



STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Milton Keynes Office

This document relates to the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (amended 2013) Regulation 3 and National Minimum Standard 2011 Standard 16

This document is available in other languages, larger text and braille

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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Company Information

Legal Status:	An Independent Fostering Organisation Company Registration No: 4356133
Director:	Nicholas Barnsby - B.A. Philosophy and Psychology, M.A. Social Work, CQSW, Diploma in Pastoral Care, Guidance and Counselling and CCETSW post qualification course in Management in the Public Sector
Responsible Individual: Office Address:	Nicholas Barnsby The Masters House College Road Maidstone ME15 6YQ
Telephone Number	01622 760600
E mail:	nickbarnsby@futures-for-children.org
Web site	www.fostering-options.org
Registered Manager:	Debra Corstorphine
Regulations: Reference Number:	SCO63551
Date of last Inspection:	11 May 2015
Overall Rating:	Good

MISSION STATEMENT

Fostering Options provides, through a flexible, caring and imaginative foster care service, an opportunity for all our children and young people to become valued members of tomorrow's society.

Looked after children represent the most disadvantaged and vulnerable members of our community. At Fostering Options it is our objective to provide support and conditions in which these most vulnerable young people can thrive and achieve a positive outcome from the time spent in foster care. There is much work to be done to redress the disadvantages these children have experienced and little time to do this before they become independent young adults.

For many children a positive outcome may be a return to their parents or extended family. Maintaining contact and working with genuine respect for the child's family is crucial for keeping these options available. Other children may succeed best in long term alternative families including permanent foster care placements.

Fostering Options can provide a wide range of foster care placements and professional support services to provide specific packages of care to meet the needs of individual children and young people. These services are delivered by qualified and experienced social work staff and foster carers who are valued as full members of our professional team.

Organisation Details

<u>Milton Keynes Office:</u> Fostering Options Threshing House Hayfield Business Park Aspley Guise Milton Keynes MK17 8HS Tel No: 01908 587666	<u>Head Office:</u> The Master's House College Road Maidstone Kent ME15 6YQ Tel No: 01622 760600 Fax No: 01622 760609
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Referrals: FODuty@Fostering-Options.org

Website: www.fostering-options.org

Organisational Office

Registered Office

Milton Keynes

Fostering Options is part of a group of companies owned by Futures for Children.

Futures for Children	-	Essex, Kent, and Durham
Foster Care Solutions	-	Durham
Time for Children	-	London

Contracts and Purchasers

Fostering Options currently have contracts with:

- London Care Placements – 33 London Boroughs
- Hertfordshire
- ER4 – Thurrock, Essex, Cambridge, Suffolk
- Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes
- Luton, Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough
- West Midlands

Additionally we are able to provide placements to other Local Authorities on a spot purchase basis.

Aims & Objectives

Fostering Options recognises that the children and young people it is asked to provide placements for will have experienced trauma in their lives, either through neglect, physical injury, emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse. It also acknowledges that these young people are often overwhelmed by these events and, unable to find appropriate ways of dealing with them, will inevitably present a wide range of behaviours.

At Fostering Options we acknowledge that, along with these more challenging behaviours, every young person will also have acquired many skills and strengths which have enabled them to survive their experiences thus far. Whilst we do not believe that it is the child's responsibility to solve the problem, it is our aim to assist them in building on these strengths and skills to find acceptable solutions to their own particular circumstances.

Therefore, at Fostering Options we aim to equip foster carers with the appropriate skills and training to work with the child in such a way that it facilitates joint growth and solutions which will eventually enable young people to return home successfully, move on to a more permanent placement or achieve independent living; whichever is in accordance with their Care Plan.

Philosophy of Care

We believe that children in our care have a right to expect the following regardless of gender, colour, ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation or disability:

- A safe family environment.
- To be heard.
- To be valued.
- To be involved in decision making.
- Access to high quality education.
- Access to family and/or significant others.

We believe that the adults responsible for their care should treat all children and young people with respect and, regardless of gender, colour, ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation or disability, should:

- Recognise the child's potential.
- Provide opportunities for self-realisation.
- Recognise and respect the child as an individual.
- Assist young people to build solutions.

We believe that the organisation:

- Should actively involve children in all aspects of service delivery.
- Should encourage and facilitate feedback, ideas and suggestions from foster carers, staff and those involved in the service.

- Should provide an environment that promotes equality and does not discriminate against any individual in any way.
- Should recognise and acknowledge the achievements of all members of the organisation.
- Should encourage enthusiasm, imagination and individual contributions to the team effort.
- Should put in place systems and structures, training and consultation, which enable the delivery of childcare to a high standard.

Placement Categories

The organisation provides a wide range of placements for children and young people of all ages and needs, these include:

- Respite care for children who need one-off or regular breaks from their families.
- Emergency placements for children who need a safe place to stay for a few nights.
- Short term placements for children who need to be away from their families for a longer period.
- Long term or permanent placements – where carers commit to care for children until they are eighteen (and beyond).
- Children with disabilities - for children who need increased support and care.
- Remand placements – for young people remanded into care by the courts following alleged criminal activity, or requiring a bail address.
- Unaccompanied Minors - for young people who have left their country of origin with no parents or guardian in England.
- Parent and Child placements
 - Assessment Arrangements
 - Support Arrangements
 - Holding Arrangements

Services Provided

Education

Fostering Options holds the belief that educational achievement is crucial to the future life chances of our most vulnerable young people and should therefore be afforded a priority within the development of high quality fostering services.

All Fostering Options carers are required to participate fully and take an active role in the education of all looked after children, encouraging and enabling the children to enjoy and benefit from their educational experiences.

The organisation contracts the services of an education provider that offers a telephone helpline during term time to offer assistance and guidance with educational matters. An education audit measuring the performance of each office takes place annually.

Therapy

Fostering Options employs the services of a Director of Therapy, Inger Gordon - MA/CQSW Diploma in Systemic Therapy, BSc in Sociology and Psychology and Teaching Skills in Systemic Therapy - who is able to provide consultation and guidance on therapeutic support to foster carers in the midst of challenging situations.

Contact/Family Work

Fostering Options is committed to the promotion of Contact with those who are significant to the child or young person, believing that it is essential for their emotional and physical well being.

Fostering Options has access to a team of independent workers who are able to complete specific pieces of work aimed at promoting family relationships for the child. These could include:

- The supervision of Contact.
- Life story work.

Health

All young people will, wherever possible, remain registered with their own GP and dental services. Where this is not possible the child or young person will be registered with the health provision local to the foster placement.

Fostering Options believes that by promoting health and providing education on related issues, eg smoking, drug and alcohol abuse, diet, etc, this will improve the outcomes for young people placed within the organisation.

The organisation provides each child and young person with a Health Passport. This passport records health related incidents, appointments, etc, and will follow the child or young person when they move on, supporting a consistency of care.

Leisure and Recreation

At Fostering Options leisure and recreational pursuits are considered to be an important part of a child's social education, as well as important in the holistic development of "self". Whether the leisure pursuit is just for enjoyment or, indeed, one where a young person is particularly gifted, participation in such activities will be encouraged in line with the child's wishes and potential.

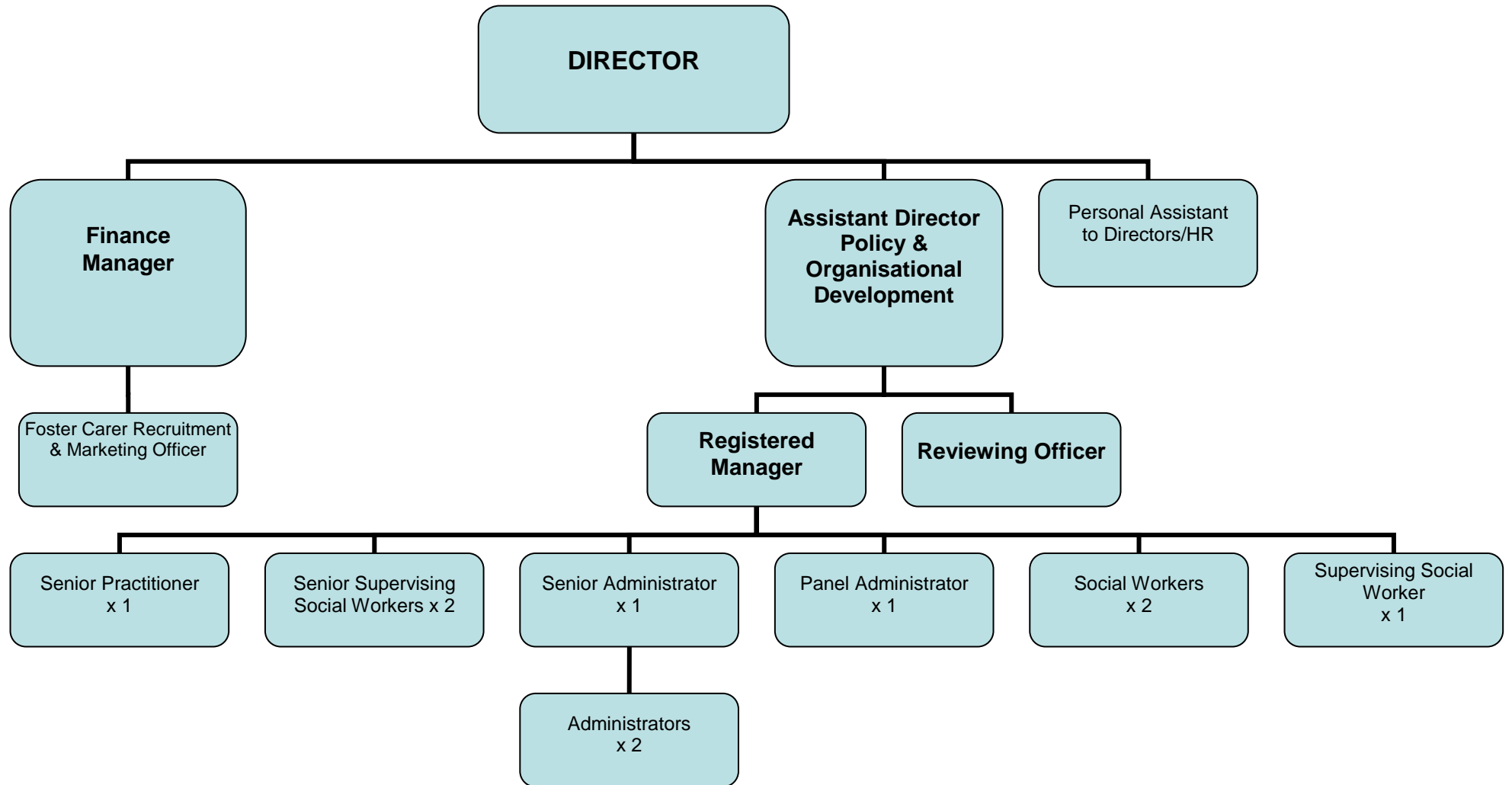
Involvement in activities will be monitored, as with the rest of our service, and health and safety issues considered as necessary.

Staff Employment

Fostering Options recognises the importance of child-centred, empathetic staff who have a good understanding of the difficulties and conflicts affecting foster carers and their families. We seek to employ people who are able to demonstrate the skills to work professionally with carers and children and who can give a commitment to work within the child-centred ethos of the organisation. Social work staff will be qualified to CQSW, CSS, DipSW or degree level, and must be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council. Other staff, such as support staff or administration, will be selected on qualifications, experience and merit. All staff will be subject to a rigorous selection process which includes an interview based on the safer recruitment process, checks from the Disclosure and Barring Service, Ofsted, Local Authority, employment and personal references. All references are followed up by telephone.

Fostering Options is an equal opportunity employer and welcomes applications from ethnic groups and people with disabilities and will not discriminate against anyone because of race, culture, sexual orientation, gender, age, marital status, religion or disability.

ORGANISATIONAL/MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE



Staff List

Assistant Director – Policy and Organisational Development

Julie Mountney

NVQ4 in Management, Diploma Social Work with Children and Families (S.A.C. Dip.)

Julie began her career as a foster carer. After twelve years she moved on to working for a Local Authority as a Foster Care Advisor. This role involved all aspects of support to foster carers and placements, including out of hours support and crisis intervention. Julie also managed a team of support workers who worked with adopters to avoid adoption breakdowns. Julie began working for Fostering Option at its inception in 2002. She has held various positions during this time. Julie was appointed in September 2011 to work across the organisations under the Futures Group umbrella. She takes the lead in creating and developing policies and systems to ensure that the organisation's practice meets or exceeds the requirements of current legislation.

Finance Manager

Michelle Whalley

Sage Accounting Stage 1 & 2, +ECDL, OCR Bookkeeping Level 1, AAT NVQ 4 Advanced Level. Member of the Association of Accounting Technicians (MAAT) CIMA Operational Level. Chartered Institute of Management Accounting Diploma (CIMA Dip MA)

Michelle has many years' experience in business, responsible for managing staff and financial matters. She joined Fostering Options in May 2003 as an Administration Assistant. Michelle has increased her knowledge through experience and qualifications and in 2010 was promoted to Futures for Children Group Finance Manager with responsibility for the Finance Department.

