

**LOCAL CARERS
FOR LOCAL CHILDREN**

Statement of Purpose

Bedford Borough Council

Fostering Service

February 2015

**'Fantastic Foster Carers and Amazing Adopters - make
the difference'**

Document control sheet

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Contents:	Page
1. Aims, Objectives and Principles of the Fostering Service	
2. Standards of Care	
3. Status and Constitution	
4. Management Structure	
5. The Work of the Fostering Service	
6. Training	
7. Recruiting and Approving Foster Carers	
8. Number of Foster Carers	
9. Finance	
10. Complaints and Allegations	
11. Number of Complaints and their Outcomes	
12. Advocacy and Children's Rights	
13. Number of Children Placed	
14. Equality and Diversity	
15. Private Fostering	
16. Ofsted	

Introduction

Statement of purpose the Bedford Borough Fostering Service

This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirements of Standard 1 of the Fostering Services Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act 2000) and Regulations 3 and 4 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Aims, objectives and principles of the Fostering Service

The main aims of the Bedford Borough Fostering Service are to:

- Provide high quality and safe care within a family setting for children and young people who are unable to live within their own families.
- Provide a range of Foster Carers able to meet the emotional, physical, cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic needs of all the children looked after by Bedford Borough Council.
- Bedford Borough Council delivers its Fostering Service through a dedicated Fostering Team managed by a Team Manager.

The main service objectives are to:

- Place children and young people in local foster placements where relationships with family, friends and community are maintained and continuity of education, health, cultural links and activities are provided. In instances where it is not possible to achieve this within the Council's Foster Placements an appropriate placement outside of the resources of the Council will be sought under the IFA (Independent Fostering Agency) Framework Agreement.
- Maintain a sufficient number of foster care placements in relation to the location, numbers, needs, age range and characteristics of the looked after population and review this annually through the team plan in line with the sufficiency strategy.
- Recruit Foster Carers who are trained and supported in providing safe care to children who live with them. The service will determine the number and types of foster placements required and produce an annual recruitment and marketing plan.
- Provide a safe and nurturing foster placement with every effort made to achieve good outcomes for the looked after children within set timescales and to agree standards which are reviewed regularly.
- Provide for sibling groups to be placed together when this is in their best interests.
- Respect and promote the child's heritage, culture and identity.
- Promote contact between the child and their family where this is consistent with the care plan.

- Ensure openness and partnership working between all those (Health, Education, Child's Social Worker, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)) involved and concerned with the child's welfare.
- The Fostering Service has set targets to achieve best practice for the following Children's Performance Assessment Framework and National Indicators:
 - NI062 – stability of placements of looked after children: number of placement moves.
 - PAF B79 – the percentage of children in public care in foster placements or placed for adoption.
 - PAF C69 – the percentage of children newly looked after who were placed more than 20 miles from their home address from which first placed.
 - NI063 – stability of placements of looked after children: length of placement.

The main principles underpinning the service are:

- Foster Carers will be treated with respect and recognition will be given to the valuable role they play in the care of children in public care.
- Recruitment of new Foster Carers and staff who work within the service, comply with National Fostering Regulations, national standards and good practice.
- Foster Carers are vetted, prepared and assessed in line with national fostering regulations and requirements.
- The Bedford Borough Fostering Panel considers all carer applications and reviews of approval.
- Involve young people and Foster Carers in developing all services and building their feedback into service development.
- Matching of placements is undertaken to ensure a good fit between the needs of the child and the skills and experience of the foster carer(s).
- Every child placed will be subject to the looked after children care planning process.
- All Foster Carers are provided with the required documentation to support the placement of the child in their care.
- Children have their placement and plan reviewed within four weeks of initial placement.
- All approved Foster Carers are required to sign the Foster Care Agreement.
- All Foster Carers have a named supervising social worker.
- Children in foster care have a named allocated social worker.

Standards of care to be followed by the agency

The Fostering Service aims to provide safe, secure and high quality care in family settings for children who need to be looked after away from home. This will be achieved to the standards set out in the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 (referred to as the 'Regulations'), the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the UK National Standards for Foster Care (1999) along with the Code of Practice on the recruitment, assessment, approval, training, management and support of Foster Carers. These standards will apply equally to family and friends placements. The service complies with the requirements of the Training and Development Standards of the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) introduced in 2008.

