



FOCUSED FOSTERING SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

April 2012

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In compliance with the
Fostering Service Regulations 2011
Care Standards Act 2000

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Introduction

This Statement of Purpose is written to let people know about our services, what it provides and how it works. It is a requirement under the National Minimum Standards for every Fostering service to have a Statement of Purpose.

We aim to run in accordance with The Foster Service Regulations 2011 and the National Care Standards Act 2000.

Our Service also adopts the best practice standards outlined in the UK National Standards for Foster Care and code of practice and complies with the core principles and values described in this document.

Review Cycle of the Statement of Purpose

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis, at least annually, and modified if necessary. The annual review cycle is April each year.

Aims and Objectives

We aim to provide stable and high quality family based care for children and young people of all ages who are unable for whatever reason to live with their own families, or for whom short term breaks are needed to maintain them in their own homes.

We aim to provide a service where children and young people are valued, supported and encouraged to grow and develop as individuals and realising their full potential.

As an independent provision, we provide care, in accordance with The National Care Standards Policies and Procedures for Fostering Agencies. This provides staff and carers with written guidance and management support to enable them to offer an efficient service. We are committed to establishing and maintaining standards in order to provide a quality provision that can meet the diverse needs and circumstances of all looked after children in our care.

Foster care is a partnership between the carer, supervising social worker, and the child's social worker, all working together in the best interest of children and young people. This partnership should always extend to the child's parents, or interested relatives, children and young people.

Formal decisions relating to individual children or young people in foster care should be taken in consultation with them, their parents, and the foster carer concerned.

Foster carers, children and young people and their parents should be able to challenge plans and decisions by the local authority and be aware of the procedures whereby they can exercise their right to make representations or complaints.

Objectives:

- To maintain a sufficient number of suitable Foster care placements, in relation to the numbers, needs, age range and characteristics of the Children Looked After population, to meet predicted need and provide effective placement choice
- To increase the overall number of approved Foster Carers whilst ensuring the recruitment activity is focused on identified resource shortfalls and in accordance with our recruitment Strategy
- To further develop and expand our services to provide additional services for children that are placed with our foster carer and our fostering families.
- To ensure compliance with national requirements in relation to health and education need of Children Looked After

Principles and Values and Beliefs

It is recognised that a child's needs are best met within the setting of a nurturing family. The complexity of the child's/young person's family background is taken into account when making a placement, in order to ensure an appropriate match.

Our main priority is the child's welfare and their individual needs and circumstances. We aim to provide positive and consistent responses to these needs. We endeavour to match children with families who have a special interest, experience and commitment to caring for a looked after child.

Our philosophy of approach is to show positive regard for the child's racial, religious, linguistic, cultural needs and their sexuality. The individual child's needs, wishes, feelings, abilities and inherent potential, are paramount and are taken into account in relation to placement planning and provision.

Children and young people are placed in foster care for a wide variety of reasons. We recognise the need to offer consistently high standards of care in a variety of settings. This will include the promotion of mutual support, diverse choice of placements, rehabilitation, and preparation for independence and integration in the local community.

The Children's Act 2004 Outlined 5 Key Outcomes That Children and Young People's Services Strive to Achieve

- **Staying Safe**
Children and young people are: safe from accidental injury and death; safe from maltreatment, neglect, violence and sexual exploitation; safe from crime and anti-social behaviour in and out of school; and have security and stability and are well cared for.
- **Being Healthy**
Children and young people are; physically healthy; mentally and emotionally healthy; sexually healthy; have a healthy lifestyle; and choose not to take illegal drugs.

- **Enjoying and Achieving**

Children and young people are; ready for school; attending and enjoying school; achieve educational standards at primary school; achieve personal and social development and enjoy recreation; and achieve educational standards at secondary school and college.

- **Making a Positive Contribution**

Children and young people; engaged in decision making, support the community and environment; engage in law abiding and positive behaviour in and out of school; develop positive relationships and choose not to bully and discriminate; develop self confidence and successfully deal with significant changes and challenges; and develop enterprising behaviour.

- **Economic Well-being**

Children and young people; engage in further education, employment or training on leaving school; are ready for employment; live in decent homes and communities; have access to transport and material goods; and live in households free from low income.

We aim to deliver quality services to our carers, children and young people and local authorities. We are working hard to make sure that Focused Fostering ensures that children and young people in our care grow up in “good shape”

Focused Fostering is Committed to:

- Encouraging team and personal development for both staff and foster carers.
- Anti-discriminatory practice, which promotes equal opportunities for all and values diversity of both foster children and foster carers regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, age, religious beliefs, disability or marital status.

We acknowledge and recognise the unique contribution that can be made by family and friends as carers, and where it is has been deemed in the best interest of the child we will support a care plan that is to re-habilitate home, or place with a member of the child’s birth family.

The Services We Provide

We hold statutory responsibilities in our role as an Independent Fostering Service Provider that undertakes a number of distinct and inter-related activities:

Recruitment, Assessment and Training of Foster Carers

- Assessment of foster carers is based on their competencies and ability to meet the needs of children looked after regardless of race, class, age, marital status, religion, sexual orientation or disability.
- ‘Skills to Foster’ training groups are held for prospective carers in preparation for their role as Foster Carers

- The Fostering Team organises recruitment campaigns in order to attract prospective foster carers and raise public awareness about the needs of children who are looked after and require foster placements.
- The Fostering Team work to ensure all assessments and subsequent reviews are carried out in a transparent manner in which strengths, skills and resources of individual applicants are the primary consideration.
- We aim to increase the number and choice of foster carers thereby improving placement choice.
- Regular Supervising Social Worker visits and advice and telephone duty support to all foster carers.
- CWDS, NVQ and other training of foster carers.
- Specialist Outreach work.

Types of Placements Provided

Focused Fostering Services are an approved supplier of fostering services with the London Councils (formally Pan London). Foster carers are approved as Short-Term, Long-Term; Respite, Remand, Unaccompanied Minors, and Parent and Child and can care for children and young people within the age range for which they are approved.

Emergency Placements

This service provides emergency care, immediate safety, security and comfort when there are exceptional and unforeseen circumstances, until suitable arrangements can be made either with the child's relatives or an identified foster placement.

Short Term Fostering

Short-term placements could involve a period of days, weeks, months or and period of time up to two years. Short-term placements are never initially planned to be long term or permanent. Prior to, or upon placement the viability of rehabilitation home is assessed by the child's social worker and a care plan is devised accordingly. This care plan is regularly reviewed through different forums, i.e. Statutory Reviews, Supervision and the Child Care Planning Panel. The review of all care plans includes consultation with the child/young person, parents and carer.

Remand Foster Carers

Remand foster carers take on responsibility for young people who are remanded by the Courts into Local Authority care. Young people are remanded for specific periods of time - usually a few weeks, so placements are generally short term. The remand foster carer works closely with the workers in the Youth offending Service in supporting and helping a young person to make positive changes in their life. Remand foster carers need to have experience of teenagers or the Youth Justice system.

Carers must have full-time availability and be able to offer placements at short notice. They will need to accompany young people to court and police stations on a regular basis, and other meetings/appointments as required. Ideally this needs to be a household where there are two carers.

