

COMPLAINTS AGAINST CARERS POLICY



Introduction

This policy has been produced to outline to children, parents, foster carers and social workers Foster Care Link's policy on responding to complaints made against foster carers.

Complaints against carers are an inevitable result of the increasingly complex and sensitive work with children carers are now required to undertake.

Complaints by or on behalf of a child placed with Foster Care Link carers will always be taken seriously.

There may be a conflict between Foster Care Link's legal responsibilities for the care and protection of a child and its obligation to provide support for a carer.

The overriding principle will be that the needs of the child are paramount.

Foster Care Link will also respect the rights and interests of its carers.

Statutory framework

Standard 22 National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 requires fostering services to ensure that staff, carers and children are aware of the procedures for dealing with complaints.

Standard 22.12 also requires the provision of independent support to the carers during the course of an investigation.

Principles

Information

Carers against whom a complaint is made are entitled to expect to receive clear and detailed information about the nature of the complaint. Foster Care Link staff will endeavour to provide such information as early as possible in the process.

There may be however occasions when information is delayed or withheld as a result of a formal child protection investigation or where the complainant has requested anonymity. In normal circumstances information will be provided verbally within three working days and in writing after a further two weeks.

Support and Advice

Normally carers will be supported and advised throughout the process of investigating any complaint by their allocated supervising social worker. On some occasions however Foster Care Link and carers may agree that in a particular case, support and advice should be provided in some other way.

Carers at all times retain the right to seek independent advice, including legal advice and assistance, on their own behalf.

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Foster Care Link Carers are enrolled as individual members of Fostering Network .

Membership of the Fostering Network gives access to a free Legal Advice & Expenses scheme. Carers should note that legal expenses will only be reimbursed according to the provisions of the Fostering Network scheme or Foster Care Link's insurance policy for foster carers.

Other sources of advice and support may be available and carers should discuss this with their supervising social worker or the registered manager.

Records

Foster Care Link will ensure that all complaints investigations result in a clear, recorded outcome, which will be communicated in writing to all parties.

Foster Care Link will confirm its actions and decisions in writing.

Carers have the right of access to records held about them, subject to the removal of any confidential third party information.

Carers have the right to record their own views about any complaint or its investigation, and have those records placed on file alongside Foster Care Link's.

Allowances

Where a child has been removed pending the outcome of an investigation, allowances will continue to be paid for a maximum of four weeks or until the conclusion of the investigation (whichever is the earlier). These will be paid at the reward element rate as outlined in Foster Care Link's payment scheme for carers.

Child Protection Complaints

Any complaints that raise child protection concerns will be dealt with under Foster Care Links **Child Protection Policy and Procedure and in line with the relevant area authority's procedures.**

In the event of a conflict between the Child Protection Procedure and any other Foster Care Link policies and procedures, the Child Protection Procedure shall apply.

Where the area and/or placing authority determines that a complaint does not fall under child protection procedures and the complainant is a child, young person or other user of our service (or is complaining on behalf of a child/young person), the complaint will be dealt with in accordance with this policy.

The normal process for dealing with a complaint will be by means of a personal interview with the complainant (person making the complaint) to establish the detail of the complaint and any evidence they may have for substantiating the complaint. The

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interview will be carried out by someone other than the foster carers supervising social worker. The supervising social worker will ensure that carers receive prior notice of the complaint/s where appropriate.

Where a complaint raises wider concerns about a foster carer's practice, the registered manager may decide to instigate a "Standards of Care" investigation.

A complaint that is serious in nature, whether or not substantiated, or which results in a recommendation to alter the carer's terms of approval, will be referred to the Fostering Panel, normally by means of a carer's review.

No action to alter permanently a carer's terms of approval will be taken without a recommendation of the Fostering Panel first being considered by the agency decision-maker.

However, Foster Care Link reserves the right to suspend placements with a carer pending the outcome of an investigation and consideration by the Panel and agency decision-maker.

Serious complaints about a carer and how the complaint was dealt with, will be forwarded to Ofsted for their information.