



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

NATIONAL MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR FOSTERING SERVICES

National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services

A statement of national minimum standards published by the National Assembly for Wales under section 23 the Care Standards Act 2000.

National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services

Note

This document contains a statement of national minimum standards published by the National Assembly for Wales under section 23(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000.

The statement is applicable to fostering agencies as defined by section 4 of that Act.

The statement is accompanied, for explanatory purposes only, by an introduction to the statement as a whole, and a further introduction to each group of standards.

Each individual standard is numbered and consists of the numbered heading and numbered paragraphs. Each standard is, for explanatory purposes only, preceded by a title and where relevant, an indication of the intended outcome in relation to that standard.

National Assembly for Wales

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General Introduction

This document contains the national minimum standards applicable to fostering services. Together, the Fostering Service (Wales) Regulations 2003 and these standards form the basis of the new regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 (CSA) for the conduct of fostering services.

Regulatory Context

The regulations and standards replace The Foster Placement (Children) Regulations 1991. They are applicable to local authority fostering services, independent fostering agencies, and voluntary organisations providing fostering services under s59 of the Children Act 1989.

The regulations are made under sections 22 and 48 of the CSA, which provides the powers for making regulations to govern the conduct of services to be regulated by the National Assembly for Wales. The Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales (the Inspectorate) has been established by the National Assembly for Wales to exercise its regulatory functions in respect of social and health care services which were previously regulated by local councils and health authorities in Wales. The National Assembly for Wales also has powers under the Children Act 1989 to make regulations about the placing of children with foster parents. The national minimum standards are issued under sections 23 and 49 of the CSA.

How Regulations and Standards work together

The relationship between the regulations and standards and how they operate in practice are very important. The regulations are mandatory and fostering service providers must comply with them. The standards must be taken into account by the Inspectorate in making its decisions.

Role of the Inspectorate

When the Inspectorate makes a decision about a breach of regulations (or any decision to do with registration, cancellation, variation or imposition of conditions) it must take the national minimum standards into account. It may also take into account any other factors it considers reasonable or relevant to do so.

If a regulation is breached, the breach of which is an offence, the National Assembly for Wales has the power to prosecute. The standards will be taken into account in any enforcement action.

The Inspectorate could decide there has been a breach of regulation even though standards have been largely complied with. But it must still decide what action, if any, to take. If the standards are persistently flouted and/or they are substantially or seriously disregarded, the Inspectorate will take enforcement action. Even in this event (unless the failing is substantial), there is an opportunity for providers to take action to improve the position before enforcement action is taken.

Consultation

These standards and regulations were produced following widespread consultation nationally, with local authorities, individual fostering services and service users. Many commentators during consultation considered that the regulations should use the term 'foster carer' rather than 'foster parent', as the former is normally used. The reason why the regulations have to continue to use the term 'foster parent' is because that is what is used in the primary legislation, the Children Act 1989.

Introduction

The national minimum standards for fostering services are issued by the National Assembly for Wales under sections 23 and 49 of the CSA. The National Assembly for Wales will keep the standards under review and may publish amended standards as appropriate.

The fostering services providers to which these standards apply are:

- ❖ local authority fostering services
- ❖ independent fostering agencies which carry out fostering functions on behalf of local authorities
- ❖ voluntary organisations providing fostering services in their own right, under s59 of the Children Act 1989.

They are 'minimum' standards, rather than 'best possible' practice. Many fostering services providers will more than meet the national minimum standards and will aspire to exceed them in many ways. Minimum standards do not mean standardisation of provision. The standards are designed to be applicable to the wide variety of different types of fostering services providers, and to enable rather than prevent individual providers to develop their own particular ethos and approach to care for children with different needs.

Although the standards are issued for use by the Inspectorate in regulating fostering services providers, they will also have other important practical uses. They may be used by providers and staff in self-assessment of their services, they provide a basis for the induction and training of staff, 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, and they can provide guidance on what is required when setting up a fostering service. Those involved with fostering services in any way are encouraged to make full use of these standards in these ways.

Structure and approach

The national minimum standards for fostering services focus on achievable outcomes for children and young people – that is, the impact on the individual of the services provided.

The standards are grouped under a series of key topics:

- ❖ statement of purpose
- ❖ fitness to carry on or manage a fostering service
- ❖ management of a fostering service
- ❖ securing and promoting welfare
- ❖ recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers
- ❖ records
- ❖ fitness of premises
- ❖ financial requirements.

Each standard or group of standards is preceded by a statement of the outcome to be achieved by the fostering service provider. The standards themselves are numbered and the full set of numbered paragraphs must be met in order to achieve compliance with the standards. The standards are intended to be qualitative, in that they provide a tool for judging the quality of life experienced by service users, but they are also designed to be measurable.

Wherever possible, the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003 have been cross-referenced to the standards. However, other regulations and/or primary legislation, in particular the Children Act 1989, may also be relevant. This note should be taken as a general guide and is not an exhaustive legal reference.

In inspecting against these standards, the Inspectorate will follow a consistent inspection methodology and reporting format across Wales.

It is intended that the standards will be used, both by fostering services providers and by the Inspectorate, to focus on securing positive welfare, health and education outcomes for children and young people, 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 in their care, 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.

Relationship with UK National Standards for Foster Care

The UK National Standards for Foster Care, produced in 1999, along with the Code of Practice on the recruitment, assessment, approval, training, management and support of foster carers, continue to be applicable to fostering services.

Those Standards are more far-reaching and child-centred – in the sense that they cover all aspects of the life of the foster child, not only the services provided by the fostering service. Although in contrast to the national minimum standards issued under the CSA they have no formal legal status, they represent best practice and as such should be fully complied with by fostering service providers.

1. Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide

Outcome

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.

