

NSPCC Northern Ireland response to the Consultation
on Foster Placement and Fostering Regulations
(Northern Ireland) 2014

March 2014

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Safety
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Dear Marc

Re: Foster Placement and Fostering Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014

NSPCC is very grateful to be able to respond to the proposed Foster Placement and Fostering Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014. We are generally content with these regulations and it is good to see them being revised and modernised. NSPCC appreciates that its role is recognised in Regulation 35.

The Regulations sit between Departmental guidance, issued in 1996 and new HSC Board Policies and Procedures relating to Looked after Children. DHSSPS have also issued recent standards for Kinship care. There is a need for the various pieces of guidance to fit together to avoid confusion for staff and we would suggest this is an issue the Department consider as part of the outworking of its Looked after Children Policy Statement. It would be helpful to reissue Departmental Guidance under the Children Order to deal with some issues which are not possible to reference on the face of the regulations.

We have a number of suggestions:

Immediate placements and health and safety

There is increasing use of Kinship care arrangements to meet the needs of Looked after Children in Northern Ireland. We are pleased to note that the underlying processes for the approval and supervision of these cases has been subject to recent guidance issued by the Health and Social Care Board. We welcome that proposed regulations deal with the issue of health and safety considerations for assessment of prospective foster parents (Regulation 5, Schedule 2 para 5). This is very helpful and a development on previous provisions. However this provision relates to foster parents who are *undergoing an assessment* and while this may well include kinship placements made on the foot of an emergency, it may be useful to add the following addition in Regulation 14 (3):

(3) Where the authority is satisfied that the immediate placement of a child is necessary it may, for a period not exceeding 12 weeks, place the child with a person who has not been approved under regulation 6 provided, after interviewing the person, inspecting the

accommodation, **considering any health or safety matters** and obtaining information about other persons living in the household, the authority is satisfied that –

This addition would dovetail and fit with recently issued guidance and developments in practice standards.

Supervision

The regulations deal with supervision of placements and are clear on both approved placements and visiting schedules for those immediate and emergency placements made under regulation 14 (1) and (3). It would be necessary to replicate this in revised Departmental Guidance to avoid any confusion and to dovetail with HSCB procedures which reference same i.e. weekly visits to approval and four weekly visits thereafter.

Approval

Regulation 6 is silent on what constitutes approval. We understand the reason behind this and the need to allow flexibility for Authorities to determine. Established practice is through approval at Fostering Panels. To avoid doubt and to underscore practice it would seem useful to deal with the definition of approval in Part 1 of the regulations at Interpretation.

We would suggest adding:

*“approval” means approval as a foster parent **by a Fostering Panel** in accordance with regulation 6.*

I hope these comments are useful and we would be very happy to discuss further with you. I would be grateful if you could advise if these suggestions are incorporated into the Regulations

Yours sincerely



Neil Anderson
National Head of Service
NSPCC Northern Ireland