

Foster Cares Ltd



STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND FUNCTION

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FOSTER CARES LTD**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE & FUNCTION****1. Introduction**

Foster Cares Ltd was established in June 2000, to provide a range of high-quality foster placements in the North of England. Today in the North East the Agency has 50 sets of foster carers with capacity to provide placements for over 100 children. Foster Cares Ltd provides services for all Children's Services Departments in the North East of England, Cumbria and North Yorkshire. Our head office is based at **7 Fern Court, Bracken Hill Business Park, Peterlee, Durham. SR8 2RR**

In February 2005, Foster Cares Ltd opened an office on Manchester, with the aim of developing new fostering services in the North West of England. Subsequently, the office moved in February 2017 to our current office address of **Chadwick House, Suite 514, Birchwood Park, Birchwood, Warrington, WA3 6AE**

The service provides high quality foster placements in line with the philosophy, values, aims and purpose of the North East Head office. The Warrington office now has 20 sets of foster carers with a capacity to provide 30 placements for children and young people.

The combined total of our approved foster carers across our service provision is 70 households able to provide a total capacity of over 130 placements

Foster Cares Ltd structure enables a consistent service approach across our Fostering provision. The aim of our structure is to provide a clear structure, improve and build upon common practice, standardise agency requirements and to be supportive to the overall improvement of the service we provide.

The Registered Manager with responsibility for the day to day management of the service, its delivery and development. In addition, a Team manager in the North West office provides day to day management of service delivery in the Warrington office and is responsible to the Registered Manager.

The service aim is to work closely with families, foster carers and all other professionals involved in the care of children and young people to ensure that the highest quality of service is provided.

2. Status And Constitution

Foster Cares Ltd is the trading name of Foster CARES Ltd. which is registered as a Limited Company Registration No 5038789. A list of the Directors is available on the main Company document – Company Details at May 1st 2005.

3. Responsibility And Staff Team.

The owner/Director of Foster Cares Ltd is **David Cassie**, who is based at the Old Hall, Byers Green, Co Durham. David was a qualified social worker with over 36 years' experience.

Colin Rice the Managing Director is the responsible person for our fostering service and Agency decision maker. He has been with the Agency since December 2009. Colin is based at our Peterlee, County Durham, Head office, however, has overall responsibility for all aspects of the Fostering Service and its efficient, compliant provision. Colin is a qualified Social Worker with a Dip. SW, he has also completed his NVQ 4 in management. Colin has over 34 years' experience in social care including direct work with young people in residential care, various social work practitioner posts, experience of working in fostering services and in management for both Local Authority and Independent sectors.

Staff Team - Durham

At Foster Cares Ltd our Supervising Social Workers work on the basis that foster carers vary in the number of children they are approved to look after and children's needs vary, therefore we prefer to measure support needs as a reflection of this. Supervising Social Workers are therefore allocated to families based on the potential number of children placed and the service need. The Agency workloads are intended to indicate that the welfare of the child in placement is of paramount importance.

Foster Cares Ltd.'s Registered Manager is based in the North East and to support the management of the service we have a Team Manager in the North West. We currently have five Supervising social workers based in the North East and two in the North West.

Dawn Paton – Registered Manager - Dawn took up her post in March 2013. Dawn is a qualified Social Worker who has worked in both local Authority and independent sectors. Dawn has experience in child protection, fostering and as a Team manager and a Fostering service manager.

Andrew Peacock –Supervising Social Worker – Andrew joined the team in September 2004. Andrew completed his MA. / Dip. SW at Durham University in June 2002 and prior to this worked in Care for the Elderly and for MIND. Since qualifying he has worked for in a Youth Offending team, a Long-Term Placement area team and a Local Authority Fostering team prior to joining Foster Cares Ltd.

Debbie Strong – Supervising Social Worker – Debbie joined the team in July 2013, is a qualified social worker. Debbie is an experienced Supervising social worker and has a background in residential childcare and supporting people with disabilities

Alan Howes – Supervising Social Worker - Alan joined the team in April 2016 and is a Dip SW qualified social worker. Alan has a background in residential children's home and significant experience and knowledge of working within fostering services as a practitioner. Alan has worked in both the statutory and independent sectors

Cath Rice – Supervising Social Worker - Cath joined the team in January 2017 after working for Barnardo's for 16 years. Cath completed her Dip. SW at Sunderland University in June 2000. Cath has also completed a level 3 NVQ management award.

Cath has significant experience having worked in various roles and settings including, supported lodgings, mediation, fostering, teenage pregnancy, children centres and youth training provision.

Janet Wright –Supervising Social Worker – Janet joined the team in March 2020, having previously worked as a Fostering Social Worker in Local Authority and IFA settings. Prior to this, Janet has undertaken various roles within the Local Authority Children’s sector, before graduating from Northumbria University with a BSC Hons Degree in 2011, at which time, she originally became a Children’s Social Worker for Looked After Children. Janet has also worked in various administrative posts and was a legal secretary for 9 years, before moving to the Local Authority.

Nichola Mulholland –QA & Compliance Co-ordinator – Nichola joined the Agency in June 2003, having just completed her MA/Diploma in Social Work. Prior to completing her Dip. SW she gained experience working as a Residential Social Worker for children and young people with a range of needs including those with Learning Difficulties and Physical Disabilities and as an Assistant Social Worker within a Local Authority Social Work office. Nichola has completed her NVQ assessor’s award at a local college and is Practice teacher for social work students. Following nearly 17 years as a supervising social worker, Nichola was successfully appointed to her current role taking up her post as of March 2020.