Unaccompanied Minors

Unaccompanied young people come from different parts of the world, predominantly from countries in Africa and more recently from Afghanistan. We are particularly interested in recruiting people from within the relevant communities in Croydon who understand the cultural needs of these young people and speak their languages. However, we are also recruiting potential carers within the indigenous community in Croydon who are interested in caring for these young people. Under current legislation, the likelihood is that many of these young people will have to return to their countries of origin when they reach 18, and foster carers therefore have a difficult task in preparing them for what this may mean.

Respite Care

We are in the progress of developing a service for respite placements for disabled children and those with additional needs. The aim of this service is to offer short-term family based care to disabled children and young people, or have a severe medical condition. Should special equipment be required in order to facilitate and maintain this type of placement then it is expected that the cost of this will be met by the placing authority

- Achieve flexible responses to disabled children and their families
- Reduce risks of family/placement breakdown
- Prevent the need for long term accommodation
- Provide day care or overnight stays

Long Term Fostering (Permanency)

For some children, often those who maintain close and significant relationships with birth parents or relatives, long term fostering may be a more appropriate option than adoption. Foster carers can be approved as long term foster carers for these reasons.

Ideally, children in short term foster placements return home, but if rehabilitation is not possible, adoption may be considered for children aged ten years and under. For older children, alternative permanency plans will be made and this often includes long term fostering.

Occasionally, short-term foster carers ask if they can offer a permanent home to a child they are looking after. In these instances, a full assessment is always undertaken to establish if this is the best option and plan for the child. If adoption or long term fostering is considered to be in the child's best interest, foster carers undergo the same assessment process as another prospective adopter or long term foster carer.

Children with Learning Disabilities

These placements are for children or young people with disabilities. The young person or child may be suffering from conditions such as Downs Syndrome, Autistic Spectrum. Asperger's, Attention Deficit Disorder.

Support and provision provided for these placements are inclusive of everything that is stated within the standard placement. Should respite be required then this will be discussed on an individual basis and the cost of this will be discussed with the placing

authority. Focused Fostering will do its utmost to find a carer within its own resources, but this may not always be possible.

Parent and Child Placements

Our Foster carers that have been approved for parent and child placements have demonstrated their ability to provide the following.

- Can provide individual care – not all young people want to be placed with others.
- They have the scope for matching to meet the cultural, religious, racial, ethnic and linguistic needs of the young person.
- They can work with young fathers, making them welcome as part of the “family” whether joining in at mealtimes, caring for the baby or babysitting. Boundaries may be needed but these can be set to meet individual circumstances.
- Good communication skills with teenagers.
- The ability to prepare care leavers for adult life.
- Experience of handling difficult behaviour.
- Experience of working with a young person’s own family.
- An understanding of working in partnership with a range of other professionals (legal, social work, medical).
- Advocacy skills – either on behalf of young parent or their child. To enable and encourage the young parent to effectively put forward their views and wishes or to access other professional advocacy services.

Placement Agreements

A child’s Care Plan and Placement Plan must be completed for all foster care placements. We seek to ensure that written background and supporting information, including a Core Assessment is provided for all children and young people. This greatly assists foster families in being able to provide the best possible care to meet the specific needs and circumstances of any look after child in their care.

New Placement Developments

We are working to develop further the pool of foster carers we have available to reflect the local community’s needs and diversity.

Numbers of Foster Carers and of Children Placed

As of April 2012, we had **15** foster carers providing placements for **16** looked after children.

Recruitment of Carers

All our foster carers are assessed by experienced, qualified and General Social Care Council (GSCC) registered Social Workers, using recognised British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) procedures.

We encourage carers to participate in training. Training is focused on enhancing the carer’s knowledge and skills to ensure successful and positive experiences for both children and carers. In addition, carers receive regular support throughout their fostering career and the effectiveness of this is evaluated in their annual review.

Ongoing Support for Foster Carers

The fostering team provides support to foster carers through the following:

- Supervision of foster carers on a regular basis
- At least four weekly visits and weekly regular telephone contact
- Information and advice regarding childcare issues
- Practical assistance, such as provision of equipment
- Training Programme
- Professional support, advice and guidance
- Access to the out of hours duty worker

Every foster carer is provided with our Foster Carer's Handbook, which has been developed to cover a range of information.

Out of Hours Support

There is an Emergency worker to assist in difficulties that may arise outside of office hours and can not wait to be resolved during normal working hours.

EDT Tel number: 07931 664571

Annual Reviews of Foster Carers (Regulation 28)

Foster placement regulations require that carers are reviewed at least annually, and whenever the suitability of the carer to continue to foster is being considered. Additional reviews can be called at any time if there is a change in circumstances or whenever an issue of concern arises.

Where appropriate and necessary the foster carer review will be referred to the Fostering Panel for approval.

The review is usually carried out at the foster carer's home and is chaired by our Review Officer. It is a three way process in which carers can also express their views about Focused Fostering.

In the case of a carer's first annual review or when there have been significant changes or events which have impacted on the foster carer or child, then the Fostering Panel will consider the annual review and make recommendations accordingly. Foster carers are notified of the outcome of any review or Panel in writing.

The Fostering Panel

A Fostering Panel has been established and is constituted in accordance within the provisions of Regulation 23/24. The fostering service provider must maintain a list of persons who are considered by them to be suitable to be members of a fostering panel, including one or more social workers who have at least three years' relevant post-qualifying experience. Completed assessment reports are presented to Panel by the assessing Social Worker and applicants are encouraged to attend the Panel meeting in person. Once approved, applicants can only work as foster carers for Focused Fostering.

The Panel is chaired by an independent chair that has substantial experience in childcare work. The Panel has access to expert legal, medical and educational advice.

Members of the Fostering Panel

<i>Independent Chair</i>	Brian Fitzgibbon
<i>Vice Chair</i>	Marion collins (Independent Foster Carer)
<i>Agency Representative</i>	Kevin Henry (Agency Managing Director)
<i>Panel Advisor</i>	Linda Shephard (Registered Manager)
<i>Agency Social Worker</i>	Paul Rhys-Taylor
<i>Independent Member</i>	Patricia Dixon (Legal Advisor)
Independent Member	Addy Jacobs (sits on panel as individual who has been in the care system)
Independent Member	Charles Goodridge (Independent Social Worker with child care expertise)
Independent Member	Gracia Williams (is a parent of a young person who was previously in care)
Agency Medical Advisor	Dr. Tom Guilder

Legal Framework and Requirements

The establishment of fostering Panels is laid down by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. The requirements in relation to membership of fostering Panels and individual roles are set out in Regulation 23. Further detail regarding the membership and functions of fostering Panels appears in Standard 14 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services

The UK National Standards for Foster Care 1999 (Standard 23.2) emphasise that the primary responsibility of fostering Panels is to act in the best interests of children and young people needing foster care. Standard 14 makes clear that the overriding objective of fostering Panels must be to promote and safeguard the welfare of children and young people in foster care.

Regulation 23 - Constitution and Membership of Fostering Panel

Fostering panels are quorate with 5 members. The members can be drawn from a new central list/

The fostering service provider must maintain a list of persons who are considered by them to be suitable to be members of a fostering panel ("the central list"), including one or more social workers who have at least three years' relevant post-qualifying experience.

The fostering service provider must ensure that the fostering panel has sufficient members, and that individual members have between them the experience and expertise necessary, to effectively discharge the functions of the panel

A person to chair the panel who, in the case of any appointment made after 1st October 2011, must be independent of the fostering service provider, and one or two persons who may act as chair if the person appointed to chair the panel is absent or that office is vacant ("the vice chairs") from the persons on the central list.

