect of allegations on other children in the home who are not directly involved in the allegation, and any additional support that those children may need.
- E. Supervising social workers should continue to offer support to foster carers facing an allegation. This includes regular check-ins on the carer's wellbeing. It is likely to be suitable for supervising social workers to increase the support they offer to carers in this situation, given the distress that these processes can cause. This should continue even when the foster family is also receiving independent support.
- F. We will reiterate the importance of independent support and emphasise that this should happen from the earliest stages of the allegation process. This support should last for the duration of the investigation. Where the case continues to a panel review meeting, panel chairs should check whether the foster carer was offered independent support, and when this support began.
- G. Foster carers should be able to choose their own form of independent support if they do not wish to use the independent support that has been offered to them. We will also make it clearer that independent supporters should be allowed to speak on behalf of foster carers in panel meetings, if the foster carer requests this.
- H. Fostering services should review their handling of allegations afterwards to identify where they can improve. Services should seek feedback from foster carers and (as long as it is appropriate) the children affected.

- I. Fostering services should continue to offer support to both children and foster carers after an allegation has been resolved, including where children were removed from the home during the investigation. This is a crucial part of the process for foster carer retention, as it allows foster carers to rebuild relationships with their fostering service or social workers.

3. Making the allegations process fairer and more transparent

We are planning to introduce the following elements to upcoming standards and guidance on foster care:

- A. If the foster carer normally receives a fee, they should continue to receive that fee during the full period of investigation into the allegation, including when child(ren) have been removed from their placement. This should continue until a final decision has been made and this should happen for the duration of the investigation. Government will provide funding to cover this additional cost.
- B. A foster carer's supervising social worker should not be the same person who investigates an allegation of harm. The investigation should be carried out by another social work practitioner within the service. This will enable the supervising social worker to continue to support the foster carer in question.
- C. Fostering services should provide specific training on allegations so that all adults in a fostering household are suitably prepared, should an allegation be made. We will set out an expectation that allegations are addressed in pre-approval training, then delivered in more detail in post-approval training within the first six months of approval.
- D. The 'designated person' should be the head of fostering service, or a senior manager specifically delegated by them. The designated person should, as soon as possible, provide foster carers with a written account about the nature of the allegation or concerns. The foster carer should also be given written information about the enquiry procedures that are being followed and scheduled timescales.
- E. There should be regular (weekly) updates given from the 'designated person' to the foster carer on the status of the allegation, even if this is to confirm that there is no new information. Where information cannot be provided during an investigation, it should be provided afterwards.
- F. Local authorities should prioritise the investigation of allegations to ensure that they are resolved as quickly as possible. We reiterate our expectations on the timeframes that are set out in our guidance, where the police are not involved. It is expected that 80 per cent of cases should be resolved within one month, 90 per cent within three months, and all but the most exceptional cases should be completed within 12 months.
- G. During the handling of an allegation or standard of care concern, foster carers should be able to continue to access any records that they have previously created, such as journals or logs of their fostering experience and relationship with the child.

- H. If a foster carer's continued suitability of approval is reviewed by a panel, foster carers should receive a copy of the documentation that goes to the panel at least one week in advance of the panel meeting. Foster carers should be able to provide an unedited response to be included to the panel, and the meeting should not proceed unless this has happened.

Questions:

19. To what extent do you agree with the proposed changes to our standards and guidance for providing greater support to children and carers who are experiencing an allegation?

Select one from: Strongly agree; - Agree; - Neither agree nor disagree; - Disagree; - Strongly disagree; - I don't know.

If desired, please explain your response (Free text).

20. To what extent do you agree with the proposed changes to our standards and guidance for making the allegations process fairer and more transparent?

Select one from: - Strongly agree; - Agree; - Neither agree nor disagree; - Disagree; - Strongly disagree; - I don't know.

If desired, please explain your response (Free text).

21. Do you have any additional suggestions to improve the allegations process? **(Free text).**



Department
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