

INFORMATION FOR FOSTER CARERS ATTENDING AN IRM REVIEW PANEL

Who will be on the review panel?

Your case will be considered by a review panel of between 5 and 7 voting members. There will be a Chair, at least one social worker with experience of fostering and other members with personal and/or professional experience in fostering.

A list of the review panel members will be sent to you and your Fostering Service Provider (FSP) before the panel meeting and a profile booklet will be available to read in the waiting rooms on the day. If any of these people are known to you in either a personal or professional capacity or you believe that any of them have been involved in the original consideration of your case, please let us know immediately.

A medical advisor may be present if there are medical issues that the panel requires advice on, and they will take part in the decision making process. A professional advisor and a panel secretary will also be present to assist the panel but they are not panel members and will take no part in the decision-making process.

Who will attend from the Fostering Service Provider (FSP)?

Your FSP will be invited to send up to two representatives to the panel meeting. It will, of course, be for them to decide who should attend, but we suggest they send someone who will be able to answer the panel's questions such as an assessing or supervising social worker and a manager.

Will I be invited to attend the review panel?

Yes, you will be invited to attend the review panel meeting. Feedback from previous attendees has indicated that people were made to feel welcome, put at their ease and enabled to put forward the information they wanted the review panel to hear.

You may bring a supporter; he or she cannot speak on your behalf or act as an advocate but is there for moral support.

If you have a physical, sensory or learning impairment that you have not yet made your IRM caseworker aware of please contact the office. If English is not your first language and you feel an interpreter may be required please contact the IRM office.

I do not think I will be able to attend the review now, what do I do?

The review panel meeting will only be cancelled in exceptional circumstances and you must therefore assume that the review of your case will take place and proceed to a review panel recommendation even if you have indicated that you wish to attend, but do not appear. It is, therefore, vital that you inform the IRM office immediately if you are unable to attend the review panel meeting or may be late. It will be wholly at the discretion of the IRM Contract Manager whether to allow for the case to be deferred and you must not assume that a deferment will be granted.

How does the review panel work?

It is anticipated that you and the FSP representatives will need to be available for approximately two hours; however each case is individual and all times are estimated. You and the FSP representatives will have separate waiting rooms.

The Panel Chair and/or Professional Advisor will meet you and the FSP representatives to explain the process on the day. You and the provider's representatives will then be invited together into the panel meeting.

You will be asked questions which the panel members have prepared after reading the Panel Pack. The FSP representatives will also be asked questions. You and the FSP representatives will be asked not to interrupt each other during the review panel's questioning but to wait until given the opportunity to comment at the end. You will have the opportunity to comment briefly at the end of Panel if there is anything you wish to add. The same opportunity will be given to the FSP representatives.

If the review panel has questions about 3rd party confidential information they will invite the FSP representatives to the review panel without you being present whilst these are being discussed. The review panel will then ask both parties to return to the waiting room whilst they consider whether they have any additional questions for either party and if they do will invite them both back into the panel. Once the review panel has decided there are no further questions, both parties are advised they can leave.

Neither party will be allowed in the panel meeting room while the review panel concludes their deliberations and reaches a recommendation.

What happens after the review panel?

Minutes of your Panel will be prepared and will be posted to you with the recommendation 12 working days after Panel. A copy will also be sent to your FSP. Any discussion on 3rd party information will be removed from your copy of the minutes.

The Agency decision maker will then be required to reach a Final Decision, taking into account the IRM recommendation.

The FSP will then formally write to you with this decision.

Is there any further "appeal" if I am not satisfied with the review panel's recommendation?

There is no right of appeal against your FSP's final decision. If you remain dissatisfied, you should seek your own advice from, for example, a solicitor or the Citizen's Advice Bureau, as to what action you may take. If you are unhappy about the Fostering Service Provider's process, you may use their complaints procedure.

If you are unhappy with the IRM process, there is a formal complaints procedure that is available for you to use and sets out the steps you should take. This is available from the IRM office or www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk.

If you have any questions about the IRM process you can contact the IRM office on 0845 450 3956.