Louise Bagshaw – Recruitment Social Worker – Louise joined the team in May 2012, is a qualified social worker who has experience as a child protection worker in Local Authorities and more recently in fostering services in the Independent sector.

Joanne Green – Administrator – Joanne joined the team in 2007 and has since become an integral part of the team ensuring the efficient running of the service.

Claire Eltringham – Administrator – Claire joined the team in 2011 and has established herself as an integral part of the team ensuring efficient running of the service.

Helen Pounder – Finance & Commissioning - Helen joined the team in April 2018. Helen has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Accounting and business and went on to qualify as a chartered certified accountant in 2002. She has worked in a private practice as an accountant and auditor for 23 years before moving to Foster Cares Ltd.

Staff Team – Warrington

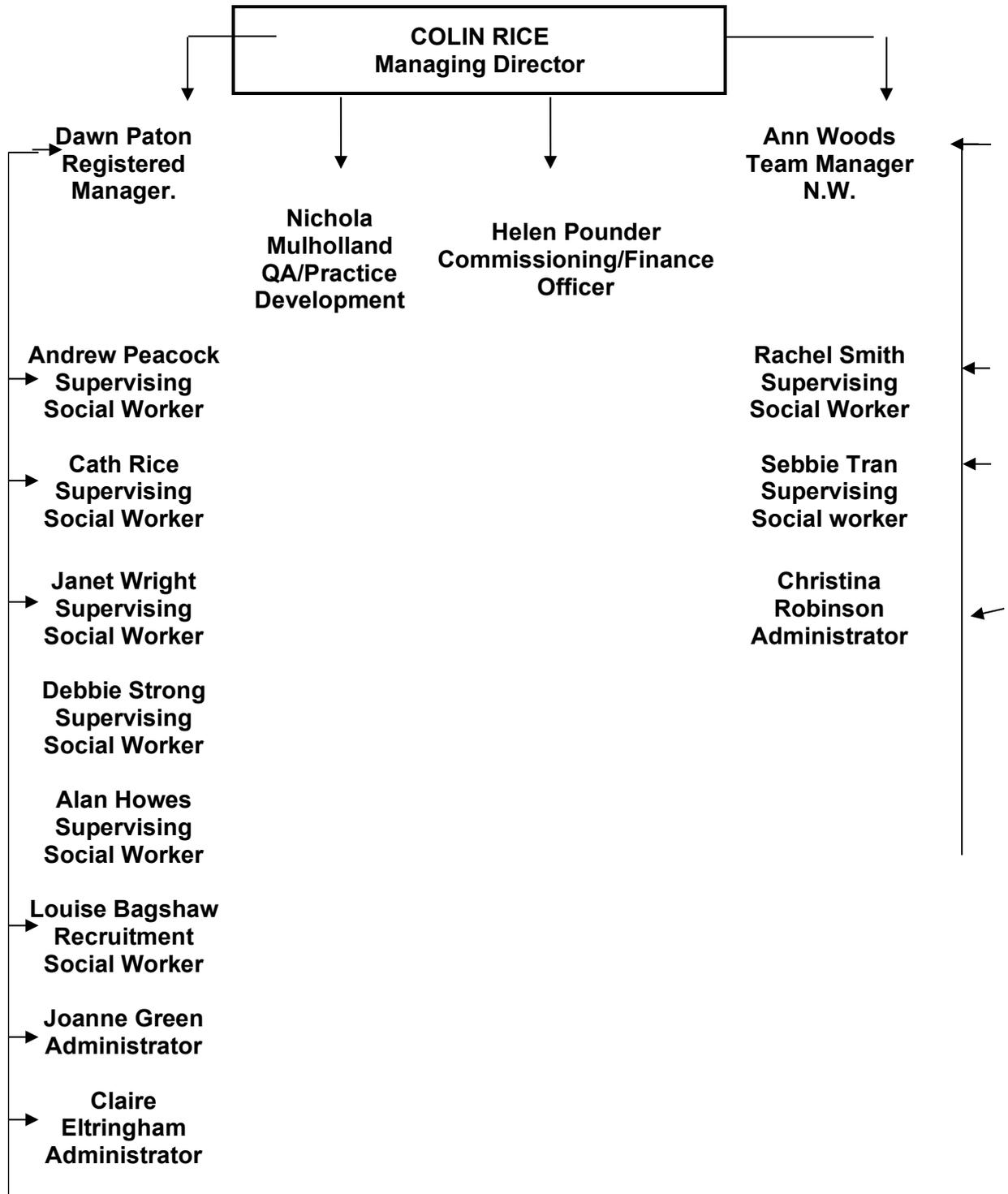
Ann Woods – Team Manager NW – Ann joined the team in May 2016. She is a qualified Social worker, with significant experience across the social care field both as a practitioner and in management positions. Ann has worked in both statutory and independent sector and brings a wealth of experience in fostering service provision.