Principles and values statements:

Standard 1: understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people.

Standard 2: understand your role as a foster carer.

Standard 3: understand health and safety, and healthy care.

Standard 4: know how to communicate effectively.

Standard 5: understand the development of children and young people.

Standard 6: keep children and young people safe from harm.

Standard 7: development yourself.

Status and constitution of the agency

Bedford Borough Council is an approved fostering service provider and will be inspected under the Care Standards Act 2001.

Decision making and arrangements for the management of the service including the appointment of the Fostering Service Manager (Regulation 10) and approval of the Foster Carer Registrations (Regulation 28) are delegated to the Assistant Director, Children's Social Work & Targeted Services (Chief Social Worker Children's).

A Fostering Panel has been established in accordance with Regulation 24. The panel is chaired by an Independent Chair.

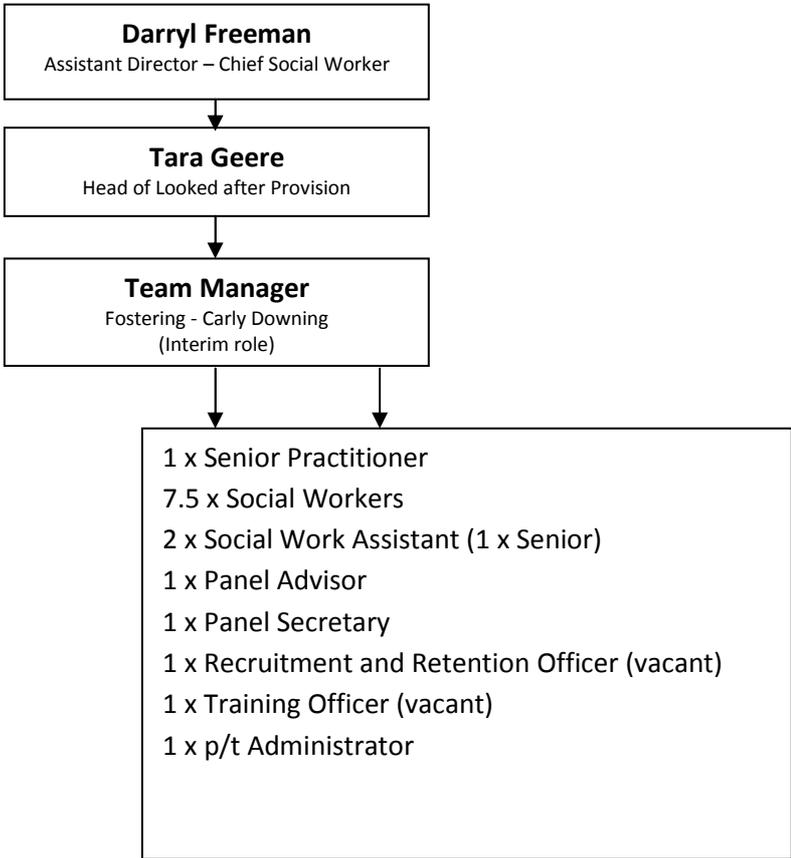
Management Structure of the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service is managed by the Head of Service, Looked After Provision through a Team Manager who is based at Borough Hall in Bedford.

The Registered Manager appointed to manage the Fostering Service under Part II of the Fostering Regulations is:

Tara Geere
Head of Service, Looked after Children
Borough Hall
Cauldwell Street
Bedford
MK41 9AP
Telephone: 01234 267422
Email: tara.geere@bedford.gov.uk

Tara Geere has over 25 years experience in social care settings. Tara qualified as a Social Worker in 1999 having obtained a Diploma of Higher Education in Applied Social Studies and a Diploma in Social Work, as well as a Postgraduate Certificate in Management Studies and a NVQ 5 in Operational Management. Tara has had a variety of experiences in her career, including all posts up to registered manager in Residential children’s Homes, managing children with disabilities teams, commissioning and brokerage services, fostering and adoption. Tara joined Bedford Borough in November 2013 and manages the Residential services, Placements team, Adoption and Fostering service, Permanence, Leaving and After Care including Asylum Team and is the lead for Corporate Parenting within the authority, tasked with driving improvements and advising and leading on Looked After Children.