Focused Fostering recognise the advantage of having a Chair who is not involved in management responsibility for the agency's work and can bring a fresh and objective viewpoint. We also appreciate that a Chair's role is crucial in ensuring that the work of a fostering Panel is carried out efficiently, effectively and sensitively and this is reflected in the specific responsibilities assigned to him.

The Agency decision maker must consider all the information available, including any recommendations from an Independent Review panel within 7 days of the recommendation. (Prospective) Carers must be informed verbally within two days of the meeting and five in writing.

There is no specific requirement for fostering Panel membership to include a legal adviser or a medical adviser, although focused Fostering has access to medical expertise as required.

The fostering service provider must however ensure that the fostering panel has sufficient members, and that individual members have between them the experience and expertise necessary, to effectively discharge the functions of the panel.

Standard 2.3 of the UK National Standards for Foster Care indicates that the membership of a fostering Panel should reflect the community it serves. Focused Fostering is committed to establishing and maintaining a fostering Panel that has a balanced membership in terms of gender, racial and cultural backgrounds.

It is imperative that Panel members are committed to attending meetings. In particular there must be good liaison between the Chair and Vice-Chair regarding their availability to attend meetings if both are absent then the Panel meeting cannot proceed.

Any fostering panel member may resign at any time by giving one month's notice in writing to the fostering service provider which appointed them.

Where a fostering service provider are of the opinion that any member of the fostering panel appointed by them is unsuitable or unable to continue as a panel member, they may terminate that member's appointment at any time by giving the member notice in writing.

Focused Fostering recognise that panel members are privy to highly confidential information including some information about backgrounds and needs of children/young people placed via the agency. Panel members will be required to sign a Confidentiality Bond, and they will be subject to Police and Department of Health (DOH) and Department for Education and Skills (DFES) checks through an Enhanced Disclosure enquiry to the Criminal Records Bureau. Other relevant references may be required. It is the policy of Focused Fostering that no prospective Panel member can begin his/her appointment until satisfactory statutory checks has been received.

Prior to appointment all Panel members will sign a written agreement, setting out the protocol for Panel membership, this makes explicit their responsibilities in relation to regular attendance at Panel meetings, attendance at training events, the importance of confidentiality, declaration of any interest or prior knowledge of matters being presented to Panel, commitment to equal opportunities/anti-discriminatory practice, making an effective contribution to the work of the Panel and of the agency.

The Functions of the Fostering Panel

Regulations set out the core legal functions of Fostering Panels – these are:

- consider each application for approval and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a foster parent,
- where it recommends approval of an application, to recommend any terms on which the approval is to be given,
- to recommend whether or not a person remains suitable to be a foster parent, and whether or not the terms of their approval (if any) remain appropriate
- In considering what recommendation to make under paragraph, the fostering panel must consider and take into account all of the information passed and the panel may request the fostering service provider to obtain any other relevant information or to provide such other assistance as the fostering panel considers necessary, and the panel may obtain legal advice or medical advice it considers necessary.
- The fostering service provider must obtain such information as the fostering panel considers necessary and send that information to the panel, and provide such other assistance as the fostering panel may request, so far as is reasonably practicable.

The fostering panel must also

- Advise, where appropriate, on the procedures under which reviews in accordance with regulation 28 are carried out by the fostering service provider, and periodically monitor their effectiveness,
- Oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering service provider, and give advice, and make recommendations, on such other matters or cases as the fostering service provider may refer to it.

It is good practice to carry out a foster carer review in situations of serious concern, complaint or allegations about existing foster carers. Additionally a review of foster carers, if not the first review since approval, would be presented to Fostering Panel if a very significant change in the terms of approval were being recommended. With any review where termination of approval is being recommended, contrary to the wishes of foster carers, the full review report must be presented to Panel for recommendation to be reached.

Assessments of Foster Carers

Currently Focused Fostering uses the BAAF 2008 Form F as a tool for the completion of competence based assessments of prospective foster carers.

Regulations 26 States the Following:

- The fostering service provider may carry out an assessment of any person who applies to become a foster parent and whom they consider may be suitable to become a foster parent
- Any such assessment must be carried out in accordance with this regulation.
- The fostering service provider must obtain the information specified in Schedule 3 relating to the applicant/s and other members of the household and family members and any other information they consider relevant
- Must interview at least two persons nominated by the applicant/s to provide personal references for the applicant/s and prepare written reports of the interviews
- Except where the fostering service provider is a local authority and applicant/s lives in the area of that authority, must consult with, and take into account the views of, the local authority in whose area the applicant/s lives,

- Where the applicant/s was approved as a foster parent by another fostering service provider and that approval has been terminated, and where the applicant/s consents to the inspection, request inspection of the relevant records compiled by that other fostering service provider in relation to applicant/s under regulations 30 and 31.
- Having regard to the information obtained the fostering service provider must consider whether the applicant/s is suitable to be a foster parent and whether the applicant/s household is suitable for any child
- Prepare a written report on the applicant/s which includes the matters set out in paragraph and refer the report to the fostering panel and notify the applicant/s accordingly.
- The report must include the following matters in relation to the applicant/s suitability to be a foster parent proposals about any terms of the approval.

The outcome for Standard13 of the NMS 2011 states the fostering service recruits assesses and supports a range of foster carers to meet the needs of children they provide care for and is proactive in assessing current and future needs of children.

Focused Fostering has a clear set out assessment process for an applicant which defines:

- ✓ The task to be undertaken
- ✓ The qualities, competencies or aptitudes being sought or to be achieved
- ✓ The standards to be applied in the assessment
- ✓ The stages and content of the selection process and the timescales involved
- ✓ The information to be given to applicants

In assessing qualities, competencies and aptitudes for fostering, the following is considered:

- ✓ Child rearing
- ✓ Caring for children born to somebody else
- ✓ Contact between fostered children and their families
- ✓ Helping children make sense of their past
- ✓ Sexual boundaries and attitudes
- ✓ Awareness of issues around child abuse
- ✓ Approaches to discipline
- ✓ Awareness of how to promote secure attachments between children and appropriate adults
- ✓ Awareness of own motivation for fostering/own needs to be met through the fostering process
- ✓ Religion
- ✓ Racial/cultural/linguistic issues
- ✓ Standard of living and lifestyle
- ✓ Health

The assessment report should provide an analysis of the prospective carer's strengths, limitations, abilities and areas for development. The report should also include the age range, gender, numbers of children and type of fostering approval recommended. Any placement restrictions or conditions should also be specified.

The usual fostering limit of no more than three children applies, unless all the children are part of the same sibling group (Children Act 1989).

- When reading reports Panel members should also be mindful of the following;
 - ✓ Statutory checks – have these been completed satisfactorily
 - ✓ Personal references – at least two of these should be provided. It is important that Panel members have a copy of the areas covered in interviews with personal referees
 - ✓ The views of other children in the household – the applicant/s own children should be interviewed separately from them
 - ✓ Anti-racist and anti-discriminatory parenting practices – how is this evidenced
 - ✓ Terms of approval – does this appear to appropriately match the assessed abilities of the applicant/s; members of the fostering household and the needs of the children in the recommended approval range?

The Conduct of the Fostering Panel

Focused Fostering Services Panel meeting dates are agreed in advance for a twelve-month period.

