



Tim Loughton MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families

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Dear Colleagues,

TRUSTING FOSTER CARERS AND SUPPORTING FAMILY LIFE

I am writing to you about an issue that is increasingly being raised with me by individual foster carers and looked after children, namely the excessive restrictions that can sometimes be placed on the decisions foster carers are allowed to take in relation to children they care for on behalf of local authorities.

I want to make my position on this clear. Foster carers should have the maximum appropriate flexibility in taking decisions relating to children in their care, within the framework of the agreed care plan and placement plan, and properly respecting the views and wishes of the birth parents.

Those who foster children make an invaluable contribution to the happiness and wellbeing of the children they care for. To do this they need to be able to provide, as fully as possible, the family environment and opportunities they feel are right, and if they are deemed suitable to qualify as foster carers we need to trust their judgement.

Parental responsibility for a child who is subject to a care order is shared between the local authority and the birth parents, and remains wholly with the birth parents where a child is voluntarily accommodated. For this reason a clear and agreed placement plan is essential to give both the child and the foster carer an understanding of the respective roles of the carer and the local authority, and of the continuing parental responsibility of the birth parents. Statutory guidance makes clear that it is precisely those sensitive and personal decisions— such as haircuts, ear piercing, sleep-overs, staying out late, taking part in family holidays etc – that need to be carefully explored and for which clear ground rules need to be agreed at the outset. I am concerned that risk aversion and myths about what is or is not required are preventing foster carers and children they care for from having the full range of experiences of being part of a family.

As both a Minister and a Constituency Member of Parliament I hear from many young people and foster carers who have been frustrated by excessive

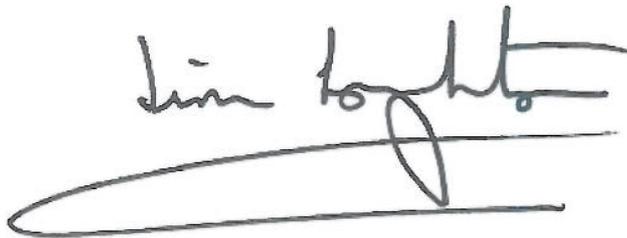
restrictions or confusion around decisions which in normal circumstances should be delegated to foster carers and written into the placement plan.

I would like your help in promoting the clear default position that children should as far as possible be allowed the same opportunities to take part in normal everyday activities as would reasonably be granted by parents to their own birth children. We also need to challenge the myths around CRB checks for sleepovers, and tackle excessive administration that may have arisen around the day to day parenting decisions of foster carers.

I would ask that all those involved in managing and supervising foster care placements make sure that the ground rules for decision taking by individual foster carers are as clear as possible at the start of the child's placement, but are also appropriately workable and pragmatic.

I would also welcome feedback on what is contained in the revised draft Fostering Services Regulations and draft guidance on foster care being published today for consultation alongside draft Children's Homes Regulations and guidance on children's homes. The consultation can be found at www.education.gov.uk/consultation. The response document specifically asks if the draft guidance strikes the right balance in what it says about delegation of decision-making to foster carers, and I hope you will take the opportunity to comment.

You may also be interested to know that the Fostering Network, with support from the Department, is producing a tool-kit to help local authorities improve their practice around the delegation of decision-making to foster carers. This should be available in the spring.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Loughton', written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

TIM LOUGHTON MP