The Work of the Fostering Service

The work of the Fostering Service is informed by the Every Child Matters Agenda and underpinned by the Fostering Teams Visions and Values.

Visions and Values

- To recognise that all children are unique individuals and to offer **personalised** support/care for all children, delivered locally wherever possible. To provide information about the new services we deliver and promote informed choice wherever possible. To develop new services in response to identified need
- To promote a **positive** culture in which people feel valued and respected, are able to challenge, to take risks, to share ideas and to think innovatively. To be confident, behave with integrity, be accountable and learn from mistakes.
- To have a **professional** and highly skilled 'workforce' that is effectively trained and supported. That all staff and Foster Carers are clear about their role and are working to specific objectives.
- To enable children to reach their **potential** by finding the best fostering families for them when they are needed and the most effective supports for them. Also by ensuring that all activity is evidence based and to demonstrate we are making a difference by measuring the impact of our work outcome focused.
- To work effectively in **partnership** with foster carers, children, their families and other professionals. To listen to their views and use them to inform and influence service development.
- To ensure that resources are used creatively, effectively and efficiently to achieve best value for the **pounds** we spend and to continuously improve the services we deliver, in collaboration with our foster carers.

Health

All children will be registered with GP's and Dentists. Performance is measured against a National Performance Standard set by the CQC (Care Quality Commission).

Initial and annual health assessments will be carried out and children will be supported by their foster carers in ensuring they are 'Healthy' both physically and emotionally.

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires are completed annually. This ensures that services for children who require additional support are identified quickly in order to improve their emotional well-being.

Staying safe

Foster carers are subject to a thorough assessment which includes DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks, personal references, employment history and motivation and commitment to the fostering role.

Safer Caring is an important part of the foster carers training and an individual safer care policy is completed for each placement.

Any allegations against foster carers are taken seriously and are investigated by the LADO through an established procedure.

Regular supervision and unannounced visits are undertaken by the Supervising Social Worker. This ensures foster carers continue to practice within expected standards and are supported.

Foster Carers have a crucial role in the review of children's plans through the Statutory Review process. Their input helps ensure that the placement remains appropriate and safe for the child/young person.

Each individual placement will have a Placement Plan in place which identifies areas such as visits to friends, diet, education, health needs, contact with family and house 'rules'. It will also agree areas of delegated authority for the placement.

Bedford Borough Council ensures all foster carers have access to out of hours support and are aware of borough policies in relation to children missing from care.

Enjoying and Achieving

Foster Carers are crucial in ensuring that young people meet their full potential and are given every opportunity to grow and develop their skills and interests.

All school age children will be supported in attending schools and foster carers will support both the child and the school by providing both physical space for homework and support with reading and other activities.

Foster Carers should participate in parent/teacher events such as parents evenings and feedback to the Children's Social Worker both positives and areas of concern raised.

As young people approach leaving school, foster carers will support them in looking at education, training and employment options.

Making a positive contribution

All children are encouraged by their foster carers to succeed in hobbies or sports of their choice, or to support the identification of activities with them. These activities range through organised clubs and groups – scouts, guides, cadets – to activities such as horse riding, arts and crafts and drama. Children are encouraged to join their local library.

Children in Care Council (CiCC)

Bedford Borough Council has thriving Children in Care Council. This is open for children in care between the ages of 8 and 21 years.

The Children in Care Council aims to improve the lives of children and young people in the care of Bedford Borough Council by campaigning on their behalf, creating projects and events and by working together with the Council and the Corporate Parenting Partnership Group. 'Our Pledge' has been drawn up to let the children and young people know what they can expect when they are in the care of Bedford Borough and was reviewed by the children and young people, staff and Councilors.