Agenda, minutes and reports for Panel meetings are dispatched 10 –14 days in advance of Panel meetings. All Panel papers are returned to Panel Administrator at the end of the Panel meeting. Where a Panel member is unable to attend a Panel meeting, but has received the reports, then he/she must ensure the return of these to the agency.

It is expected that Panel members will have read the circulated reports, carefully and identified issues where further information or clarification seems necessary. The Panel Chair has a specific responsibility to effectively manage the Panel meetings, ensuring that each Panel member has an opportunity to make their contributions, and to facilitate discussions.

Applicants wishing to foster for Focused Fostering Services are expected to attend the Panel meeting at which their application is being considered. Essentially the purpose of this is to clarify issues raised from reading the completed assessment report and any additional issues that emerge from discussion with, the assessing social worker. It also serves as an opportunity for applicants to ask questions and to give feedback about their experiences of the assessment process. We are committed to thorough preparation of and good support for applicants attending Panel we have a leaflet for 'People Attending Panel' which clearly state out process that they are due to undergo. It is essential that Panel does not view applicant/s attendance at Panel as a means for reassessment.

Prior to the social worker/s and applicant/s joining Panel, Panel members will have identified any issues and questions they wish to raise. The Chair will establish how and by whom the questions will be raised and in what sequence. The social worker/s may attend initially on their own if Panel members wish to examine issues such as those raised by referees, or concerns highlighted in the assessment process. The social worker and applicant/s would otherwise attend together for questions and observations. Questions will be asked by individual Panel members, directed through the Chair. The applicant/s and social worker/s will be asked to leave whilst the Panel deliberates and reaches its recommendation. Panel members will be asked by the Chair whether or not they support the proposed recommendation and their reasons for doing so.

If not all Panel members are in agreement with the proposed recommendation, then a decision may have to be reached on a majority basis. The applicant/s and social worker/s are then invited back in to the meeting to be informed of the recommendation. The Panel is only able to make recommendations; the agency decision-maker has the final say. If the decision-maker decides to approve Panel's recommendations he will write to the applicant outlining the terms of approval, within 7 days.

The emphasis will be on making attendance at Panel a positive experience for applicants during which they can engage openly and comfortably with Panel members without this detracting from the serious responsibility of the Panel to reach a view about their suitability.

In making its recommendation Panel must always be mindful of its regulatory duty to safeguard the welfare of children/young people needing foster care.

It may be decided that additional specific information is needed before the Panel can reach a recommendation, especially if there is serious difference of opinion between Panel members. Serious reservations expressed by individual Panel members must be recorded within the Panel minutes and made known to the agency decision-maker.

In situations where the Panel is unable to reach a recommendation because further information is needed or where Panel has serious concerns and are not able to recommend the applicant/s as suitable to foster, the applicant/s together with their social worker will be given this information, having joined Panel, by the Chair. It will have been explained to applicants that, in the event of this happening, the Chair will not be able to engage in detailed discussion and that this will be the task of the Panel adviser. As above, whatever the Panel recommendation, applicant/s will always be reminded that the responsibility for decision-making rests with the decision-maker

The Panel Chair has responsibility for ensuring that the Panel's reasons for reaching a particular recommendation are clear.

Good minutes of Panel meetings are critical. Fostering service providers have a regulatory duty to keep a written record of the fostering Panel's proceedings and reasons for its recommendations. It is important that the Panel Chair and the Panel administrator / minute-taker work closely together, with the minute taker able to seek clarification from the Chair if he/she is unclear about what is being recommended and/or the reason for this. It is important that Panel members pay close attention to the content of Panel minutes and take responsibility to comment on anything that they consider is not an accurate record of what was said or agreed.

Agency Decision Maker

Legislation requires that no member of a fostering Panel should take part in any decision made by a fostering service provider and effectively creates a distinction between a fostering Panel's recommendations and the separate decision making responsibilities of the agency decision maker. The decision maker will not participate in Panel meetings.

The decision maker will receive copies of all papers (agendas, minutes and reports) circulated to Panel members for Panel meetings. In making the decision, the decision maker will take account of Panel's recommendation and he will see the Panel's draft minutes. In complex cases the decision maker may need to clarify points with the professional adviser or the Chair. However the Chair is not allowed to take part in the

decision making process and will need to be mindful of this. Focused Fostering Services will endeavour to communicate the decision to applicants within 7 working days.

Representations

If the decision maker, on receiving a recommendation from the Fostering Panel, considers that prospective foster carer/s are not suitable to foster then he must

- Give the applicants written notice that he/she does not intend to approve them, including the reasons why and a copy of the Fostering Panel's recommendations

And

- Invite them to submit written representations within 28 days of receiving the notification

If written information is received within 28 days, the decision maker must then refer the case to the fostering Panel for further consideration, as previously stated. In line with good practice the applicant/s will be invited to attend the Panel meeting in part to discuss their written representation, and to present any further information they wish. The Panel will make its recommendations taking account of the representation. This is seen as a new recommendation. Within 7 working days the prospective foster carer will be informed in writing of the decision, either notifying the terms of approval or explaining the reasons for deciding not to approve.

If no representations are received then the decision maker will proceed to make his decision.

With regard to foster carer reviews, if the decision maker after receiving the Panel recommendation is no longer satisfied that existing foster carers continue to be suitable to foster or that the terms of their approval are appropriate, then he must notify the foster carers in writing that he proposes to terminate their approval, or to revise the terms of their approval, with the reasons for this:

And

- Invite them to make written representations within 28 days. If representations are received then the matter must be referred back to the fostering Panel for further consideration and a fresh recommendation.

The above representation and decision making process / procedure will apply here also.

Foster carers attending a fostering Panel meeting, as part of making representations will be advised that their contribution should be clear, focused and concise. They will need to demonstrate the following:

- The fostering Panel and/or the decision maker did not have all the information needed to reach a fair and balanced judgment or failed to properly evaluate and balance all available information and/or:
- There have been significant relevant changes in their circumstances and/or an improved understanding of and their ability to carry out the responsibilities involved in fostering and/or:
- The fostering Panel and/or the decision maker focused unfairly on issues that

effectively discriminate against them rather than on the knowledge, skills and abilities in relation to fostering.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Foster Carers

Foster Carers are monitored throughout the year by their Supervising Social Worker and are reviewed annually by the Annual Review Officer. This process includes obtaining the views and comments of the children placed with the carer, their social worker, the carer and the supervising social worker. Where appropriate, the views of the children's parents will also be sought.

Regulation 28 of The Fostering Regulations 2011 requires all agencies to review every foster carer at intervals of not more than a year, to see whether the foster carer and her/his household continue to be suitable to act as foster carers. However, a review may be initiated at anytime due to a change in the circumstances of the carers such as change of address, marriage/remarriage, and bereavement or as a result of a complaint/allegation or concern about quality of care given by the foster carer and also at the carer's request.

Prior to the review meeting, the Supervising Social Worker will collate all information relevant to the foster carers' suitability to foster, including the number and type of placements in the last year, information from the Looked After Reviews of children placed, any extensions or exemptions that have been agreed in the previous year, supervision records, post placement reports and records of any complaints or allegations made against the foster carers or members of their household.

