



FOSTERING PANEL HANDBOOK

including

Stage 1 & 2 Foster Carer Approval

NMS 14

Independent Review Mechanism

National Minimum Standards

Fostering Panel Handbook

1. Introduction

The fostering panel has a crucial role in the provision and monitoring of foster care for children and young people. As an independent body, the making of recommendations about approval, the terms of approval, matching, and assessing the continuing ability of foster carers to meet the needs of children is a central task focused on ensuring the child's welfare is paramount. An effective Fostering Panel is an essential part of a high quality fostering service and has a key role in quality assurance. Kirklees Family Placement Service acknowledges the vital role that Fostering Panels play in supporting good outcomes for children placed through the agency.

This guidance clarifies roles and responsibilities in terms of the panel and its members, as well as outlining the protocols and procedures for the effective management of panel business. This protocol is consistent with Kirklees council policy and procedures

2. Establishment of Panels

Underpinning Regulations and Standards

- The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services England 2011
- Children Act Guidance Volume 4: Fostering Services 2011
- Children and Young Person's Act 2008
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Guidance and Regulations (2010) England
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2013
- Assessment and approval of foster carers: Amendments to the Children's Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations
- Independent Review of Determinations (Adoption and Fostering) Regulations 2009
- The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015
- Short Breaks: Statutory Guidance on how to Safeguard and Promote the Welfare of Disabled Children using Short Breaks (2010)
- Promoting the Education of Looked After Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (July 2014)
- Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Looked After Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities, Clinical Commissioning Groups and NHS England (March 2015)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children: A Guide to Inter-agency Working to Safeguard and Promote the Welfare of Children (March 2015)

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities (2011) |
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3. Panel Functions

Kirklees Fostering Panel has the responsibility of considering matters brought before it and the responsibility to arrive at clear recommendations which will then go to the agency decision maker for the agency decision (Qualifying Determination) with any recommendation by the Independent Review Mechanism (where involved).

The Fostering Panel monitors the range and type of foster carers available to the local authority in comparison with the needs of children, and plays a key role in the improvement of standards within the fostering service.

As part of this function, the Panel oversees the conduct of assessments and annual reviews of approved foster carers, advises on any relevant matters in relation to the fostering service and makes recommendations to Children's Services about quality issues and performance standards.

In particular, the Panel makes recommendations as to the following:

- a. The suitability of applicants to act as foster carers and terms of their approval (including Connected Persons Foster Carers);
- b. The continued suitability of the foster carers and whether the terms of the approval remain appropriate (after the first annual review of foster carers and any other review where significant changes or termination of approval is recommended)
- c. Long term matches between Looked After Children and Foster Carers
- d. Any representations challenging a decision not to approve an applicant as suitable, or to terminate or revise the terms of a foster carer's approval where the applicant is not in agreement with such changes
- e. Extension to Regulation 24 (Connected Person) requests
- f. Considers Stage 2 brief reports

In relation to points a-e above, the Fostering Panel is able to make one of three recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker. These are:

- Approve
- Defer
- Not approve

The Panel also:

- Receives notification of a foster carers resignation.
- Monitor agreed exemptions of the limit to the number of children placed with foster carers;

- Considers reports detailing disruptions/unplanned endings
- Considers any other special matters relevant to a foster carer which the Chair of the Panel in conjunction with the Panel Advisor considers appropriate to be referred.

The Panel will receive annually the Fostering Service Manager's annual report on the Panel's business, including statistical information about approvals, reviews, termination of approvals, the number of children in placement and complaints received about foster carers during the preceding year.

Panels will also:

- Monitor, review and advise on the standard of and quality of reports submitted to the Panel. The Chair will communicate any issues of concern to the Fostering Service Manager and take part in regular meetings with him or her and the Vice Chair to review the Panel's functioning and report on the quality of work being presented to Panel, to ensure good standards are maintained.
- Contribute to the setting of service standards, policies and practice guidance

Kirklees Fostering Panel takes place weekly and is hosted in Civic Centre 1.

4. Panel Membership

Kirklees Family Placement Service endeavours to ensure that the composition of the Fostering Panel is such that it has sufficient members, and that those members have between them the experience and expertise necessary to effectively discharge the functions of the panel. National Minimum Standard 14.8 requires that:

“The number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for”

In order to ensure smooth effective panel performance and to ensure a continuing fresh perspective, the Fostering Panel will be regularly reviewed as to its membership. This will normally take place during the appraisal process. In any event, the tenure of membership of any panel member will be reviewed three yearly via this mechanism.

The Fostering Panel operates a ‘central list’ of a maximum of 24 people, including the Chair. This will include a ‘core’ membership who will be regularly invited to attend panel, with other central list members attending on a less regular basis. In line with Good Practice, appointment of panel members will be undertaken by the Fostering Panel Chair in conjunction with the Fostering Panel Advisor. Appointment of the Chair will involve the Agency Decision Maker, along with the Fostering Panel Advisor. It may also involve the Deputy Head of Service.

Panel members receive a letter of appointment outlining their duties and responsibilities and confirming their terms and conditions. They also receive a copy of the BAAF booklet 'Effective Panels' and the Kirklees Fostering Panel Handbook.

Panel members will have an opportunity to speak with the Panel Chair and/or Panel Advisor to clarify their duties and responsibilities and will have an opportunity to observe at least one panel meeting as part of their induction prior to taking on the full role of panel member. All panel members will receive an induction to the Family Placement Service and the Fostering Panel within ten weeks of joining the central list.

All panel members sign the terms and conditions agreement which outlines roles and responsibilities of both Kirklees Family Placement service and the Panel Member. Panel members will also sign a confidentiality agreement.

Panel member performance is continuously assessed through various feedback and evaluation forms as well as monitoring by the Chair of the panel and the Panel Advisor. The Panel Advisor will plan and coordinate formal annual reviews (appraisals) for panel members and chairs. For the panel chair, this is undertaken by the Agency Decision Maker and Agency Panel Advisor with information gathered by the latter. For panel members, appraisal will be undertaken with the Panel Chair and Panel Advisor.

If Kirklees Family Placement Service consider any panel member to be unsuitable to remain in office, the panel member's appointment may be terminated by giving one month's notice in writing. A panel member may also resign at any time by giving 1 month notice in writing. Panel members are expected to attend a minimum of 75% of meetings a year unless by prior agreement, for example where it is jointly agreed they will attend fortnightly or monthly only in advance.

All panel members are offered at least one day of learning and development a year. In addition the Panel Advisor will regularly share relevant legislative, policy and practice changes which impact on the panel functions and business element of panel agendas.

5. Panel Composition

The Fostering Panel will have within its core membership:

- A social worker or manager with at least 3 years relevant post qualifying child care experience
- A social worker or manager with expertise in the provision of a fostering service
- An independent member who is, or within the last two years has been, a foster carer for another fostering service
- An independent member who has had experience of being in foster or residential care

- An independent member who is the parent of a child or young person who has been in foster carer, or the son or daughter of a foster carer or children's right professional
- At least 4 independent members who have expertise in health, education, psychological services. One or two of the panel members will be appointed as Vice Chair to act as Chair in that person's absence.
- An Elected Member

The Fostering Panel will have access to medical and legal advice as required.

6. Quoracy

Regulation 24(1) requires that 'no business may be conducted by a fostering panel unless at least the following meet as the panel'. These are:

The Chair or Vice Chair

A social worker with at least three years relevant post qualifying experience

At least three other members

If the Chair is not present, there must be at least one independent member present, either the Vice Chair or a member, who could be the social work member if they are independent of the agency

Kirklees Fostering Panel will endeavour to have at least one Vice Chair in attendance at each panel. The Panel Advisor will also be in attendance. The panel BSO will take minutes at each Fostering Panel.

7. Independence

A panel member cannot be defined as independent if they are a carer approved by Kirklees council, an employee of the council, are part of the management structure within the council or are related to an employee or manager of the council.

Fostering panels are intended as multi disciplinary bodies with a considerable element of independence from the fostering service. A greater number of independent members can help to challenge practice where necessary; greater independence should mean that the panel is fair and is seen to be so. Independent members therefore play an important role in relation to panel, bringing a range of experiences, expertise and knowledge to consideration of panel business.

8. Conflict of Interest

There can be situations where a panel member knows or has worked with the applicant or approved foster carer to be considered by the panel. It is important that the panel member declare an interest in such situations. The panel member should say whether he/she thinks this knowledge will prejudice their consideration of the case. If he/she thinks so, they should not participate

in the case and should leave the room. It will be the responsibility of the Chair, in conjunction with the Panel Advisor to determine whether a conflict of interest exists and to make the final decision. It is important for panel members to alert the Panel Advisor or Chair as early as possible to avoid a possible problem over quoracy.

Where a panel member receives the panel pack and they believe in knowing the name, that there may be a need to declare an interest, they must not read the pack and must instead speak with the Panel Advisor or Chair of the Fostering Panel to determine the best way forward.

Where an interest is declared but it is not considered a conflict of interest by the Fostering Panel Chair/Panel Advisor, it is good practice to confer with the applicant/carer to determine whether they would feel comfortable with the panel member being part of the recommendation process. Declaration of interest will however, be recorded in the panel minutes in any event.

9. Key roles and responsibilities

Fostering Panels need to be able to carry out their function as effectively as possible, and there are individuals on panel who have key responsibilities in relation to this objective

9.1 Panel Chair

The Panel Chair has the key responsibility for ensuring the meeting is conducted in a positive and supportive manner and that this will comply with Kirklees Family Placement Service Terms and Conditions relating to the role.

The Panel Chair should:

- Ensure that panel keeps children's welfare paramount throughout panel discussions
- Ensure that panel discussion operates effectively and fairly, and plan how the discussion will be conducted with applicants/carers and social workers
- Facilitate the active participation of all panel members in the panel considerations and ensure panel members have relevant and up to date expertise
- Ensure that, where panel members have serious reservations these are recorded in the minutes of the panel's meeting and are also attached to the panel's recommendation
- Ensure that applicants/carers are made to feel welcome at the panel and that it is run in a way which encourages their engagement and participation
- Ensure that the panel reaches clear, evidenced recommendations and that the minutes of the meeting are accurately recorded
- Be clear about the panel's recommendation and the reasons for making them

- To be clear with social workers and attending applicants that the panel makes recommendations only, and should give a timescale for the Agency Decision Maker's decision.
- Check, amend and return the minutes so that they can be forwarded to the Agency Decision Maker within stipulated timescales
- Where appropriate, consult with the Panel Advisor regarding panel member performance and termination of appointment
- Where appropriate, be involved in the appointment and induction of new panel members
- In conjunction/liaison with the Panel Advisor ensure that the panel carries out a quality assurance role in relation to the panel process, paperwork completion and social work presentation
- Liaise with the Agency Panel Advisor and the BSO to ensure panel dates are booked for the year ahead
- Ensure that feedback on the panel process is considered and acted upon by the panel as required

Panel Chairs should be involved in”

- Consulting where appropriate with the Panel Advisor concerning the annual report
- Decisions regarding extra panels
- Managing conflict of interest in a case
- Agreeing the attendance of observers at panel
- Communicating immediate concerns, along with the Panel Advisor, to the Family Placement Service

9.2 Medical and Legal Advice

NMS 14.6 requires that ‘fostering panels have access to medical expertise and legal advice, as required’. Kirklees Fostering Panel have access to legal advice through Kirklees Legal Services.

In general, the medical advisor will:

- Liaise with the applicant/s GP and approved carers under review when a medical issue concerning capacity to undertake the work of a carer has been raised and requires clarification
- Make contact with consultants or specialist in relation to medical issues raised
- Report any medical issues concerning applicants or approved carers under review, to the Fostering Panel
- Interpret medical information, concerning applicant and approved carers under review or children and young people either referred or in placement, for the panel

Kirklees Fostering Panel will also have a health representative as a core member who will be in regular attendance in order to offer a health perspective.

