

# Wirral Fostering Service

## Exemptions and Extensions/Variations to Foster Carer Approval

IT TAKES A BIG **HEART** TO FOSTER



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## **1. Usual Fostering Limit on Number of Children**

A person may not foster more than three children in each foster home except where all the children are siblings.

In all other circumstances, foster carers may only exceed this number if an exemption has been agreed.

## **2. Reasons why an Exemption may be Considered**

Applications for an exemption will usually be made because of the following exceptional circumstances:

- a. The child concerned was previously placed with the Foster Carers and his or her placement elsewhere has disrupted.
- b. The Foster Carers have special skills to meet the child's needs which are not available elsewhere.
- c. The placement of the child over the limit is the most appropriate way of meeting the child's needs arising from disability, race, religion, language and/or culture.
- d. The placement is required to keep siblings together.

Applications can only be made with the agreement of the Foster Carers concerned. When considering an exemption the following factors should be regarded:

- a. The number, ages and circumstances of the children concerned.
- b. The arrangements proposed for the care and accommodation of the children concerned.
- c. The relationship between the Foster Carers and the children concerned.
- d. The period of time over which the placement is likely to last.
- e. The likely effect on the children concerned and any other children living in the household.
- f. The Foster Carers' capacity to provide sufficient care for all the children in the placement.
- g. The need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the fostered children/young people and any other child/young people who live in the foster home.

## **3. The Process for Exemptions**

### **3.1 Planned Exemptions**

The need for an exemption will be identified at the point when the Duty Fostering Social Worker is seeking to identify a suitable placement for a child or children.

Where a Foster Carer is identified as the most appropriate option to meet the child's needs, and this is agreed by the Supervising Social Worker for the carers and the Foster Carer, the Duty Social Worker should consult with the Manager and if agreed prepare an application for an exemption.

The Social Worker(s) to any other child in the placement should also be consulted in order to seek their views on any impact (positive or negative) from a further placement commencing.

All applications for planned exemption for Foster Carers living in the Local Authority area must be made in writing, supported by reasons, to the Head of Service for approval. Where the Foster Carers live in a different Local Authority area, the application must be made to the Manager of the Fostering Service for

that area. The written application will be prepared by the Supervising Social Worker for the Foster Carers in conjunction with the relevant child's Social Worker.

The decision whether or not to grant an exemption will be recorded in writing, together with reasons. Any exemption will be specific to a child or children and can be subject to conditions. The Foster Carer will be notified in writing of the decision.

Upon the granting of an exemption, a time limit will be specified, and an exemption can only extend beyond that date if the Head of Service for the relevant Local Authority area authorises it.

The decision must be recorded.

### **3.2 Emergency Exemptions**

The Duty Manager for the Out of Hours Service can agree for a child to be placed in a foster home above the usual limit in an emergency i.e. without the agreement of the Head of Service. This agreement will only last until the next working day.

An application for exemption beyond the next working day must then be made to the Head of Service.

An interim decision by the Head of Service may be necessary pending full consideration of the exemption.

As with 3.1, the emergency and interim approval can only be given by the Local Authority for the area where the Foster Carers reside. Depending on the Local Authority involved, there may be arrangements in place for a Duty Manager within the Local Authority to agree an emergency or interim exemption. If such arrangements exist, an application for an emergency or interim exemption must be made to the relevant manager in line with their procedures. Otherwise an emergency exemption cannot be granted.

Any emergency or interim decisions to grant an exemption must be confirmed in writing and copies of the decision, together with the reasons, must be placed on the Foster Carer's case record. A copy must also be sent to the Foster Carer.

The decision must be recorded.

### **4. Review and Monitoring of Exemptions**

The Fostering Service is responsible for recording the ending of the exemption when the exemption is no longer required.

### **5. Extension/Variation to the Foster Carer's Terms of Approval**

The placement must also be compatible with the Foster Carer's terms of approval. If the placement would not be compatible, then an extension/variation to their terms of approval will be required. (This will usually be in addition to an extension to the usual number of children, as detailed above).

The Social Worker must agree the placement is suitable with the Team Manager before requesting sign off from the Fostering Head of Service.

All extensions must be reported to the Head of Service.

In these circumstances, the Head of Service can agree an emergency extension of the Foster Carer's approval to allow the placement to go ahead. Any such decision can last for up to 6 working days.