The views of the foster carers, all members of the household, any children placed since the last review, their parents (where appropriate) and their social workers, and any other professional whose views are relevant will be sought and taken into account at the review. This will include contacting social workers for children previously placed but no longer in the placement. Wherever possible these views should be reported to the review in writing.

The foster carer and members of the family (including the foster carers' own children depending on their age and understanding) will be asked to complete their own review form for this purpose.

Any updates on checks will also be carried

The Supervising Social Worker will prepare a review report stating whether the carers continue to be suitable to foster and whether the terms of his or her approval continue to be appropriate. This report should include a summary of the fostering work undertaken so far and how this relates to the development of the foster carer's skills. Any recommendations for change in the foster carers' approval should be highlighted.

A copy of the review report will then be sent to the foster carers and once it has been agreed by them, forwarded to the Fostering Service Manager for approval. A copy will be sent to Review Officer and copy will also be kept on the foster carer's file.

The Review Officer should receive all paper work relating to the review at least 2 weeks before the review meeting.

The Reviewing Officer will only be attending second and subsequent reviews

Review meetings should take place in the foster carer/s home

The review meeting should be attended by the Supervising Social Worker, foster carer/s and the Review Officer

Minutes of the meeting will be taken by the Reviewing Officer who will then compile a report and make a recommendation.

Should the Review Officer have any concerns about recommending approval then a written report will be presented at the fostering panel for consideration. Prior to taking this course of action it should be discussed with the foster carer/s and the supervising social worker and the fostering manager

In all cases the foster carer/s will view the report by the Reviewing Officer and will sign the report as an indication that they are happy with the account. A copy will be placed on file.

At the end of the meeting a provisional date should be set for the next review meeting

As well as considering the information collated in advance, the review will also consider the foster carer's safe caring practice, Fire Plan, training programme and any risk assessment in relation to the family pets as part of the review. A health and safety checklist will also be completed.

The review will consider all the available information and views and reach the following conclusions;

- whether the foster carer continues to be suitable to foster children
- whether the terms of approval continue to be suitable
- what training and development needs the foster carer has
- how these needs will be met and who will be responsible
- what support needs the carer has, and how these will be met
- any difficulties or concerns since the last review
- the date for presentation to the Fostering Panel, if relevant

A report on the first annual review meeting will be presented to the Fostering Panel within 12 months of the original approval.

Thereafter the review report will be presented to the Reviewing Officer for approval, and who will then convene a Review meeting. This process will be followed unless significant changes to the foster carer's approval or the termination of the foster carer's approval is recommended or where any circumstances exist which in the opinion of the Reviewing Officer and Fostering Manager require further consideration. This will include the situation where an updating Criminal Records Bureau check reveals a new concern about the foster carer or a member of the household.

In these circumstances, the review report will be presented to the Fostering Panel.

Where the report recommends termination of the foster carer's approval, the report should give full details of the concerns, allegations or complaints and the outcome of any Section 47 Enquiry or investigation. Any mitigating circumstances should be

outlined. A copy of the foster carers' Form F and any previous relevant Panel minutes should also be attached to the report.

The report for the Panel will be shared with the foster carer(s) and they should be invited to submit written comments.

A copy of the report to the Panel (and attachments including any written comments of the foster carer(s) on the report) should be sent to the Panel Administrator at least 15 working days before the relevant Panel meeting.

Foster carers should be invited to attend the Fostering Panel when their review is being considered, together with a supporter if they wish, and the Panel Administrator should be informed if they intend to do so.

Where the Review recommends the termination of approval of foster carers, the review should be presented to the earliest possible Fostering Panel.

Where the Panel's recommendation is for a different category of approval, the Panel may require further assessment or training for the foster carer.

Where the review is presented to the Fostering Panel, the Panel's recommendation as to the future approval of the foster carer will be submitted to the Agency Decision Maker for a decision to be made.

Whether or not the foster carers are present at the Panel, the Panel Adviser will arrange for them to be informed in writing of the outcome of the review as soon as possible and at the latest within 5 working days after a decision is made. The notice will set out:

- a. that the foster carer and household continue to be suitable and that the terms of the approval continue to be appropriate; or
- b. that the approval is terminated from a specified date, and the reason for the termination; or
- c. the revised terms of the approval and the reasons for the revision

The Supervising Social Worker will write to any social worker for a child placed with the foster carers to inform them of the outcome of the review.

The outcome of the review will also be recorded and the Register of Foster Carers updated as necessary. Where there has been any change in the terms of the approval, the Foster Care Agreement will be updated and signed by the Supervising Social Worker and foster carer.

Where the approval is terminated, the Fostering Manager will inform the Regulatory Authority.

Where the approval is terminated, the Fostering Manager in consultation with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) will decide whether to refer the former foster carer to the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) under the Vetting and Barring Scheme.

Where, as a result of a review, the variation or termination of a foster carer's approval is proposed, by the fostering panel he or she must be advised, when informed of the outcome of the Agency Decision Maker's decision, that if they wish to challenge the decision, they have the opportunity to make representations to the Panel or to request a

review by an Independent Review Panel. The only circumstances where the foster carer will not have the right to request a review by an Independent Review Panel is if he or she is regarded as disqualified as a result of a conviction or caution for a specified offence.

If no written representations or notification of a request for a review are received within the period, the decision to terminate or vary an approval can be confirmed.

Where the termination of the approval of a foster carer is being considered, plans for the termination of any current placement will also be required and made as appropriate.

Criminal Records Bureau checks on persons aged 18 and over will be updated every 3 years and if necessary, a review of the foster carers' approval should be carried out immediately to take account of any new information.

The foster carers should also be asked to complete Declarations of Health and Suitability every 3 years. In the event of any serious concerns about the foster carer's health, a review of the foster carer's approval will be carried out immediately.

Foster carers' case records should be retained for a minimum of 10 years after their approval has been terminated.

Support for Foster carers

Support to foster carers is vital and is linked to the overall retention rate. Foster carers need help and support with difficulties that arise from the fostering role and also in connection with the care of a particular child. Fostering makes demands on the whole family and can be the cause of stress in family relationships. Early support is important whilst new carers develop the skills needed to cope with the demands and problems they face. Continuing support is needed to maintain carers and to help carers with new challenges.

Every approved foster carer is allocated a supervising social worker who will provide a link between the carer and Focused Fostering Service and the social worker of any child in placement. The tasks of the supervising social worker are varied but primarily they are there to ensure the safety and welfare of the child through supporting the carer in the fostering task. The supervising social worker will offer support and advice but will also have a supervisory role to monitor that the care given to children placed with the foster family is of the best possible standard. The supervising social worker will visit the carer's home at least once a month and although these visits are usually by appointment there will be a minimum of one visit which is unannounced. The supervising social worker has a duty to see areas of the foster home that are used by the foster child or young person and will also ask from time to time to see their clothing and savings account.

The supervising social worker will carry out a formal supervisory visit every four-six weeks. The meeting will cover all aspects of the care of the child in placement and areas for discussion regarding the family's own circumstances, personal development and training needs and support needs. The visit is recorded on the form, the carer, supervising social worker and his or her manager will sign it as a true record of what

was discussed. The carer must be given a copy and a copy will be held on the carers file.

Focused Fostering Services regularly audit files to ensure that they meet the requirements set by the Fostering Regulations for file content and maintenance of information. The supervising social worker must also record unmet needs of the carer on the supervision form. This will also provide the agency with information when planning resources and services for the future.

Supervising social workers must vary the times of his/her visits to ensure all family members are seen as well as the fostered child (ren).

Supervising Social Workers are responsible for ensuring that carers are in receipt of:

1. Letter of approval
 2. Foster carer agreement
 3. Health and safety checklist
 4. Safe caring policy and household plan
 5. Lockable file*
 6. NFCA membership
 7. Smoke alarm(s)*
 8. Lockable medicine cabinet*
 9. Carbon monoxide alarm (as applicable)*
 10. Identity card
 11. Foster carer's handbook
- * Responsibility of the Carer/s

Visits to the carer by the Supervising Social Worker

- Supervising Social Workers are expected to visit each carer at least once every four weeks, more frequently for newly approved carers and where there are particular difficulties and when requested by the carer.
- Supervising Social Workers should be clear about the purpose of any visit and agree with the carer a common agenda.
- Supervising Social Workers must record the visit and its outcomes on the supervision form, and a copy should be sent to the carer within 10 working days of the visit. The record should include any concerns expressed, support needs identified and proposals for action.
- Supervising Social worker will make weekly phone calls for carers with placements, and regular phone calls to carers without placements.
- Supervising Social Workers are required to conduct an annual health and safety audit. However supervising social workers need to be clear that as an agency we expect health and safety issues to form part of the regular agenda of the supervisory visits they make to carers. A Health and Safety checklist forms part of the foster carer review form.
- Supervising Social Workers will make one unannounced visit as least once a year but we aim to for twice a year.
- Supervising social workers will send in monthly reports to the children's social worker which will record the progress of the placement and the child's development

- Supervising social worker will provide reports for LAC reviews

Advocacy and Mediation

- Supervising Social Workers may advocate on behalf of a carer on specific issues and in particular situations.
- Supervising Social Workers should help carers in representing their views.
- Supervising Social Workers should endeavour to ensure that carers receive information, finances and equipment speedily.
- Supervising Social Workers must recognise when they are unable to support or advocate for a carer because this would conflict with the primary responsibility to the child, and they should arrange advocacy or support from elsewhere. The role of the Supervising Social Worker is not to offer unconditional support to the carer but s/he does have a responsibility to the carer to ensure that the carer knows of the sources of available and appropriate support.

Monitoring the Work of the Foster Carer

- Supervising Social Workers and child/young persons Social Workers are responsible for monitoring that the carer is working in line with the expectations expected for the care task, regulations, policies, Care Plan and Placement Agreement and to ensure that the placement is safe.
- Supervising Social Workers will take up with the carer any issues, which arise and come to the attention of the child's Social Worker, directly or from the child/young person or parent.
- Children's Social Workers should inform the Supervising Social Worker of any concerns or any dissatisfaction with the carer's work even if these have been resolved in order that the Supervising Social Worker can monitor the carer's performance. Any such concerns will normally be part of the carer's annual review.
- Supervising Social Workers will monitor the support given to the carers and the placement. This will include frequency of visits, reviews and information provided by the child's social worker and placing agency. Where there are issues the Supervising Social Worker needs to feedback to the child's Social Worker.
- Supervising Social Workers will monitor the appropriateness of placement(s) and that these are within approval criteria. Whether the carer wishes to change approval terms and whether carers require a break.
- Supervising Social Workers will need to monitor the length of placement and speak with children's Social Worker where there is a risk of placement exceeding terms of carer's approval.

Supervising Social Workers will monitor changes in the carer's household, including health issues, changes in accommodation, and changes in relationships, people moving

in and out of the household. Our Supervising Social Workers visit the household and discuss and bring forward the annual review as appropriate. The Supervising Social Worker will inform the child's worker of any significant change.

Access to Records

Foster carers have the right of access to their records and such a request must be made in writing to the Fostering Manager.

Under the Data Protection Act applicants have a right to access all information held about them. On completion of the assessment the prospective carer/s will be given a copy of the Form F, which they must sign. This Form F is the property of Focused Fostering Services and is highly confidential; it should not be shared with any other person without the explicit consent of Focused Fostering Services. Under their name access may be denied if:

1. It would interfere with the prevention or detection of crime,
2. It would harm the welfare of a child;
3. The information is restricted by statute e.g. adoption records, parental order records;
4. It involves mental or physical health information – that cannot be disclosed without consulting an 'appropriate health professional'.

In order to gain access to files either by a carer or young person there must be a formal request this can be oral, written or by e-mail, giving at least two working days notice. Arrangements will be made for the person requesting to view his or hers personal file in the office and with the Manager present, all third party information will be removed. The file may not be removed from the office. Copies of papers in his/her file may be copied as follows: Notice must be given formally in writing, specifying the pages to be copied.

This Policy has been introduced in Accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998

Allegations and Complaints

Allegations of Abuse Against a Foster Carer

In any investigation of abuse against a carer the Agency of Residence i.e. the Local Authority where the foster carer lives, is responsible for the conducting the investigation and any subsequent Child Protection enquiry. The Placing Authority retains responsibility for the child's welfare and will have a significant presence at all meetings that follow.

Carers are in a very vulnerable position in caring for young people, many of whom have come from very disturbed and abusive backgrounds. In the vast majority of cases foster carers provide safe and secure care to children often with a very high level of commitment through difficult times. However children and young people do make allegations against their carers and these must be fully and thoroughly investigated to protect the child and the carer. Allegations illustrate why it is so important to discuss, implement and review safe caring for every member of the household and for friends and family who may visit you. Our carer are given The Fostering Network booklet 'Safer Caring' which gives good guidelines in assessing and managing risk and all carers receive a copy.

Foster carers should be treated fairly during any investigation. Should a referral be made which alleges that a carer/s has mistreated a child it will be initially discussed between the carer and supervising social worker, the child's social worker and their respective team manager? The placing agency may delegate the responsibility for the investigation to the local agency where the carer is living. If this is not possible the placing agency will conduct the enquiry themselves. Focused Fostering Services will have a direct input into any enquiry or investigation. The process will vary from one agency to another should an allegation occur. Focused Fostering will ensure that you have a copy of the procedures under which the investigation is being carried out. Usually the Service Manager will decide if enquiries are to be made, how any enquiries are carried out and if there is a need to provide immediate protection to the foster child or any other child in the household.

The allegation may easily be recognised as false in which case it will be recorded on your file but no further action will be taken. The allegation may identify an area of the foster carer's practice, which needs to be addressed, and the carer's supervising social worker will need to work with the carer to rectify this and identify appropriate training. This may mean that for a temporary period the carer has no placements made. Where it is uncertain as to the truth or otherwise of the allegation further enquiries will be made.

This will entail the carer and perhaps other members of their household and family being interviewed by a social worker and in some cases the police. Information will be gathered from sources known to the carer and the child concerned. A strategy meeting of professionals will be convened. The carer will not be invited to this. The meeting will clarify what the carer can be told about the enquiry and any further action that will be taken and by whom.

A decision may be made at this meeting that the child or children in placement should be removed. If this decision is made or the child was removed at the time the original allegation was made the carer will continue to get their fostering fees for a further 4 weeks after the child has left in lieu of notice. The meeting may conclude that the allegation was false and no further action is necessary or that there are practice issues that the supervising social worker needs to discuss with carer. If it is felt the allegation is serious either at the time of the referral or during the course of enquiries the Strategy Meeting outcome may well recommend that further enquiries are made under Section 47 of the Children Act, this outlines the response where there are Child Protection concerns.