9.3 Role of the Panel Advisor

The advisor to the panel:

- Advises the Chair and members of the panel on the relevant fostering policies, procedures and practice
- Is not a member of the panel and does not therefore take part in reaching a recommendation
- Has responsibility for ensuring that all panel reports are comprehensive and are of a suitable standard to be presented to the panel and that post panel paperwork is completed accurately and in a timely manner
- Oversees the administrative arrangements for panel and ensures that it works effectively
- Where the advisor recognises the need for legal advice in relation to matters being deliberated by panel, he or she will seek legal advice
- Confirms that that statutory checks are completed prior to panel and are recorded in the minutes
- Compiles an annual report in conjunction with the Panel Chair, outlining the activity of the panel (within 3 months of that financial year ending). This will include a collation of all returned feedback questionnaires and panel evaluations
- Analyses the panel evaluation forms in order to present quarterly written feedback to panel, the ADM and the Service Manager
- After the panel, be available to offer technical or regulatory advice to the ADM as required, as the Panel Advisor is not a member. The ADM is not able to discuss the panels' deliberations and recommendations with the Chair or any other members of panel, since they are barred from any involvement in a decision about the approval of a foster carer. Once the decision has been made by the ADM, this must be given verbally to the applicant or foster carer within two working days and confirmed in writing within five working days (Regulation 27(4), Standard 14(10) hold a discussion with the ADM as required, and record written actions
- The Panel Advisor must in no way share information about deliberations and discussions held by the panel members. The ADM must use the information available to him/her by way of panel paperwork and panel minutes
- The Panel Advisor relays decisions, actions and comments to the service management and/or Chair regarding ADM decisions and comments

9.4 Business Support Officer (BSO)

Good administrative arrangements are essential for the effective functioning of panel. The Panel Advisor will work closely with the BSO team on facilitating the process of panel. In general, Foster Panel BSO's are involved in:

- Arrangements for room booking and refreshments and ensuring that the meeting room is prepared for panel
- Maintaining the Central List and ensuring that panel will be quorate

- Maintaining files on all panel members, and ensuring DBS/disclosure checks and other checks, appraisals are up to date
- Ensuring the Panel Advisor is aware when the necessary electronic paperwork has been submitted for panel.
- The circulation of reports, documents and appropriate letters to relevant parties pre and post panel
- Taking minutes and submitting a draft to the Chair and panel members for checking.
- Ensuring the ADM receives the minutes and ADM decision proforma and any other papers required to make a decision
- Maintaining records of panel business and performance for monitoring and evaluation and use in the annual report
- Ensuring that final decisions re: approval terms of approval and termination of approval are recorded within CareFirst and/or other relevant database
- Ensuring that the relevant documentation needed for the panel process is available.
- Maintaining the foster care register

9.5 Agency Decision Maker (ADM)

The ADM is responsible for all Fostering Panel decisions, and provides an independent oversight of all panel business, maintaining a focus on safeguarding for children and young people and monitoring the quality of care planning and decision making for children and young people in care. In order to carry out this role effectively, it is important that the ADM communicates and liaises regularly with the Fostering Service Manager, and Panel Advisor about panel process and quality as well as regulatory requirements.

The Fostering Panel make recommendations and not decisions regarding cases presented to it, which are made by the ADM. The ADM's decision is known as the 'Qualifying Determination'. This is made by the ADM after they have considered the recommendations made by the panel and the reasons for them.

More than one ADM may be appointed, but they may not delegate their authority to another person. The ADM must be registered with the HCPC.

NMS 23 sets out the qualifications, knowledge and experience required of the decision maker. Regulation 27 requires that the decision maker must take account of the Fostering Panel's recommendation and any recommendation made by the IRM before deciding whether or not to approve a person as a foster carer, and on what terms. Their decision must be made within seven working days of receipt of the panel's recommendation via the minutes.

9.6 Stage 1 and 2

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act 2013 brought in two stages to the assessment process.

Stage 1

Stage 1 of the assessment process 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. Once all the checks and information required for Stage 1 have been received the decision about whether an applicant is unsuitable at this stage must be reached by the ADM and the applicant informed in writing with reasons within 10 working days of receipt of the final check. Stage 2 may run concurrently with Stage 1 but this does not prevent decisions being made about suitability at Stage 1. If the applicant is considered unsuitable due to Stage 1 information but they do not receive written information (with reasons) about this, the assessment will continue as part of Stage 2.

Stage 2

At stage 2 the ADM has the responsibility to take a decision on the applicants' suitability to foster either on completion of a full assessment or a brief report, both of which must be presented to panel for consideration.

At post approval stage the ADM is also responsible for deciding whether a person and their household remain suitable to foster, and whether the terms of approval remain suitable, following each review of the foster carer's approval. The decision should be based on the written report of the review; it must take account of any recommendation by the Fostering Panel (which must be provided on the occasion of the first review and may be provided for subsequent reviews) and any recommendation to the IRM

Once a carer is approved, they must be notified of this in writing, and the terms of the approval.

Connected Person's carers are approved for a specific child or children. In notifying the carer of the ADM decision, the full names and dates of birth of the child or children must be included in the correspondence and all other documentation relating to their care of the child or children.

9.7 Terms of Approval

Kirklees Family Placement Service provides a number of different schemes within the wider fostering offer. In Kirklees, so that children have opportunity for continued stability and continuation, practice is that all mainstream carers are approved 0-18 (unless smokers) where their approval range will be restricted to 5-18. Carers may have an age preference within this range and this will inform the 'best assessed match'.

Terms of approval will also include the number of children, and the type of care: short term, long term, parent & child, emergency, short breaks. Holiday and respite care will fall under the term 'Short Term'. Foster carers must also enter into a Foster Carer Agreement.

10. Panel Process

10.1 Booking items to panel

On booking an item onto panel, the Panel BSO will create an electronic folder in which to deposit the necessary electronic files. The Panel Advisor will maintain an updated schedule of submission dates, this will be kept by Panel BSO's for reference.

Mainstream foster care applications should be booked to be heard at panel no later than four months following receipt of application. Where a Regulation 24 placement has been made, the Connected Person's assessment should be uploaded to the electronic folder by week 12 following the date the Regulation 24 placement was authorised. This will enable the ADM to make their decision within the required 16 weeks. Where a child is not in a Connected Person's placement, the full assessment should be booked onto panel to be heard no later than four months from receipt of application.

In the rare instances that an extension to a Regulation 24 placement is required, this should be submitted so that it is presented to panel no later than week fourteen in order that the ADM has sufficient time to consider their decision.

First reviews should be booked onto panel no later than eleven and a half months following the ADM decision regarding initial approval of the carers. This will then allow sufficient time for the ADM to make their decision within the regulatory requirement of twelve months of initial approval.

10.1 Panel meetings

Panels will normally meet four times per month at Civic Centre 1, Huddersfield. They will be held on either a Monday or Wednesday. Dates will be circulated on an annual basis in advance and will also be available to view through the Panel BSO team. The Fostering Panel starts at 9.30am sharp and will either be a half or full day panel. Whilst the aim will be for the Fostering Panel to complete business by 3pm, panel members should ensure that should the Fostering Panel not finish until 5pm, that they are available for the full panel.

10.1 Circulation of paperwork

All panel papers should be uploaded into the nominated folder ten working days prior to panel, once they have been quality assured by the relevant team manager. The Panel BSO team will circulate these electronically to panel members five days prior to panel sitting. A pack will also be sent to the ADM and a printed pack will be made available at the actual panel.

Panel will provide feedback to the service in terms of quality assurance for each item presented. This will be circulated to the appropriate member of staff and their team manager following panel via the Panel BSO team.

Previous questionnaires completed by attending social workers, applicants and carers should be circulated to panel members once monthly for information and discussion as required at the Fostering Panel.

10.2 Applicants, Approved Carers, and Social Workers

Applicants and approved carers must be given the opportunity to attend and be heard at panels at which their approval is being discussed. They are also able to bring a supporter if they wish, the Panel BSO team should be advised no later than one week prior to panel where a supporter will be in attendance.

Whilst applicants and approved carers are not mandated to attend the Fostering Panel, they should be strongly encouraged to do so. Kirklees council views the attendance of applicants and approved carers at panel very positively and recognises the Fostering Panel as an arena that welcomes the views of applicants and approved carers.

Where an interpreter is required, the presenting social worker will ensure that the Panel BSO team are informed at least one week prior to panel so that they can ensure that seating arrangements are set up appropriately and that adequate time is allowed

The Chair will explain the process to applicants, approved carers and social workers prior to being presented to panel. Following the Fostering Panel recommendation, the Chair will inform them of the recommendation and the role of the ADM. The Panel Advisor may accompany the Chair in carrying out this role as appropriate.

Applicants, approved carers, and social workers will be given the opportunity to feed back on their experience of the panel process via feedback forms.

10.3 The Panel Meeting

The way the panel meeting is managed and conducted on the day will very much depend on the agenda and the panel members present. However, Kirklees Family Placement Service promotes the use of a number of key principles:

- The Panel Chair independently confirms the status of statutory checks for the minutes from the information presented to panel
- Where a panel member has direct knowledge of a case being presented, a conflict of interest may be present. Where possible, any potential conflict of interest should be explored prior to panel due to the risk of the impact on quoracy if left to the day of panel. In any event, where it is deemed that the panel member has prior knowledge of, but has no conflict of interest, this will be minuted. Where it is determined that a panel member has a conflict of interest, the Panel Chair in

consultation with the Panel Advisor will decide whether the panel member is to step down from the whole or just part of the panel.

- The Fostering Panel should work to a ethos of transparency. Where possible, questions should be set and shared with the social worker/s, applicants and approved carers beforehand, who should also be in panel for as much of the panel process as possible, without compromising the integrity of the Fostering Panel.
- Assessing/supervising social workers should present their reports to panel. Where complex issues are apparent, the worker's team manager may also attend.
- Presentation at panel can be experienced as a daunting process for those presenting. Panel should make the experience as welcoming as possible, with respect and consideration of the views of those presenting at all times. However, this should not detract from robust enquiry and a spirit of professional curiosity, borne from learning coming from Serious Case Reviews and research. Respectful uncertainty should ensure that panel members do not feel restricted from sharing a view that may be in the minority. It is the role primarily of the Panel Chair to make a judgement about the validity and appropriateness of such views to the case in hand.
- Panel discussions are recorded fully, giving particular note of the recommendations reached and the reasons for reaching them. Where panel members are not in agreement, the minute must accurately reflect the range of views expressed.

10.4 Panel Decision Making

Following full discussion of the agenda item, the Fostering Panel may:

- Make a unanimous recommendation to the ADM
- Defer to a later date for further information and advice
- Make a split recommendation to the ADM. In such cases, the minute must reflect the details of each panel member's recommendations, along with their stated reasons for their recommendation. Where there is a split recommendation, the Panel Chair does not have the casting vote.

The minutes of the panel need to be plainly articulated and obvious as to the recommendation and reasons underpinning it as the ADM will not be party to the discussions held that inform the recommendation. It is imperative that it is clear that the ADM has come to an objective and independently informed decision, based on the information available and that they are not considered simply to have ratified the Fostering Panel recommendation.

In reaching a decision or Qualifying Determination, the ADM should consider *Hofstetter v LB Barnet and IRM* (2009) in which the court set out guidance for the way in which an adoption agency decision maker should approach a case, whether it is a decision based on the agency panel's recommendation or the independent review panel's recommendation. This applies equally to fostering

decision makers. The court said it would be good discipline and appropriate for the decision maker to:

- List the material taken into account in reaching the decision
- Identify key arguments
- Consider whether they agree with the process and approach of the relevant panel and are satisfied as to its fairness and that the panel has properly addressed the arguments.
- Consider whether any additional information now available to them that was not before the panel has an impact on its reasons or recommendation
- Identify the reasons given for the relevant recommendation that they do or do not wish to adopt, and
- State (a) the adopted reasons by cross reference or otherwise and (b) any further reasons for their decision

10.5 Panel Minutes

Robust minutes are essential and the minute taker should ensure that the key issues and views are captured, and in particular, dissenting views and concerns. Those undertaking the minutes should be appropriately trained and supported to do so. They should also access a copy of the BAAF good practice guidance on minute taking.

There is no prescribed format in which to write minutes and some may write in the first, or third person. The important note is to ensure the key points are recorded. Where there are dissenting views, these should be recorded along with the reasons for dissension.

10.6 Post Panel Process

The minutes should be distributed and received back from the Panel Chair and members within four working days of the panel. These constitute the final set of minutes. In line with Fostering Regulations, the ADM should make their decision within 7 days of receiving the final set of minutes, however, Kirklees has practice standard of five days. The ADM's decision should be communicated to the applicants/ approved carers within two days of the decision being made (usually by the responsible social worker), and followed up in writing within five working days.

In making their decision, and in particular for complex cases, the ADM may access the Panel Advisor to clarify any issues arising from the panel minutes. Any action points about an individual assessment or review should be noted by the ADM and fed back to the social worker and their team manager. The ADM will make note of any themes that would be considered useful to bring to the Fostering Panel quarterly business meeting.

The ADM will satisfy themselves that the Fostering Regulations and Standards are being adhered to during their deliberations. On occasion, the ADM may feel unable to come to a decision without further information. In these instances, the social worker presenting the case should inform the

applicant/approved carer of this. Notwithstanding any further deliberations, the ADM will be mindful to come to a decision in a timely manner, especially in terms of the regulatory framework surrounding Connected Person's.

In line with National Minimum Standards, in coming to their decision the ADM will record notes detailing the process of decision making, the reasons for their decision and commenting on the functioning of the Fostering Panel.

On return of the signed decision record, the Fostering Panel BSO team will send notification letters and associated Foster Care Agreements to the Panel Advisor for signing. They will then send these out to the applicant/approved carer. The BSO will also add a copy of the minute and notification on the carer's file on CareFirst.

Where the notification is not to approve, to not continue to approve, or to change the carer's terms of approval, the notification will also advise the recipient of their rights to review of the decision by either Kirklees Fostering Panel or the IRM, but not both. The notification will be clear regarding the 28 day timescale for requesting a review of the decision.

Where a review of the decision is held, the ADM will be able to make their final decision following the conclusion of the review. In the meantime, where this applies to Connected Carer's, the Connected Carer remains temporarily approved. Mainstream carers remain 'under assessment'.

Where a carer has submitted a resignation, this cannot be retracted. The Fostering Panel BSO team will send a letter of acknowledgement from the Fostering Panel which will also advise the carer that their name will be taken off the foster carer register. The length of service will be acknowledged and celebrated accordingly. It is important that resignations are not delayed from being presented at panel and should be presented within the notice period. Should a foster carer wish to foster again after resigning, they will be assessed in line with the 2011 Regulations.

The Fostering Panel BSO team will send panel feedback to social workers that presented to panel and their managers. They will also send out feedback forms to those who attended panel, to get an understanding of their experience. On return of these, they will be sent to the Panel Advisor for collation and presentation at the future panel. They will also be incorporated into the quarterly report presented to the Fostering Panel.

10.7 Reconsideration of Agency Decisions

The ADM must decide whether a Qualifying Determination is to be made. This is a determination that they:

- Propose not to approve the applicant as suitable to be a foster carer
- Are no longer satisfied that the approved carer is suitable to be a foster carer
- Propose to change the terms of the approved carer's existing approval

The determination letter gives the applicants or carers 3 options:

- Accept the proposal
- Submit a written representation within 28 calendar days of receipt of the determination letter being received, asking that the case be referred back to the Fostering Panel for reconsideration
- Apply to the IIRM within 28 calendar days of receipt of the determination letter, to request an independent review

If the applicant/approved carer makes written representation within the 28 days to reconsider the panel recommendation/ADM decision, the case shall be heard at the Fostering Panel for further discussion. It will then be considered by the ADM who will make their final decision taking any new information into account.

If the applicant/approved carer makes no representation to either Kirklees Fostering Panel, or the IRM within 28 days, the original decision of the ADM is final.

The Independent Review Mechanism is managed by British Association for Fostering & Adoption (CoramBAAF). The cost of the review meeting is met by the fostering service. Travelling and other expenses are borne by individuals.

The function of the IRM is to:

- Review the suitability of an applicant to care for a child
- Review any proposed changes to the terms of approval
- Make a fresh recommendation to the fostering service on the suitability of a carer and the terms of approval, including for a specific child

When a fostering service is notified of an application to the IRM they are required to send in the following within 15 days:

- All original paperwork that was available to panel
- A copy of the qualifying determination letter and the panel's reason for the recommendation. This is in addition to any other documents sent to the applicants/approved carers
- Any relevant information in relation to the individual which was obtained after the date on which the report was prepared or the documents circulated to panel.

The minutes from the panel in which the case was heard are not sent to the IRM. This is to enable the IRM to take an objective view based on the information before them.

If neither representation is made to the IRM or to the fostering service within 28 days, the ADM will be free to decide whether or not to approve the applicant as a foster carer (after a full assessment), continue the assessment (following a brief report) or amend their terms of approval.

11. Monitoring and Quality Assurance

As an independent body, the Fostering Panel has a key role in quality assurance alongside the robust scrutiny it applies to panel business such as the assessment, reviews, and matches etc. Whilst panel provide a supportive role to Kirklees Family Placement service, it is imperative that it is able to evaluate its effectiveness on a regular basis.

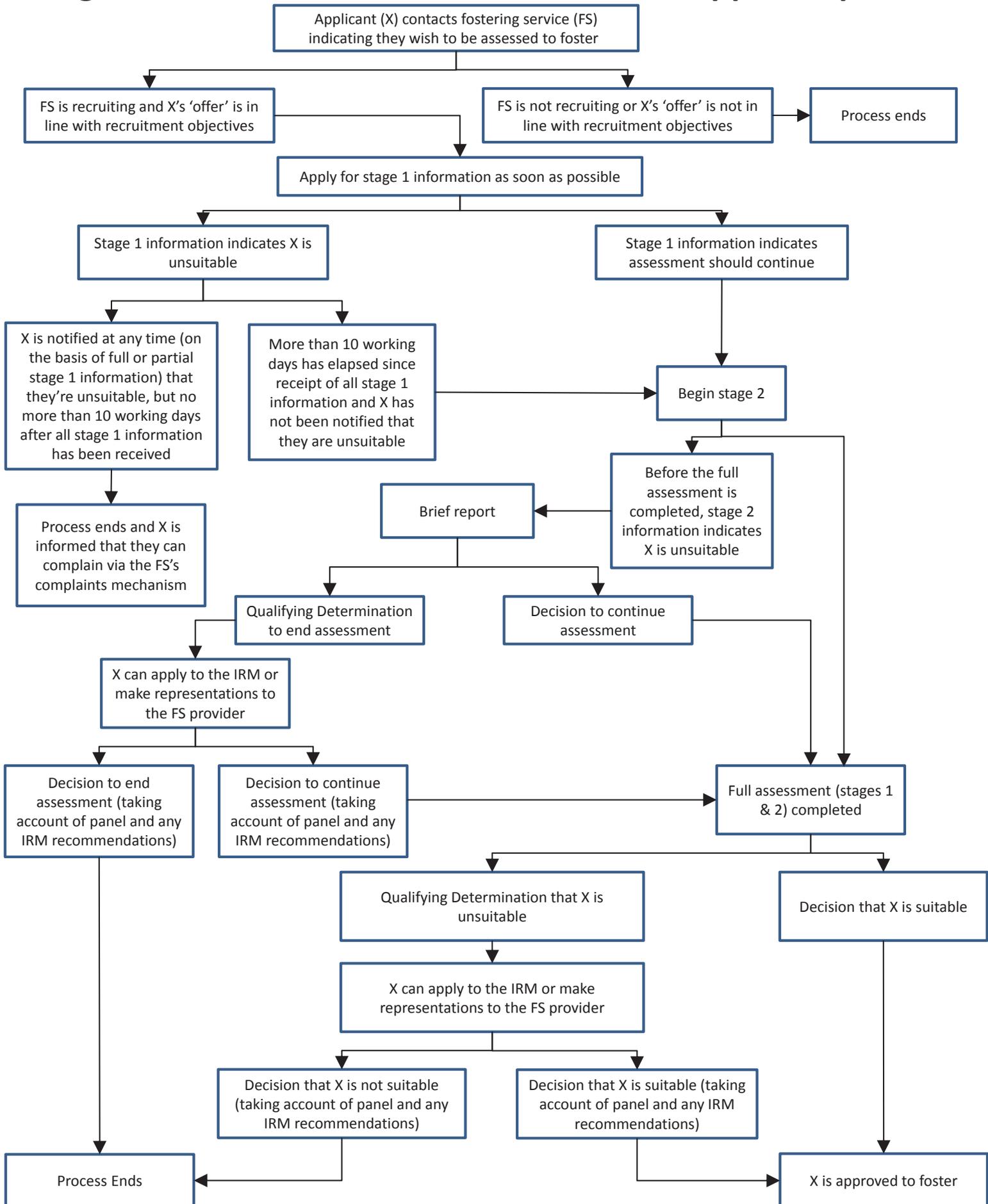
Panels are able to carry out their monitoring and quality assurance role through the following:

Regular and joint training with Kirklees Family Placement Service

- Evaluation of reports presented to panel and feedback to the service
- Monitoring the timeliness of items presented in terms of regulatory requirements
- Evaluation of feedback from applicants, carers, and presenting social workers regarding their panel experience.
- Regular 'business meetings' including representation from the ADM and Deputy Head of Service
- Appraisal of panel members and Chair, including actions plans reflecting roles and responsibilities where they fall short
- Completion of an annual report to the Service to share what has been learnt as a result of business presented to the panel, and what Kirklees Family Placement Service would benefit from reviewing in terms of issues that need to be addressed
- Consideration of presenting social workers, applicant's, and approved carer feedback to panel.

END

Stages 1 and 2: Foster carer assessment & approval process



NB - This diagram illustrates how stages 1 & 2 of the assessment process fit together. It is not intended to cover all actions a FS must undertake as part of the process - FSs must refer to the regulations and statutory guidance for this information. It should be noted that at any point in the process applicants (1) can withdraw, in which case the process ends; and (2) can complain to the FS (and must be informed of their right to do so if they are turned down in stage 1).

Fostering panels and the fostering service's decision-maker

Outcome

The fostering panel and decision maker make timely, quality and appropriate recommendations/decisions in line with the overriding objective to promote the welfare of children in foster care.

- 14.1 The fostering service implements clear written policies and procedures on recruitment to, and maintenance of, the central list of persons considered by them to be suitable to be members of a fostering panel ("the central list") and on constitution of fostering panels.
- 14.2 Panel/s provide a quality assurance feedback to the fostering service provider on the quality of reports being presented to panel.
- 14.3 All necessary information is provided to panel members at least five working days in advance of the panel meeting to enable full and proper consideration.
- 14.4 The fostering panel makes its recommendation on the suitability of a prospective foster carer within eight months of receipt of the prospective foster carer's application to be assessed.
- 14.5 Foster carers and prospective foster carers are given the opportunity to attend and be heard at all panel meetings at which their approval is being discussed and to bring a supporter to the panel if they wish.
- 14.6 Fostering panels have access to medical expertise and legal advice, as required.
- 14.7 The panel chair ensures written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation.
- 14.8 The number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for.
- 14.9 The fostering service provider's decision-maker makes a considered decision that takes account of all the information available to them, including the recommendation of the fostering panel and, where applicable, the independent review panel, within seven working days of receipt of the recommendation and final set of panel minutes.
- 14.10 The foster carer or prospective foster carer is informed orally of the decision maker's decision within two working days and written confirmation is sent to them within five working days.

So, a referral is made to the IRM – what happens now?

After receiving your application by email or post we confirm that all of the information needed is included and that the application has been made within the required timescales. We will contact you if any further information is required for the application. We also contact your Fostering Provider to inform them of your application and ask them to confirm that they have issued a Qualifying Determination (QD) letter

After the IRM Contract Manager has confirmed that your application can be accepted a letter will be sent to you confirming acceptance. This letter also includes a form for you to return requesting your consent to disclose all documentation including medical information if required.

A letter will also be sent to your fostering provider requesting a copy of all the documents that were provided to your original fostering panel, any additional information that may have been considered by the Agency Decision Maker and a copy of the QD letter. The IRM panel will consider your case afresh and therefore will not see the fostering panel minutes, however, they will be informed of the reasons for the fostering panel and decision maker's recommendation not to approve

The IRM Panels are located in London, Birmingham and Leeds. In most cases we will allocate the Panel closest to your home. We will advise you of the date, time and location of the review panel meeting, giving you at least six weeks' notice. You will also be given a date by which to submit any extra relevant information you wish panel to consider.

Your IRM caseworker and our legal advisor will review all of the paperwork submitted to your original panel. We will consider whether further information will be required from your fostering provider or yourself. If necessary a medical advisor will provide a medical report to the IRM panel. They may seek additional information to assist them with this report from you or your GP

All the relevant papers will be collated by the IRM office and a copy is sent to you and your fostering provider at least two weeks prior to the Panel Hearing. Neither party receives a copy of the IRM Legal report or the IRM medical report. The only other information which will not be shared is 3rd party confidentiality information. E.g. references or Strategy Meeting minutes.

Your agency should provide you with independent support to assist you prepare for the IRM Review. On the day of Panel this person or if you prefer another adult supporter may attend Panel with you to provide moral support. However they will not be able to advocate for you at Panel. If you have a physical, sensory or learning impairment, or English is not your first language, you may bring an interpreter or helper with you in addition to a friend. Please inform the IRM as soon as possible if you require this additional support. Your fostering service provider will be invited to send up to two representatives to the Review Panel meeting. We expect them to send someone who will be accountable for your case in most cases this is the assessing or supervising social worker and their line manager

Panel members will have had at least two weeks to read the papers prepared for your case. Please note further written documents cannot be provided on the day of panel, and you are advised to bring the copy of the papers sent to you by the IRM to the Review for ease of reference

On arrival at the Panel venue you will be taken to your waiting room where you will be able to view the panel member profiles (brief information about the panel members sitting on your panel). The fostering service representatives will have a separate waiting room. The Chair or Professional Advisor will come and welcome you and briefly explain the procedure. Following this both parties will be taken into the Review Meeting where all Panel members will introduce themselves. Panel commences with the panel chair informing the review meeting of your strengths as a foster carer that have been identified in the panel papers. Panel members will have a number of questions to put to the applicants and agency. They will start with questions to you, the applicants and be followed by questions to the fostering service provider. After the questions you and your fostering provider are given a brief opportunity to provide any further comments you wish to make. Before being advised that you can leave, panel members will consider if they have any further questions they need to ask. After you and your fostering provider representatives has left, panel will have a discussion regarding your suitability before reaching their recommendation regarding your suitability and if deemed relevant offering advice on your terms of approval. There are occasions where panel may need to ask your fostering provider questions of a third party/confidential nature to which you are unable to be present but you will be inform if this is to happen on the day. Apart from this and the panel discussions you will be present through the whole of the panel review and will need to be available for up to two hours.

Within 12 working days we will send you a copy of the review panel's recommendation and reasons with a copy of the panel minutes (these are not a verbatim record). A copy of the panel's recommendation, reasons and a full set of minutes will be also be sent to your fostering service provider to assist them in their decision making. Your fostering service provider will then write to you informing you of its final decision taking into consideration the IRM's recommendation.

There is no appeal process against an IRM recommendation or the Final Decision of the Agency. If you are unhappy about the outcome or process you may wish to seek your own legal advice from, for example, a solicitor or the Citizens Advice Bureau, as to what action you may take.

Fostering Services:

National Minimum Standards

FOSTERING SERVICES NMS

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This document contains the National Minimum Standards (NMS) applicable to the provision of fostering services. The NMS, together with Regulations relevant to the placement of children in foster care such as the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (the 2011 Regulations), form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 (CSA) for the conduct of fostering services.

The values statement below explains the important principles which underpin these standards.

Values

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of their care.
- Children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefiting from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
- Children are entitled to grow up in a loving environment that can meet their developmental needs.
- Every child should have his or her wishes and feelings listened to and taken into account.
- Each child should be valued as an individual and given personalised support in line with their individual needs and background in order to develop their identity, self confidence and self-worth.
- The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account
- The significance of contact for looked after children, and of maintaining relationships with birth parents and the wider family, including siblings, half-siblings and grandparents, is recognised, as is the foster carer's role in this.
- Children in foster care deserve to be treated as a good parent would treat their own children and to have the opportunity for as full an experience of family life and childhood as possible, without unnecessary restrictions.
- The central importance of the child's relationship with their foster carer should be acknowledged and foster carers should be recognised as core members of the team working with the child.
- Foster carers have a right to full information about the child.

- It is essential that foster carers receive relevant support services and development opportunities in order to provide the best care for children.
- Genuine partnership between all those involved in fostering children is essential for the NMS to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes the Government, local government, other statutory agencies, fostering service providers and foster carers.

Legal status of the standards

The NMS for fostering services are issued by the Secretary of State under section 23 of the CSA 2000. The Secretary of State will keep the standards under review and may publish amended standards as appropriate.

Minimum standards do not mean standardisation of provision. The standards are designed to be applicable to the wide variety of different types of fostering service. They aim to enable, rather than prevent, individual providers to develop their own particular ethos and approach based on evidence that this is the most appropriate way to meet the child's needs. Many providers will aspire to exceed these standards and develop their service in order to achieve excellence.

The standards are issued for use by Ofsted, who take them into account in the inspection of fostering services. They will also be important in other ways. The standards may be used by providers and staff in self-assessment of their services; they provide a basis for the induction and training of staff and carers; they can be used by parents, children and young people as a guide to what they should expect a fostering service to provide and to do as a minimum; and they can provide guidance on what is required when setting up a fostering service.

The standards apply to fostering services. Where a standard places an expectation on a foster carer, this should be interpreted as an expectation on their fostering service to support the foster carer to meet the standard.

Structure and approach to inspection¹

The National Minimum Standards for fostering services focus on delivering achievable outcomes for children. Each standard is preceded by a statement of the outcome to be achieved by the fostering service provider. The standards are intended to be qualitative, in that they provide a tool for judging the quality of life experienced by services users, but they are also designed to be measurable. Services will normally show that they are meeting the headline statement of the outcome by following the standards below. However, these do not have to be followed exactly if the service can demonstrate, and Ofsted is satisfied, that the outcomes are being met in a different way. The exception is a

¹ Ofsted will be providing advice on how the individual standards fit against the judgements in their inspection framework

requirement set out in regulations in which case the requirement must be met. The standards outline in the legislation box what the statutory requirement is which underpins the standards. Unless otherwise specified, the legislation referred to in the legislation box is a provision in the 2011 Regulations.

Across all its work, Ofsted has three core statutory responsibilities under section 117 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006: to ensure that inspection supports improvement in the services Ofsted inspects and regulates; that it is centred on the needs of users; and that it promotes the effective use of resources.

There are four elements to Ofsted's function as a regulator: registration; inspection; compliance; and enforcement. The purpose of Ofsted's inspection of social care is to assess the quality of care being provided for children and, where appropriate, their families. Inspection focuses on the outcomes which they are being supported to achieve. It tests compliance with the relevant Regulations and takes into account the NMS.

Following inspection, inspectors will make a number of judgements, including a judgement on the overall effectiveness of the service inspected. They will make recommendations for improvement, including any action required to ensure that provisions fully meet the NMS. For those provisions which are required to be registered with Ofsted, they will set requirements to be fulfilled in order to remedy any identified failure to meet the relevant regulations. Any identified failure in meeting the requirements of regulations may lead to consideration of enforcement action. Conditions of registration may be imposed.

The wider context

These national minimum standards are underpinned by the 2011 Regulations. Statutory guidance for fostering services – *Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services* - sets out the wider context for local authorities, as providers and commissioners of fostering services. This is not an exhaustive list, and other legislation and guidance may also be relevant, for example, legislation covering such matters as health and safety, fire or planning requirements.

It is intended that the standards will be used, both by fostering service providers and by Ofsted, to focus on securing positive welfare, health and education outcomes for children, and reducing risks to their welfare and safety. All providers and staff of fostering services should aim to provide the best care possible for the children for whom they are responsible, and observing the standards is an essential part, but only a part, of the overall responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of each individual child.

Application to Short Breaks

Both the 2011 Regulations and the NMS are modified in relation to short breaks. This is in recognition that where the child receives short breaks the parents have primary responsibility for planning for their child.

Regulation 42 defines short break care and sets out the modifications, which are that the following regulations do not apply in relation to the child where the child is on a short break: regulations 14, 15(2)(a) and (d), and 16.

The following NMS do not apply in relation to short break care: standard 2.5, 2.7 and all of standard nine and twelve.

In addition there is no requirement for a separate placement plan for children looked after in a series of short breaks (Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, regulation 48 (3)). For such children the short break care plan includes key elements of the placement plan. Where the NMS state 'placement plan' this will be the short break care plan in relation to children on short breaks.

CHILD FOCUSED STANDARDS

STANDARD 1 – The child’s wishes and feelings and the views of those significant to them

Underpinning Legislation:

- 11 – Independent fostering agencies – duty to secure welfare
- 18 – Independent fostering agencies – representations and complaints

Children Act 1989:

Section 22 – General duties of local authority in relation to children looked after by them

Sections 61 and 62 – duties of voluntary organisations and local authorities in relation to children accommodated by or on behalf of the voluntary organisation

Outcome:

- Children know that their views, wishes and feelings are taken into account in all aspects of their care; are helped to understand why it may not be possible to act upon their wishes in all cases; and know how to obtain support and make a complaint.
- The views of others with an important relationship to the child are gathered and taken into account.

- 1.1) Children’s views, wishes and feelings are acted upon, unless this is contrary to their interests or adversely affects other members of the foster care household.
- 1.2) Children understand how their views have been taken into account and where significant wishes or concerns are not acted upon, they are helped to understand why.
- 1.3) Children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support.
- 1.4) The views of the child, the child’s family, social worker and Independent Reviewing Officer are sought regularly on the child’s care (unless in individual cases this is not appropriate).
- 1.5) Children have access to independent advice and support from adults who they can contact directly and in private about problems or concerns, which is appropriate to their age and understanding. Children know their rights to advocacy, how to access an advocate and how to contact the Children’s Rights Director.

- 1.6) Children can take up issues in the most appropriate way with support, without fear that this will result in any adverse consequences. Children receive prompt feedback on any concerns or complaints raised and are kept informed of progress.
- 1.7) The wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service.

STANDARD 2 – Promoting a positive identity, potential and valuing diversity through individualised care.

Underpinning Legislation:

11 - Independent fostering agencies - duty to secure welfare

Children Act 1989:

Section 22 – General duties of local authority in relation to children looked after by them

Sections 61 and 62 – duties of voluntary organisations and local authorities in relation to children accommodated by or on behalf of the voluntary organisation

Outcome:

- Children have a positive self view, emotional resilience and knowledge and understanding of their background.

- 2.1) Children are provided with personalised care that meets their needs and promotes all aspects of their individual identity.
- 2.2) Foster carers are supported to promote children's social and emotional development, and to enable children to develop emotional resilience and positive self-esteem.
- 2.3) Foster carers meet children's individual needs as set out in the child's placement plan as part of the wider family context.
- 2.4) Children exercise choice in the food that they eat, and are able to prepare their own meals and snacks, within the context of the foster family's decision making and the limits that a responsible parent would set.
- 2.5) Children exercise choice and independence in the clothes and personal requisites that they buy and have these needs met, within the context of the foster family's decision making and the reasonable limits that a responsible parent would set. **This sub-standard is not applicable to short break placements.**
- 2.6) Children develop skills and emotional resilience that will prepare them for independent living.

2.7) Children receive a personal allowance appropriate to their age and understanding, that is consistent with their placement plan. **This sub-standard is not applicable to short break placements.**

STANDARD 3 – Promoting positive behaviour and relationships

Underpinning Legislation:

11 – Independent fostering agencies - duty to secure welfare
13 – Behaviour management and absence from the foster parent's home
17 – Foster parent to be provided with up to date information about the child including the child's care plan

Children Act 1989:

Section 22 – General duties of local authority in relation to children looked after by them

Sections 61 and 62 – duties of voluntary organisations and local authorities in relation to children accommodated by or on behalf of the voluntary organisation

Outcome:

- Children enjoy sound relationships with their foster family, interact positively with others and behave appropriately.

- 3.1) Foster carers have high expectations of all of the foster children in their household.
- 3.2) Foster carers provide an environment and culture that promotes, models and supports positive behaviour.
- 3.3) Children are able to develop and practice skills to build and maintain positive relationships, be assertive and to resolve conflicts positively.
- 3.4) Children are encouraged to take responsibility for their behaviour in a way that is appropriate to their age and abilities.
- 3.5) Foster carers respect the child's privacy and confidentiality, in a manner that is consistent with good parenting.
- 3.6) Foster carers have positive strategies for effectively supporting children where they encounter discrimination or bullying wherever this occurs.
- 3.7) Foster carers receive support on how to manage their responses and feelings arising from caring for children, particularly where children display very challenging behaviour, and understand how children's previous experiences can manifest in challenging behaviour.

- 3.8) All foster carers receive training in positive care and control of children, including training in de-escalating problems and disputes. The fostering service has a clear written policy on managing behaviour, which includes supporting positive behaviour, de-escalation of conflicts and discipline. The fostering service's policy is made clear to the responsible authority/placing authority, child and parent/s or carers before the placement begins or, in an emergency placement, at the time of the placement.
- 3.9) Each foster carer is aware of all the necessary information available to the fostering service about a child's circumstances, including any significant recent events, to help the foster carer understand and predict the child's needs and behaviours and support the child within their household. The fostering service follows up with the responsible authority where all such necessary information has not been provided by the authority.
- 3.10) The fostering service's approach to care minimises the need for police involvement to deal with challenging behaviour and avoids criminalising children unnecessarily.

STANDARD 4 – Safeguarding Children

Underpinning Legislation:

- 11 – Independent fostering agencies – duty to secure welfare
- 12 – Arrangements for the protection of children

Outcome:

- Children feel safe and are safe. Children understand how to protect themselves and are protected from significant harm, including neglect, abuse, and accident.

- 4.1) Children's safety and welfare is promoted in all fostering placements. Children are protected from abuse and other forms of significant harm (e.g. sexual or labour exploitation).
- 4.2) Foster carers actively safeguard and promote the welfare of foster children.
- 4.3) Foster carers make positive relationships with children, generate a culture of openness and trust and are aware of and alert to any signs or symptoms that might indicate a child is at risk of harm.
- 4.4) Foster carers encourage children to take appropriate risks as a normal part of growing up. Children are helped to understand how to keep themselves safe, including when outside of the household or when using the internet or social media.
- 4.5) The service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment.
- 4.6) Foster carers are trained in appropriate safer-care practice, including skills to care for children who have been abused. For foster carers who offer placements to disabled children, this includes training specifically on issues affecting disabled children.
- 4.7) The fostering service works effectively in partnership with other agencies concerned with child protection, e.g. the responsible authority, schools, hospitals, general practitioners, etc., and does not work in isolation from them.

STANDARD 5 - Children Missing from Care

Underpinning Legislation:

13 – Behaviour management and absence from the foster parent's home

Outcome:

- Children rarely go missing and if they do, they return quickly.
- Children who do go missing are protected as far as possible and responded to positively on their return.

- 5.1) The care and support provided to children, minimises the risk that they will go missing and reduces the risk of harm should the child go missing.
- 5.2) Foster carers know and implement what the fostering service and the responsible authority's policy is in relation to children going missing.
- 5.3) Foster carers are aware of, and do not exceed, the measures they can take to prevent a child leaving without permission under current legislation and Government guidance.
- 5.4) Children who are absent from the foster home without consent, but whose whereabouts are known or thought to be known by carers or staff, are protected in line with the fostering service's written procedure.
- 5.5) The fostering service and foster carers take appropriate action to find children who are missing, including working alongside the police where appropriate.
- 5.6) If a child is absent from the fostering home and their whereabouts are not known (i.e. the child is missing), the fostering service's procedures are compatible with the local Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols and procedures applicable to the area where each foster home is located.
- 5.7) Where children placed out of authority go missing, the manager of the fostering service follows the local RMFHC protocol. They also comply with, and make foster carers aware of, any other processes required by the responsible authority, specified in the individual child's care plan and in the RMFHC protocol covering the authority responsible for the child's care².

² Statutory Guidance on children who run away and go missing from home and care – 3.5(27).

- 5.8) Children are helped to understand the dangers and risks of leaving the foster home without permission and are made aware of where they can access help if they consider running away.
- 5.9) Where a child goes missing and there is concern for their welfare, or at the request of a child who has been missing, the fostering service arranges a meeting in private between the child and the responsible authority to consider the reasons for their going missing. The fostering service considers with the responsible authority and foster carer what action should be taken to prevent the child going missing in future. Any concerns arising about the foster carer or the placement are addressed, as far as is possible, in conjunction with the responsible authority.
- 5.10) Written records kept by the fostering service where a child goes missing detail action taken by foster carers, the circumstances of the child's return, any reasons given by the child for running away from the foster home and any action taken in the light of those reasons. This information is shared with the responsible authority and, where appropriate, the child's parents.

STANDARD 6 - Promoting good health and wellbeing

Underpinning Legislation:

15 – Health of children placed with foster parents.

Children Act 1989:

Section 22 – General duties of local authority in relation to children looked after by them

Sections 61 and 62 – duties of voluntary organisations and local authorities in relation to children accommodated by or on behalf of the voluntary organisation

Outcome:

- 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.

- 6.1) Children's physical, emotional and social development needs are promoted.
- 6.2) Children understand their health needs, how to maintain a healthy lifestyle and to make informed decisions about their own health.
- 6.3) Children are encouraged to participate in a range of positive activities that contribute to their physical and emotional health.
- 6.4) Children have prompt access to doctors and other health professionals, including specialist services (in conjunction with the responsible authority), when they need these services.
- 6.5) Children's health is promoted in accordance with their placement plan and foster carers are clear about what responsibilities and decisions are delegated to them and where consent for medical treatment needs to be obtained.
- 6.6) Children's wishes and feelings are sought and taken into account in their health care, according to their understanding, and foster carers advocate on behalf of children.
- 6.7) Foster carers receive sufficient training on health and hygiene issues and first aid, with particular emphasis on health promotion and communicable diseases.
- 6.8) Foster carers receive guidance and training to provide appropriate care if looking after children with complex health needs.

- 6.9) Medicines kept in the foster home are stored safely and are accessible only by those for whom they are intended.
- 6.10) Foster carers are trained in the management and administration of medication. Prescribed medication is only given to the child for whom it was prescribed, and in accordance with the prescription. Children who wish to, and who can safely keep and take their own medication, do so.
- 6.11) Foster carers keep a written record of all medication, treatment and first aid given to children during their placement.
- 6.12) Any physical adaptations or equipment needed for the appropriate care of the children are provided to foster carers.

STANDARD 7 - Leisure activities

Underpinning Legislation:

16 - Education, employment and leisure activities.

Outcome:

- Children are able to enjoy their interests, develop confidence in their skills and are supported and encouraged to engage in leisure activities.
- Children are able to make a positive contribution to the foster home and their wider community.

- 7.1) Children develop their emotional, intellectual social, creative and physical skills through the accessible and stimulating environment created within the foster home. Children are supported to take part in school based and out of school activities.
- 7.2) Children pursue individual interests and hobbies. They take part in a range of activities, including leisure activities and trips.
- 7.3) Foster carers understand what is in the child's placement plan and have clarity about decisions they can make about the day to day arrangements for the child, including such matters as education, leisure activities, overnight stays, holidays, and personal issues such as hair cuts.
- 7.4) Foster carers are supported to make reasonable and appropriate decisions within the authority delegated to them, without having to seek consent unnecessarily.
- 7.5) Children have permission to take part in age appropriate peer activities as would normally be granted by a reasonable parent to their children, within the framework of the placement plan. Decision-making and any assessment of risk to the child should be undertaken on the same basis as a reasonable parent would do.
- 7.6) Children are encouraged and enabled to make and sustain friendships, which may involve reciprocal arrangements to visit friends' homes.
- 7.7) Children can stay overnight, holiday with friends, or friends and relatives of their foster carer, or go on schools trips, subject to requirements of the care/placement plan, if foster carers consider it appropriate in individual circumstances. CRB checks are not normally sought as a precondition.

STANDARD 8 - Promoting educational attainment

Underpinning Legislation:

16 – Education, employment and leisure activities

Children Act 1989:

Section 22(3A) – duty on local authority to promote educational achievement

Outcome:

- The education and achievement of children is actively promoted as valuable in itself and as part of their preparation for adulthood. Children are supported to achieve their educational potential.

- 8.1) Children, including pre-school children and older children, have a foster home which promotes a learning environment and supports their development.
- 8.2) Children have access to a range of educational resources to support their learning and have opportunities beyond the school day to engage in activities which promote learning.
- 8.3) Children are supported to attend school, or alternative provision, regularly.
- 8.4) Children are helped by their foster carer to achieve their educational or training goals and foster carers are supported to work with a child's education provider to maximise each child's achievement and to minimise any underachievement.
- 8.5) The fostering service has, and is fully implementing, a written education policy that promotes and values children's education and is understood by foster carers.
- 8.6) Foster carers maintain regular contact with each child's school and other education settings, attending all parents' meetings as appropriate and advocating for the child where appropriate.
- 8.7) Foster carers engage and work with schools, colleges and other organisations to support children's education, including advocating to help overcome any problems the child may be experiencing in their education setting. Foster carers have up-to-date information about each child's educational progress and school attendance record.

STANDARD 9 - Promoting and supporting contact

Underpinning Legislation:

14 – Duty to promote contact

Outcome:

- Children have, where appropriate, constructive contact with their parents, grandparents, siblings, half-siblings, wider family, friends and other people who play a significant role in their lives.

- 9.1) Children are supported and encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships, subject to any limitations or provisions set out in their care plan and any court order.
- 9.2) Foster carers are given practical help to support appropriate contact, including financial help where needed, alongside support to manage any difficult emotional or other issues that the child and foster carer may have as a result of contact.
- 9.3) Emergency restrictions on contact are only made to protect the child from significant risk to their safety or welfare and are communicated to the responsible authority within 24 hours of being imposed.
- 9.4) Ongoing restriction on communication by the child is agreed by the child's responsible authority, takes the child's wishes and feelings into account and is regularly reviewed in collaboration with the responsible authority.
- 9.5) The fostering service feeds back to the responsible authority any significant reactions a child has to contact arrangements or visits with any person.
- 9.6) When deciding whether to offer a placement, the fostering service works with the responsible authority in giving consideration to how the child's contact with family and significant others will be supported, particularly where a child is placed at a distance from home.
- 9.7) Foster carers understand what decisions about contact are delegated to them, in line with the child's care plan, and make those decisions in the child's best interests.

The above standards are not required for short breaks. For children in short breaks the foster carer must know how to contact parents and maintain such contact as has been agreed in the short break care plan

STANDARD 10 - Providing a suitable physical environment for the foster child

Underpinning Legislation:

26 – Assessment of prospective foster parents

Schedule 3 – Information as to prospective foster parent and other members of their household and family

Outcome:

- Children live in foster homes which provide adequate space, to a suitable standard. The child enjoys access to a range of activities which promote his or her development.

- 10.1) The foster home can comfortably accommodate all who live there including where appropriate any suitable aids and adaptations provided and fitted by suitably trained staff when caring for a disabled child.
- 10.2) The foster home is warm, adequately furnished and decorated, is maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene and is in good order throughout. Outdoor spaces which are part of the premises are safe, secure and well maintained.
- 10.3) Foster carers are trained in health and safety issues and have guidelines on their health and safety responsibilities. Avoidable hazards are removed as is consistent with a family home.
- 10.4) Foster carers understand the service's policy concerning safety for children in the foster home and in vehicles used to transport foster children. The service's policy is regularly reviewed in line with the most recent guidance from relevant bodies.
- 10.5) The foster home is inspected annually, without appointment, by the fostering service to make sure that it continues to meet the needs of foster children.
- 10.6) In the foster home, each child over the age of three should have their own bedroom. If this is not possible, the sharing of a bedroom is agreed by each child's responsible authority and each child has their own area within the bedroom. Before seeking agreement for the sharing of a bedroom, the fostering service provider takes into account any potential for bullying, any history of abuse or abusive behaviour, the wishes of the children concerned and all other pertinent facts. The decision making process and outcome of the assessment are recorded in writing where bedroom sharing is agreed.

STANDARD 11 - Preparation for a placement

Underpinning Legislation:

11 – Independent fostering agencies – duty to secure welfare

Children Act 1989:

Section 22 – General duty of local authority in relation to children looked after by them

Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations (2010):

Regulation 22 – Conditions to be complied with before placing a child with a local authority foster parent

Outcome:

- Children are welcomed into the foster home and leave the foster home in a planned and sensitive manner which makes them feel loved and valued.
- Children feel part of the family. They are not treated differently to the foster carer's own children living in the household. The child's needs are met and they benefit from a stable placement.

- 11.1) The service has and implements clear procedures for introducing children into the foster care placement, to the foster carer and to others living in the household, which cover planned and, where permitted, emergency/immediate foster care placements. They help children understand what to expect from living in the foster home.
- 11.2) Children are carefully matched to a foster placement. Foster carers have full information about the child (as set out in standard 3.9).
- 11.3) Unless an emergency placement makes it impossible, children are given information about the foster carer before arrival, and any information (including where appropriate, photographic information) they need or reasonably request about the placement, in a format appropriate to their age and understanding. Wherever possible, children are able to visit the foster carer's home and to talk with the foster carers in private prior to a placement decision being made. Children can bring their favourite possessions into the foster carer's home.
- 11.4) Children are given free access to the household facilities as would be consistent with reasonable arrangements in a family home. Foster carers explain everyday household rules and expectations to children.

- 11.5) Where children are leaving the foster family, they are helped to understand the reasons why they are leaving. Children are supported during the transition to their new placement, to independent living or to their parental home.
- 11.6) Foster carers are supported to maintain links with children moving on, consistent with their care plan.

STANDARD 12 – Promoting independence and moves to adulthood and leaving care

Underpinning Legislation:

11 – Independent fostering agencies – duty to secure welfare

Children Act 1989:

Section 22 - General duty of local authority in relation to children looked after by them

Outcome:

- Children are prepared for, and supported into, adulthood so that they can reach their potential and achieve economic wellbeing.

12.1) Children are supported to:

- a. establish positive and appropriate social and sexual relationships;
- b. develop positive self-esteem and emotional resilience;
- c. prepare for the world of work and or further or higher education;
- d. prepare for moving into their own accommodation;
- e. develop practical skills, including shopping, buying, cooking and keeping food, washing clothes, personal self-care, and understanding and taking responsibility for personal healthcare;
- f. develop financial capability, knowledge and skills;
- g. know about entitlements to financial and other support after leaving care, including benefits and support from social care services.

12.2) Foster carers contribute to the development of each child's care plan, in collaboration with the child, including the pathway plan for an "eligible" child, and work collaboratively with the young person's social worker or personal adviser in implementing the plan.

12.3) The fostering service ensures there are comprehensive arrangements for preparing and supporting young people to make the transition to independence. This includes appropriate training and support to foster carers caring for young people who are approaching adulthood. Arrangements are consistent with the young person's care plan, including their placement plan, pathway plan and transition plan for children with disabilities and special educational needs.

12.4) The fostering service has a policy and practical arrangements which enable children to remain with their foster carer(s) into legal adulthood, for example so that s/he may develop appropriate life skills before being required to move to more independent accommodation. Any such decisions are agreed with foster carers at a placement meeting and are detailed in a child's placement plan.

The above standards are not required for short breaks.

STANDARDS OF FOSTERING SERVICE

STANDARD 13 - Recruiting and assessing foster carers who can meet the needs of looked after children

Underpinning Legislation:

26 – Assessment of prospective foster parents

27 – Approval of foster parents

28 – Reviews and terminations of approval

Children Act 1989:

Section 22G – General duty of local authority to secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children

Outcome:

- 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.

13.1) The local authority fostering service implements an effective strategy to ensure sufficient foster carers to be responsive to current and predicted future demands on the service. Planning for future demands covers the need for short breaks for disabled children.

13.2) People who are interested in becoming foster carers are treated fairly, without prejudice, openly and with respect. Enquiries are dealt with courteously and efficiently by staff who have the necessary knowledge and skills. Prospective foster carers are provided with timely and relevant information following their initial enquiry and are kept informed about the progress of any subsequent application for approval.

13.3) Prospective foster carers are prepared to become foster carers in a way which addresses, and gives practical techniques to manage, the issues they are likely to encounter and identifies the competencies and strengths they have or need to develop.

13.4) The assessment process is set out clearly to prospective foster carers, including:

- a. the qualities, skills or aptitudes being sought or to be achieved;
- b. the standards to be applied in the assessment;
- c. the stages and content of the selection process and where possible timescales involved;
- d. the information to be given to applicants.

- 13.5) Checks are carried out in line with regulation 26 and prospective foster carers understand why identity checks, relationship status and health checks, personal references and enquiries are undertaken about them and why enhanced CRB checks are made on them and adult members of their household.
- 13.6) Prospective foster carers are considered in terms of their capacity to look after children in a safe and responsible way that meets the child's development needs.
- 13.7) The written report on the person's suitability to be approved as a foster carer sets out clearly all the information that the fostering panel and decision maker needs in order to make an objective approval decision. The reports are accurate, up-to-date and include evidence based information that distinguishes between fact, opinion and third party information. The reports are prepared, signed and dated by the social worker who assessed the prospective foster carer and countersigned and dated by the fostering team manager or a team manager of another of the provider's fostering teams.
- 13.8) Reviews of foster carers' approval are sufficiently thorough to allow the fostering service to properly satisfy itself about their carers' ongoing suitability to foster.
- 13.9) Areas of concern, or need for additional support, that are identified between reviews are addressed. Such matters identified between reviews are addressed at the time they are identified, where appropriate, rather than waiting for a review.

STANDARD 14 - Fostering panels and the fostering service's decision-maker

Underpinning Legislation:

- 23 – Constitution and membership of fostering panel
- 24 – Meetings of fostering panel
- 26 – Assessment of prospective foster parents
- 27 – Approval of foster parents
- 28 – Reviews and terminations of approval

Outcome:

- The fostering panel and decision maker make timely, quality and appropriate recommendations/decisions in line with the overriding objective to promote the welfare of children in foster care.

- 14.1) The fostering service implements clear written policies and procedures on recruitment to, and maintenance of, the central list of persons considered by them to be suitable to be members of a fostering panel ("the central list") and on constitution of fostering panels.
- 14.2) Panel/s provide a quality assurance feedback to the fostering service provider on the quality of reports being presented to panel.
- 14.3) All necessary information is provided to panel members at least five working days in advance of the panel meeting to enable full and proper consideration.
- 14.4) The fostering panel makes its recommendation on the suitability of a prospective foster carer within eight months of receipt of the prospective foster carer's application to be assessed.
- 14.5) Foster carers and prospective foster carers are given the opportunity to attend and be heard at all panel meetings at which their approval is being discussed and to bring a supporter to the panel if they wish.
- 14.6) Fostering panels have access to medical expertise and legal advice, as required.
- 14.7) The panel chair ensures written minutes of panel meetings are accurate and clearly cover the key issues and views expressed by panel members and record the reasons for its recommendation.

14.8) The number, skills, knowledge and experience of persons on the central list are sufficient to enable the fostering service to constitute panels that are equipped to make competent recommendations to the fostering service provider, taking into account the nature of the children and carers that the service caters for.

14.9) The fostering service provider's decision-maker makes a considered decision that takes account of all the information available to them, including the recommendation of the fostering panel and, where applicable, the independent review panel, within seven working days of receipt of the recommendation and final set of panel minutes.

14.10) The foster carer or prospective foster carer is informed orally of the decision maker's decision within two working days and written confirmation is sent to them within five working days.

STANDARD 15 – Matching the child with a placement that meets their assessed needs

Underpinning Legislation:

17 – Support, training and information for foster parents

Relevant Legislation:

Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations (2010):

Regulation 9 – Placement plan

Regulation 14 – Termination of placement by the responsible authority

Outcome:

- The responsible authority has information and support from the fostering service which it needs to facilitate an appropriate match between the carer and child, capable of meeting the child's needs and consistent with the wishes and feelings of the child, so maximising the likelihood of a stable placement.

15.1) The fostering service only suggests foster carers to local authorities as a potential match for a child if the foster carer can reasonably be expected to meet the child's assessed needs and the impact of the placement on existing household members has been considered. Where gaps are identified, the fostering service should work with the responsible authority to ensure the placement plan sets out any additional training, resource or support required.

15.2) Prior to the placement of each child, the foster carer is provided with all the information held by the fostering service that they need to carry out their role effectively. The information is provided in a clear, comprehensive written form and includes the support that will be available to the foster carer. The fostering service follows up with the responsible authority any gaps in the information provided to them on the child or the child's family, which may hinder the foster carer in providing a safe caring environment that meets the child's needs and enables them to keep the child, other children in the fostering household and the foster carer him/herself safe.

15.3) Once placed, a child is not removed from a foster carer who is willing and able to continue caring for the child, unless that is in their best interests, taking the child's current wishes and feelings into account, and decided (other than in an emergency) through the child's care planning process. If a placement move occurs in an emergency the fostering service informs the responsible authority within one working day.

STANDARD 16 - Statement of purpose and children's guide

Underpinning Legislation:

- 3 – Statement of purpose and children's guide
- 4 – Review of statement of purpose and children's guide

Outcome:

- Children, their parents, foster carers, staff and the responsible authority/ placing authority are clear about the aims and objectives of the fostering service and what services and facilities it provides.
- The fostering service's operation meets the aims and objectives in the Statement of Purpose.

- 16.1) The fostering service has a clear statement of purpose which is available to, and understood by, foster carers, staff and children and is reflected in any policies, procedures and guidance. It is available to the responsible authority and any parent or person with parental responsibility.
- 16.2) The aims and objectives of the Statement of Purpose are child focused and show how the service will meet outcomes for children.
- 16.3) Subject to the child's age and understanding, the fostering service ensures the child receives the Children's Guide at the point of placement and that the foster carer explains the contents of the Children's Guide in a way that is accessible.
- 16.4) The Children's Guide includes a summary of what the fostering service sets out to do for children, how they can find out their rights, how a child can contact their Independent Reviewing Officer, the Children's Rights Director, Ofsted if they wish to raise a concern with inspectors, and how to secure access to an independent advocate.
- 16.6) Where a child requires it, the guide is available, where appropriate, through suitable alternative methods of communication, e.g. Makaton, pictures, tape recording, translation into another language.

STANDARD 17 - Fitness to provide or manage the administration of a fostering service

Underpinning Legislation:

- 5 – Fostering agency – fitness of fostering service provider
- 6 – Fostering agency – appointment of manager
- 7 – Fostering agency – fitness of manager
- 8 – Fostering agency - Registered person – general requirements
- 10 – Local authority fostering service - manager

Outcome:

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those who are suitable to work with children and have the appropriate skills, experience and qualifications to deliver an efficient and effective service.

17.1) People involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service:

- a. have good knowledge and experience of law and practice relating to looked after children;
- b. have business and management skills to manage the work efficiently and effectively; and
- c. have financial expertise to ensure that the fostering service is run on a sound financial basis and in a professional manner.

17.2) The registered manager (or registered person, where the registered person is an individual and there is no registered manager) has:

- a. a recognised social work qualification or a professional qualification relevant to working with children at least at level 4;
- b. a qualification in management at least at level 4³;
- c. at least two years experience relevant to fostering within the last five years; and
- d. at least one years experience supervising and managing professional staff.

17.3) Appointees to the role of registered manager who do not have the management qualification (above) must enrol on a management training course within six months, and obtain a relevant management qualification within three years, of their appointment.

³ With respect to standard 17.2 (a) and (b), for persons undertaking a qualification after January 2011, the relevant qualification will be the Level 5 Diploma in Leadership for Health and Social Care and Children and Young People's Services. Managers who already hold a Level 4 Leadership and Management for Care Services and Health and Social Care will not need to undertake this qualification at level 5.

17.4) The responsibilities and duties of the manager, and to whom they are accountable, are clear and understood by them. The manager is notified in writing of any change in the person to whom they are accountable.

17.5) The manager exercises effective leadership of the staff and operation, such that the fostering service is organised, managed and staffed in a manner that delivers the best possible child care that meets the individual needs of each fostered child and of foster carers.

STANDARD 18 – Financial viability and changes affecting business continuity

Underpinning Legislation:

- 33 – Fostering agency ceasing to carry out fostering functions – notifications and records
- 34 – Fostering agency ceasing to carry out fostering functions – new fostering service providers
- 37 – Financial position
- 38 – Notice of absence
- 39 – Notice of changes
- 40 – Appointment of liquidators

Outcome:

- The fostering service is financially sound.
- Where a service is to close or substantially change, there is proper planning, to make the transition for children, foster carers and staff as smooth as possible.

- 18.1) A qualified accountant certifies that the independent fostering agency's annual accounts indicate the service is financially viable and likely to have sufficient funding to continue to fulfil its Statement of Purpose for at least the next 12 months.
- 18.2) The registered provider has a written development plan, reviewed annually, for the future of the service, either identifying any planned changes in the operation or resources of the service, or confirming the continuation of the service's current operation and resource.
- 18.3) Where the service, for any reason, cannot adequately and consistently maintain provision which complies with regulations or NMS, an effective plan must be established and implemented either to rectify the situation or to close down the service.
- 18.4) The registered provider must notify Ofsted, the responsible authority and where different the placing authority, if closure of the service or substantial change to the service significantly affecting the care, welfare or placement of children, is likely or actively being considered. The registered person should work with the responsible authority/placing authority to ensure as smooth a transition for children and foster carers as possible.

18.5) Any person or organisation temporarily responsible for a fostering service in administration or receivership, or in the process of closure or substantial change, must operate the service in the best interests of the placed children and foster carers under the circumstances that apply, in accordance with the applicable regulations and these Standards.

STANDARD 19 – Suitability to work with children

Underpinning Legislation:

- 20 – Fitness of workers
- 21 – Employment of staff
- 22 – Records with respect to fostering services
- 30 – Case records relating to foster parents and others

Outcome:

- There is careful selection of staff, fostering households, volunteers and the central list of persons considered suitable to be members of a fostering panel, and there is monitoring of such people to help prevent unsuitable people from having the opportunity to harm children.

- 19.1) All people working in or for the fostering service, and the central list of persons considered suitable to be members of a fostering panel, are interviewed as part of the selection process and have references checked to assess suitability before taking on responsibilities. Telephone enquiries are made to each referee to verify the written references⁴.
- 19.2) The fostering service can demonstrate, including from written records, that it consistently follows good recruitment practice, and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance, in foster carer selection and staff and panel member recruitment. This includes CRB checks.⁵ All personnel responsible for recruitment and selection of staff are trained in, understand and operate these good practices.
- 19.3) The fostering service has a record of the recruitment and suitability checks which have been carried out for foster carers and those working (including as volunteers) for the fostering service which includes:
- a. identity checks;
 - b. CRB Disclosures, including the level of the Disclosure, and the unique reference number (in line with eligibility to obtain such checks);
 - c. checks to confirm qualifications which are a requirement and those that are considered by the fostering service to be relevant;
 - d. at least two references, preferably one from a current employer, and where possible a statement from each referee as to their opinion of the person's suitability to work with children;
 - e. checks to confirm the right to work in the UK;

⁴ These requirements are the responsibility of Ofsted with respect to checking suitability of those seeking to carry on or manage a fostering service.

⁵ Please note that the Government is currently reviewing the criminal records system and vetting and barring scheme and therefore references in both the Regulations and Standards may be subject to change.

- f. where the person has lived outside of the UK, further checks, as are considered appropriate, where obtaining a CRB Disclosure is not sufficient to establish suitability to work with children.
- 19.4) The record must show the date on which each check was completed and who carried out the check. The CRB Disclosure information must be kept in secure conditions and be destroyed by secure means as soon as it is no longer needed in line with the CRB Code of Practice. Before the Disclosure is destroyed, records need to be kept as described above.
- 19.5) The registered person's system for recruiting staff and others includes an effective system for reaching decisions as to who is to be appointed and the circumstances in which an application should be refused in the light of any criminal convictions or other concerns about suitability that are declared or discovered through the recruitment process.
- 19.6) There is a whistle-blowing policy which is made known to all staff, volunteers, foster carers and panel members. This makes it a clear duty for such people to report to an appropriate authority any circumstances within the fostering service which they consider likely to significantly harm the safety, rights or welfare of any child placed by the service.

STANDARD 20 – Learning and development of foster carers

Underpinning Legislation:

- 17 – Support, training and information for foster parents
- 28 – Reviews and terminations of approval

Outcome:

- Foster carers receive the training and development they need to carry out their role effectively.
- A clear framework of training and development is in place and this is used as the basis for assessing foster carers' performance and identifying their training and development needs.

20.1) All new foster carers receive an induction.

20.2) All foster carers, including all members of a household who are approved foster carers, are supported to achieve the Children's Workforce Development Council's Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care⁶. Short break carers who are approved foster carers are supported to achieve the Training Support & Development Standards for Short Break Carers. Family and friends foster carers are supported to achieve the Training, Support and Development Standards for Family and Friends Foster Carers⁷.

20.3) Foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval (or within 18 months for family and friends foster carers). For foster carers who were approved as such before April 2008, the Standards are attained by April 2011 (or by April 2012 for family and friends foster carers). Fostering households may use the same evidence workbook.

20.4) Foster carers maintain an ongoing training and development portfolio which demonstrates how they are meeting the skills required of them by the fostering service.

20.5) Foster carers' personal development plans set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development needs and experience.

⁶ For information and guidance please visit <http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/foster-care/standards>

⁷ Short break carers / family and friends carers may choose to undertake the mainstream Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care, instead of the Standards for Short Break Carers / Family and Friends Carers, if this is their preference.

- 20.6) The reviews of each carers approval include an appraisal of performance against clear and consistent standards set by the agency, and consideration of training and development needs, which are documented in the review report. The foster carer's personal development plan is reviewed and the effectiveness of training and development received is evaluated. Reviews take into account the views of each child currently placed with the foster carer.
- 20.7) The fostering service is clear and transparent with their foster carers about the level of support available to them and how to access such support.
- 20.8) Support and training is made available to foster carers, including hard to reach carers⁸, to assist them in meeting the specific needs of the children they are caring for or are expected to care for.
- 20.9) Appropriate training on safer caring is provided for all members of the foster household, including young people of sufficient age and understanding, and ensures that foster carers understand how safer caring principles should be applied in a way which meets the needs of individual children.
- 20.10) All training fits within a framework of equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice and is organised to encourage and facilitate attendance by foster carers.
- 20.11) In cases where a foster carer moves to a new fostering service, details of the development and training which he or she has undertaken, and of the extent to which the agreed training and development standards have been met, are made available on request to the new provider, and the foster carer is able to take their training and development portfolio with them.

⁸ <http://www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/foster-care/case-studies/reaching-all-carers> provides helpful case studies

STANDARD 21 - Supervision and support of foster carers

Underpinning Legislation:

17 – Support, training and information for foster parents

Outcome:

- Foster carers receive the support and supervision they need in order to care properly for children placed with them.

21.1) The fostering service supports their foster carers to ensure they provide foster children with care that reasonably meets those children's needs, takes the children's wishes and feelings into account, actively promotes individual care and supports the children's safety, health, enjoyment, education and preparation for the future.

21.2) The fostering service ensures foster carers understand the nature and level of support which will be provided to them by the fostering service.

21.3) There is an effective out of hours advice and support service for foster carers.

21.4) Peer support, foster care associations and/or self help groups for foster carers are encouraged and supported.

21.5) Foster carers are provided with breaks from caring as appropriate. These are planned to take account of the needs of any children placed.

21.6) All foster carers have access to adequate social work and other professional support, information and advice, to enable them to provide consistent, high quality care to the child. This includes assistance with dealing with relevant services, such as health and education. Consideration is given to any help or support needed by the sons and daughters of foster carers.

21.7) The role of the supervising social worker is clear both to the worker and the foster carer.

21.8) Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. The frequency of meetings for short break foster carers should be proportionate to the amount of care provided. Foster carers' files include records of supervisory meetings.

21.9) The supervising social worker ensures each foster carer he or she supervises is informed in writing of, and accepts, understands and operates within, all Regulations and standards and with policies and guidance agreed by the fostering service.

21.10) On approval, foster carers are given information, either a handbook or electronic resources, which cover policies, procedures (including with regard to allegations), guidance, financial information, legal information and insurance details. This information is updated regularly.

21.11) Current and prospective foster carers are able to make a complaint about any aspect of the service which affects them directly. Records are kept of representations and complaints, how they are dealt with, the outcome and any action taken. These records are reviewed regularly so that the service's practice is improved where necessary.

21.12) There is a good system of communication between the fostering service social workers and the child's social worker. The fostering service social workers understand the role of the child's social worker and work effectively with them.

STANDARD 22 - Handling allegations and suspicions of harm

Underpinning Legislation:

- 11 – Independent fostering agencies – duty to secure welfare
- 12 – Arrangements for the protection of children
- 17 – Support, training and information for foster parents
- 30 – Case records relating to foster carers and others
- 36 – Notifiable events

Children Act 1989:

- Section 22 – General duties of local authority in relation to children looked after by them
- Sections 61 and 62 – duties of voluntary organisations and local authorities in relation to children accommodated by or on behalf of the voluntary organisation

Outcome:

- Allegations and suspicions of harm are handled in a way that provides effective protection and support for children and the person making the allegation, and at the same time supports the person who is the subject of the allegation.

22.1) All foster carers, fostering service staff and volunteers understand what they must do if they receive an allegation or have suspicions that a person may have:

- a. behaved in a way that has, or may have, harmed a child;
- b. possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or
- c. behaved towards a child in a way that indicates he or she is unsuitable to work with children.

The fostering service ensures that the required actions are taken, or have been taken, in any relevant situation of which it is aware.

22.2) The fostering service's procedure is in line with Government guidance and requirements, including the duty to refer information to statutory bodies⁹. It is known to foster carers, fostering service staff, volunteers and children.

22.3) A copy of the fostering service provider's child protection procedures is made available to foster carers, fostering service staff, volunteers and children. Any comments on these procedures are taken into account by the provider.

⁹ Since October 2009, the duties to refer concerns regarding individuals under List 99 and the Protection of Children Act 1999 have been replaced by a duty to provide information to the Independent Safeguarding Authority. Please see the referrals page of www.isa.gov.org.uk for information on the legal requirements for making referrals.

- 22.4) The fostering service provider's child protection procedures are submitted for consideration and comment to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) and to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) for Child Protection¹⁰ (or other senior officer responsible for child protection matters in that department). They are consistent with the local policies and procedures agreed by the LSCB relevant to the geographical area where the foster carer lives. Any conflicts between locally agreed procedures and those of other placing authorities are discussed and resolved as far as possible.
- 22.5) Each fostering service has a designated person, who is a senior manager, responsible for managing allegations. The designated person has responsibility for liaising with the LADO and for keeping the subject of the allegation informed of progress during and after the investigation.
- 22.6) Allegations against people that work with children or members of the fostering household are reported by the fostering service to the LADO. This includes allegations that on the face of it may appear relatively insignificant or that have also been reported directly to the police or Children and Family Services.
- 22.7) A clear and comprehensive summary of any allegations made against a particular member of the fostering household, or staff member, including details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, a record of any action taken and the decisions reached, is kept on the person's confidential file. A copy is provided to the person as soon as the investigation is concluded. The information is retained on the confidential file, even after someone leaves the organisation, until the person reaches normal retirement age, or for ten years if this is longer.
- 22.8) As soon as possible after an investigation into a foster carer is concluded, their approval as suitable to foster is reviewed. There is a clear policy framework which outlines the circumstances in which a foster carer should be removed as one of the fostering service provider's approved foster carers, in the interests of the safety or welfare of children. This is available to foster carers.
- 22.9) Investigations into allegations or suspicions of harm are handled fairly, quickly, and consistently in a way that provides effective protection for the child, and at the same time supports the person who is the subject of the allegation. Fostering services follow the framework for managing cases of allegations of abuse against people who work with children as set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children.
- 22.10) Fostering services ensure that a clear distinction is made between investigation into allegations of harm and discussions over standards of care. Investigations which find no evidence of harm should not become procedures looking into poor standards of care - these should be treated separately.

¹⁰ Working Together to Safeguard Children (2010)

22.11) There is written guidance for foster carers and staff, which makes clear how they will be supported during an investigation into an allegation including payment of allowance and any fee to foster carers while investigations are ongoing.

22.12) During an investigation the fostering service makes support, which is independent of the fostering service, available to the person subject to the allegation and, where this is a foster carer, to their household, in order to provide:

- a. information and advice about the process;
- b. emotional support; and,
- c. if needed, mediation between the foster carer and the fostering service and/or advocacy (including attendance at meetings and panel hearings).

STANDARD 23 – Learning, development and qualifications of staff

Underpinning Legislation:

19 – Staffing of fostering service

Outcome:

- Children and foster carers receive a service from staff, volunteers and panel members and decision makers who have the competence to meet their needs.

- 23.1) There is a good quality learning and development programme, which includes induction, post-qualifying and in-service training, that staff and volunteers are supported to undertake. The programme equips them with the skills required to meet the needs of the children, keeps them up-to-date with professional, legal and practice developments and reflects the policies, legal obligations and business needs of the fostering service.
- 23.2) The learning and development programme is evaluated for effectiveness at least annually and is updated where necessary.
- 23.3) New staff and volunteers undertake the Children’s Workforce Development Council’s induction standards, commencing within 7 working days of starting their employment and being completed within six months.
- 23.4) All social workers and other specialists (e.g. medical, legal, educationalists, psychologists, therapists) are professionally qualified and, where applicable, registered by the appropriate professional body. They are appropriately trained to work with children, their families and foster carers, and have a good understanding of foster care and the policies and purpose of the fostering service.
- 23.5) Assessment and appraisal of all staff involved in fostering work takes account of identified skills needed for particular roles and is used to identify individuals’ learning and development needs.
- 23.6) Any staff involved in assessing the suitability of persons to be foster carers are social workers, have experience of foster care and family placement work and are trained in assessment. Social work students and social workers who do not have the relevant experience, only carry out assessments under the supervision of an appropriately experienced social worker, who takes responsibility for the assessment.

- 23.7) Where unqualified staff and volunteers carry out social work functions they do so under the direct supervision of experienced social workers, who are accountable for their work.
- 23.8) Persons joining the central list of persons considered suitable to be fostering panel members are provided with an opportunity to observe a fostering panel meeting.
- 23.9) Each person on the central list is given induction training which is completed within 10 weeks of joining the central list.
- 23.10) Each person on the central list is given the opportunity of attending an annual joint training day with the fostering service's fostering staff.
- 23.11) Each person on the central list has access to appropriate training and skills development and is kept abreast of relevant changes to legislation and guidance.
- 23.12) The fostering service's decision-maker is a senior person within the fostering service, or is a trustee or director of the fostering service, who is a social worker with at least 3 years post-qualifying experience in childcare social work and has knowledge of childcare law and practice.

STANDARD 24 - Staff support and supervision

Underpinning Legislation:

- 19 – Staffing of fostering service
- 20 – Fitness of workers

Outcome:

- Staff and volunteers are supported and guided to fulfil their roles and provide a high quality service to children.

- 24.1) The employer is fair and competent, with sound employment practices and good support for all its staff and volunteers.
- 24.2) All staff, volunteers and the registered person are properly managed and supported and understand to whom they are accountable.
- 24.3) Suitable arrangements exist for professional supervision of the agency's registered person or manager of a local authority fostering service.
- 24.4) Staff have access to support and advice, and are provided with regular supervision by appropriately qualified and experienced staff.
- 24.5) A written record is kept by the fostering service detailing the time, date and length of each supervision held for each member of staff, including the registered person. The record is signed by the supervisor and the member of staff at the end of the supervision.
- 24.6) All staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually and, where they are working with children, this appraisal takes into account any views of children the service is providing for.
- 24.7) Staff and volunteers are able to access the specialist advice needed to provide a comprehensive service for children, including legal advice.

