

Allegations against Foster Carers

This procedure must be used alongside **Allegations of abuse made against staff** in Supplementary guidance in South West Child Protection Procedures. In Bristol the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) is Nicola Laird and the Designated Senior Manager (DSM) for fostering is the Service Manager for Children's Resources, Karen Gazzard.

Principle: The welfare of the child is of paramount consideration.

Where complaints or allegations are made or concerns are expressed about a foster carer's treatment of a child (included adopters prior to the Adoption Order), whoever they are raised with:

Stage 1 - the Family Placement social worker, the Family Placement Team Manager and the child's social worker should discuss them and the Family Placement Team Manager must report the concern or allegation to the Service Manager (Children's Resources) (Designated Senior Manager (DSM) or Designated Deputy (DD) as soon as possible. A signed and dated written record of concerns, observations and information must be made and given to the DSM or DD. This should include details of any other previous concerns, allegations or incidents. The DSM or DD must countersign and date this record.

All complaints/allegations and their outcomes should be logged on an allegations sheet for the carer. The DSM or DD must contact the **LADO within one working day** of receiving the report of an allegation.

The DSM or DD will decide whether the complaints raise any possible child protection concerns. If not the DSM or DD will decide how to follow them up and by whom and will ensure that the foster carer is informed. The concerns which do not warrant formal child protection enquiries should be followed up by the Family Placement social worker, the child's social worker or a combination of both. The plan of appropriate action to deal with the matter should be taken **within 3 working days** and the BSCB Allegations Form updated and sent to the LADO.

Stage 2 - Multi Agency Strategy discussion If the complaint raises any possible child protection concerns, the information should be passed immediately to the Duty and Assessment Team Manager for the Children's social care district where the foster carer lives. The Team Manager must discuss the referral with their Senior Manager. A multi agency discussion will take place involving the DSM or DD, the Police Child Abuse Investigation team, a Community Paediatrician, the Family Placement Team Manager and the Duty & Assessment Team Manager/District Senior Manager to decide what type of enquiries should take place. This meeting will be chaired by the District Senior Manager or can be delegated to the Duty and Assessment Team Manager.

The following must be considered:

- a) All other children in the household and any other children affected.
- b) What information can be shared and with whom. Plan of enquiries, allocated tasks and timescales. At what stage the foster children's parents should be informed of the allegation.

- c) Whether the placement should be immediately terminated. (Hasty removal of the child may cause more damage to the children than the alleged incident may have done).
- d) The process of the investigation; particular attention should be paid to the support of the foster carers.

NB Foster carers are providing a service to Children's social care. They are vulnerable to false allegations, which can devastate families even if unfounded.

- e) Whether increased independence (and to what extent), is necessary in investigating the allegations. Consideration should be given to including a relevant voluntary organisation or another local authority staff member.

The Senior Manager/Team Manager will ensure that a case co-ordinator is allocated from the district team where the carers live. This will be a social worker who is not already involved with the foster carers.

The allocated social worker should follow the usual procedure for conducting S47 enquiries. Because of the nature of foster carer assessments and reviews, and social work with looked after children, it may be that much of the information required for a core assessment will already be held.

On completion of the enquiries:

Action

The parents of the foster child must be informed in writing of the outcome of the enquiries. The foster carers must be given a written statement of the allegations against them and the outcome, sending them a copy of the Core Assessment if one has been completed.

At the conclusion of any enquiries, if there is substance to the complaint, the Family Placement Team Manager will decide whether the Area Fostering Panel should consider the registration of the carer immediately. If not, the matter should be included in the next review of the carer and this review should be considered at a panel. Carers are invited to this panel and receive copies of the minutes. A copy should be sent to the LADO.

Where the result of the enquiries is that there are serious concerns of a Child Protection nature any children placed will be removed except in exceptional circumstances where the child's Senior Manager has been consulted. (This decision can be taken at any point during the enquiries if it is necessary to safeguard the child).

Where a Child Protection Conference would be indicated

A child protection conference will not be held where concerns only relate to fostered children. If they are serious enough to warrant a Child Protection Conference the children will be removed and the Foster Care Panel is the appropriate route for dealing with the outcome of the enquiries.

However, where enquiries result in the threshold for a child protection case conference being met with regard to the carers own children:

Action

The case co-ordinator must ensure that the foster carers have appropriate information

about the child protection conferences and that they are aware that the conference will consider risks to all of the children in the household, including the carer's own children. Procedure regarding initial child protection conferences should be followed.

Action

The Family Placement social worker will ensure that the Foster Care Panel has a copy of the decisions and recommendations of the conference to consider when making decisions about the registration as carers. A copy should be sent to the LADO.