Rachel Smith –Supervising Social Worker – Rachel joined the team in February 2015. Rachel completed her BA (Hons) in Social Work Studies at the University of Chester and graduated in 2014. Rachel's most recent role was working as a Youth Worker for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service. Prior to this Rachel gained experience working in Care for the Elderly, supporting young people with mental health needs and 'one to one' support work with a young person with Asperger's syndrome.

Sebbie Tran – Supervising Social Worker – Sebbie joined the team in March 2020. Sebbie completed her BA (Hons) in Social Work Studies at Salford University in 2009. Sebbie has worked for Bolton Local Authority for ten years as a Looked After Children and Safeguarding Social Worker and her last role for Bolton was a Supervising Social Worker. Prior to qualifying as a Social Worker, Sebbie has worked as a Play Co-Ordinator, Independent Visitor Co-Ordinator for Salford Children's Rights and as a Residential Care Staff in Residential Children's Home across Manchester.

Christina Robinson - Administrator - Christina joined the team in November 2017. Christina has a working background that has been predominantly in HR and Payroll for Banking and Recruitment sectors. Christina has gained many years' experience in all aspects of Administration and brings her excellent organisational skills to the role. Christina has Business & Finance Studies BTEC National Diploma and typing qualifications.

Staff Team Structure.



Foster Cares Ltd Supervising Social Workers are professionally qualified social workers with experience in childcare practice, policy and legislation, the needs of Looked after Children and Foster Carers and their families. They visit foster carers regularly on an agreed basis and call unannounced during each year. The purpose of the visits is to provide supervision, in order to support foster carers in their care of children, identify concerns and support solutions in relation to matters which impact on the welfare of children placed with the foster family. The frequency of visits is monthly, however will reflect reported or anticipated difficulties. For example, in the early part of a placement or when difficulties are being experienced, visits are more frequent. Increased frequency or unannounced visits may reflect reported and shared concerns about the care being offered.

The staff team are provided mobile phones so that they can be contacted. The service operates an out of hours duty system staffed by our own team of social workers which allows foster carers direct access to known staff outside normal working hours.

Foster carers, their own children and children placed with them have access to support and recreational groups and activities, reflecting the family model of Foster Cares Ltd and recognising that issues can exist for all parties which can be explored in groups as well as one-to-one settings. This network is also designed to facilitate opportunities for relatively seamless respite arrangements, which are agreed with the Agency and the placing Local Authority.

4. Aims And Objectives

Foster Cares Ltd aim to provide services which complement those provided by Local Authorities through cooperation rather than competition.

Foster Cares Ltd provide an emergency, short, medium and long-term needs led service for Looked after Children where they can reflect and plan for the future with their families, social workers and other significant people.

Where it is in the interests of the child and agreed by the appropriate professionals, foster carers who have been approved as long-term carers, having gained relevant experience and completed the appropriate training may be considered for long-term placements

Children will only be placed with foster carers approved by our own panel and with the exception of emergencies, the prior approval of the placing Authority. The placing Authority should approve the placement and arrange for statutory visits by the child's social worker. Each child will have an Individual Placement Agreement.

In placement we aim to provide:

- A physically safe, supportive, family environment, which protects and safeguards the welfare of each child.
- A placement which reflects the child's needs as identified in his/her care plan.
- Support for agreed programmes to ensure that the key development areas of health, education, social, emotional and behavioural needs are met.
- Access to education appropriate to the child's age and ability accompanied by effective liaison and cooperation with the Education Authorities.
- Commitment to a review schedule, which will reflect general and specific outcome targets for each child.
- Access to appropriate health care.

- An open, honest approach to achieve a shared understanding of the outcomes expected from placement with the child, carers, family, and social workers.
- Records which are kept on a daily basis in such a way as to facilitate the participation of the child in their progress and key life events while respecting the need for confidentiality and security of such information.
- Respect for the child's network of family and friends and facilities to promote contact where it is in the child's interests.
- Stability and consistency in the child's attachments and networks.
- Increased self-esteem and confidence through support and encouragement in personal achievement and positive feedback.
- After-care planning and support including "Staying put" where this is appropriate.
- Access to other support services, such as Educational assessment, facilitating family group meetings to plan contact and/or rehabilitation and time-out and respite activities to reduce the possibility of placement breakdown.
- Respite activities which may only be provided by persons checked by the Agency and approved by the Local Authority.

5. Philosophy And Care Principles

The values, which inform our approach to foster care, are:

- Children are children first and are entitled to a safe living environment in which they feel secure and their unique circumstances, rights and opinions are respected and listened to.
- While looked after they should have a positive experience of family life, relationships and attachments, which validate the child's, own family and recognize the loss and separation, which they have experienced.
- It is essential to give the opportunity for the child to be involved in planning for the future, which, where possible, should involve active consideration of rehabilitation to members of the wider family network.
- In the absence of such a solution, to plan for stability and permanence in attachments which continue to validate the child's own family, race, culture, language, religion, gender and sexual orientation.
- To achieve this, foster carers will work in partnership with the child, their family and social worker.
- To ensure positive outcomes in the child's physical, intellectual, social, emotional and behavioural development we will work together with those who have parental responsibility and professionals in order to access the opportunities, resources and support needed to secure a future which will fulfil the child's potential and encourage social inclusion.
- We do not believe that readiness for independence is achieved at a date determined by the young person's 18th birthday, so we will continue to work with all parties where appropriate towards independence or staying put where agreed at the young person's pace.