STANDARD 25 - Managing effectively and efficiently and monitoring the service

Underpinning Legislation:

- 8 – Fostering agency – Registered person – general requirements
- 10 – Local authority fostering service – Manager
- 18 – Independent fostering agencies – representations and complaints
- 35 – Review of quality of care
- 36 – Notifiable events
- 37 – Financial position

Outcome:

- The fostering service is managed ethically, effectively and efficiently, delivering a service which meets the needs of its users.

- 25.1) There are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the service. This includes the financial viability of the service, any serious incidents, allegations or complaints about the service and ensuring the quality of the service.
- 25.2) The manager regularly monitors all records kept by the service to ensure compliance with the service's policies, to identify any concerns about specific incidents and to identify patterns and trends. Immediate action is taken to address any issues raised by this monitoring.
- 25.3) Management of the service ensures all staff's work and all fostering activity is consistent with the 2011 Regulations and NMS and with the service's policies and procedures.
- 25.4) Managers, staff, volunteers and foster carers are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The level of delegation and responsibility of the manager, and the lines of accountability, are clearly defined.
- 25.5) Clear arrangements are in place to identify the person in charge when the registered manager, or local authority fostering service manager, is absent.
- 25.6) The registered person ensures copies of inspection reports by Ofsted are made available to all members of staff, to their foster carers, children fostered by the service and their parents/carers, and, on request, to the responsible, or where different placing, authorities of existing foster children or those considering placing a child through the service.

25.7) The executive side of the local authority or the independent foster service's provider/trustees, board members or management committee members:

- a. receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the fostering service every 3 months;
- b. monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the service is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children;
- c. satisfy themselves that the provider is complying with the conditions of registration.

25.8) The registered person takes action to address any issues of concern that they identify or which are raised with them.

25.9) Staff, volunteers and foster carers have a copy of:

- a. the policies and working practices in respect of grievances and disciplinary matters;
- b. details of the services offered;
- c. the equal opportunities policy;
- d. health and safety procedures.

25.10) Information is provided to commissioners of services as part of tendering. This includes:

- a. charges for each of its services;
- b. statements of the amounts paid to foster carers (separated by fee and allowance); and
- c. any amounts paid for other services e.g. health and education.

25.11) The registered person has provided the service with a written policy and procedural guidelines on considering and responding to representations and complaints in accordance with legal requirements and relevant statutory guidance.

25.12) The service has the facilities to work with children with physical, sensory and learning impairments, communication difficulties or for whom English is not their first language. Oral and written communications are made available in a format which is appropriate to the physical, sensory and learning impairments, communication difficulties and language of the individual. The procedures include arrangements for reading, translating, Makaton, pictures, tape recording and explaining documents to those people who are unable to understand the document.

STANDARD 26 – Records

Underpinning Legislation:

- 22 – Records with respect to fostering services
- 26 – Assessment of prospective foster parents
- 30 – Case records relating to foster carers and others
- 31 – Register of foster carers
- 32 – Retention and confidentiality of records
- 33 – Fostering agency ceasing to carry out fostering functions – notifications and records

Outcome:

- Records are clear, up to date, stored securely and contribute to an understanding of the child's life.

- 26.1) The fostering service has and implements a written policy that clarifies the purpose, format and content of information to be kept on the fostering service's files, on the child's files and on case files relating to foster carers.
- 26.2) Staff, volunteers, panel members and fostering households understand the nature of records maintained and follow the service's policy for the keeping and retention of files, managing confidential information and access to files (including files removed from the premises). There is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed.
- 26.3) Children and their parents understand the nature of records maintained and how to access them.
- 26.4) Information about individual children is kept confidential and only shared with those who have a legitimate and current need to know the information, and to those parts of a child's record or other information that they need to know.
- 26.5) Entries in records, decisions and reasons for them, are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, distinguish between fact, opinion and third party information and are signed and dated.
- 26.6) Information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. Children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements.

- 26.7) The foster carer understands the important supporting role they play in encouraging the child to reflect on and understand their history. The child, subject to age and understanding, is encouraged to keep appropriate memorabilia (including photographs) of their time in the placement. The fostering service makes this role clear to their foster carers and ensures they can record, and help children make a record of (subject to age and understanding), significant life events.
- 26.8) Where there is an agency placement, the agency works with the responsible authority to ensure effective integration of information held in the agency's case files and those of the responsible authority. On receipt of a written request by a child's responsible authority, the agency immediately provides copies of records and documents in relation to the child.
- 26.9) When a foster carer seeks to move to a new provider, the new provider seeks information from the previous provider about the prospective foster carer, and the previous provider complies with such a request within one month of receipt of the written request.

STANDARD 27 - Fitness of premises for use as fostering service

Underpinning Legislation:

32 – Retention and confidentiality of records

Outcome:

- The premises and administrative systems are suitable to enable the service to meet the objectives of its Statement of Purpose.

27.1) There are efficient and robust administrative systems, including IT and communication systems. Premises have:

- a. Facilities for the secure retention of records;
- b. appropriate measures to safeguard IT systems; and
- c. an appropriate security system.

27.2) The premises and its contents are insured (or there are alternative prompt methods of replacing lost items).

27.3) The provider has a Business Continuity Plan, which staff understand and can access, which will include both provision of premises and safeguarding/back up of records.

STANDARD 28 - Payment to carers

Underpinning Legislation:

17 – Support, information and training for foster parents
27 – Approval of foster parents
Schedule 5 – Matters and obligations in Foster Care Agreements

Outcome:

- Payments to foster carers are fair and paid in a timely way.
- Foster carers are clear about the fostering service's payment structures and the payments due to them.

- 28.1) Each foster carer receives at least the national minimum allowance for the child, plus any necessary agreed expenses for the care, education and reasonable leisure interests of the child, including insurance, holidays, birthdays, school trips, religious festivals etc, which cover the full cost of caring for each child placed with her/him.
- 28.2) Payments of allowances and any fees paid are made promptly at the agreed time and foster carers are provided with a statement of payment at the end of each tax year.
- 28.3) Allowances and any fees paid are reviewed annually and the fostering service consults with foster carers in advance of any change to the allowance and fee.
- 28.4) The fostering service advises foster carers of financial and other support that is available to foster carers where a child remains with them after they reach the age of 18 or where they care for/provide a home for a child and their parent(s).
- 28.5) There is a clear and transparent written policy on payments to foster carers that sets out the criteria for calculating payments and distinguishes between the allowance paid and any fee paid. The policy includes policy on payment of allowances and any fee during a break in placement or should the fostering household be subject to an allegation.
- 28.6) The written policy and the current level of payments are provided annually to each foster carer and commissioners of the service. The foster carer receives clear information about the allowances and expenses payable, and how to access them, before a child is placed.

- 28.7) Criteria for calculating fees and allowances are applied equally to all foster carers, whether the foster carer is related to the child or unrelated, or the placement is short or long term.
- 28.8) Fostering service providers are clear about what equipment is being either loaned or given to foster carers.
- 28.9) Where a child is eligible for benefits as a result of a disability, foster carers are encouraged to apply for those benefits. There are regular recorded discussions about how any additional benefits are being spent to promote the best interests of the child.

STANDARD 29 - Notification of Significant Events

Underpinning Legislation:

36 – Notifiable events
Schedule 7 – Events and notifications

Outcome:

- All significant events relating to the health and protection of children fostered by the service are notified by the registered person to the appropriate authorities.

- 29.1) The registered person has a system in place to notify, within 24 hours, persons and appropriate authorities of the occurrence of significant events in accordance with regulation 36. The system includes what to do where a notifiable event arises at the weekend.
- 29.2) A written record is kept which includes details of the action taken, and the outcome of any action or investigation, following a notifiable event.
- 29.3) The registered person has a system for notification to responsible authorities of any serious concerns about the emotional or mental health of a child, such that a mental health assessment would be requested under the Mental Health Act 1983.
- 29.4) Following an incident notifiable under regulation 36, the registered person contacts the responsible authority to discuss any further action that may need to be taken.

STANDARD 30 – Family and friends as foster carers

Underpinning Legislation:

17 – Support, training and information for foster parents

Relevant Legislation:

Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 – regulation 24 and 25

Outcome:

- Family and friends foster carers receive the support they require to meet the needs of children placed with them.

- 30.1) The needs and circumstances of family and friends foster carers are taken into account when determining the fostering service's policies and practices.
- 30.2) The fostering service's Statement of Purpose includes the services and facilities that they provide to family and friends foster carers.
- 30.3) In deciding whether a relative, friend or other connected person should be approved as a foster carer, the decision maker takes into account the needs, wishes and feelings of the child and the capacity of the carer to meet these.
- 30.4) In seeking to support family and friends foster carers, the local authority fostering service works closely with the wider local authority children's services department, other departments, and agencies such as housing, to mitigate any limitations to the carer's capacity to care for a foster child.
- 30.5) When assessing an individual's suitability to be a family and friends foster carer, the likely length of the placement, the age of the child, the wishes and feelings and any concerns of the child and, if appropriate, the capacity of the wider family to contribute to the child's long term care, are taken into account.
- 30.6) Potential family and friends foster carers should be provided with information about the assessment process, so they know what is expected of them, how they will be assessed, including the criteria that will be used and how particular issues for family and friends foster carers will be addressed, and any support offered during the assessment process.

- 30.7) Family and friends foster carers are asked about their existing knowledge of the foster child's behaviour and background and any concerns they have about the child, as well as being provided with information about the child that is held by the fostering service.
- 30.8) The child's introduction to the new fostering arrangement takes account of the fact that, whilst the child may know the carer well, the carer's role in the child's life is now changing. This is explained to the child and the carer is provided with the support they need to manage this transition.
- 30.9) The fostering service takes into account the carer's, parents' and child's views about contact before the start of the placement, or as soon as possible afterwards, and puts in place appropriate supports to help manage contact.
- 30.10) Financial and other support is provided to all foster carers according to objective criteria that do not discriminate against foster carers that have a pre-existing relationship with the child. Family and friends foster carers may require some services to be delivered in a different way, but there should be equity of provision and entitlement.
- 30.11) Family and friends foster carers have access to training available to other foster carers, but the fostering service provider also offers training that addresses the particular needs and circumstances of family and friends foster carers.
- 30.12) Family and friends foster carers have access to support groups that meet their particular needs.
- 30.13) Supervising social workers who are supporting family and friends foster carers have training in the particular needs and circumstances of this group.
- 30.14) Where a family and friends foster carer is temporarily approved as a foster carer under regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, a full assessment is completed as soon as practicable, where the intention is for the child to stay with the carer, and always within the statutory timeframe set out in the Regulations.

This standard only applies to local authority fostering services and those independent fostering services which approve family and friends foster carers. However, where family and friends are approved as foster carers the other standards apply as they do for other foster carers.

STANDARD 31 - Placement Plan and Review

Underpinning Legislation:

Schedule 5 – Matters and obligations in Foster Care Agreements

Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations (2010):

9 – Placement plan

Part 6 – Reviews of the child's case

Outcome:

- Children are cared for in line with their Placement Plan/Short Break Care Plan.
- The fostering service takes action to chase up outstanding reviews or visits from the responsible authority, contributes to those reviews and assists the child to contribute to their reviews.

31.1) The fostering service supports foster carers to play an active role in agreeing the contents of each child's placement plan, in conjunction with the responsible authority.

31.2) The foster carer is given a copy of the child's placement plan as soon as this is provided to them by the responsible authority. If provision of the care plan by the responsible authority is delayed, the fostering service follows this up with the responsible authority.

31.3) The foster carer is supported to contribute effectively to the review of their care plan, which includes the placement plan.

31.4) The foster carer is supported to assist the child to put forward their views, wishes and feelings as part of each review process, and the fostering service helps to ensure that these are fully taken into account by the child's responsible authority.

31.5) Foster carers are supported to explain the child's care plan, and any changes to those plans, to the child.

31.6) The fostering service contacts the responsible authority to request statutory reviews or visits if these are overdue for any child, or if a review has not already been arranged by the responsible authority and a change in the care plan is needed, there has been a significant change in arrangements for the child's care or a major action (e.g. a change of placement) which is not in the care plan appears likely.

31.7) The fostering service and foster carer contribute effectively to each child's Placement Plan review and statutory review of the child's care plan

31.8) Children are assisted to secure an independent advocate to support them in providing their views, wishes and feelings to statutory reviews.

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Search using the ref: DfE-00029-2011

ISBN: 978-1-84775-867-5

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