Registered Manager

Debra Corstorphine

DipSW, NVQ5 Diploma in Management

Before qualifying as a Social Worker, Debra worked in the Victim Support Service where she was employed as a co-ordinator for approximately seven years offering support, advice and counselling to people who had experienced any sort of crime. Debra was involved in working with victims of domestic violence, sexual crimes, murder, burglary and robbery. Debra used the skills and experience she had gained within the victim support service and qualified as a Social Worker in 2001. Since that time she has worked within local authority settings including Family Placement Service and a Family Support Team for the under 12s.

Debra joined Fostering Options in August 2003, initially as an agency Social Worker, but shortly after was appointed permanently as a Supervising Social Worker in the Milton Keynes office. In 2006 Debra was promoted to Senior Practitioner and in 2008 promoted to Deputy Manager in the Milton Keynes office.

Debra attained her NVQ Level 5 in Management in 2012.

Senior Practitioner

Sharon Charles

DipSW, PQ1 Child Care Award, ILM Level 3 First Line Management

Sharon started working for Fostering Options in September 2011. Prior to training as a Social Worker, Sharon had worked for a mental health charity organising a social club/day centre for people with mental health conditions such as depression and schizophrenia. She also implemented a group for mothers with postnatal depression via referrals from their GP. Sharon has also worked as a youth advice worker with young people aged between 13 to 25 years. This involved advocating on the behalf of homeless young people, providing Benefits advice, crisis counselling and setting up a lodgings register to provide accommodation.

Sharon completed her Diploma of Social Work training in 1999. Following her training, Sharon's first post was as a children's Social Worker for a local authority which involved working with young people who were aged over 12 years, and included both looked after and child protection cases. After two years Sharon became an agency Social Worker in order to gain more experience and had a variety of contracts. These posts involved a lot of family and individual work, assessments of parenting capacity for Court and co-facilitating on parenting and assertiveness courses. Sharon then had a six month contract within a CAMH service. Sharon went on to complete her PQ1 and Child Care Award.

Following this, in 2004, Sharon became a Supervising Social Worker for an independent fostering agency. She was promoted to the management team as Principal Social Worker three years later, where she supervised several Supervising Social Workers and a Recruitment Officer. Sharon went on to become a Duty Manager. Sharon completed her ILM Level 3 in First Line Management during the next 2.5 years. Sharon returned to agency work following redundancy until she was employed by Fostering Options as a Senior Practitioner in September 2011.

Senior Supervising Social Worker Laura Gray

Laura started working for Fostering Options in January 2010. Prior to training as a Social Worker, Laura worked with adults with learning disabilities in home support, helping with personal care, health needs and emotional needs then latterly as an activity support worker helping adults to find social groups and activities they enjoy.

Laura completed her Diploma of Social Work training in 2003. Following her training, Laura's first post was as a Bail Support Officer for the Youth Offending Team which involved working with young people who were on bail from Courts, suggesting reasonable sanctions and offering supervision packages as an alternative to remand. After a year Laura secured a post in a Community Mental Health Team, this involved supporting adults with significant mental health needs in the community. Within this post Laura completed her PQ1-5 mental health award that qualified her to complete assessments under the Mental Health Act 1983.

Laura left the mental health team after the birth of her first child and in 2008 she found employment within a Local Authority Family Support team working with families on issues around safeguarding. After having her second child Laura was employed by Fostering Options.

Laura joined Fostering Options in January 2010 as a Supervising Social Worker. Over the next five years she attained her Senior Practitioner status. In March 2015 Laura moved to a Social Worker role in the Post Adoption Team in the Local authority but returned to the employment of Fostering Options in November 2015 as Senior Practitioner.

Senior Supervising Social Worker

Claudine Irankunda

MA Social Work, BSc (Hons) Psychology

Claudine has been working with the wider organisation since November 2014. After completing her social work training in December 2011 she worked for various independent fostering agencies.

Claudine has also worked as an Independent Social Worker.

Parvi Ark

Supervising Social Worker

Having qualified in 2004 as a Social Worker, Parvi has worked in various organisations, working closely with children and families who are in need of support. Parvi has experience in undertaking comprehensive assessments in a Parenting Assessment Unit, the Local Authority as well as an independent fostering agency. Her focus has been to assess and support vulnerable children and families, incorporating child development, and taking an ecological approach.

Parvi started my fostering career in 2007 as a Supervising Social Worker for a fostering agency in the West Midlands and left in 2008 to work as an independent Social Worker within fostering. Parvi's role has involved working as a freelance Form F Assessor, a FISS Advisor, providing advice and support to foster carers through allegations; independent Fostering Panel Member; and as an independent Reviewing Officer for a fostering agency.

Reviewing Officer

Ade Larigo

MA in SW (Merit), PQ Award

Ade has six years' direct experience in the fostering sector within independent fostering organisations. She qualified in 2006 with a MA Social Work from University of Birmingham and she undertook her Post Qualifying award in 2008. Ade has experience in both independent fostering agencies and within local authority children's teams.

Ade joined the Futures group as a Senior Supervising Social Worker in March 2015. She has experience in the recruitment, support and supervision of foster carers across a widespread region. Ade is passionate about achieving positive outcomes for children as the focal point of her work. From June 2016 Ade has taken on the role of Reviewing Officer for the Futures group.

Social Worker

Michelle O'Connor

BA (Hon) Social Work

Michelle joined the wider organisation in May 2011 after qualifying in 2010. As part of her qualification Michelle had a placement in a family placement team which she really enjoyed and encouraged her to seek a position within the fostering sector. Prior to deciding to become a social worker Michelle worked in the recruitment industry.

Social Worker

Andrew Turner

C.S.S., MCI (NVQ4 in Management)

Andy began his career in Social Work in 1982, in an Observation and Assessment Centre for teenagers. He qualified as a Social Worker in 1987. He then worked in a setting that combined intensive field and residential work with teenagers and their families. From 1991 to 1994 he worked as a Family Placement Social Worker, responsible for the recruitment and assessment of prospective adoptive parents and foster carers. Andy supported an established group of foster carers and was involved in a number of step-parent adoptions, as well as a range of Form F assessments.

In 1994 Andy was appointed as Under 8s Team Manager in Bedfordshire, managing three teams responsible for the registration and inspection of childminders, pre-schools, nurseries, play schemes and crèches. He achieved NVQ Level 4 in Management in 1997. In 2001 all regulation of under 8s Day Care was transferred into Ofsted. Andy worked in Ofsted's Policy Division, was the Eastern Region's Child Protection Liaison Officer for six months and then managed teams of inspectors covering a variety of counties.

In 2009, when Ofsted planned to outsource Under 8s work, Andy took early retirement.

In 2010 he began working for Action For Children as the Deputy Manager at a large children's centre in Milton Keynes. After a year he became the Manager of Ampthill, Cranfield and Barton Children's Centres.

Andy joined Fostering Options as a Supervising Social Worker in 2012.

Foster Carer Recruitment & Marketing Officer

Alice Turbine

CIM3 , CIM4 – Award in Marketing (Distinction)

Alice began her marketing career shortly after completing her Level 3 Certificate in Marketing. Alice has drawn marketing experience from an array of marketing environment, from the hustle and bustle of the recruitment world to sales and data-driven e-commerce, but craved a more rewarding role. Alice joined the Futures group of companies in April 2017 and is looking to complete her Level 4 Certificate in Marketing, focused on Digital Marketing, in Spring 2018.

Jessica Soul

Senior Administrator

NVQ4 Business & Administration

Jessica joined Fostering Options in November 2009 as a full time Administration Assistant. Initially Jessica worked within the Milton Keynes office but transferred to the Wollaston office when it opened in 2010. Jessica went on maternity leave in February 2013 and returned to the Milton Keynes office as a part time Administrator in April 2014. Since working at Fostering Options Jessica has completed several Administration qualifications and became Senior Administrator in November 2015.

Senior Administrator

Patrizia Parsons

NVQ3 Business & Administration

Patrizia joined Fostering Options in January 2016. She has 15 years' experience in administration and comes from a background of working with young people. Patrizia is the

first aid trainer for the office and has undertaken all the relevant safeguarding training required to work with young people.

Panel Administrator

Jaime Burbidge

NVQ3 Business & Administration

Jaime joined Fostering Options in July 2008 as a part time Panel Administrator. She has a comprehensive record of administration in several roles, including several years with a national charity. Jaime has continued to develop the skills relevant to her role through training and development including attending the BAAF course for Panel Administrators and their role in Adoption and Fostering Panels.

Temporary Administrator

Ann-Marie Welham

Independent Consultants

In addition to the above staff group, the organisation contracts the services of:

Name	Position	Qualifications/relevant experience
Jennita Hancock	Education Consultant	Teaching Certificate Counselling Certificate (Level 1 & 2 N.W.R.A.E.B.)

Recruitment & Approval Process

- Fostering Options will use various methods of advertising in an effort to continue organisational development including magazine and newspaper advertising, website, posters and specialist publications. The aim is to support Local Authorities to meet their sufficiency targets.
- Following an enquiry or response to an advertisement, a member of the social work team will contact the prospective applicant(s). They will complete an Initial Enquiry Form obtaining basic information and are able to answer any queries about fostering or the organisation.
- An Information Pack will be sent out which contains a brochure detailing information about the organisation, its services, the assessment process, fees and allowances.
- Should the decision be made to proceed, a visit to the applicants at their home will be arranged. Following this visit, if the applicants wish to proceed and the organisation consider that they are able to meet the placement needs of the organisation, then a recommendation will be made to proceed to the next stage and an application form provided for completion.
- All applicants will be invited to attend an induction course 'Skills to Foster' as part of their assessment. This will give them some insight into the fostering task and provide the organisation with evidence of their skills and abilities and any areas that may need to be explored further as part of the assessment.

Stage One

The information required at this stage:

- the applicant's full name, address and date of birth;
- details of the applicant's health, supported by a medical report;
- particulars of other adult household members;
- particulars of children in the applicant's family (whether or not they are members of the household) and any other children in the household;
- particulars of the household's accommodation;
- the outcome of any request or application made by the applicant, or any member of the applicant's household, to foster children or for registration as an early or later years provider under Part 3 of the Childcare Act 2006, including particulars of any previous approval or refusal of approval;
- the name and address of any fostering service where the applicant has been an approved foster carer in the preceding 12 months;
- names and addresses of at least two persons who will provide personal references for the applicant;
- in relation to the applicant and each member of their household aged 17 or over, an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Certificate;
- details of any current and any previous marriage, civil partnership or similar relationship;
- consult the Local Authority in whose area the applicant lives, if this is different to the fostering service; and
- interview at least two personal referees and prepare written reports of the interviews; **or**, if the person has been an approved foster carer for another fostering service in the preceding twelve months, request a written reference from that fostering service.

At any point during stage one of the assessment process, if the fostering service's Agency Decision Maker decides that the applicant is not suitable to foster, they will write to the applicant informing them of this decision, giving full reasons, within 10 working days of all the stage one information being received.

The applicants will also be informed that they may complain if they are unhappy with the way in which their case has been handled via the fostering service's complaints process. The complaints process should address whether or not the applicant's case has been handled in a reasonable way, rather than the question of the applicant's suitability to foster.

N.B. Stage one and two can run concurrently. However, if the decision maker determines that an applicant is unsuitable to foster more than ten working days after the information required by stage one has been received, or as a result of information required by stage two, then the provider must follow the stage two procedure and the determination must take account of a fostering panel recommendation informed by either a brief report or a full assessment report.

Stage Two

Additional information which forms part of the assessment process:

- details of personality;
- religious persuasion and capacity to care for a child from any particular religious persuasion;
- racial origin, cultural and linguistic background and capacity to care for a child from any particular racial origin or cultural or religious background;
- past and present employment or occupation, standard of living, leisure activity and interests;
- previous experience (if any) of caring for their own and other children;
- Skills, competence and potential relevant to their capacity to care effectively for a child placed with them;
- confirmation of financial stability, including mortgage/rent is not in arrears;
- employer references in current or latest position as well as for all roles where the applicants have worked with children or vulnerable adults;
- where applicants have school age children in the household, a consultation with their school will be undertaken;
- where applicants have had children with an ex-partner, the ex-partner will be contacted and asked whether they know of any reason why the applicant should not be approved as a foster carer;
- where applicants are transferring from another organisation or Local Authority the Fostering Network Protocol process will be adhered to (including, if appropriate, a visit to the organisation/Local Authority to read the applicant's fostering file);
- adult children of the applicant(s), living away from home, will be contacted for consultation; and
- any relevant training undertaken that the applicants can evidence (ie certificates).

Before the assessment is complete, if information comes to light indicating that the applicant is unlikely to be suitable to foster, a 'brief report' can be compiled setting out details of the assessment done and the reasons for considering the applicant unsuitable.

The applicant will be:

- notified that the brief report is to be sent to the Fostering Panel;
- provided with a copy of the brief report; and
- given 10 working days from the date of the notification to send their observations to the fostering service provider.