The CiCC Aims for 2014 are:

- Create a buddy project to support younger children in care
- Run a Takeover Day for Teachers to have "a day in care"
- Help people to know about the Pupil Premium and how it can help
- More trips, activities and FUN things to do!
- Plan and run the Achievement Awards on the 19 September 2014
- Work with the Fostering Service to develop a recruitment video for new foster carers

There are three different parts to CiCC which together create a strong voice for children and young people in care:

- CiCC – a group of 10 young people who will be meeting with the Director, Mayor, senior managers and the Corporate Parenting Partnerships once a term from Autumn 2014 to raise the strategic voice of those in care
- CiCC Youth Club takes place in school holidays giving children and young people in care the chance to try out the music studio, cook, do sports and generally have fun! At the same time consultations on health, education, websites and key events like the Achievement Awards take place making sure everyone has the chance to share their ideas.
- CiCC Projects take place throughout the year focused on the CiCC aims for 2014 including making a video to recruit new foster carers, information and challenge on the pupil premium, the new CiCC Website, planning an education Takeover Day and creating a buddying scheme.

The Annual Achievement Awards

The Achievement Awards celebrates the achievements of children and young people in care. In 2014, the event was planned by five young people from the CiCC with input from a further twenty looked after children. £2,460 was raised by Bedford Borough staff to fund the event, £800 was donated by local businesses and a further £2,000 was received through kind donations. The event was attended by 265 children, young people, carers, parents, workers and Counsellors.

Awards were given for Education, Personal Achievement, Transition, Overcoming Adversity, Sports, Arts/Music, Life Skills, Highly Commended and outstanding Achievement. There were 167 nominations for 125 children and young people aged 3-20 years. Everyone received a certificate, medal and £10 voucher. Those children receiving Highly Commended and Outstanding Commended Awards received a trophy and a goody bag.

Celebration of Fostering

Each year an event to celebrate the fostering service is held in Bedford Borough. This is attended by foster carers and their children, staff and Counsellors. There are traditionally a variety of awards presented:

- Long Service Awards sponsored by Bedford Borough Council for 5, 10, 15, 20, 25 years.
- Fantastic Foster Carer Award Awards sponsored by Field of Enterprise and Beds Foster Carers
- Fantastic Corporate Parent Award (professionals / teams) sponsored by Affairs Group and Beds Foster Carers Association

The 2014 event took place on 17th October with key note speakers including Beds Foster Carers Association, Bedford Borough Council and David Akinsanya (broadcaster and previously a fostered child).

There was also a personal message and award from the Children in Care Council.

Achieving Economic Well Being

Bedford Borough Council pays a fostering allowance for all children in placement. Carers also receive a weekly fee as part of a scheme of allowances for carers. Connected Persons also receive an allowance for children placed.

The fostering allowance supports the placement and includes pocket money, activities and clothing for the child in placement.

Carers will support children and young people achieve economic wellbeing by supporting them to save, helping with budgeting and making positive choices.

As young people prepare to leave care, their foster carers will support their plans by ensuring they are equipped with the necessary skills for independence. This is in conjunction with the Leaving and Aftercare Team.

Supporting the Fostering Service

Supervising Social Worker

The role of the supervising social worker is to give support and supervision to the foster carer. They also assist with practical difficulties and the provision of equipment. They are a vital link between the carer and the child's social worker. There is a supervision policy for foster carers. Supervision takes place on a regular basis not exceeding six weeks and includes a focus on personal development.

Although most support visits will be prearranged, the supervising social worker has a duty to undertake at least one unannounced visit per year as required by the National Minimum Standards. Current policy in Bedford is two per year. They are also responsible for undertaking an annual review of carers, which incorporates the carer's views and those of any birth children and fostered children. The review also includes reports from social workers and the supervising social worker who will identify strengths and future learning needs. Following completion of the review the foster carer is issued with a new Foster Carer Agreement. The First and Fourth Review is referred to the Fostering Panel.

Child Care Social Worker

The Child's Social Worker is responsible for the overall management of the child's care plan. They have a statutory duty to visit the child within one week of placement when the placement plan will be completed including the safer care arrangements and delegated authority and thereafter at a minimum of six weekly intervals. However in most circumstances the visiting pattern will be more frequent, particularly in the early stages of a placement or when there are particular difficulties.

Foster Carer Support Group

Foster carers are supported by their supervising social worker to attend a support group run on a regular basis. In addition, the Senior Managers meet with the Bedfordshire Foster Carers Association on a monthly basis in order to develop the service, share ideas and solve problems.

All foster carers receive a handbook which details local policy, information about fostering terms and conditions and guidance about requirements including policies and procedures specific to looked after children. The handbook is regularly updated and reviewed and amended information is sent to foster carers.

Out of hour's service – Emergency Duty Team (EDT)

The Fostering Service also offers an out of hours support service to foster carers. This is a telephone service where carers can ring a Fostering Social Worker for advice and support regarding children in their care. The service offered is:

Monday – Thursday	5.20 p.m. – 11.00 p.m.
Friday	4.20 p.m. – 11.00 p.m.
Weekends and bank holidays	8.45 a.m. – 11.00 p.m.

Telephone No.: 07837129968

In addition the Local Authority also provides an Emergency Duty Team (EDT) service which provides a team of social workers who are available outside of office hours to offer emergency support to service users and the public. The EDT can offer telephone advice and has access to placement information and can provide emergency placements for children with foster carers.

Independent Reviewing Officers

Independent Reviewing Officers have a responsibility for chairing the statutory reviews of all looked after children.

Foster carers are key to the review process through the contribution relating to the progress of the care plan. Independent Reviewing Officers also feedback to the fostering service evidence of best practice by the carers as part of the annual review process.

Training

The Fostering Service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care to meet the needs of each child placed in their care.

Training of foster carers is a significant aspect of the service and is provided both prior to and post approval and is included within the Fostering Service's Annual Training Programme.

In line with our service vision 'to have a professional and highly skilled workforce that is effectively trained and supported', it is very important to us that everyone involved in our service has available to them the appropriate level of training, support and the opportunity to be involved so they feel valued, respected and equipped with the skills and expertise to help our children and young people achieve their potential.

National Minimum Standards require that:

- The fostering service provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that foster parents are familiar with, and act in accordance with the policies established in accordance with regulations 12(1) and 13(1) and (3).
- The fostering service provider must ensure that, in relation to any child placed or to be placed with a foster parent, the foster parent is given such information, which is kept up to date, as to enable him to provide appropriate care for the child, and in particular that each foster parent is provided with a copy of the most recent version of the child's care plan provided to the fostering service provider under regulation 6(3) (d) of the Care Planning Regulations.

Training and induction standards were introduced for carers in Skills to Foster in 2008. A three year cycle of training in Child Protection, Safer Caring and First Aid has been a requirement for all carers since April 2007.

Pre-approval training is provided in-house and the course has evolved over the years to reflect changing practice, local experience and the national fostering agenda. Further work is being undertaken to develop the course with an agreed curriculum and handbook for prospective carers, amendments include the National Standards and current research.

Post approval, there is a number of internal and external learning opportunities including on-line training, conferences and short courses.

Foster Carers are required to complete Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD) supported by their Supervising Social Worker within their first year of fostering.

The process of recruiting and approving foster carers

Foster carers are recruited and assessed in line with Bedford Borough guidance based on the National Minimum Standards, Fostering Regulations and relevant legislation.

The recruitment of carers is currently managed and effected from within the Fostering Service and is supported by the Marketing and Commercial Plan 20th March 2014.

Recruitment involves:

- Newspaper advertisements
- Newspaper articles
- Distribution of posters
- Information distributed through displays and presentations such as the Bedford River Festival
- Word of mouth through existing carers
- The recommend a friend scheme

Enquiries are followed up within fourteen days and contact is made by a Supervising Social Worker to make arrangements to visit the family's own home. If they are interested in proceeding further, preliminary information will be gathered and statutory checks undertaken. Prospective carers attend a preparation group, following which the decision is made whether or not to apply for assessment. The home study and presentation to panel should take place within four months. The assessments are completed by qualified social workers and follow the format of the British Association for Adoption and Fostering Form F.

Foster Carer approvals (including family and friends carers) are considered by the Fostering Panel. The composition and organisation of the Panel is in accordance with regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations, 2011.

The service provider Agency Decision Maker is currently the Assistant Director for Children's and Adult's Services.

The Fostering Panel always considers first and 4th reviews and other reviews are normally considered under local management arrangements, unless there is a disagreement regarding the terms of approval which necessitates referral back to Panel. Serious complaints or allegations will also be put before Panel to consider whether or not there should be any alterations to the terms of approval. Since April 2009 Foster Carers have the right to challenge decisions through an Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

Panel will agree approval in the 0-18 age range with a preferred target age.

Every foster carer is required to sign a Foster Carer Agreement (regulation 28 (5) – (5b)) and in addition a placement agreement (regulation 34) containing all the information the Local Authority considers is necessary to care for an individual child.

Number of foster carers

Currently there are 74 Fostering Households within Bedford Borough and of those 57 are mainstream and 14 are connected person carers.

From January – July 2014 the following data is recorded:

There were 64 enquiries received in relation to fostering and 21 cases were progressed to stage 1.

9 approvals were made and 4 de-registrations were recorded.

Number of children placed 2013/14

As of November 2014, there were 249 children looked after by Bedford Borough Council. Of this number 89 were placed with in-house foster carers and 38 were placed outside of the Borough.

Finance

Most Foster Carers receive a fee and allowances according to the type of placement and age of the child.

Bedford Borough run a tiered system which allows career progression for Foster Carers.

Complaints and Allegations

Summary of the Complaints Procedure

Bedford Borough Council has a statutory complaints service, the details of which are contained in the guide 'Comment Compliment Complaint'. There are three stages to our complaints procedure and we will aim to acknowledge receipt of complaint within two working days.

- Stage 1 – Local resolution
- Stage 2 – Investigation
- Stage 3 – Independent review

Comments are helpful as they help the Local Authority to deliver the services needed. Compliments are useful because they tell us when we are getting it right. Complaints are vital, however large or small because they tell us that our customers may not be getting what they want.

A record of complaints against or by Foster Carers and the Fostering Service and their outcome is kept.

Allegations

Foster Cares can sometimes be the subject of allegations in respect of the care of the children or young people they are looking after. If this occurs the allegation will be investigated in line with Bedford Borough Council procedures. In addition to the role of the supervising social worker, foster carers have access to an independent social worker who can offer practical and emotional support.

All allegations and other matters listed in Schedules 7 and 8 of the Regulations are monitored by the Manager who ensures that the appropriate notifications to Ofsted and other agencies are carried out.

There is a separate procedure for reporting Schedule 8 Events and Notifications. A copy is made available to Foster Carers and staff.

Advocacy and Children's Rights

National Youth Advocacy Service (nyas)

The Directorate provides a separate independent advocacy service to children and young people in public care through the National Youth Advocacy Service. Contact details are:

NYAS
Egerton House
Tower Road
Wirral
CH41 1FN
Tel: 0808 808 1001
Website: www.nyas.net
Email: help@nyas.net

The Children's Commissioner for England

The Children's Commissioner for England and the Right4Me organisation promote and protect children's right in England. The law says her work should have particular regard to the children living away from home or received social care interventions. Contact details for the Commissioner are:

The Office of the Children's Commissioner
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT
Tel: 0800 528 0731
Website: www.rights4me.org
Email: advice.team@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

Equality and Diversity

The Bedford Borough Council Fostering Service works to Bedford Borough's Council Equality and Diversity Policy which is available on the council's intranet site.

The Bedford Borough Council Fostering Service will treat all service users fairly, openly and with respect throughout the fostering approval process. Applicants wishing to be approved as foster carers will be considered irrespective of ethnicity, religion, belief, gender, sexual orientation or disability providing the fostering service considers they can safely meet the needs of children throughout their childhood and into independence. The minimum age for applying to be a foster carer is 21 years old.

Every attempt will be made to find a placement which meets a child or young person's emotional and developmental needs taking into consideration their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability.

The Bedfordshire Borough Council Fostering Service recognises that no child or young person should have to wait indefinitely for the ideal placement.

All policies and procedures concerning the fostering service are subject to Equality Impact Assessment.

Private Fostering

In addition, we have a duty of care for Private Fostering arrangements. This currently sits within the Fostering Service where the responsibility for the assessment and monitoring of private fostering arrangements.

There is a Private Fostering Panel which meets six monthly to consider those cases.

For further information see the Private Fostering Statement of Purpose.

Ofsted

Ofsted is the single, independent inspectorate for all social care services in England. It is responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting fostering services under the provision of the Care Standards Act, 2000.

Questions or complaints

The one point of contact for all questions, queries and complaints is the Ofsted National Business Unit. Contact details are as follows:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
Tel: 0300 123 1231
Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk
Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk