



Department
for Education

Updating foster care standards and guidance

Government consultation

Launch date: 8 July 2026

Respond by: 16 September 2026

Contents

Introduction	3
Who this is for	3
Issue date	3
Enquiries	3
Additional copies	3
The response	4
About this consultation	5
Background	5
Our approach to writing the standards	5
What are we proposing to change?	6
Links to other consultations	7
Specific consultation proposal on notice of resignation	9
Engagement	10
Legal bases	10
Respond online	10
Other ways to respond	11
Deadline	11
Questions on each standard	12
Part 1: Why this matters	12
Part 2: The quality standards	12
Part 3: The Training and Development Standards	15
Part 4: Guidance for Fostering Services	17
General Questions	18
Implementation Questions	19
Consultation Proposal 1 – Withdrawing notice	20
Background	20
Rationale	20
Proposal	21

Introduction

This consultation focuses on changes to national fostering standards and guidance.

Who this is for

- Current and former foster carers
- Care experienced people
- Kinship carers
- Local Authority staff, including social workers
- 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. This is available [here](#).

Issue date

The consultation was issued on 8 July 2026.

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the team on standards.CONULTATION@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 Autumn 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

Background

As set out in our Action Plan – [Renewing Fostering: Homes for 10,000 more children published in February 2026](#) – there is an urgent need to reform the foster care system to address the crisis in foster carer recruitment and retention and ensure the best outcomes for children and young people.

As part of that commitment, we are simplifying and rewriting the national fostering standards for services, training standards for foster carers and associated guidance. A new rulebook is essential to deliver ambitious change.

The current statutory guidance that governs how foster carers are selected, assessed, supported and developed is outdated. It was designed for a different time and focuses heavily on what services should do and document rather than on what children need. Layer upon layer of guidance has been added in response to specific concerns without consideration of how they combine to support a good childhood and better outcomes for children in care. This has led to unnecessary complexity that drives bureaucracy, inconsistent decision-making, and confusion about what is permitted.

Too many children struggle to access a foster home when they need one. We know that many practitioners who go above and beyond every day to support children in care and foster carers. Despite that, we hear that lack of clarity leads to inconsistent expectations and risk-averse practice which make it harder to offer stable, relationship-based care.

Updating the standards and guidance to set clearer national expectations for the sector is therefore essential to ensure more children can grow up in safe, stable, loving families.

Our approach to writing the standards

A lead drafter was appointed to work with the Department for Education to rewrite the national fostering standards and guidance, supported by an expert group advising on the drafting. The group brings together people with lived experience of fostering and being in care, alongside professional expertise across children's social care. Their combined experience underpins their commitment to systemic change that centres the needs of children and young people.

The revised standards and guidance are grounded in evidence, social work theory, practice insights and lived experience, increasing their potential to drive meaningful improvements in recruitment, retention, and the quality-of-care children receive.

The expert group includes:

1. **Niketa Sanderson-Gillard** as the lead drafter. Niketa is the founder and CEO of Why Care and a qualified social worker, bringing experience across frontline practice, national policy (including at the Department for Education and the Independent Review of Children's Social Care) and system reform. A Churchill Fellow, she has explored international models of foster care to inform improvements in the UK system. She also brings lived experience of care.
2. **Luke Rodgers BEM** as the engagement lead. Luke is the CEO of The Care Leaders, bringing lived experience and recognised expertise in co-design, sector engagement and service development in children's social care.
3. **Hanan Al-Najjar**. Hanan is a foster carer, bringing frontline insight and national advisory experience (including with the Department for Education and CoramBAAF). She has developed training to support inclusive practice and children's identity, faith and belonging.
4. **Margaret Mulowska**. Margaret is a care-experienced social worker, bringing expertise in improving frontline practice through innovation and trauma-informed approaches, alongside experience supporting fostering and kinship families. She has contributed to national policy through roles with the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and the Department for Education's National Practice Group.
5. **Paul Adams**. Paul is a fostering consultant with over 30 years' experience in social work. He brings expertise in fostering practice, and how that is impacted by regulations and standards. He also has experience as a foster carer and adopter.
6. **Poonum Chamdal**. Poonum is a youth and community worker, bringing 20 years' experience in community engagement and co-design with children and young people. Poonum is a foster carer bringing insight into fostering alongside working full-time.

What are we proposing to change?

The revised standards and guidance introduce several important changes:

1. The [revised standards and guidance](#) have been simplified and combined into one document for ease of use. Thirty-one National Minimum Standards have been consolidated into 7 Quality Standards for services in Part 2. The Training, Support and Development Standards have been replaced by 7 Foster Carer Development Standards covering the first-year post-approval in Part 3. Operational detail on how fostering services should carry out their key duties is described in Part 4 and replaces The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services as well as Fostering services: assessment and approval of foster carers. We have reduced more than 185

pages of guidance into 80 and think placing them all in one place will help services understand what is expected of them.

2. **The revised standards are explicitly focused on children's outcomes, not process.** Each standard begins with what it means for children and why it matters to them, then set out what outcomes services must achieve, rather than how they should achieve them.
3. **Children tell us that what they need most is at least one enduring, trusted relationship with an adult who knows them, cares for them and stays.** The standards are focused on supporting foster carers to build these strong, lasting relationships, recognising them as central to children's stability and wellbeing.
4. **This is a fundamental re-write of the old standards and guidance** and so represents a wide range of changes on what services should do and how they should carry out their duties.

This work sits within and is aligned with broader reform to children's social care that is rebuilding the system around families and their networks, including Family Help, family group decision-making and kinship-first approaches. These initiatives reflect that wherever it is safe, children should be supported to remain with the people they know and love.

Links to other consultations

We are consulting on the revised standards and guidance for 10 weeks.

We would like to hear your views on each standard to ensure that they are clear and effective in delivering better outcomes.

Earlier this year, we launched a consultation on the use of [panels in foster carer assessment and on the handling of allegations against carers](#). The changes in the revised standards and guidance reflect what we heard from that consultation.

There is a parallel relevant consultation out [currently on the statutory framework for the help, support and protection of children](#), which includes the role of the LADO and the handling of allegations as explained below.

We are again seeking views on these complex areas of practice and whether we have written about them in standards in the right way. These areas include:

1. Panels

In our previous consultation, we heard strong support from stakeholders for retaining panels for foster carer approvals and first annual reviews. However, we also heard that the current operation of panels is not working optimally, and that panels would benefit from streamlining and reform.

In light of this feedback, the revised standards and guidance set out what good panel practice looks like. The standards set clearer expectations on the training and expertise that a panel should have, including on the law and regulations around fostering. The standards and guidance now state that the chair and independent person should be 3+ years social work qualified with experience of working in fostering. This is to ensure that panels provide value and relevant insight to identify risks and support needs around a foster carer.

The revised standards and guidance state that panels should be selected for 3 years at a time and that there should be a clear process for removing any panel member whose practice is not up to standard.

The revised standards and guidance also set stronger expectations on the role of panels in service improvement and responses to complaints. This includes a new expectation that foster carers can raise concerns about the service with the panel chair, and the chair contributes to discussions on the quality of the service's practice and decision-making.

2. Allegations

Through our recent call for evidence, we have heard clear feedback that the current process for managing allegations against foster carers is not always working well for children or carers. Broad definitions of harm have in some cases blurred the line between standards of care concerns and safeguarding allegations, sometimes leading to disproportionate investigations, placement moves, and distressing experiences for children and foster carers. This can overlook children's voices, and drive carers away or deter new ones from coming forward, increasing pressure on the system.

Great practice also exists in the system, where 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. Great practice ensures that children are safeguarded and that foster carers are treated with dignity throughout the process.

The proposed standard and guidance aim to clarify and strengthen expectations of the handling of standards of care concerns and allegations, emphasising the importance of timeliness, support for carers and children, regular updates, independent advocacy and ongoing payment. At the same time, they stress the importance of spotting patterns in

concerns over time for effective safeguarding and the centrality of children's best interest, including the protection of their enduring relationships, in any process.

We have committed to make the difference between an allegation and a standard of care concern clearer to encourage the right proportionate response to any issue.

However, the relevant thresholds are not defined in fostering standards and guidance only. The wider framework for managing allegations against people who work with children, including the role of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), is set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children. The Government is consulting on the statutory framework for the help, support and protection of children, which includes the role of the LADO and the handling of allegations. The detailed thresholds for managing allegations are being considered through that wider process, so that the fostering standards and the safeguarding framework develop together. The consultation can be accessed [here](#).

The consultation on the statutory framework for the help, support and protection and the consultation on these fostering standards are complementary. The framework consultation closes on 4 September 2026, and responses to both will be considered together.

The Government intends an approach to allegations in fostering that includes more consistent support for children and carers throughout the process. This standard sets the principles for that approach; additional detail will follow both consultations.

Specific consultation proposal on notice of resignation

We plan to make clarifying regulatory change that a foster carer who has given notice to deregister from fostering can withdraw this notice within 28 days i.e. before their resignation takes effect. There is no reason, within existing legislation, that a foster carer would or should be unable to change their mind in this period.

The proposed change would enable foster carers who change their mind after submitting notice to reengage in fostering, without having to complete the assessment process from the start and ensuring foster care providers retain foster carers.

Foster carers who do not change their mind about giving notice would still have their approval terminated after 28 days. The proposal on withdrawing notice of resignation is outlined in more detail on page 20 of the document.

Engagement

The DfE and the expert drafting group will be conducting engagement events for children's social care leaders, frontline practitioners, foster carers and young people across the country. These events will span from July to September and will be both in-person and virtual.

There will be youth participation sessions for care-experienced children and young people to engage on the revised standards and guidance, alongside a [Children and Young People's version](#) of the document. This engagement is essential to ensure that the standards are aligned with the experiences of those they are designed to support and actually meet children's needs.

We have included children's quotes from past research in the consultation document but may update them with new ones based on this engagement with children and young people.

Legal bases

Part 2 – Quality Standards will be issued under section 23 of the [Care Standards Act 2000](#). These are minimum national standards applicable to fostering services which explain the requirements set out in the [Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations 2011](#). They are applicable to local authorities in their exercise of fostering functions by virtue of section 69 of that Act.

Part 3 – Foster Carer Training Standards set out what fostering services should cover in the training they provide to foster carers. They are non-statutory guidance. Fostering services, including both local authority and independent fostering agencies, are expected to have regard to them.

Part 4 – is a proposed replacement to [Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4](#) and explains how fostering services should carry out their key duties. It supports the requirements set out in the [Children Act 1989](#) and [the Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations 2011](#) and reflects related responsibilities under the [Children Act 2004](#) and the [Children and Young Persons Act 2008](#) in relation to fostering services. It sets out the wider statutory framework within which all fostering services operate.

Respond online

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit [DfE consultations on GOV.UK](#) 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

standards.CONULTATION@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 16 September 2026.

Questions on each standard

The following questions relate to your views on each individual standard and the overall guidance. We encourage you to have the [revised standards and guidance](#) available for reference when answering these questions.

Please also provide your views on the proposed changes to panel practice, transfers between agencies, and allegations as outlined in the 'About this consultation' section.

While we welcome comments on as many areas as possible, you are not expected to respond to all questions. Please focus on the areas where you have relevant feedback.

Questions 1 – 8 are about you as the respondent and can only be answered on the [online form](#). The first question on the revised standards is Question 9.

Part 1: Why this matters

9. To what extent do you agree with the principles used to write this document?

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

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest **[Free text]**.

Part 2: The quality standards

Standard 1: Recruitment and assessment

10. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

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

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest **[Free text]**.

Standard 2: Kinship and family and friends foster carers

11. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

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

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest **[Free text]**.

Standard 3: Identity, culture and family relationships

12. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

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

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest **[Free text]**.

Standard 4: Knowledge and capability

13. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

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

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest **[Free text]**.

Standard 5: Support and supervision

14. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

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

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest **[Free text]**.

Standard 6: Delegated authority and everyday family life

15. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

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

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest **[Free text]**.

Standard 7: Allegations, concerns and the fair treatment of carers

As noted on page 8, the Government is also consulting in parallel on proposed changes to LADO processes as part of the consultation on the statutory framework for help, support and protection which will inform future updates to statutory guidance such as Working Together to Safeguard Children. This can be accessed [here](#). We will consider the response to both consultations and align our approach accordingly.

16. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

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

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest **[Free text]**.

17. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the same processes should apply to allegations against foster carers as apply to allegations against other adults who work with children, whether in a paid or voluntary capacity?

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

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest **[Free text]**.

Part 3: The Training and Development Standards

Introduction

18. To what extent do you agree with the principles used to write the Development Standards?

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

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest **[Free text]**.

Standard 1: Understanding the role of the foster carer

19. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

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

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest **[Free text]**.

Standard 2: Building safe, stable and loving relationships with children

20. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

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

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest **[Free text]**.

Standard 3: Therapeutic parenting

21. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

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

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest **[Free text]**.

Standard 4: Identity, culture and the child's sense of self

22. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

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

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest **[Free text]**.

Standard 5: Safeguarding and the child's sense of self

23. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

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

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest **[Free text]**.

Standard 6: Health, education and everyday wellbeing

24. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

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

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest **[Free text]**.

Standard 7: Working with others around the child

25. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

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

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest **[Free text]**.

Part 4: Guidance for Fostering Services

26. To what extent do you agree with the proposed content of this guidance?

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

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest **[Free text]**.

General Questions

The following questions relate to your views on the document as a whole.

27. Do you have any overall comments on the proposed standards and guidance that you have not yet had the opportunity to share? For example, you may wish to comment on the overall impact of the proposed changes or identify any areas where additional detail or attention may be needed to support meaningful improvement **[Free text]**.

28. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed standards are suitable for kinship carers and meet their specific needs?

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

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with for kinship carers and any changes you would suggest **[Free text]**.

Implementation Questions

The following questions relate to your views on the implementation of the revised standards and guidance.

29. To what extent do you agree or disagree that these standards and guidance can be implemented in day-to-day practice?

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]**

30. In your view, what are the challenges to implementing these standards and guidance? **[Free text]**

31. In your view, what additional support, if any, would be required to enable effective implementation of these standards and guidance? **[Free text]**

Consultation Proposal 1 – Withdrawing notice

Background

The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, section 28 (13) currently states that: *A foster parent may give notice in writing to the fostering service provider at any time that the foster parent no longer wishes to be a foster parent, in which case the foster parent's approval is terminated with effect from 28 days from the date on which the notice is received by the fostering service provider.*

The 2013 assessment and approval of foster carers guidance currently states that a fostering service provider does not have the power to decline a resignation, and that the resignation automatically takes effect after 28 days regardless of whether the foster carer withdraws their notice.

We propose to make a clarifying regulatory change so that a foster carer who has given notice can withdraw this notice within 28 days i.e. before their resignation takes effect.

Rationale

From 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025¹, 4,690 mainstream households deregistered from foster care (with some of these households deregistering to rejoin a different agency). Some of these foster carers may have changed their mind, after submitting notice to deregister but, current guidance states that the foster carer is unable to withdraw their notice. To recommence fostering, these individuals would have to begin the entire foster carer registration process again.

We have heard from the sector that foster carers would value the opportunity to withdraw their notice within 28 days i.e. before the resignation automatically takes effect. However, there is currently no provision within regulation 28 to allow a foster carer to withdraw their notice.

We expect that the proposed change to regulation would enable:

- a) Foster carers who change their mind after submitting notice to reengage in fostering, without having to recomplete the assessment process.
- b) Foster carers who do not change their mind about giving notice to still have their approval terminated after 28 days.

¹ [Main findings: fostering in England 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 - GOV.UK](#)

- c) Foster care providers to potentially retain foster carers who have changed their mind about giving notice, but who (under current legislation) are unable to withdraw their notice.

Proposal

We propose to make a clarifying regulatory change that a foster carer who has given notice can withdraw this notice within 28 days i.e. before their resignation takes effect.

If the foster carer does not withdraw their notice, the foster parent's approval will be terminated with effect from 28 days from the date on which the notice is received by the fostering service provider. This is the current process and timescale, as outlined in legislation.

Questions:

- 32. To what extent do you support a regulatory clarification being made to allow a foster carer to withdraw their resignation within 28 days? Where a foster carer does not withdraw a resignation within 28 days then they will be deregistered.

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

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any benefits and any challenges of the proposal [Free text].



Department
for Education

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