Throughout any investigation of an allegation the supervising social worker will continue to support the carer. Carers may also use another foster carer, representative of Fostering Network (of which all Focused Foster Carers are members) or a family member or friend. You must remember that confidentiality for you and the child is important. Carers can get advice and support through the Citizens Advice Bureau or they can contact a childcare solicitor. It is always the intention that any inquiry is carried out in the shortest time possible in recognition of the tremendous strain that it places on all those involved. However there may be delays in getting information or of contacting key people who could help the. Carers must be kept fully informed of any progress and the timescale for conclusion.

Any allegations will be reported to our Fostering Panel and when the inquiry is concluded a foster carer review is carried out and presented to the Panel for any recommendations regarding the continued registration of the carer and the terms of their approval. Should the Fostering Panel make a recommendation to terminate the carer's approval, they can appeal and attend Panel with a representative and will be given time

to respond to any de-registration reports presented to Panel and have their comments attached to the review report which is presented to the Fostering Panel.

If an allegation is substantiated, or if it is not substantiated but there are significant concerns, a Child Protection Case Conference will be held.

As part of the foster carer agreement carers have undertaken to allow the removal or any child or children who is placed with them. If this is the decision made as part of the inquiry or following a Child Protection Conference, carers must allow the social worker to remove the child and, although it is very difficult, try to end the placement in a positive manner. If the carer has a close or long term relationship with the child and wish to keep in touch or the child wishes to keep in contact it is essential that the social worker is involved in and gives agreement to any contact arrangements.

In order to protect themselves from allegations carers are encouraged to uphold the following practices:

- Establish a strong support network of family and friends and contacts with other Focused Fostering Services carers
- Attend relevant training and put it into practice
- Use Fostering Network to keep in touch with recent fostering developments or for advice and support
- Keep a daily diary of events
- Keep social workers informed of events in the child's life
- Be aware at all times of your, and the child's, vulnerability
- Discuss safe care with your supervising social worker and read the Fostering Network publication, Safe Caring booklet carefully.

The Fostering Network's leaflet Managing Abuse Allegations against Foster Carer's 2003 leaflet is also given to our carers.

In the period January 2010 – January 2011 we dealt with no complaints and no allegations:

Type of Complaint	Number of Complaints	Outcome
Children Act 1989	None	
Child Protection Inquiry and Care Standards Inquiry	None	
Care Standards Inquiry	None	

The Regulating Body: Ofsted

Ofsted is a governmental body responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting fostering services provided by both Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies, under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000.

Ofsted
Royal Exchange Buildings
St. Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA
Tel: 08456404040
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Health Care and Development

Outcome for Standard 6 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services States 'Children live in a healthy environment where their physical, emotional and psychological health is promoted and where they are able to access the services to meet their health needs'.

Focused Fostering recognise that healthy children are generally more able to withstand day-to-day illnesses and, when they do become ill they are more likely to recover quickly. Healthy children are usually also better able to deal with stress

Focused Fostering is able to access therapeutic intervention for children and young people through our specialist outreach work. This service undergoes a separate charge.

Focused Fostering promotes good health through valuing and nurturing the children placed with its foster carers and by attending to their primary health, dental and ophthalmic needs, encouraging them to develop a healthy lifestyle, eating healthily and taking regular exercise

Focused Fostering care for children who may, whether they know it or not, live with transmittable conditions including HIV virus. Our foster carers maintain high standards of hygiene in line with the expectations of our standard of hygiene policy. Focused Fostering believes this offers an appropriate and safe environment for children and adults living together. Focused Fostering are able to access health training in respect of HIV & AIDS for all our foster carers.

Focused Fostering ensures that children who become ill or who are the victims of accidents receive the best possible available care and are fully supported through their treatment.

Focused Fostering believes that from the earliest agreed appropriate time, children should have access to information about their sexual development and the need to safeguard their sexual health. Foster carers are given training and advice in managing this.

Focused Fostering and its foster carers understand the need to support young people in their care as they develop their sexual identity, reassuring and valuing them during this process

Focused Fostering believes that passive smoking causes harm to children. We expect our foster carers that smoke to do so away from the young people that are placed with them and in rooms that are not shared by the children and young people living there, and they do not take children in to smoky atmospheres when away from the home. Focused Fostering do not approve carers who smoke for children between the ages 0 – 5 years.

Focused Fostering does not support the misuse of alcohol and drugs and does not recruit or maintain on their register of approved carers those who do misuse them

Focused expects its foster carers to be appropriate role models of healthy living to which the children cared for can aspire

Focused Fostering are committed to providing staff and foster carers who are committed towards supporting all the health needs of each child in foster care.

Each child in our care is an actively, informed participant in the process of her or his own health care, appropriate to her or his age and understanding; he or she is offered health care that incorporates confidentiality and choice.

The child's informed consent to all health care and treatment is actively sought

Each child in our care has accurate information about her or his health history and where it is known knowledge of significant medical problems in her or his family, appropriate to her or his age and understanding.

We have a medical adviser for looked after children in our care who has sufficient time allocated to fulfil this task.

The carer receives a full description of the health needs of each child placed in her or his care and clear procedures governing consent for the child to receive medical treatment.

Education of Children Looked After:

Focused fostering considers education to be of the utmost importance in the child and young person's journey towards realising his or her full potential. Focused Fostering aims to ensure that each child and young person has opportunities to further their education according to their age and ability.

Focused Fostering ensure its foster cares are proactive in identifying local schools and other educational resources which can meet a range of educational needs. Focused Fostering foster carers committed to appropriately pursuing school placements of choice for those children who arrive without a school placement. Focused Fostering carers are when it is in their means to do so are committed to maintaining attendance as schools already established prior to a child arriving.

Foster carers are supported by their supervising social worker to liaise effectively and cooperatively with schools concerning children's educational progress, behaviour, social integration and other aspects of school attendance. Focused Fostering foster carers are also expected to contribute information that may support a child or young person's personal education plan and it is expected that our foster carer and the supervising social worker attend PEP meetings.

Focused Fostering foster carers ensure that children and young people in their care are actively supported in school activities such as open evenings, medicals, school plays and sports day etc

Focused Fostering foster carer ensure that children and young people in their care are always cleanly and appropriate dressed for school and have the equipment they need.

They ensure that children and young people in their care attend school regularly and are punctual

Our foster carers promote education in all the above ways and encourage children to appreciate learning as something that continues when they arrive home from school. Our foster carers assist children and young people when necessary to do home work and provide a quiet time and place in which to do this.

Focused Fostering ensures that its foster carers attend training and development opportunities around supporting children and young people achieving their education potential.

Focused Fostering takes the view that children's education is the responsibility of the authority, where on a temporary basis the education authority can provide home tuition. Focused Fostering ensures that its foster carers support these arrangements and work cooperatively with tutors.

Focused Fostering is able access educational support services to children and young people who are unable to attain full access to their learning through mainstream education. This service comes with an additional charge

Leisure of Looked After Children

Focused Fostering foster carers must recognise the provision of a broad-based activity programme as being important to the well-being of children and young people. Some children may show particular potential or talents in activities such as sport, music, dance and other leisure opportunities. The foster carers supervising social worker will ensure that the foster carer he/she manages actively promotes the development of such potential and talent while ensuring that children and young people have opportunities to engage in a wide range of other activities.