As an organization, we work within the:

- The Fostering Service Regulations (2011)
- The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011)
- The Care Standards Act 2000
- Children Act 1989
- Children Act 2004

We are therefore concerned to target the following specific outcomes for the children and young people that we look after:

- Children should enjoy the best possible physical and mental health.
- Children should fulfil their intellectual and educational potential.
- Children should experience security in their attachments.
- Children should enjoy satisfying and appropriate social, family and peer relationships.

6. Placements And Referrals

Placements are available for children and young people of either sex, aged 0 to 18 years. We have foster carers able to provide a wide spectrum of placements including those for children with challenging behaviour, sibling groups, emergency placements, younger children, solo placement and mother and baby placements.

Bridging And Emergency Placements: Most of our carers can respond to a crisis during which time the child's future placement needs can be assessed and the child prepared for permanence with the involvement of family, social workers, and other professionals.

Short Term Planned Placements: We provide short to medium term placements during which the future placement needs of young people can be assessed by providing our own assessment and working together with the young person, their family, social workers, and others involved in the young person's welfare.

Long Term Placements: We are also able to provide long term placements by those foster carer's able to meet our approval criteria and our Panel agree that this is in the best interests of the child.

Permanency Placements: We are also able to respond to requests for permanent matched placements for young people where this is identified as being in the best interests of the child. We are committed to ensuring foster carers and children understand and appreciate the commitment they are making when agreeing permanency.

Parent And Child Placements: We have a number of placements, which can provide intensive assessment and support for parenting abilities in placement, and with agreed after care support.

The Agency supports the view that planning and matching of placements is a crucial factor in providing security and stability for the child in placement, therefore minimising the potential of breakdown. While full information is not always available to the referring Local Authority Social Worker, high standards are expected by the Agency in the provision of child centred information and referrals are encouraged at the earliest possible opportunity.

Planned Placements: These should be discussed with the Duty Supervising social worker or Team Manager, followed by a written referral with full details. A Pre-Placement Planning Meeting will then be convened within agreed timescales to explore the detailed issues for the placement. A meeting involving all parties will then produce a written Individual Placement Agreement.

Emergency Placements: Such referrals must be discussed in the first instance with the duty supervising social worker who may decide further discussion is necessary with the Team Manager before a final decision can be made.

All placement referrals in the North East will be managed by our social work team based at our **Peterlee Head Office** who can be contacted either by **Tel – 0191 586 9655** or by email – duty.durham@cares.co.uk

All North West referrals will be managed by our **Warrington office**, who can be contacted by **Tel - 0161 8727048** or by email - duty.manchester@cares.co.uk dependent upon which office is serving the particular contract or Local Authority.

Referrals made outside of office hours will be managed by our out of hour's social worker in each area, contactable on the above telephone numbers for the relevant area who are available 365 days a year.

Placement Procedure

An Individual Placement Agreement will be drawn up between all parties and consistent with the desired outcomes and the child's Care Plan, prior to the child's move into a planned placement or within a week of an emergency placement. This will include: -

- Anticipated period of stay and financial arrangements.
- Educational needs and arrangements.
- Health needs and arrangements.
- Attachment issues.
- Family contact needs and arrangements.
- Cultural, racial, religious, gender and language needs and arrangements.
- Areas of delegated Parental Responsibility.

Referral Criteria

It is anticipated that Local Authorities will be seeking placements for young people who have experienced any number of the following:

- A high level of attachment disruptions or difficulties
- Inconsistent or inappropriate care arrangements
- Personal or family trauma, violence or abuse
- Loss, separation and rejection
- Levels of high criticism and low affection
- Involvement in offending behaviour
- Lack of continuity and consistency in education and health care
- Social exclusion and disrupted social and peer relationships
- Inappropriate levels of independence

As a consequence, young people will need to learn to trust, develop self-esteem and express feelings of anger, guilt and confusion about their lives.

The successful matching of placements involves the balancing of the needs of young people with the competencies, skills, capacity and circumstances of foster carers. Such a decision depends on an open and detailed sharing of the young person's history including their strengths and the requirements for monitoring any behavioural change to ensure that their welfare is compatible with individuals and environment of the foster home.

7. Care Arrangements

Foster Carers will support the child's access to Education Services so that the young person can receive continuity in education either by travelling to their previous school or in gaining a local school or college place. The foster home environment will reflect positive support for good health and education.

Health Care

- Young people will be supported in cooperating with routine and Looked After health checks and specific treatments, having regard to their wishes, legal status, those with parental responsibility, care plans and appropriate development towards independence.
- Young people will be registered with the local G.P. at the earliest opportunity should it be impractical for them to continue to attend their previous GP.
- Young people will be encouraged to participate in a healthy lifestyle, in relation to diet, hygiene, drugs and sexual relationships, consistent with their cultural, racial and religious beliefs.
- Specialist health care will be sort / provided locally through the relevant health authority. Issues regarding specialist health care will need to be discussed with the social worker at the time of referral and appropriate timescales agreed to ensure that resources are in place before the placement begins.

Contact Arrangements

Positive encouragement will be given to ensure contact with significant people to the young person can continue or be established where it is in their best interests and consistent with the Care Plan. The need for supervision of such activities will be agreed on a case-by-case basis but it should not be assumed that the foster home is always an appropriate venue for all such arrangements. In general, positive encouragement will be given to achieve an active partnership with the young person's family and all-party involvement in planning and decision-making.

Education And Employment

Where it is possible to maintain attendance at the same educational establishment, this will be supported through negotiation between the Agency, foster carers, and the Placing Authority, those with parental responsibility, the young person, and the Education Department.

Where this is not possible the choice of enrolment at a local school or college will be supported by foster carers.

Young people will be encouraged and supported to attend school, complete homework, and take part in extra-curricular school activities, develop positive peer relationships and appropriate community-based activities will be provided in consultation with all parties.

Similarly, support will be provided in enjoying positive work experiences, training schemes, dealing with agencies and authorities to achieve employment and independence.

Daily Routines

These should reflect each individual child/young person's abilities and needs in relation to appropriate dependence/independence and preparation for adulthood. Such routines and boundaries are closely related to health care and educational achievement as well as to social inclusion, so are important in the context of social presentation and social skills which come from a positive experience of family, adult, and peer relationships.

Having appropriate relationship skills is particularly important for young people who have experienced abuse.

Children and young people will be provided with an environment in which they can build and maintain relationships, understand their own sexuality, establish caring relationships, and develop self-esteem.

Foster carers will work actively with young people to help them prepare for the responsibilities of adulthood and the capacity to care for themselves by teaching budgeting, domestic tasks, shopping etc.

Behaviour Management

Inappropriate behaviour will be dealt with by positive disciplinary means, agreed with the placing authority and people with parental responsibility. These means will only be used where positive validation and reward has not been effective in modifying behaviours.

Some forms of punishment are **not acceptable**, for example:

- Corporal punishment.
- Any deprivation of food or drink usually available, affection, sleep, shelter or clothing.
- Restriction on contact or communication with parents, family and friends, people with parental responsibility, solicitor, independent visitor, social worker or other professionals identified in the Care Plan unless a specific requirement of the agreed Care Plan.
- Actions, which could lead to social exclusion or humiliation.
- Withholding/forcing of medical treatment.
- Being locked in a room.
- Discriminatory language or acts.
- Public criticism of the young persons' family or friends.

Some forms of punishment are acceptable but should always be appropriate in relation to the transgression for example:

- The withholding of a proportion of pocket money to pay towards the cost of damaged or stolen items.
- Restriction on certain leisure activities, which are 'earned' by acceptable behaviours.
- Additional domestic chores or other duties.
- Grounding.
- Confiscation of illegal or dangerous items.
- Helping to mend things, which the young person has broken.
- Apologizing to those who have been harmed by the young person's behaviour.

Absences From The Foster Home

- Foster carers should inform the placing Local Authority, the Agency and Police immediately if they become aware of an unplanned absence which suggests that the young person has run away or been removed from the household. A decision regarding who will inform the police must be made and acted on at this point.
- Foster carers are required to inform the Agency in advance of any planned overnight stay away from their household and of any period of time spent in the care of another adult no matter how temporary. The Agency will ensure with the Authority that such plans are in the interests of the child.
- In the event of an emergency situation, approval for arrangements should be agreed with the Agency who would consult with the Authority at the earliest opportunity.
- Foster Cares Ltd will keep a detailed record of any such events.

The Protection Of Children And Young Persons

Young people who have experienced abuse or neglect in the past can be especially vulnerable to further abuse; they have the right to be protected whilst being looked after.

- Foster carers will follow Agency policies and cooperate with the Placing and/or Host Authorities Safeguarding Children Procedures and Protection Plans by adhering to the procedures described in the Foster Carers Handbook.
- These procedures apply equally to an allegation of abuse made against a member of the foster carer's family.
- All of our foster carers undertake safeguarding and safer care training and complete a household "safe caring" agreement prior to their approval with the Agency. This agreement will be individualised to the needs of children in placement.
- In any event of alleged or actual abuse, the Placing Authority will determine whether the placement can continue.
- The Agency will support and appraise the competence of the foster carers and their need for support and development.
- Young people themselves will have access to age and ability appropriate information regarding how they can raise concerns or complaints about how they are being cared for.
- Foster carers will receive guidance, training and support to assure that the young person's welfare is safeguarded, and his/her environment is a safe place. However, it may become evident that welfare or safety is being or likely to be compromised.
- Foster carers will communicate with their Supervising Social Worker and child's Social Worker routinely but should indicate at the earliest opportunity should the placement not be going well, thus avoiding arriving at a crisis without warning to the Agency or the placing Local Authority.
- Circumstances also change for the foster family household which impact on the viability of the placement.
- In circumstances which may lead to the breakdown or disruption of a placement, notice of 28 days is required of foster carers or the earliest possible communication of such concern, whichever is earlier.

Health & Safety

Any living environment contains hazards. There are too many risks to list but generally- the household should be:

- Kept clean, warm and comfortable and safe.
- Provide personal and communal space appropriate to the needs of its members.
- It should also be kept safe from the risks of fire and accidental injuries
- Offer safety and security for the young person and their possessions without preventing their freedom of movement.
- Activities within and outside the house, which would normally involve parental consent, should be referred to the Authority via the Agency.
- Foster carers will be trained in risk assessment and basic first aid and be aware of relevant Health and Safety Standards through the initial assessment checklist which is updated at annual reviews or earlier should events indicate the need.
- Health and Safety issues are also monitored during fortnightly supervision visits to carers.
- If applicable a Dog assessment will be carried out through our qualified assessor.

8. Recruitment, Approval, Support And Training Of Foster Carers

The recruitment, selection, support, and monitoring of foster carers is the process which ensures that Children are looked after by carers who are competent in the skills needed, are accountable and supported.

The Agency will ensure that all foster carers and any other members of their household are assessed as to their suitability prior to recommendation of approval by the Agency's Fostering Panels. This includes-

- Enhanced DBS
- Probation, Local Authority, Education checks for all members of the household over the age of 16
- Comprehensive referencing accompanied by interviews of referees
- Medicals
- Other statutory checks
- Employment history.
- Pre-approval preparation in terms of advice, training (Skills to Foster – Fostering Network)
- An in-depth analytical Form F assessment
- Application presented to the Agency independent fostering panel
- Induction in relation to the Agencies philosophy, values and expectations.

Following approval, foster carers are informed of their approval terms in writing and required to enter into a Pre-Placement Agreement with the Agency before any child/young person is placed with them.

Foster carers receive their copy of the Foster Care Agreement and the Foster Carer Handbook, which includes:

- Their original assessment and subsequent review reports.
- Ongoing training and development profile.
- Policy documents in relation to; assessment and checks, safeguarding and child protection procedures, placements, methods of care and control, record keeping and access, incident reporting, confidentiality, financial procedures, health and safety, dealing with disclosure of abuse, arrangements for visiting and contact, reviews, working in partnership with family, working together, disciplinary and grievance procedures, appeals procedure, delegated parental and other responsibilities, changes in household composition, welfare principles, discrimination, medical consent, and life story work.
- Other documents and guidance in relation to; pro-forma, Agency philosophy, care standards and competences, the panel, legislation and guidance, terms and conditions and support arrangements.

Before a specific placement, foster carers will receive a copy of the Individual Placement Agreement and information provided by the Authority relating to the Care Plan and history of the child and his/her family and placements as well as a copy of the placing authority's child protection procedures.

The Approval Process

Foster Cares Ltd follows the requirements of the Assessment and approval of Foster Carers: amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and regulations, volume 4: foster services 2013 by undertaking assessments in two parts, stage 1 and stage 2.

Stage 1. Is intended to provide the decision maker with basic information about the applicant to enable clearly unsuitable applicants to be sifted out without unnecessary bureaucracy or expenditure of time and resource by the fostering service or the applicant.

Stage 2. Requires more detailed information including the following information is obtained as set out in Part 2 of Schedule 3: relating to the applicant and other members of the household, together with any other relevant information.

Regulation 26(1A) requires that where a person applies to become a foster carer and it is decided to assess their suitability to become a foster carer, the following information must be obtained as soon as reasonably practicable relating to the applicant and other members of:

- Full name, address and date of birth;
- Details of health (supported by a medical report);
- Particulars of any other adult members of the household;
- Particulars of the children in the family, whether or not members of the household, and any other children in the household;
- Particulars of their accommodation;
- The outcome of any request or application made by them or any other member of their household to foster or adopt children, or for registration as an early year's provider or later years provider under Part 3 of the Childcare Act 2006), including particulars of any previous approval or refusal of approval relating to them or to any other member of the household;

- If the applicant has, in the preceding twelve months, been a foster parent approved by another fostering service provider, the name and address of that fostering service provider;
- Interview at least two persons who will provide personal references and prepare written reports; and/or obtain a written reference from the previous fostering service if they have been a foster carer in the last 12 months.
- In relation to the applicant and any other member of the applicant's household who is aged 18 or over, an enhanced criminal record certificate;
- Details of current, and any previous, marriage, civil partnership or similar relationship.
- The views of the local authority in whose area the applicant lives, if different;
- Where the applicant has previously been, or is currently, approved as a foster carer by another fostering service provider, or as a prospective adopter by an adoption agency, and consents, access may be requested to the relevant records compiled by that other fostering service provider/ adoption agency in relation to the applicant. That service/agency must provide access within 15 working days of a request being received.

Records compiled by another fostering service, or an adoption agency, can be used to inform the new assessment of the applicant's suitability to foster. For instance, if previous partners have been interviewed in the past to verify facts, and the current assessing social worker is satisfied with the records in respect of these interviews, it should not be necessary to repeat the interviews if no further information is required. The assessing social worker should, however, satisfy themselves as to the quality and continuing relevance of the information before using it to inform the current assessment.

Where, having regard to any information obtained, it is decided (by the Agency Decision Maker) that the applicant is not suitable to become a foster carer, the applicant must be notified in writing with reasons. This notification may be given whether or not all of this information has been obtained. Such a notification may not be given more than 10 working days after all the information has been obtained. The applicant has no right to make representations about the decision or to have their case reviewed under the Independent Review Mechanism. However, the applicant must be informed that they can complain via the fostering service's complaints process if they are unhappy with the way in which their case has been handled. The complaints process should address whether or not the applicant's case has been handled in a reasonable way, rather than the question of the applicant's suitability to foster.

Where all the specified information (Reg 26(1A)) has been obtained and the applicants are suitable, or notification has not been given within 10 working days (of completion of stage 1) that the applicant is not suitable, then the application must proceed to **Assessment - Stage Two**.

Stage Two

More detailed information is collected in stage 2 of the assessment. Regulation 26(2) requires that the following information is obtained as set out in Part 2 of Schedule 3: relating to the applicant and other members of the household, together with any other relevant information;

- Details of personality;
- Religious persuasion, and capacity to care for a child from any particular religious persuasion;
- Racial origin, cultural and linguistic background and capacity to care for a child from any particular racial origin or cultural or linguistic background;
- Past and present employment or occupation, standard of living, leisure activities and interests;
- Previous experience (if any) of caring for their own and other children;
- Skills, competence and potential relevant to their capacity to care effectively for a child placed with them;
- Consider whether the applicant 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 which includes the following matters;
 - The information required to be obtained, as set out above;
 - Any other relevant information;
 - An assessment of the applicant's suitability to be a foster parent;
 - Proposals about any terms of approval.
 - There are no specific regulatory requirements about the way in which assessment information must be collected or presented to Panel. Foster Cares Ltd uses the BAAF Form F and requires assessing social workers to demonstrate that they have collected evidence from a range of sources and used every opportunity to verify and substantiate/check out information and evidence received.

The assessing social worker will:

- Familiarise him or herself with the application form;
- Contact the applicant(s) and arrange a visit;
- Draw up a written agreement setting out the dates for the assessment visits and the date for the presentation to the Fostering Panel;
- Interview couples individually and together and ensure the children of the applicant or other significant members of the family/household are seen alone;
- Contact ex partners (see below);
- Inform the applicant(s) of any revised timescales if there are delays.

The assessing social worker must complete the Form F in full and cover all aspects of the competency and standards framework as well as devising a comprehensive Personal Development Plan (PDP) which includes the means by which all mandatory training is to be completed in the first 12 months of fostering.

The applicants skills and personal qualities need to be evidenced in relation to the terms of the approval recommended by the assessing social worker and will be different according to the type of fostering, e.g. babies and toddlers or teenagers, short term or permanent, parent and child etc. If the applicants have a wide category of approval, then evidence should be provided to support this.

A safe caring policy and health and safety document should be completed at the earliest stage of the assessment and updated as the applicant's progress through stage 2. A copy should be given to the foster carers. This document will be reviewed annually.

Where, having regard to information obtained during Stage Two, it is decided that the applicant is unlikely to be considered suitable to become a foster parent, notwithstanding that not all the Stage Two information has yet been obtained, a **Brief Report** may be prepared and submitted to the fostering panel in the same way as for a full assessment report. (There is no prescribed length or format for a brief report).

As well as providing a written reference, two (or more, if considered appropriate) personal referees will also be interviewed during the assessment. Referees and any other family members spoken to during the preparation of the report should be informed in writing about the position in relation to confidentiality. A written reference will not be shown to an applicant unless the applicant requests disclosure and the referee consents to disclosure. The same applies to information and opinions shared in the course of conversation. These will not be disclosed to an applicant without permission. However, referees and others should be made aware that it will often be necessary to discuss with applicant's information and opinions expressed although where this happens, the particular source of the information or opinion will not be disclosed. The assessing social worker may also contact the previous partners of the applicants (taking care not to disclose confidential personal information about the applicant).

Where there were any children of the relationship or where children were cared for jointly, the social worker will arrange to interview them face-to-face wherever practicable. All adult children of the applicant(s) living away from home will also be interviewed.

Applicants will be encouraged to be actively involved in contributing towards the assessment and supported to provide their own written report/portfolio for Panel to evidence their capabilities and to support their application.

The foster home will also be thoroughly checked to ensure it provides appropriate and safe for the child, as well as safe transport. Each child over 3 has their own bedroom or, where this is not possible; the sharing of the bedroom has been agreed by the placing authority. A risk assessment must be conducted in regard to pets.

The applicant must be notified that the case is to be referred to the fostering panel, be given a copy of the report and be invited to send any observations in writing within 10 working days beginning with the date on which the notification is sent.

At the end of the 10 working days, (or when the applicant's observations are received, whichever is sooner), the report, the applicant's observations on that report, if any, and any other relevant information obtained, must be sent to the fostering panel.

Where there are concerns about the suitability of the applicant that arise at any point during the assessment, the assessing social worker should discuss these with the applicants and consult the manager. Where the issues cannot be addressed by training and the applicants are advised to withdraw.

Review Of Approval

Under Regulation 28 Fostering Regulations 2011, the Agency is required to review the approval of all Foster Carers on an annual basis.

- The foster carer's annual reviews are chaired by Independent Reviewing Officer's,
- The reviewing officer's report and recommendations are submitted to the Agency Fostering Panel for consideration on their first annual review.
- Each subsequent annual review will be ratified by the Agency Decision maker.
- It is an Agency requirement that all foster carers attend their annual review and participate fully with the process.
- In the event of a complaint, allegation or other matters of concern or at the carer's request, the Agency may decide to hold or bring forward a review to address the issues identified.
- This should follow at a time consistent with the level of concern, these reviews and recommendations will always be submitted to the Fostering Panel for their consideration.
- It may be that due to concerns or conflict that foster carers will be invited to attend the fostering Panel, so they can state their case and provide clarification.
- Prior to all reviews, all parties involved including the foster carers, Supervising Social Worker, the young person, and their social worker will be informed and invited to contribute their views to the review process.

Appeals Procedure

Should the applicant be dissatisfied with any aspect of the assessment process, subsequent review reports or panel recommendations which cannot be resolved with their Supervising Social Worker, he/she should discuss the matter with the Team Manager.

Should this fail to resolve the dissatisfaction; concerns should be sent in writing to the Chair of the panel.

A written reply will be provided within 21 working days.

Further dissatisfaction will be resolved by joining the Company's Grievance Procedure at Stage 3. (See Appeals against Panel Recommendations and Decisions in the Foster Carer's Handbook.)

Approval Conditions

Approval will be accompanied by the terms that apply in relation to numbers and ages of children to be fostered.

There may also be matching constraints related to gender, race, culture, religion, disability or other individual characteristics or circumstances.

Applicants will also be advised of any development needs identified during assessment and have the opportunity to work together with the Agency to address them to either achieve approval or change the terms of approval.

Termination Of Approval

If on review, Foster Cares Ltd are not satisfied with the suitability of the foster carer and/or the household, approval will be terminated from a specified date.

- This will be by written notification to the carers and any Local Authority with children placed with them.
- Such recommendations must be recommended by the Panel and ratified by the Agency Decision Maker.
- The intention to de-register approval will be sent in writing to the foster carers, along with the Agency's complaints procedure.
- The foster carers will also be informed of their right to access the Independent Review Mechanism, what this entails and their role and contact details.

Transfer To Another Fostering Agency

- Foster carers cannot be approved by more than one Agency at any one time.
- Any proposed move to another Agency, foster carers must inform us of their intention to look at other agencies without delay.
- Where a transfer is to take place to another fostering provider carers must precede any move by providing 28 days' notice of such intention to resign.
- Approval with the original Agency must be terminated before approval is granted by another unless there is all-party agreement to a transitional arrangement based on a decision which is made in the best interests of any children placed with the foster carers.
- Prospective foster carers must provide our Agency with a copy of their letter of intention to consider other agencies before a new assessment can begin.

9. Development, Training And Support Policy**Foster Carers**

This process begins at the point of contact between Foster Cares Ltd and the foster care applicant.

While it cannot be assumed that each applicant will be approved, the relationship at this early stage is one of potential colleagues, who need to develop a trusting, open and honest relationship to establish whether the applicants and Agency will be able to work together to meet the needs of children placed with us.

The opportunities for learning, supervision and peer support should continue until the termination of foster carer's approval.

Each foster carer has a personal development and training profile agreed with their supervising social worker.

The Preparation Process

Prospective foster carers are expected to attend preparation courses, which are designed to provide information about the Agency and expectations about the role of foster carer.

The agency presently runs the Fostering Network, "Skills to Foster" course over a number of days.

Experienced carers are invited to be part of this process and share their experience with new carers.

Preparation courses also provide the opportunity to inform the assessment process and elicit early development needs.

Post Approval Training And Development**Induction**

The Supervising Social Worker will appraise with foster carers their short, medium, and long-term development needs in relation to the competences and knowledge needed to fulfil their responsibilities. This will result in a Development Profile for each carer and will be reviewed six monthly in light of experience and performance.

During the initial induction period, this programme will ensure that the foster carer:

- Knows key personnel and resources in the organization.
- Has access to and understands key policy and procedural guidance, such as safeguarding, safer care, health and safety requirements, legislation, child protection procedures and support arrangements.
- Is able to understand and meet the needs of young people placed with the foster carers.
- Can apply anti-discriminatory policy to practice.
- Can work together with agencies and professionals and in partnership with the families of children placed with them.
- Have their copy of the Foster Cares Ltd Foster Carer Handbook.

The induction process will also inform ongoing development needs in key themes such as, caring for children, safeguarding and child protection, providing a safe environment, the foster care task, anti-discriminatory practice, moving young people on and the issues relating to the foster carers' own family.

Post Induction Training

The Care Standards Act has created requirements that foster carers meet qualification standards. Foster carers will be encouraged to undertake ongoing training including completion of the TDS minimum standards and National Vocational Qualifications and offered support in this process.

Development opportunities need to be tailored to the individual circumstances and learning preferences of individual foster carers and a range of methods is used. Support groups, workshops, supervision, conferences, adult education classes, individual study and formal courses are some of the many forms.

The Agency provides also provides access to online training provision to support /enable carers to access a variation of courses via different media.

10. Complaints Procedure

Any child placed with Foster Cares Ltd may, under Section 26(3) of the Children Act 1989, may complain to his/her local authority about his/her care arrangements and foster carers may also make representations on their behalf.

However, children and young people who are in family placements are potentially vulnerable and every effort is made to encourage self-expression through whatever route the child or young person feels comfortable and safe.

The Agency's Complaints procedure identifies those people who can be consulted at times of concern and the "Whistle Blowing" Procedure recognizes that safeguarding the welfare of the child depends on easy access to people in positions of responsibility who will listen.

In addition, each child or young person receives a handbook at the start of their placement, which includes advice about how to get help if they are worried about their welfare. The Agency ensures that the child receives the appropriate information and documentation provided by the placing authority with regard to complaints.

11. Registration And Inspection.

Foster Cares Ltd is registered and inspected under The Care Standards Act 2000 by OFSTED who can be contacted by telephoning **0300 123 1231** or by email at enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk. Or in writing at

OFSTED
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