The brief report will then be presented to the Fostering Panel for consideration, along with any observations submitted by the applicant and any other relevant information. The

Agency Decision Maker's determination about whether to terminate the assessment following a brief report will take account of the recommendations of the fostering panel.

A stage two assessment that has been started must be completed, unless:

- the assessment is terminated following a brief report;
- the applicant withdraws from the process;
- the applicant is deemed unsuitable as a result of stage one of the assessment (where stages one and two have been carried out in parallel); or
- it becomes apparent that the applicant or an adult member of their household has been convicted of, or cautioned for, a specified offence.

Completed Assessments

When all the information has been collated and the assessment has been completed the assessing social worker together with the applicant(s) will make a decision as to the age range, gender, placement type, and number of children that would best meet their household, their skills and abilities.

Fostering Panel

- On completion of the assessment the applicants and their assessing social worker will be invited to attend the next available Fostering Panel.
- Fostering Options Fostering Panel will determine the suitability of applicants and the circumstances of their approval as foster carers and make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker.
- The Agency Decision Maker will make the final decision within seven working days of receipt of the recommendation and final set of minutes taking all of the information available to them, including the recommendation of the Fostering Panel as to the applicant's approval status, adding his/her comments and signature to the Panel Approval Form.
- If the decision is that they consider the applicants to be unsuitable to foster then the applicants will be informed of this decision and the reasons why the organisation is proposing not to approve (qualifying determination) and they will be provided with information on the appeals process.
- Applicants will be informed verbally within two days of the decision and within five days in writing.
- Following approval as foster carers for the organisation, carers are required to attend a Foundation Course (Child Protection, Safe Caring and Record Keeping).

N.B. Fostering Options aim to complete all assessments, in line with regulations, within eight months.

Foster Care Agreements

Following approval foster carers are asked to agree and sign a Foster Care Agreement. This agreement details the expectations the organisation places on the foster carer and the service the foster carer can expect from the organisation.

Foster Carer Annual Home Reviews

All foster carers approved by the organisation are reviewed annually or earlier should this be appropriate. As part of this process the following people will be consulted on the foster carer's ability to meet the needs of the children placed:

- Children placed (or previously placed during this Review period)
- The school or college of children placed
- Child's Social Worker from the Local Authority
- Children of foster carers who live in the household
- Foster carers
- Foster carer's Supervising Social Worker
- Any person whose contribution will add value i.e. IRO/therapist/YOTs

The first and every third annual review will be referred to the Fostering Panel for consideration and their recommendation will go to the Agency Decision Maker. Reviews may be brought forward at any time, for example if there has been a complaint on standard of care or an allegation made against a member of the fostering household. As a quality assurance measure all reviews which do not go to the Fostering Panel will be presented to the Fostering Panel Chair before going to the Agency Decision Maker.

Training and Development

Foster Carers

Fostering Options is committed to the development of its foster carers which will enhance and develop their skills and knowledge to ensure the best possible outcomes for our children and young people. Each foster carer will have an Individual Development Plan which will identify their learning needs and interests and be reviewed annually although can be updated at any time.

- **Core Training** – Essential courses to provide foster carers with a sound grounding in working with children and young people who are looked after.
- **Expansion Training** – In-depth training programme that builds on the core skills for developing foster carers or for those with more experience.
- **Specific Training** – Individual training courses, specific to the individual foster carer's skills and interests, or relating to the particular needs of any young person in placement.
- **Training, Support and Development Standards** – All foster carers will be supported by the organisation to complete the standards within the first twelve months of their approval.

- **National Vocational Qualification Training** – The organisation promotes and supports foster carers towards gaining this recognised national qualification.

These courses are provided in various forms such as:

- In house courses
- External trainers
- External training resources
- One to one
- Men's groups
- Children and young people groups
- E learning
- Support groups

Staff

Fostering Options is committed to the progression of its staff. Each member of staff will have an Individual Development Plan which will be reviewed annually at their Appraisal but may be updated at any time.

Training will form part of the staff's supervision sessions.

Training courses will be provided both internally and externally, leading, wherever possible to further qualification, including NVQs for Administrators, Post Qualifying Awards for Social Workers and Management Qualifications for senior staff members.

Complaints and Representation

Fostering Options endeavours at all times to promote positive communication and partnership between all those involved in foster care. The organisation therefore hopes that any concerns and representations can be expressed easily, with confidence and in the expectation that they can be responded to quickly and informally.