Focused Fostering recognises that some leisure activities are expensive. Focused Fostering's judgment on the funding of such activities is either through our own service or the placing authority is always based on the immediate and long-term best interest of the child

Equal Opportunities

Focused Fostering welcomes the diversity of gender, abilities, language, disability, sexuality, ethnic origins, faiths and cultures of the people who make up our society. It is a fundamental principle of Focused Fostering's policy that every adult and child should be valued and we are committed to promoting equal opportunities.

The majority of children are cared for by their parents or a close relative but many families experience problems from time to time and where appropriate Social Services are there to help them. If the family has such difficulties that the child cannot live at home then an alternative must be found. Social Services will try to place the child within their own family but where this is not possible they will seek to place them with a suitable foster carer.

We believe all children and young people should have the opportunity to live with a foster family if they cannot remain within their own family. At Focused Fostering we aim to place children and young people with foster carers who reflect their cultural, linguistic

and religious identities. However it is acknowledged that placements may not always provide an exact match for a child and in such situations the foster family will be provided with training, support and information to ensure that the child's heritage is recognised and promoted and alternative placements where appropriate, will be sought at the earliest opportunity.

Disability Summary Statement

Focused Fostering responds flexibly to existing and future requirements of legislation and the Common Inspection Framework, to ensure that people with disabilities and learning difficulties have the same access to opportunities as others. Our Disability Statement, in common with our Equal Opportunities Policy, applies to foster carers, clients, staff, potential staff, stakeholders, visitors and associates.

The provisions of Focused Fostering's Disability Statement are made known to all new employees, clients, and associates through Focused Fostering's induction processes. Focused Fostering strives to remove, wherever possible, any barriers, which could place people with disabilities at a disadvantage. In order to achieve this aim, we maintain contacts with Local Authorities Placement Assessment Teams, Jobcentre Plus, Learning and Skills Councils, the Equality Exchange and other professional bodies interested in both occupational and educational opportunities for people with disabilities.

Internet & Email Policy

Introduction

The internet is a global network that offers access to many millions of pages of information and resources. It is not controlled by any particular organisation and the standard of source of information cannot always be guaranteed.

The internet offers many benefits to our business and our staff. However, using the Internet also involves risk and responsibilities.

Some of the greater areas of risk include:

- Exposure to unsuitable or harmful material: and
- Exposure to harm resulting from disclosure of personal information

Safety & Usage Guidelines

Focused Fostering is aware that the nature of the Internet is that of a global network which may transmit information from countries that have different beliefs and laws to the United Kingdom. It is possible for staff to be exposed (or expose others) to material that may be considered offensive and /or illegal in this country. It is the staff member's responsibility to prevent this while using Focused Fostering's Internet facilities. To help staff fulfil this obligation Focused Fostering has provided some Safety and Usage Guidelines.

The following guidelines have been written to help staff to comply with this policy. All equipment and other users should be treated with respect and facilities should be used in a way that does not disrupt its use by others. Staff should be aware that despite the virtual nature of communication, use of the Internet can entail personal risk. The

following guidelines are suggested to ensure a safer and more productive experience when using Focused Fostering's Internet facilities.

1. Staff should be aware that Internet access is monitored for network management purposes and that every site visited is recorded.
2. Individual email messages are backed up and can be restored at a later time. This provides Focused fostering with the tools monitor the email usage. However Focused Fostering does not undertake random surveillance.
3. Sometimes the Internet can seem separate from real life – it's not. Laws and standards of behaviour do apply.
4. Staff should not give personal details such as home address, telephone numbers or other contact details via the Internet, particularly if the recipients are unknown.
5. Never give out log-in information or passwords. It is possible for someone to access ALL your information should you do so. Any activity related to your logon information will be attributed to you.
6. Do not reply to offensive or threatening messages via the Internet, keep a copy of the message and inform any member of the IT Department.
7. Emails have the same legal status as written documents. Staff should ask themselves, before sending an email, how they would feel if their message was read out in court. Email messages may be disclosed in litigation
8. Staff should obtain confirmation receipt for important emails sent.
9. Staff should reply promptly to all email messages requiring a reply. Where a prompt detailed response is not possible, then send a short acknowledging receipt and give an estimate of when a detailed response will be sent.
10. If staff discover any material they consider may be offensive or inappropriate they should report the matter immediately to our IT Department.
11. The downloading and attempted installation of software is strictly prohibited.

Personal Use

- Although the internet and email facilities are for the purpose of conducting business an occasional and reasonable amount of personal use is expectable.
- Personal usage of the facilities should be avoided wherever possible during normal working hours (usage should normally only be during lunch brakes).
- Personal usage is carried out at staffs own risk
- The Internet and Email rules and Code of Practice applies at all times.
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Focused Fostering is able offer CEOP **Think U Know** sessions for 11-16 year olds which covers Cyber **bullying; Sexting and Grooming**. There is also an adult presentation, which is offered to our foster carers and staff.

Terms and Conditions

Focused Fostering will share it terms and conditions with placing authorities and prior to a placement being made a placement agreement will be agreed stating costs, terms and conditions.

Focused Fostering and its staff are committed to working through problems with young people, but in the event that a child has to move the Focused Fostering will normally give 28 days notice to the placing authority to ensure that a move is carried out in a planned manner.

In the event of an emergency Focused Fostering will aim to place the child or young person involved with respite carers within our own provision. Whenever possible this will be done in consultation with the placing authority. In exceptional circumstances, the 'out of hours' emergency duty team of the placing authority will be informed as soon as possible after such an arrangements is made. This will always be within 24 hours of a respite placement being made or the first working day thereafter

Fees

Focused Fostering will review it fees annually on the 1st April. It is our intention to keep increases in line with current rates. Placing Authorities will be given a minimum of one month's notice of any increase

All placements will be invoiced four weeks in arrears in line with the London Councils contractual arrangement.

In the event of emergency placements, placing authorities will be invoiced in arrear as soon as is practical this will be amended to our normal conditions specified in above.

Appendix 1: The Registered Manager and Staff

The Registered Manager of Focused Fostering Service is: Linda Shephard
Her qualifications are: Dips: SW, PQ1 & NVQ Level 4 Management and Leadership

Fostering Team

Position	Name	Qualification
Registered Manager	Linda Shephard	Qualified: Dip SW,PQ1 & practice assessor Award NVQ level 4 Management and Leadership
Independent Training Manager	Margaret Richardson	Qualified: Dip SW,PQ1 and practice assessor
Social Worker	Grace Mahoney	Social worker Degree of Bachelor of Arts
Social worker	Kate Walters	Social worker Degree of Bachelor of Arts
Fostering Support Worker	Tonie Bull	NVQ Level 3 Health & Social Care A1 Assessor Award
Helena Folks	Form F Assessor	Qualified: Dips SW
Richard Harris	Form F Assessor	Qualified: Dips SW
Julia Yearwood	Outreach Specialist	B.Ed Teaching/QTS P.G. Cert. Counselling skills and Grief & bereavement Counselling. P.G. Cert. Aspects of Counselling – C P.G. Cert. Counselling in Educational Settings
Maggie Richardson	Independent trainer	Qualified: Dip SW,PQ1 & Practice Assessor Award

Appendix 2: Structure Chart of Focused Fostering as of April 2012

