

# Information about the IRM for Foster Carers

This leaflet is for people who have been through a brief or full assessment and have been found unsuitable to foster or for foster carers whose fostering service provider has proposed to terminate, or change the terms of, their approval.

## What is the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)?

The IRM is a review process that prospective or existing foster carers can access when they do not agree with the qualifying determination letter sent to them by their Fostering Service Provider Agency Decision Maker (ADM). The review process is conducted by an IRM review panel which is independent of your fostering service provider.

A “Qualifying Determination” is a proposed decision made by a fostering service provider that it does not consider someone suitable to foster. A qualifying determination is issued after either a brief or full report has been presented to the fostering service providers Panel. A qualifying determination can also be issued if the fostering service provider proposes to terminate, or change the terms of approval, of an existing fostering carer.

## Who can apply to have their case reviewed?

Prospective or existing fostering carers who have received a qualifying determination from their fostering service provider; including cases involving a specific child who is known to the applicants.

The review process does not have the power to deal with complaints against the fostering service provider. Complaints should be dealt with through the fostering service provider’s own complaints procedure.

## Can I apply to the IRM for a review and make representations to my fostering service provider?

No, you have to make a choice whether you wish to make representations to your fostering service provider OR apply to the IRM.

## Can the IRM make a new decision about my case?

No. The review panel is not an appeal and it cannot overturn the fostering service providers qualifying determination. It can however make a fresh recommendation to your fostering service provider on your suitability to foster a child and/or the terms of your approval.

The review panel will make its recommendation after it has taken into account:

- The information that was put before the original fostering panel, including any additional information you may have submitted for consideration by the IRM panel;
- Any relevant information received by the fostering service provider after the papers had been sent to the fostering panel;
- Your IRM application and grounds;

- Any further information requested by the IRM from yourselves or the fostering service provider. The IRM may also obtain its own medical advice.

### **Will people who originally considered my case be on the review panel?**

No. The IRM is independent of the fostering service provider and the IRM Panel considering your review will have no members connected with your case. You will receive the names of the IRM panel members who will consider your case prior to the hearing and you should tell us if you believe a particular review panel member should not be on the panel your case.

### **Who will decide whether I am suitable to foster a child?**

The final decision rests with your fostering service provider; however, it must take into account the recommendation of the IRM Panel when making its final decision on your suitability to foster and/or the terms of the approval or, in cases where there has been a brief report, whether you should continue to a full assessment.

### **How do I make an application?**

You can make an application by post or email; our contact details can be found on the back of this leaflet.

You must make your application within 28 calendar days from the date of your fostering service provider's letter (the qualifying determination) and should include the following information:

- Your name/s, address, contact telephone numbers and email address
- The name and contact details for your fostering service provider
- The date of your qualifying determination letter; and
- The reasons why you disagree with the reasons the ADM has given in your qualifying determination letter.

You will have an opportunity to submit further information at a later date.

### **Where will the review panel be held?**

Review panels are held in Birmingham, Leeds and London; once we accept your application, we will let you know the date and time of the panel that will consider your case.

### **Who will hear my case?**

Your case will be considered by a review panel whose members have professional or personal experience of child placements. The panel will consist of at least five voting members. A medical practitioner may prepare written advice for the panel; they will attend the panel if required.

The review panel will have written advice from a legal adviser. There is also a panel adviser who will be able to provide advice on legislation, guidance and research to ensure that all relevant issues are considered and that the correct procedures are followed on the day of the panel. A panel secretary will be present to take minutes of the meeting. The panel secretary and panel adviser are non-voting members of the panel.

### **How long does the IRM process take?**

We aim to complete each case within four months of receiving the application. Once we have received your application and a copy of the qualifying determination letter, we will write to you to confirm its acceptance.

### **Can I attend the meeting?**

Yes, you will be invited to attend the review panel meeting. You may bring a supporter; he or she cannot speak on your behalf or act as an advocate that is there for moral support.

If you have any additional needs, please let us know and we will work with you to meet them. Please also contact us if you feel you require an interpreter.

### **Will anyone else be there?**

Your fostering service provider will be invited to send up to two representatives to the panel meeting. They will 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 or a manager.

### **Will I have a chance to speak to the Panel?**

You will have the opportunity to make brief comments at the end of Panel's questions to yourselves and the fostering service provider representatives if there is anything you wish to add. The same opportunity will be given to the fostering service provider representatives.

The panel may have further questions and may call you all back to clarify any points raised. When the panel feel confident that they have all the information, they will advise you that you may go. The panel will last for up to two hours.

A copy of the panel papers will be sent to you and the fostering service provider 2 weeks prior to panel, it will exclude third party information which you are not entitled to see.

### **What happens after the hearing?**

Minutes of your panel hearing will be prepared and will be emailed to you (or posted if you do not use email) with the recommendation 12 working days after the panel hearing, a copy will also be sent to your fostering service provider, the minutes are **not** a verbatim record of the meeting.

The ADM will then make a final decision, taking into account the IRM recommendation. The fostering service provider will write to you formally to let you know the final decision.

### **Will I have to pay for the IRM to review my case?**

No, there is no charge by the IRM to have your case reviewed. Your fostering service provider does make a contribution to the cost of an IRM Review.

### **What if I'm still not happy with my fostering service provider's final decision?**

There is no right of appeal against your fostering service provider's final decision. If you remain dissatisfied, you should seek your own advice from, for example, a solicitor as to what action you may take.

### **What if I want to complain about the IRM?**

You cannot complain about the IRM panel's recommendation however there is a formal complaints procedure that is available for you to use for other issues, which sets out the steps you should take.

### **Contact Details:**

Contract Manager  
IRM  
Unit 4  
Pavilion Business Park  
Royds Hall Road  
Leeds  
West Yorkshire  
LS12 6AJ

**Tel: 0845 450 3956 / 0113 202 2080**

(0845 numbers charged at local rate)

**Email: [irm@irm.org.uk](mailto:irm@irm.org.uk)**

**Website:** [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/independent-review-mechanism](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/independent-review-mechanism)