Standard 1 – Statement of Purpose

1.1 There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of the facilities and services they provide.

1.2 A statement of purpose clearly sets out what services are provided for children who are placed by the fostering service. If education or health services, including therapeutic services are provided, these are covered in the statement of purpose.

1.3 The registered provider formally approves the statement of purpose of the fostering service, and reviews, updates and modifies it where necessary at least annually.

1.4 The statement includes details in respect of the fostering service of:

- ❖ its status and constitution (for agencies)
- ❖ its management structure
- ❖ the services it provides and any restrictions it operates
- ❖ its aims and objectives, principles and standards of care
- ❖ numbers, relevant qualifications and experience of staff
- ❖ the procedures and processes for recruiting, approving, training, supporting and reviewing carers.
- ❖ range of support services, including financial support
- ❖ arrangements to monitor and include the quality and effectiveness of their service's complaints procedures

1.5 The children's guide to the fostering service is suitable for all children fostered through the service, includes a summary of what the service sets out to do for children, and is provided to children as soon as they are fostered, and to all foster carers. (If necessary, the guide is produced in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children). The children's guide contains information on how a child can secure access to an independent advocate and about how to complain, including the right to approach the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

1.6 The fostering service's policies, procedures and any written guidance to staff and carers accurately reflect the statement of purpose.

[Regulation: Statement of purpose and children's guide, Review of statement of purpose and children's guide]

2. Fitness to provide or manage a fostering service

Outcome

There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.

Standard 2 – Skills to carry on or manage

2.1 The people involved in carrying on and managing the fostering service possess the necessary business and management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively, to ensure it is run on a sound financial basis and have the necessary knowledge and experience of child care and fostering to do so in a professional manner.

2.2 The manager has:

- ❖ a professional qualification relevant to working with children, which must be either NVQ level 4 or the DipSW or another qualification that matches the competencies required by the NVQ Level 4;
- ❖ by 2005, a qualification at level 4 NVQ in management or another qualification which matches the competencies required by the NVQ Level 4; and
- ❖ at least two years' experience of working in children's services within the past five years, and in addition at least one year's experience of working at a senior level.

2.3 For the transitional period in relation to management qualifications, appointees to the post of manager who have no such qualifications begin appropriate management training within six months of appointment.

2.4 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.

Standard 3 – Suitability to carry on or manage

3.1 Any persons carrying on or managing the fostering service are suitable people to run a business concerned with safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

3.2 For the references set out in Schedule 1 of the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003, telephone enquiries are made to follow up written references.

3.3 Criminal Records Bureau enhanced disclosure certificates are renewed every three years.

3.4 Records are kept of checks and references that have been obtained and their outcomes. Regulations: Fostering agency: fitness of provider, Fostering agency – fitness of manager, Registered person – general requirements, Local authority fostering service – manager]

3. Management of the fostering service

Outcome

The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently, delivering a good quality foster care service and avoiding confusion and conflicts of role.

Standard 4 – Monitoring and controlling

4.1 There are clear written procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the fostering service and ensuring quality performance.

4.2 There are clear roles for managers and staff and well established lines of communication and of accountability between managers, staff and carers.

4.3 The service has proper written financial procedures and there is a reviewing procedure to keep them up to date.

4.4 Information is provided to purchasers of services and others. This includes: charges for each of its services, statements of the amounts paid to foster carers, and itemised amounts paid for wider services which may include health and education.

4.5 The fostering service has clear written procedures which require carers, managers and staff to declare any possible conflicts of interest.

Standard 5 – Managing effectively and efficiently

5.1 The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.

5.2 The manager has a clear job description setting out duties and responsibilities and does not hold a similar position in another organisation.

5.3 The level of delegation and responsibility of the manager, and the lines of accountability, are clearly defined.

5.4 Clear arrangements are in place to identify the person in charge when the manager is absent.

[Regulations: Fostering agency – fitness of provider, Fostering agency – appointment of manager, Fostering agency – fitness of manager, Registered person – general requirements, Local authority fostering service – manager, Fitness of workers, Review of quality of care]

4. Securing and promoting welfare

Outcome

The fostering service promotes and safeguards the child/young person's physical, mental and emotional welfare.

Standard 6 – Providing suitable foster carers

6.1 The fostering service makes available foster carers who provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

6.2 The foster home can comfortably accommodate all who live there. It is inspected annually to make sure that it meets the needs of foster children.

6.3 The home is warm, adequately furnished and decorated and is maintained to a good standard of cleanliness and hygiene.

6.4 Each child placed has her/his own bed and accommodation arrangements reflect the child's assessed need for privacy and space or for any specific need resulting from a disability.

6.5 If the child has been or may have been abused or has abused or has been suspected of abusing another child, then the child's needs and the needs of all other children living in or visiting the home are assessed before any decision is made to place the child or allow sharing of bedrooms. The outcome of that assessment is recorded in writing.

6.6 The home and immediate environment are free of avoidable hazards that might expose a child to risk of injury or harm and contain safety barriers and equipment appropriate to the child's age, development and level of ability.

6.7 The foster carer's preparation and training cover health and safety issues and the carer is provided with written guidelines on their health and safety responsibilities.

6.8 Where the foster carer is expected to provide transport for the child, the fostering service ensures this is safe and appropriate to the child's needs.

6.9 Foster carers understand that they may be interviewed or visited as part of the Inspectorate's inspection process.

Standard 7 – Valuing diversity

7.1 The fostering service ensures that children and young people, and their families, are provided with foster care services which value diversity and promote equality.

7.2 Each child and her/his family have access to foster care services which recognise and address her/his needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality.

7.3 The fostering service ensures that foster carers and social workers work co-operatively to enhance the child's confidence and feeling of self-worth. Foster carers' and social workers' training covers this issue.

7.4 The fostering service ensures that its foster carers provide care which respects and preserves each child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background. Foster carers' preparation and training cover this. If a foster placement has to be made in an emergency and no suitable placement is available in terms of the above, then steps are taken to address the child's needs in terms of gender, etc within 6 weeks.

7.5 The fostering service ensures that their foster carers support and encourage each child to develop skills to help her/him to deal with all forms of discrimination. Foster carers' preparation and training cover this.

7.6 Each child with a disability has access to specific services and support to help her/him to maximise her/his potential and to lead as full a life as possible, including appropriate equipment and, where necessary and appropriate, adaptation of the carer's home and/or vehicle.

7.7 The fostering service ensures that their foster carers give each child encouragement and equal access to opportunities to develop and pursue her/his talents, interests and hobbies. This is set out in the information provided to foster carers. Disabled children are provided with services and supports which enable them to access as wide a range of activities as is possible for them.

Standard 8 – Matching

8.1 Local authority fostering services, and voluntary agencies placing children in their own right, ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs. For agencies providing foster carers to local authorities, those agencies ensure that they offer carers only if they represent appropriate matches for a child for whom a local authority is seeking a carer.

8.2 In matching children with carers, responsible authorities take into account the child's cultural and religious needs.

8.3 Matches are achieved by means of information sharing and consideration involving all relevant professionals, the child and her/his family and potential carers, their families and other children in placement.

8.4 Written foster placement agreements contain specific reference to elements of matching which were taken into consideration in agreeing the placement and identify areas where foster carers need additional support to compensate for any gaps in the match between the child and carer.

8.5 Placement decisions consider the child's assessed racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic needs and match these as closely as possible with the ethnic origin, race, religion, culture and language of the foster family.

8.6 Where transracial or transcommunity placements are made, the responsible authority provides the foster family with additional training, support and information to enable the child to be provided with the best possible care and to develop a positive understanding of her/his heritage.

8.7 Where practicable, each child has the opportunity for a period of introduction to a proposed foster carer so she/he can express an informed view about the placement and become familiar with the carer, the carer's family, any other children in placement, and the home, neighbourhood and any family pets, before moving in. Information for carers explains that this approach is used when possible.

Standard 9 – Protecting from abuse and neglect

9.1 The fostering service protects each child or young person from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation deprivation and discrimination.

9.2 Training for foster carers includes training in caring for a child who has been abused, safe caring skills, managing behaviour and recognising signs of abuse and on ways of boosting and maintaining the child's self-esteem.

9.3 Safe caring guidelines are provided, based on a written policy and included in a foster care agreement, for each foster home, in consultation with the carer and everyone else in the household. The guidelines are agreed with the child's social worker and are explained clearly and appropriately to the child.

9.4 The fostering service makes clear to the foster carers that corporal punishment is not acceptable and that this includes smacking, slapping, shaking and all other humiliating forms of treatment or punishment. This is set out clearly in written information for foster carers.

9.5 Management systems are in place to collate and evaluate information on the circumstances, number and outcome of all allegations of neglect or abuse of a child in foster care. The information is scrutinised regularly.

9.6 The fostering service ensures that foster carers are aware of the particular vulnerability of looked after children and their susceptibility to bullying and procedures are in place to recognise, record and address any instance of bullying and to help foster carers cope with it.

9.7 Each foster carer is provided with full information about the foster child and her/his family to enable the carer to protect the foster child, their own children, other children for whom they have responsibility and themselves.

9.8 The fostering service makes sure that the foster carer has a clear written procedure for use if the foster child is missing from home.

Standard 10 – Promoting contact

10.1 The fostering service makes sure that each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in her/his care plan and/or foster placement agreement.

10.2 There are clear procedures setting out how appropriate contact arrangements for each child in foster care are to be established, maintained, monitored and reviewed.

10.3 The fostering service considers the need for and benefits of appropriate contact for the child when finding/suggesting a suitable foster carer. Attention is paid to supporting contact where the child is placed outside of his/her community.

10.4 The views of the child or young person are sought and given weight in determining contact arrangements.

10.5 In assessment and training of carers, the fostering service stresses the importance of foster carers helping a child to maintain appropriate contacts and covers the skills required to encourage and facilitate such contacts.

10.6 Except where an overriding requirement exists, e.g. a court order, the fostering service ensures that contact does not take place until the child's social worker has carried out a risk assessment and arrangements made for any supervision that is needed.

10.7 The fostering service provides help and support to the carer in dealing with any difficult contact issues that may arise. The fostering service provider ensures that the role of the foster carer in supporting contact arrangements, including any arrangements for the supervision of contact are clearly stated in the Foster Placement Agreement.

10.8 Financial support is provided to the carer for transport or other costs involved in ensuring contacts take place at the desired frequency and in the most suitable place.

10.9 The fostering service ensures that the carer records outcomes of contact arrangements and their perceived impact on the child; this information is fed back to the child's social worker.

Standard 11 – Consultation

11.1 The fostering service ensures that children's opinions, and those of their families and others significant to the child, are sought over all issues which are likely to affect their daily life and their future.

11.2 The fostering service ensures that all foster carers understand the importance of listening to the views of the children in their care, and are trained and supported in listening and responding to children's views.

11.3 The fostering service ensures that the opinions and views of children on all matters affecting them, including day-to-day matters, are ascertained on a regular and frequent basis and not taken for granted.

11.4 Suitable means are provided, frequently, for any child with communication difficulties to make their wishes and feelings known regarding their care and treatment.

11.5 The fostering service ensures that children in foster care know how to raise any concerns or complaints, and ensures that they receive prompt feedback on any concerns or complaints raised.

Standard 12 – Promoting development and health

12.1 The fostering service ensures that it provides foster care services which help each child or young person in foster care to receive health care which meets her/his needs for physical, emotional and social development, together with information and training appropriate to her/his age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about her/his health needs.

12.2 The fostering service is informed about health services, including specialist services, available in the area it covers and takes this into account when finding/suggesting a foster carer for a child. The fostering service ensures that no placement is made which prevents a child from continuing to receive the specialist health care services they need.

12.3 Before a placement begins, the carer is provided with as full a description as possible of the health needs of a child and clear procedures governing consent for the child to receive medical treatment. Where there is an agency placement, the responsible authority provides this information to the agency and the agency passes it on to the carer. If full details of the health needs are not available before placement, a high priority is given to ensuring that the information is obtained and passed to the foster carer once the placement is made.

12.4 The carer is provided with a written health record for each child placed in their care; this is updated during the placement and moves with the child. Depending upon age and understanding, the child has access to and understands the health record kept by the fostering service.

12.5 Each carer is given basic training on health and hygiene issues and first aid, with particular emphasis on health promotion and communicable diseases.

12.6 The fostering service makes clear to the carer their role in terms of helping to promote the health of any child in their care. This includes:

- ❖ ensuring each child in a foster placement is an active, informed participant

- ❖ registering a child with a doctor or dentist when necessary
- ❖ taking the child to any health appointments, including dental and optician appointments, when required
- ❖ helping her/him to access the services that she/he needs
- ❖ giving attention to health issues in everyday care of the child, including diet, personal hygiene, health promotion issues etc
- ❖ acting as an advocate on the child's behalf.

12.7 The fostering service has good links with health agencies and helps the carer to secure services for the child when necessary.

12.8 The fostering service requires foster carers to supply information about the child's health needs for the planning and review process.

Standard 13 – Promoting educational achievement

13.1 The fostering service gives a high priority to meeting the educational needs of each child or young person in foster care and ensures that she/he is encouraged to attain her/his full potential.

13.2 The fostering service gives high priority to helping their foster carers to meet a child's educational needs.

13.3 The fostering service requires foster carers to contribute to the assessment of the child's educational needs and progress for the planning and review process. The fostering service helps the foster carer to contribute to the delivery of any personal education plan.

13.4 The foster carer's role in school contact, e.g., parents evenings, open days, discussions with teachers, in conjunction with the birth parent where appropriate and in line with the care plan, is clearly laid out in the placement agreement.

13.5 The fostering service ensures that their foster carers provide an environment in which education and learning are valued; and that the foster carer establishes an expectation of regular attendance at school, and supports the child's full participation through provision of necessary uniform and equipment, support for completion of homework, and financial and other support for attending school trips and after school activities.

13.6 The fostering service has information systems to demonstrate the educational attainment of the children and young people in their foster care services and to demonstrate the numbers excluded from school.

13.7 The fostering service makes clear its expectations (in relation to school day responsibilities) of foster carers and the arrangements which will be put in place if any child in their care is not in school. Those arrangements include structured occupation during school hours.

13.8 The foster placement agreement identifies where financial responsibility lies for all school costs, including school uniform, school trips and school equipment.

Standard 14 – Preparing for adulthood

14.1 The fostering service ensures that their foster care services help to develop skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living.

14.2 There are clear written requirements of what is expected of foster carers in terms of preparing children and young people for independent or semi-independent living.

14.3 Foster carers receive training and support to enable them to provide effective support and guidance to a young person preparing to move into independent or semi-independent living.

14.4 The fostering service ensures that foster carers understand that they need to provide all children in their care with age and developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning independence skills.

14.5 The fostering service ensures that each young person preparing to move to independent or semi-independent living is consulted about her/his future and encouraged to be actively involved in decision making processes and implementation of the Pathway Plan. (The Pathway Plan is a written forward plan for the young person. It should address those issues relevant to his/her future life when he/she ceases to be looked after. The Plan should include relevant actions cited and cover the topics listed in Schedule 1 of the Children Leaving Care Regulations 2000).

[Regulations: Independent fostering agencies – duty to secure welfare, Arrangements for the protection of children, Behaviour management and absence from foster parent’s home, Duty to promote contact, Health of children placed with foster parents, Education, employment and leisure activities, Independent fostering agencies – complaints and representations]

5. Recruiting, checking, managing, supporting and training staff and foster carers

Outcome

The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people and they are managed, trained and supported in such a way as to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care. The number of staff and carers and their range of qualifications and experience are sufficient to achieve the purposes and functions of the organisation.

Standard 15 – Suitability to work with children

15.1 Any people working in or for the fostering service are suitable people to work with children and young people and to safeguard and promote their welfare.

15.2 There are clear written recruitment and selection procedures for appointing staff which follow good practice in safeguarding children and young people. All personnel responsible for recruitment and selection of staff are trained in, understand and operate these.

15.3 All people working in or for the fostering service are interviewed as part of the selection process and have references checked to assess suitability before taking on responsibilities. Telephone enquiries are made as well as obtaining written references.

15.4 Records are kept of checks and references that have been obtained and their outcomes. CRB checks are renewed every three years.

15.5 All social work staff have an appropriate qualification, or are in the course of obtaining a suitable professional qualification, to work with children and young people, their families and foster carers, and have a good understanding of foster care. They have appropriate knowledge and skills. These include:

- ❖ understanding of the Children Act, the Children Act regulations and guidance, relevant current policies and procedures, Working Together and associated child protection guidance, the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families, the regulatory requirements under the Care Standards Act 2000 and adoption law
- ❖ knowledge of the growth and development of children and an ability to communicate with children and young people
- ❖ understanding the importance of a complaints procedure
- ❖ an ability to promote equality, diversity and the rights of individuals and groups
- ❖ knowledge of the roles of other agencies, in particular health and education.

15.6 Any social work staff involved in assessment and approval of foster carers are qualified social workers, have experience of foster care and family placement work and are trained in assessment. Students and others who do not meet this requirement carry out assessments and approvals under the supervision of someone who takes responsibility for the assessments and approvals.

15.7 All educationalists, psychologists, therapists and other professional staff are professionally qualified and appropriately trained to work with children and young people, their families and foster carers, and have a good understanding of foster care.

15.8 Where unqualified staff carry out social work functions they do so under the direct supervision of qualified social workers, who are accountable for their work.

Standard 16 – Organisation and management of staff

16.1 Staff are organised and managed in a way which delivers an efficient and effective foster care service.

16.2 There is a clear management structure with clear lines of accountability.

16.3 Staff are managed and monitored by people who have appropriate skills and qualifications.

16.4 The level of management delegation and responsibility are clearly defined and are appropriate for the skills, qualifications and experience of the relevant members of staff.

16.5 The fostering service has systems in place to determine, prioritise and monitor workloads and assign tasks to appropriate staff.

16.6 There are structures and systems in place to ensure assessments, approvals and reviews of carers are managed and implemented effectively. Local authorities using agencies check the Inspectorate's inspection reports before doing so, to ensure that there are no concerns about the agencies' assessment, approval and review processes.

16.7 Where a local authority fostering service uses an agency to provide a foster carer, they have a system to ensure that the quality of care to be provided is clearly specified in the contract and appropriate monitoring arrangements are in place to ensure compliance.

16.8 Professional supervision and consultation are provided for social work staff by appropriately qualified and experienced staff.

16.9 Staff and carers undertake on-going training and appropriate professional and skills development. Carers maintain a training portfolio.

16.10 There is adequate administrative back up, office equipment, and infrastructure to enable staff who recruit, assess, supervise, support and train foster carers to carry out their duties in an efficient and effective manner.

16.11 There is an appropriate level of clerical and administrative support.

16.12 Administrative procedures are appropriate for dealing promptly with enquiries from prospective carers and any new request for services.

16.13 There is access to the range of advice needed to provide a full service for children and young people and to support carers. This includes appropriate childcare, medical, educational and other professional and legal advice.

16.14 All employees, sessional workers and consultants are provided with appropriate written contracts, job descriptions and conditions of service.

16.15 All fostering service social workers understand the role of the children's social workers, and there is a clear understanding about how the fostering service social workers and the children's social workers work effectively together.

16.16 Staff have a copy of:

- ❖ the policies and working practices in respect of grievances and disciplinary matters
- ❖ details of the services offered
- ❖ the equal opportunities policy
- ❖ health and safety procedures.

Standard 17 – Sufficient Staff/Carers With The Right Skills/Experience

17.1 The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff and recruits a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

17.2 The full time equivalent staffing complement, in terms of numbers, grades, experience and qualifications, is adequate to meet, at all times, the needs of the fostering service and is in line with the statement of purpose.

17.3 Where a shortfall in staffing levels occurs, there are contingency plans to resolve the situation.

17.4 Staff policies encourage retention of salaried staff – including training, regular supervision, study leave, clear workloads and terms and conditions – and of carers by providing support, training and services.

17.5 The fostering service has a recruitment policy and strategy aimed at recruiting a range of carers to meet the needs of children and young people for whom it aims to provide a service.

17.6 There are clear written recruitment and selection procedures for appointing carers which follow good practice in safeguarding children and young people. All personnel responsible for recruitment and selection of carers are trained in, understand and operate these.

17.7 All prospective carers are interviewed as part of the assessment and selection process and have references checked to assess suitability before being approved. Telephone enquiries are made as well as obtaining written references.

17.8 All prospective carers are approved only after they and other adults at the same address have applied for and received satisfactory enhanced disclosure certificates from the Criminal Records Bureau.

17.9 Records are kept of checks and references that have been obtained and their outcomes. CRB checks are renewed every three years.

17.10 There is a clearly set out assessment process for carers which defines:

- ❖ the task to be undertaken
- ❖ the qualities, competences or aptitudes being sought or to be achieved
- ❖ the standards to be applied in the assessment
- ❖ the stages and content of the selection process and the timescales involved
- ❖ the information to be given to applicants.

17.11 In assessing qualities, competences and aptitudes for fostering, fostering services consider them in relation to the following:

- ❖ child rearing
- ❖ caring for children born to somebody else
- ❖ contact between fostered children and their families
- ❖ helping children make sense of their past
- ❖ sexual boundaries and attitudes
- ❖ awareness of issues around child abuse
- ❖ approaches to discipline
- ❖ awareness of how to promote secure attachments between children and appropriate adults
- ❖ awareness of own motivation for fostering/own needs to be met through the fostering process
- ❖ religion
- ❖ racial/cultural/linguistic issues
- ❖ standard of living and lifestyle

- ❖ health
- ❖ own experience of parenting and being parented
- ❖ own experiences in relation to disability and/or attitudes to disability.

Standard 18 – Fair And Competent Employer

18.1 The fostering service is a fair and competent employer, with sound employment practices and good support for its staff and carers.

18.2 There are sound employment practices, in relation to both staff and carers.

18.3 Out of hours management and support services are available for foster carers.

18.4 There are management systems for carer supervision, appraisal and support.

18.5 There is a comprehensive health and safety policy for carers, children and staff which covers all legal requirements.

18.6 For agencies, there is a public liability and professional indemnity insurance for all staff and carers. The insurance policy covers costs arising as a result of child abuse claims against any staff or carers.

18.7 There is a whistleblowing policy which is made known to all staff and carers.

Standard 19 – Training

19.1 There is a good quality training programme to enhance individual skills and to keep staff up-to-date with professional and legal developments.

19.2 There is a clear plan for the training and development of all staff involved in fostering work through induction, post-qualifying and in-service training. All new staff are given induction training commencing within 7 days of starting their employment and being completed within 10 weeks.

19.3 There is an appraisal or joint review scheme which identifies the training and development needs of all staff involved in fostering work and carers. Individual programmes of training are available, outcomes are monitored and linked to assessment of staff and carer needs, and relate to the tasks assigned to them.

19.4 All employees are kept informed of changes in any legislation or guidance that are relevant to their jobs.

19.5 The effectiveness of training programmes for the staff providing the fostering service is routinely evaluated and training programmes are reviewed and updated at least annually.

19.6 Training programmes reflect the policies of the fostering service.

19.7 Joint training between fostering service staff and foster carers is held on a regular basis.

Standard 20 – Accountability And Support

20.1 All staff are properly accountable and supported.

20.2 All staff have clear written details of the duties and responsibilities expected of them, together with the policies and procedures of the organisation.

20.3 All staff who come into contact with foster carers and prospective foster carers and children/young people receive management supervision and a record is kept by the line manager of the content of the supervision and of progress made. Supervision sessions are regular and planned in advance.

20.4 Staff receive regular, planned appraisals from their line manager.

20.5 Each member of staff has the opportunity to attend regular staff and team meetings.

Standard 21 – Management And Support Of Carers

21.1 The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.

21.2 There is a clear strategy for working with carers that is documented and understood. This includes:

- ❖ arrangements for training and development
- ❖ encouragement for self help groups
- ❖ supervision
- ❖ support services
- ❖ information and advice
- ❖ assistance in dealing with other relevant services, such as health and education
- ❖ out-of-hours support
- ❖ respite care
- ❖ arrangements for reviews.

21.5 The role of the supervising social worker is clear both to the worker and the carer. Annual review reports are prepared and are available to the Fostering Panel.

21.6 There is a good system of communication between the fostering service social workers and the child's social worker.

Standard 22 – Supervision of Carers

22.1 The fostering service is a managed one which provides supervision for foster carers and helps them to develop their skills.

22.2 Foster care agreements ensure foster carers have a full understanding of what is expected of foster carers, the agency and/or the local authority.

22.3 Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker and has access to adequate social work and other professional support, information and advice to enable her or him to provide consistent, high quality care for a child or young person placed in her or his home. The supervising social worker ensures each carer she or he supervises is informed in writing of, and accepts, understands and operates within, all standards, policies and guidance agreed by the fostering service.

22.4 In producing the Foster Care Agreement for a foster carer, in line with Schedule 5 of the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003, the fostering provider ensures that the Agreement contains the information they need to know, in a comprehensible style, to carry out their functions as a foster carer effectively.

22.5 On approval, carers are given a handbook which covers policies, procedures, guidance, legal information and insurance details. This is updated regularly.

22.6 Supervising social workers meet regularly with foster carers. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carers' work. Foster carers' files include records of supervisory meetings. There are occasional unannounced visits, at least one each year.

22.7 There is a system of practical support for carers, including: out of hours management support prompt payment, insurance cover, support for foster care associations, respite care ,where appropriate access to social work support.

22.8 Information about the procedures for dealing with complaints and representations is widely available. Complaints and representations are recorded and monitored and the outcome evaluated to inform future provision of services.

22.9 Information about the procedures to deal with investigations into allegations is made known to foster care staff, carers and children and young people and includes the provision of independent support to the foster carer(s) during an investigation.

22.10 Records about allegations of abuse are kept and monitored and there is a clear policy framework which outlines the circumstances in which a carer should be removed from the foster carer register.

Standard 23 – Training of Carers

23.1 The fostering service ensures that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.

23.2 Pre-approval and induction training for each carer includes opportunities to benefit from the experience and knowledge of existing carers. All new foster carers receive induction training.

23.3 All training fits within a framework of equal opportunities, anti-discriminatory practice and is organised to encourage and facilitate attendance by foster carers, for example by including convenient times and venues and by providing childcare and reasonable expenses.

23.4 Where two adults in one household are approved as joint carers, both successfully complete all training. Each foster carer is trained in identified key areas prior to any child being placed in his or her home. Attention is given to the training needs of particular groups, e.g. male carers.

23.5 There is an on-going programme of training and self-development for foster carers to develop their skills and tackle any weaknesses.

23.6 Appropriate training on safe caring is provided for all members of the foster household.

23.7 Specific consideration is given to any help or support needed by the sons and daughters of foster carers.

23.8 Each carer's Annual Review includes an appraisal of training and development needs, which is documented in the review report.

23.9 The effectiveness of training received is evaluated and reviewed annually.

[Regulations: Support, training and information for foster parents, Staffing of fostering service, Fitness of workers, Employment of staff, Assessment of prospective foster parents, Approval of foster parents]

6. Records

In meeting these standards in relation to record keeping, it may well be that local authority fostering services maintain some of the records within the part of the social services department that is responsible for supervising the child's placement, rather than the fostering services. Nothing in these standards requires two separate parts of the social services department to maintain duplicate sets of records, as long as both parts have access to the records.

Outcome

All appropriate records are kept and are accessible in relation to the fostering services and the individual foster carers and foster children.

Standard 24 – Case Records For Children

24.1 The fostering service ensures that an up-to-date, comprehensive case record is maintained for each child or young person in foster care which details the nature and quality of care provided and contributes to an understanding of her/his life events. Relevant information from the case records is made available to the child and to anyone involved in her/his care.

24.2 There is a written policy on case recording which establishes the purpose, format and contents of files, and clarifies what information is kept on the foster carer's files and what information is kept on the child's files.

24.3 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. The agency provides copies of the records and documents in relation to children placed by a responsible authority immediately, on receipt of a written request. When a child leaves an agency foster care placement, the agency sends all relevant records to the responsible authority.

24.4 The fostering service ensures that the foster carer knows why the child is in foster care and understands the basis for the current placement, its intended duration and purpose, and the details of the child's legal status.

24.5 The foster carer encourages the child to reflect on and understand her/his history, according to the child's age and ability, and to keep appropriate memorabilia. The fostering service makes this role clear to their foster carers.

24.6 The fostering service gives the foster carer access to all relevant information to help the child understand and come to terms with past events. (Where necessary information is not forthcoming from the responsible authority, a copy of the written request for information is kept.)

24.7 The carer is trained and provided with the necessary equipment to record significant life events for the child, and to encourage the child to make such recordings, including photograph albums.

24.8 The fostering service ensures that their carers store information in a secure manner and understand what information they are expected to keep and what information needs to be passed on to the fostering service.

Standard 25 –Complaints Procedure

25.1 The service will advise staff, others involved with the fostering service, those in receipt of a service or those who have been refused a service, about their right to make representation or complaint. These people will be for example:

- ❖ Children who have been or may be fostered
- ❖ Parents and guardians of such children
- ❖ Carers and prospective carers
- ❖ Those making an enquiry about becoming a foster carer.

Children are to be helped to do so if this is required.

The written complaints procedure must be readily available on request.

25.2 The complaints procedure:

- ❖ Includes information on how to make representations or complaints;
- ❖ Does not restrict the issues they may complain about;
- ❖ Specifies how representations or complaints will be handled;
- ❖ Specifies how long the procedure will take;
- ❖ Includes an informal resolution stage;
- ❖ Provides information on other avenues for complaint, where appropriate, the right and means for all concerned to access the complaints procedure of local authorities, the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales, the Commissioner for local Administration and the Children’s Commissioner for Wales;
- ❖ Sets out clear arrangements for the handling of any complaint made against the manager of the fostering service;
- ❖ Is accessible to the disabled and to those with sensory and learning impairments and to those whose first language is not English or Welsh;
- ❖ Enables people other than the child to make complaints on behalf of a child, provided that where the child is competent to do so he consents to this;
- ❖ Ensures that no individual will suffer discrimination, disadvantage, withdrawal or reduction of a services a result of making representations or complaints; and

- ❖ Ensures that no person who is the subject of a complaint is involved in any part of its consideration other than, if the fostering service considers it appropriate, at the informal stage only.

25.3 Any representation or complaint is addressed seriously and without delay. All staff receive training in the complaints procedures covering the following areas:

- ❖ What constitutes a representation or complaint;
- ❖ The procedure for dealing with a representation or complaint and how this is recorded;
- ❖ To whom a representation or complaint may be made outside the fostering service;
- ❖ The procedure to be followed should a representation or complaint not be resolved promptly by informal means, including who should be notified and the keeping of records; and
- ❖ How a child can be assisted in making a representation or complaint.

25.4 The fostering service maintains a complete record of all complaints and representations made and how they are dealt with, including the outcome.

25.5 The fostering service reviews the records at least annually to check satisfactory operation of the complaints procedure, to identify any patterns of complaint and action taken on individual complaints.

25.6 The fostering service takes appropriate action from such review in relation to its policies and practices, as well as taking any necessary further follow up action in relation to individual cases. A written record should be made of action taken.

Standard 26 – Administrative records

26.1 The fostering service's administrative records contain all significant information relevant to the running of the foster care service and as required by regulations.

26.2 Separate records are kept for:

- ❖ staff, employed and independent/ sessional
- ❖ carers
- ❖ children
- ❖ complaints
- ❖ allegations.

26.3 There is a system to monitor the quality and adequacy of records, and remedial action is taken when necessary.

26.4 Confidential records are stored securely at all times and there is a clear policy on access.

26.5 Records are in a form which can be readily passed on if a child moves to another placement, or ceases to be looked after or if references are requested on a member of staff or carer.

26.6 There is a permanent, private, secure record for each child and foster carer referred to or appointed by the organisation. This can, in compliance with legal requirements for safeguards, be seen by the child and by her/his parents or foster carers.

26.7 There is a written policy and procedural guidance for staff for the keeping and retention of case files ensuring that foster carers, fostered children and their parents know the nature of the records maintained and how to access them.

26.8 There is a procedure on storing and managing confidential information that is known to panel members, staff and specialist advisers.

26.9 Written entries in records are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, and distinguish between fact, opinion and third party information.

26.10 The system for keeping records is congruent with the Looking After Children System/Integrated Children's System.

26.11 Records are kept of checks and references that have been obtained and their outcomes.

26.12 Children and foster carers are encouraged to access their records, make additions and comments and record personal statements, including any dissent.

26.13 There is a system for keeping records about allegations and complaints and for handling these confidentially and securely. Records of complaints and allegations are clearly recorded on the relevant files for staff, carers and children – including details of the investigation, conclusion reached and action taken. Separate records are also kept which bring together data on allegations and on complaints.

[Regulations: Records with respect to fostering services, Case records relating to foster parents and others]

7. Fitness of premises for use as fostering service

Outcome

The premises used as offices by the fostering provider are suitable for the purpose.

Standard 27 – Premises

27.1 Premises used as offices by the fostering service are appropriate for the purpose.

27.2 There are identifiable office premises to which staff and others with a legitimate interest have access during normal office hours.

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

- ❖ facilities for the secure retention of records in a lockable room,
- ❖ appropriate measures to safeguard IT systems, and
- ❖ an appropriate security system.

27.4 Premises provide an equipped base from which staff work.

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

[Regulation: Fitness of premises]

8. Financial requirements

Outcome

The agency fostering services are financially viable and appropriate and timely payments are made to foster carers.

Standard 28 – Financial viability

28.1 The agency ensures it is financially viable at all times and has sufficient financial resources to fulfil its obligations.

28.2 Procedures exist to deal with situations of financial crisis, such as disclosing information to purchasers and liaising with them to safeguard the welfare of children receiving services through the agency.

28.3 Regulations and guidelines imposed upon businesses are conformed with. This includes Income Tax (PAYE), National Insurance and VAT.

Standard 29 –Financial Processes

29.1 The financial processes/systems of the agency are properly operated and maintained in accordance with sound and appropriate accounting standards and practice.

29.2 The agency has clearly documented financial arrangements for control and supervision of its financial affairs and powers.

29.3 The agency has a clearly written set of principles and standards governing its financial management and these are communicated to its managers and accountants.

29.4 The agency has a written set of principles describing the financial procedures and responsibilities to be followed by all staff, consultants, professional experts, directors, trustees and any manager.

29.5 The agency's accounts are maintained and properly audited by a registered accountant.

29.6 The registered provider regularly receives information on the financial state of the agency.

29.7 The agency publishes its charges for each of its services and has a clear policy for the charging of fees and expenses for any additional services it is asked to provide. The statement is available on request to purchasers and others with a legitimate interest.

Standard 30 – Payment to carers

30.1 Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with him or her. Payments are made promptly and at the agreed time. Allowances and fees are reviewed annually.

30.2 There is a written policy on fostering allowances. This and the current allowance levels are well publicised and provided annually to each carer. The carer receives clear information about the allowances and expenses payable and how to access them, before a child is placed.

[Regulation: Financial position]

9. Fostering panels

Outcome

Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care.

Standard 31

31.1 Fostering panels have clear written policies and procedures, which are implemented in practice, about the handling of their functions.

31.2 The written procedures cover decision-making when all members of the panel are not in agreement.

31.3 Fostering panels have access to medical expertise as required.

31.4 Fostering panels provide a quality assurance function in relation to the assessment process – in particular to monitor and review the work of the assessors; to provide feedback; to identify problems; and to ensure that there is consistency of approach in assessment across the service, that it is fair to all applicants and that it has been completed in a thorough and rigorous way.

31.5 Foster panels receive management information about the outcome of foster carers' annual reviews.

31.6 For local authority panels, the panel monitors the range and type of carers available to the authority in comparison with the needs of children.

31.7 The independent members of the panel include, as far as possible, expertise in education and in child health.

31.8 One of the independent members is normally a person who has at any time been placed with foster carers or whose child has at any time been placed with foster carers.

[Regulations: Establishment of fostering panel, Meetings of fostering panel, Functions of fostering panel]

10. Short-term breaks

Outcome

When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.

Standard 32

32.1 Where a fostering service provides short-term breaks for children in foster care, they have policies and procedures, implemented in practice, to meet the particular needs of children receiving short-term breaks.

31.2 Where appropriate, requirements for foster care placements for short-term breaks are different from those for children being fostered for longer periods. In particular, birth parents remain central to the promotion of health and education needs.

11. Family And Friends As Carers

Outcome

Local authority fostering services' policies and procedures for assessing, approving, supporting and training foster carers recognise the particular contribution that can be made by and the particular needs of family and friends as carers.

Standard 33

33.1 These standards are all relevant to carers who are family and friends of the child, but there is a recognition of the particular relationship and position of family and friends carers.

33.2 Local authority fostering services are sensitive to pre-existing relationships in assessing and approving family and friends as foster carers.

33.3 The support and training needs for family and friends carers are assessed and met in the same way as for any other carers.

33.4 The mechanisms within a local authority fostering service for assessing and approving family and friend carers are designed in a way that encourages their consideration as carers.

Glossary

This glossary is intended to be of general assistance to the reader in interpreting the standards. The definitions provided do not affect any meaning that a term may have under any relevant legislation.

Abuse

Something that causes actual or likely significant harm to a child. May be physical, emotional or sexual, or neglect of the child.

Advocate

A person assisting a child in putting forward their views or making their case on their behalf.

Bullying

Generally, bullying would comprise the intentional or perceived causing of pain, distress, anxiety, humiliation or social exclusion to one child by one or more other children, by physical or verbal means, or through damage or loss of property.

Care plan

An agreed plan for looking after a child and meeting that child's current and future needs, made by the placing authority under the Children Act 1989.

Child protection

Taking reasonable measures to reduce the risk of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, neglect or significant harm of a child, enabling children or staff to report concerns about actual or potential abuse or significant harm, and responding appropriately to allegations, occurrences and suspicions of abuse or significant harm of a child.

Criminal Records Bureau

A national organisation conducting police checks to enable an assessment to be made (e.g. by a school) on the suitability of a person to work with children. Different levels of check are available for different levels of regular contact and supervisory responsibility for children.

Induction

Initial training or guidance given at the start of involvement with a fostering services provider.

Job Description

A written, agreed and up to date statement of the main tasks and responsibilities of a staff member's job within the fostering service, including overall definition of their role and the person to whom they are accountable.

Neglect

Single or repeated failure to take appropriate action which results in harm or distress being suffered by the child or young person.

Placement

The agreement for a child to live in a particular place.

Policy

An operational statement of intent which helps staff make sound decisions and take actions which are legal, consistent with the aims of the fostering service, and in the best interests of children and young people.

Procedure

The steps taken to fulfil a policy.

Registered person

A person who either provides a fostering service (through an agency) and is registered with the National Care Standards Commission to do so (the registered provider) or who manages the service and is registered with the Commission to do so (the registered manager).

Staff

Person working in the fostering service or on behalf of the service, whether paid or voluntary, full-time or part-time, casual, agency or contract.

Statement of purpose

A document required by the Regulations which defines the objectives of the fostering service, and covers those issues set out in the regulations and national minimum standards.

Welfare

Meeting each individual child's reasonable physical, security, personal, emotional, and spiritual needs, providing support and guidance as needed, and enabling the child's development for the future and fulfilment in the present, taking into account the child's age, characteristics and wishes.

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