Our primary aim is to listen to and attempt to resolve problems and difficulties between ourselves in an atmosphere of mutual care and respect.

A complaint may be generally defined as "an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet about the actions, decisions or apparent failings of the organisation which requires a response".

The following principles guide the Complaints Procedure:

- Complaints and representations are welcomed as an important part of improving our service and ensuring quality.
- There is a commitment to making changes to our services where a complaint or

representation shows a need for change.

- We are committed to ensuring that our complaints system is accessible and available to everyone.
- Establishing what the complaint is, together with the desired outcome at an early stage, can lead to a better resolution for all involved.
- We are committed to responding to complaints speedily and, wherever possible, to achieving an outcome which is agreeable to the complainant.
- We aim to achieve the easiest, least stressful way to involve the complainant in the complaints process.
- We are committed to assisting and supporting children and young people to make a complaint or representation to the organisation and ensuring that they have a clear understanding that they will not be subject to any reprisals for doing so.

Who Can Make a Complaint or Representation

Anyone who has come into contact with our organisation including, but not exclusively, children and young people, parents, foster carers, social workers, local authorities, education, health, staff and independent workers. Where a complaint is received from a representative acting on behalf of a child or young person, the organisation will, if appropriate, confirm where possible that the child or young person is happy and that the complaint submitted reflects their views.

Representations

Representations can be made in writing or verbally by anyone who has an interest in the fostering service. Ideally this should be through a face to face meeting. A written record of the discussion should be completed and sent to the Assistant Director/Registered Manager for consideration and if appropriate forwarded on to the Director of the organisation. A written response should be sent to the person making the representation as soon as the information has been considered and any appropriate action taken. Should the response not be felt to be satisfactory to them then consideration can be made to evoke the Complaints Procedure.

The Complaints Procedure

Stage 1

The expectation is that the majority of complaints should be considered (and resolved) at Stage 1.

At Stage 1, we will discuss with the complainant their concerns and attempt to address the complaint as quickly as possible and find a way forward. Most Stage 1 complaints should ideally be concluded within 10 working days, however this may not always be possible and therefore the aim will be for a conclusion to be reached within a maximum of 20 working days.

If the matter is resolved, the organisation will write confirming the agreed resolution.

Where the matter is not resolved locally, the complainant has the right to request consideration of the complaint at Stage 2. This request should ideally be received by the organisation within 20 working days so that momentum in resolving the complaint is not lost.

Stage 2

Consideration of complaints at Stage 2 is normally achieved through an investigation conducted by an Investigating Officer.

The investigation should be completed and the response sent to the complainant ideally within 25 working days. However, this may be impractical in some cases, eg where the complaint involves several agencies, all or some of the matters are the subject of a concurrent investigation (such as a disciplinary process), if the complaint is particularly complicated or if a key witness is unavailable for part of the time.

Where it is not possible to complete the investigation within 25 working days, Stage 2 may be extended to a maximum of 65 working days. Where a response in 25 working days is not feasible the organisation will inform the complainant as soon as possible in writing of:

- the reason for the delay;
- and the date by which a response should be received .

After the Investigating Officer has produced their report the organisation will write to the complainant with their response to the report. The response will contain details of the right to have the complaint submitted to a Review Panel should the complainant be dissatisfied with the outcome.

Stage 3 – Review Panel

Review Panels are designed to:

- listen to all parties;
- consider the adequacy of the Stage 2 investigation;
- obtain any further information and advice that may help resolve the complaint to all parties' satisfaction;
- focus on achieving resolution for the complainant by addressing clearly the defined complaints and desired outcomes;
- reach findings on each of the complaints being reviewed;
- make recommendations that provide practical remedies and creative solutions to complex situations;
- support local solutions where the opportunity for resolution between the complainant and the organisation exist;
- to identify any consequent injustice to the complainant where complaints are upheld, and to recommend appropriate redress; and
- recommend any service improvements for action by the organisation.

The Review Panel will not reinvestigate the complaints, nor will it be able to consider any substantively new complaints that have not been first considered at Stage 2.

Complainants have the right to bring a representative to the panel to speak on their behalf. After the Panel the organisation must endeavour to send its response to the Panel's recommendations to the complainant (and other participants as necessary) within 15 days of receiving the Panel's report.

If following Panel, the complainant remains dis-satisfied they will be advised of their rights to contact the organisation's inspection body:

Ofsted
National Business Unit
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Tel: 0300 123 1231
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk