

Background and Legislative context:

The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015 which came in to force on 1st April 2015 introduced a legal definition of a long-term foster placement, and set out the conditions that must be complied with before a child can be placed in a long-term fostering placement and provision as to the frequency of reviews.

This allowed for some children who are settled within an approved long-term foster home for a reduction in the frequency of the formal statutory review meeting to once a year with a lighter touch consultation review in between.

4.17 Where a child is placed in a long-term foster placement and has been in this placement for more than a year, consideration should be given to whether it is necessary to hold a meeting as part of each review.

The regulations make clear that the child should be part of the decision-making process. A move to the lighter touch consultation reviews is recognition that some children, are living in a safe and stable home with their foster carers and acknowledges the wish for these children to have some 'normality' of family life.

4.18. The social worker should consult with the Quality Assurance and Reviewing Officer (QARO) and the child (where appropriate to age and understanding) in reaching a decision about holding a meeting. The consultation, information gathering and review process will continue on a six-monthly cycle. In circumstances where it is agreed that a formal face to face meeting will not be held as part of every review, a formal face to face meeting should be held at least once a year. The factors leading to the decision to hold review meetings on a less frequent basis should be recorded in the child's care plan.

When should a consultation review process be considered?

- The child is settled within an approved long-term foster family (12 months) or in kinship care but an SGO is not being sought;
- A child has explicitly requested for reviews to be less frequent;
- Where the above criteria are met and there are no concerns around the quality of care the child is receiving.

For these children a six-monthly formal face to face review meeting, may no longer be purposeful or required.

- Before considering whether or not a 'lighter touch' consultation review is the correct route for a child there needs to be a discussion between the social worker and their line manager the outcome of this discussion must be recorded as a case note – managers decision against the child's record.

Lighter Touch Consultation Children We Care For Reviews

If the plan is to move forward with a lighter touch consultation review process the QARO would need to review the current care plan and its implementation. Specifically, they would need to feel satisfied that the care plan is appropriate and is meeting the child's individual needs and that the child and their carer agree with the reduction in frequency of the formal face to face review meeting.

Assuming all of the above are satisfied, at the next scheduled CWCF Review, the QARO will put forward a proposal to move to a lighter touch model. This proposal will only be progressed with the explicit agreement of the child/young person, foster carer/s supervising social worker (SSW), social worker and where appropriate, the child's parents/carers.

If all parties are in agreement, the next face to face formal Children We Care For Reviews (CWCF) review will then be scheduled for twelve months' time.

Immediately following the review, the IRO must record this decision within the review recommendations and must notify the Quality Assurance Service Manager and Business Support Team. The allocated social worker must record the decision within the child's updated care plan and the supervising social worker should write the lighter touch review process within the placement plan.

The rationale for this decision will also be recorded within the minutes of the CWCF review by the QARO, which will then be distributed to all relevant parties within 20 working days.

Alongside the lighter touch consultation review process there should also be a discussion with regard to the frequency of social work visits to the child in care. The visits to the child should be based solely on the child's needs and wishes and where agreed can move to twice a year. This does not remove the requirement for a visit to the child where requested outside of the agreed frequency.

It would be expected that the Social Worker will have discussed reducing the frequency of visits within a care planning meeting or supervision and a manager decision case note recorded to the child's file prior to the review taking place.

The decision to reduce the frequency of statutory visits, must be agreed by the child and their carer and clearly recorded within the care plan, the QARO review recommendations and minutes.

QARO meetings with the child will be at least every 6 months one of which will be face to face.

It is important to note that when there are two or more siblings living in the same household this decision-making process **must be applied to each child on an individual basis**. It must never be assumed that because one child's needs are

being met through the lighter touch process that all other siblings needs will automatically be met by this process as well.

Implementation of the process

Upon setting the formal review date in twelve months' time, the QARO will also set a lighter touch consultation review date with the allocated social worker for six months' time.

Aside from these agreed review dates the QARO and social worker will undertake midpoint reviews as part of the quality assurance and scrutiny responsibilities of the QARO. Thus, whilst there will only be one formal face to face review the child and their plan will be considered at least 4 times a year, 2 midpoint reviews, one lighter touch consultation review and the face to face formal review.

The lighter touch consultation review will remain part of the formal review process but will not include a formal meeting. When held the QARO will liaise with the allocated social worker and any other party they feel necessary, in order to obtain an overview of how the child's care plan is progressing and whether this continues to meet their developmental needs.

A record of this review will then be recorded as a lighter touch consultation review and complete the full review paperwork within the child record and review schedule.

At all times the social work team retain an ongoing obligation to inform the QARO of any significant events/changes in a child's circumstances or care planning. Where these occur, consideration will be given to holding an early review and the ongoing appropriateness of lighter touch consultation reviews will be considered.

A child can also request at any time, in consultation with their social worker or QARO that the next review be changed back to a formal CWCF meeting. It is their right to have a formal meeting held when requested and their QARO will ensure the child's wishes are respected.

Foster carers and supervising social workers have an important role to play in monitoring the continuing appropriateness of the lighter touch consultation review process and this should form part of the discussion of every Foster Carers/SSW supervision session, whether they are in Swindon or Independent foster carers.

All parties have a responsibility to alert the social worker and QARO if circumstances change that then call into question the continuing appropriateness of lighter touch consultation reviews or six-monthly visits.

Exceptions

- If a child is unable to clearly articulate an agreement, be it via words or other communication tool. It should not be assumed that they are in support of a lighter touch consultation review. In these instances, normal review processes should remain in place;
- For children who are subject to child care proceedings;
- For children whose first language is not English the lighter touch consultation process must be carefully explained to them via an interpreter before they can be considered;
- All looked after children aged 14 years or over must have skills for independence included in their care plan within 6 weeks of their 14th birthday;
- All looked after children aged 16 years must have any staying put or move on plans discussed within 6 weeks of their 16th birthday;
- All looked after children reaching age 18 must have a CWCF review held within 6 weeks of them turning 18 and leaving care.

All This is essential to ensure that appropriate plans have been set in motion to support their transition to independence post 18.

FLOWCHART FOR LIGHTER TOUCH – CONSULTATION REVIEWS

Social Worker and Social Work Team manager identify and discuss the frequency and format of the child's CWCF review in supervision. And agreed to progress where appropriate

Social worker discusses lighter touch consultations with the child and their carers to consider their views. If in agreement the Social worker will include within the proposed care plan as a change.

Consultation review held. The social worker collates information within the ROA form and recorded within the review pathway.

CWCF review held and Lighter Touch Consultation review discussed and where agreed dates set for consultation and formal reviews over the next 12 month period and recorded within the review minutes and recommendations.

Prior to the next scheduled review social worker and IRO discuss whether there are any significant changes in the review period and confirm a consultation review can go ahead.

QA admin send out consultation forms as normal 2 weeks prior to the review to be included as part of the consultation.