



YOUR GUIDE TO

Transferring your fostering approval to another foster agency



Foster carers have the right to freedom of movement between fostering services.

We are saddened when we hear accounts of foster carers feeling unhappy about the agency they chose to foster with. We believe that foster carers have a right to expect that they will be supported in their role. Once you feel that you have exhausted all avenues available to you in order to remedy any issues that you are unhappy about, there is probably no other choice available to you, other than finding an alternative fostering agency. Obviously, no one wants to see foster carers leave their agency, but certainly no one wants to see foster carers leave fostering all together. We feel that transferring is an opportunity for you to get what you feel is going to enable you to be more successful in your role.

It is important that foster carers feel safe and secure in their role and feel that they have a trusted relationship with the team that they will be working with. Before deciding on transferring, it is a good idea to research what other fostering agencies are offering in your area and determine what you feel it is that you are missing in your current fostering agency and whether your expectations can be met at a new agency.

If you are feeling unhappy with the agency you are currently fostering with and considering whether a transfer is going to be better for you, what should you do?

As a foster carer thinking of transferring, you will have specific reasons for this and will have (as suggested above) researched other agencies and what they can offer you.

At some point you will need to speak to someone about your thoughts regarding transfer to another agency. The conversation should be confidential, and you should feel satisfied that there is no commitment at this stage. An initial conversation is purely a fact-finding exercise. You should not feel under any pressure, as it is important that any decision you make to transfer is made with lots of information and consideration.

you may feel very uncomfortable having conversations, with people outside of your current agency, about the possibility of transferring. It is important to know that your confidentiality is going to be protected until you feel you have reached the point of committing to a transfer.

Transferring to another fostering agency involves a piece of work which can be undertaken relatively quickly, it can be undertaken in as little as 6 weeks, although it is likely to take a little longer than that if you are planning to transfer and you have a child in placement. There are formal processes that are required to be undertaken and the processes follow a formal "Transfer Protocol" which all agencies and local authorities are required to sign up to.

What do you have to do first when you have decided to transfer and have chosen an agency to go to?

Once you have decided that you wish to transfer to a new agency, in order for a transfer process to commence, you are required to formally notify your existing agency and the placing authorities of any children you are caring for, of your intention to transfer. This is notice of your intention to transfer. As your chosen agency, we will provide you with a template letter to use. The wording of this letter is important as you are not required to serve notice of a transfer at this early stage, you are merely notifying your agency of your intent. There is a difference, and your new agency will need to advise you. The notice of your intention to transfer is highlighting your intention to seek a new agency. When you have notified your agency of your intention to transfer, as your intended agency, we will approach your agency. We will only do this if we have your formal consent to do so. Once we have your consent, we will request access to your fostering file. We do this so that a transfer assessment process can be commenced on your behalf.

If you do not have children in placement you are required only to give notice of your intention to transfer to your current fostering agency.

What happens if you decide you want to transfer to another agency, and you have a child or young person already placed with you?

The local authority acting as the corporate parent for the child in your care must be satisfied that the welfare of the child can be continued or improved as a result of the switch to a different fostering agency and that the agency you have chosen can continue to provide the level of support required for you to continue to be successful in your role.

The Local Authority will need to satisfy themselves that the transfer you are planning to make will be in the best interests of the child. They will want to make sure that the agency you are transferring to is well rated by Ofsted and that they have suitable arrangements in place to support you and meet the individual needs of the child. They will want to ensure that the fee they originally agreed, to support you and the child in your care, will continue to meet the level set in the child's care plan once a transfer is made. This is a necessary discussion and will form part of the legal transfer contract between the local authority and the foster agency you intend to transfer to.

As your chosen agency to transfer to, we will discuss fees with you with the intention to match, as a minimum, the fee paid to you by your agency. This ensures that the resources, required by any child placed with you, can continue, or possibly be improved.

Where you have a child in placement and a vacancy for another potential child being placed alongside, the local authority will be required to agree a way forward to ensure that the new agency understands how a future placement can be made alongside the child you are caring for.

The local authority will form part of the protocol meeting where questions will be asked of the new agency, in order to determine the information, they require to be able to agree in principle, a transfer for the child living with you.

If you are transferring with no child in placement, a protocol meeting is not required.

What happens after you have given notice of your intention to transfer?

Your current fostering agency will formally acknowledge your written notice of your intent to transfer. As your agency of choice, we will arrange with your current agency to look through your fostering file. This is a file which contains information about you and your fostering career. This can only be done with explicit consent from you, which we will ask for from you before we can do this. This is an important part of the initial transfer assessment process. It enables us to start to get to know you. It will enable us to confirm that there are no reasons why you should be unable to continue fostering.

We will ask your fostering agency (and any other fostering agencies you have fostered with), to provide a reference for you. The reference information will normally include the following information.

- Length of registration
- Current terms of approval (if any) and date this was agreed
- Variations in approval in the last five years
- Age, sex, and length of stay of all foster children during the last five years
- Extent to which the foster carers were able to achieve placement objectives
- Strengths and skills of the foster carers
- Recent training courses attended by the foster carer/s and skills gained post-approval
- Date and outcome of any investigation of allegations or concerns, other than unsubstantiated, unfounded, or malicious allegations (which paragraph 3.79 of The Fostering Services Statutory Guidance directs should not be referred to in references)
- Details of any current allegations or concerns
- The outcomes of the latest annual review
- any other information considered to be relevant to the assessment of the person's
- Suitability to foster.

Once this has been done and your new agency is satisfied that you are able to continue fostering, as your chosen agency, we will engage with everyone involved in the care of the children you are looking after, in order to arrange a meeting, sometimes called a protocol meeting.

What happens once the new agency is satisfied you can be considered to transfer to them?

If transferring to Moon and Back Foster Care, we will want to ensure that you fully understand the process and will meet with you formally to share the transfer process and the timescale for each part of the process. In the same way that when you first decided you wanted to foster, we are required to undertake a formal assessment of you and once complete, the assessment is shared with the agency independent panel and you will be required to attend panel. Formal checks will be undertaken on your behalf, including references. This is a regulatory requirement for transfer, however we find that this is much shorter than your original assessment, because so much is already documented about you.

Will you be required to undertake any training before transfer to The Moon and Back Foster Care?

Most fostering agencies suggest that skills to foster is not required for transferring foster carers as they have usually done it before. We do not believe that you should complete the full course as a formality, but we will explain areas of specific training that we cover as part of the course (which may be different to what you have had previously) and ask if you would like to undertake any part of it. You will be invited to a half day workshop which we find, new transferring foster carers coming to us find very informative and enables you to refresh your general fostering knowledge and understand what is available to you at our agency. We consider this as an agency induction day for you.

You will be required to be compliant in all mandatory training as set out in fostering legislation. This should be discussed as part of the transferring assessment process to be presented at Panel. It is a simple process to get fully up to date if for any reason you have fallen behind on your mandatory training.

What does a Protocol Meeting involve, and will you be included in this?

Once you have served notice of your intent to transfer, a protocol meeting date will be set. The meeting is usually convened by the placing authority/authorities – this may include commissioning/contracting officers as well as the children's social worker, representation from your current agency, representation from us as the fostering agency you are choosing to transfer to and of course yourselves.

Where there is more than one placing authority responsible for the children in your care, the authority that has had children placed for the longest period with the foster carer will be generally considered the 'lead' authority, but this is done by agreement.

Why is a protocol meeting needed?

The meeting is usually led by the placing authority for the children in your care. The aim of the meeting is to determine that the transfer you are intending to make will be in the best interest of the children in your care. The local authority acting as the corporate parent for the child in your care must be satisfied that the welfare of the child can be continued or improved as a result of the switch to a different fostering agency and that the agency you are choosing to go to, can continue to provide the level of support required for you to continue to be successful as a foster carer.

The meeting will include discussion about fees, this is to ensure that the current fee situation can be met as a basic, but by this point you should have had meaningful conversations with your transferring agency of choice and be reassured that this will be ok.

Are you expected to present this information at the meeting?

You will not be expected to bring or present this information. The agency and local authority professionals in the meeting are required to prepare for aspects of the meeting agenda. If lots of information is required, we will always consult you, during its preparation, so that it is accurate. We prepare transferring carers in advance of any protocol meeting, so that you are fully informed of what is likely to be discussed so that you can feel less anxious and can continue to focus on the children in your care and your family during the transferring process.

What happens next?

After the protocol meeting discussed above, the local authority will make their "in principle" decision about whether the transfer can go ahead. It is in principle because the final decision about the transfer, once the local authority agrees, lies with the agency where you are transferring to. Just as when you first became a foster carer, the transfer assessment must go through the agency's independent panel process. Once panel are happy to recommend approval, the final decision will go to the Agency Decision Maker after the Panel meeting.

Are you free to transfer once the Agency Decision Maker has said yes to approval?

At the point that our Agency Decision Maker has approved you to transfer to our agency, you are then required to give 28 days' formal notice of your intention to leave your current agency. This is a formal contractual process and formally states your date of leaving one agency and joining ours.

Why choose Moon and Back as your new agency

When we are approached by foster carers who are considering transferring, we are very respectful that you will have taken a long time to consider the implications before getting in touch. We want you to make the right decision and will support you to consider everything before you commit to anything.

As far as we are concerned transferring can be straightforward and can happen quite quickly once you have informed your agency that you are looking to transfer. With us you do not have to be involved in conversations with your agency about the process as that is what we do on your behalf to support you in the process. We believe once you have made the decision to transfer, it is in the best interests of everyone that the process is quick and smooth. When a foster carer chooses to foster with, us we feel very special. We appreciate that foster carers have a choice and that they have a right to exercise it. We work very hard to ensure that foster carers never want to leave us, we work in an individualised way to enable foster carers to succeed.

We believe that transferring foster carers can bring a wealth of experience to a team of foster carers. We acknowledge this experience and where foster carers feel that they would like to offer support to less experienced carers, we look to identify other roles that transferring foster carers may wish to undertake too.

If you are considering transferring, you can talk to us in complete confidence by contacting us via our website www.tothemoonandbackfostering.com email hello@moonandbackfostering.com

If you would like a confidential chat call us on 01223 800 420