



Foster Carers Handbook



**Children's Services
Education and Social Care Department
Shetland Islands Council**





Foster Carers Handbook

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Introduction

It is not possible to learn to become a good carer by reading a book. The aim of this handbook is that it should be used as a guide, and referred to when necessary, or dipped into when a particular topic arises.

The handbook contains some essential information for all Foster Carers. Some of you will be familiar with some of the procedures, but others, such as our new and less experienced Foster Carers will find the handbook helpful as they begin to Foster.

In conjunction with your handbook, you will also receive a copy of the updated CHILD PROTECTION PROCEDURES, which all Foster Carers should become familiar with.

The Family Placement team are available to Foster Carers on the telephone and through the support groups. The Out of Hours Social Worker is always available in the event of an emergency situation. The Out of Hours contact number is 01595 695611.



Guidance for Fostering Allowances and Claimable Expenses

The Fostering Allowance, which is paid fortnightly in advance, is intended to cover the cost of meeting the needs of a Looked After Child, and is calculated on the basis of elements for food, clothing, fuel, light, household goods (TV, washing, telephone, etc), pocket money, travel, gifts, clubs and magazines etc.

This method of payment delegates financial responsibility to Foster Carers, and it allows flexibility in spending the allowance as and when the child's needs require.

Fostering Allowances are paid directly into the Foster Carer's bank, fortnightly in advance. Due to this, emergency and respite carers may sometimes find that they have been overpaid when a child leaves. This can be adjusted by arrangement with the carers social worker, support worker or the relevant administrative worker. If, on any occasion, the allowance does not arrive when expected, we should be notified immediately.

Holidays, Birthdays and Christmas

Foster Carers are encouraged to treat children in their care as they would a child of their own, and the provision of holidays, giving Birthday and Christmas presents are important aspects of family life. The Fostering Service tries to compensate for the extra expense of these events by paying the following rates:

1. Holiday Allowance - two weeks Fostering Allowance. Normally paid at the commencement of School Summer Holidays, but can be paid in line with planned holidays.
2. Christmas Allowance - one weeks Fostering Allowance. For children of other faiths, alternative arrangements can be made.
3. Birthday Allowance - one week Fostering Allowance is paid before the child's birthday.

Enhanced Allowances

Enhanced Allowances can be paid for a child who requires care and attention above what is considered usual for a Looked After Child of his/her age, or where there are extra costs involved in the care of the child. Special Forms are available for Social Workers to make application, which is then passed to the Service Manager (Children's Resources) for consideration. Generally, the requirement of an enhanced allowance would be assessed at the commencement of the placement.

Equipment

The provision of equipment, which Foster Carers may require for a particular placement, can be discussed between Foster Carers and social workers or support workers. This could include beds and bedding, bedroom furniture, prams, car seats, buggies and cots. Aids and adaptations for children with additional support needs can also be provided.

Pocket Money

Fostering Allowances make provision to cover pocket money for the child. Like any parents, Foster Carers should aim to teach children the value of money as part of the growing up process.

The level of pocket money an individual child receives should be decided in discussion with his/her social worker, taking into account previous experiences and the expectations of the foster home. On average 10% of the Fostering Allowance is made up of funding for pocket money, gifts, clubs and magazines.

Child's Own Money, Investments or Property

Even a very young child who is looked after away from home may own property or money in his/her own right. It may be so in a case where the parents of the child may have died leaving an estate. The child may also have received a sum of money as compensation, for example from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme, or as an insurance payment.

It may be that the child's financial affairs are dealt with by Social Work, but Foster Carers may also be given control of a child's Bank Book. The Foster Carer does not have a right to use a child's money for his/her own purposes. Foster Carers having control of such an account should be able to demonstrate that any money withdrawn has been used for the benefit of the child. Similar caution should apply in respect of any benefits such as Disability Living Allowance or Severe Disability Allowance which is paid in the child's own right, even though carers may have withdrawn that benefit.

The child's right to his/her own property must be respected. It is important to remember that whatever is important to the child e.g. toys, books, clothes, mementos from his/her past belongs to the child rather than the parents or carers. Belongings are particularly important for children who live separately from their siblings and parents - and however poor or small a child's property may appear to an adult, it should not be destroyed or discarded without the child's agreement.

Ideally, Foster Carers should encourage children to save a proportion of their money.

Hire Purchase

A Foster Carer should never sign any hire purchase agreements on behalf of a young person: The Foster Carer could be made liable for the payment of goods purchased by the young person.

Insurance

Foster Carers are not permitted to take out a Life Insurance Policy in respect of their foster child.

It is a requirement of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 that Foster Carers have adequate insurance, and that they should have appropriate cover for property (where appropriate) for home contents and car insurance. The Council's Public and Employers' Liability Insurance covers all Foster Carers for public liability.

Travelling Expenses and Mileage Claims

The Fostering Allowance contains an element to cover ordinary travel e.g. for family outings, shopping trips, routine visits to Doctors, Dentists and social functions.

If a child's Plan decides, and the funding is agreed beforehand, additional travel costs will be reimbursed.

Travel claims should be made on a monthly basis.

Permanent and long term Foster Carers

Mileage can be claimed for the following:

- Contact visits to parents, siblings and other significant people in the child's life.
- Attendance at LAC Reviews, Children's Hearings or Court.
- Attendance at Educational Meetings.
- Any other meetings instigated by the Service.
- Attendance at training days.

Emergency, Short Term and Respite Foster Carers

It is recognised that placements may be unplanned and sudden and Foster Carers can be unprepared for the additional expense incurred. In this case, Mileage can be claimed for visits, entertainments and outings that may be in the child's best interests. This requires to be agreed in advance with the child's social worker or the Foster Carer's social worker or support worker.

Ferry Swipe Cards

Foster Carers resident on Islands will be issued with Ferry Cards to cover the cost of travelling to meetings, contact etc. These cards can be obtained through the Fostering and Adoption Team.

Telephone Expenses

Extra expenses will be incurred by Foster Carers in connection with a child's placement and by the child who needs to keep in touch with his/her family and social worker. Foster Carers should make a note of these extra expenses which can be reimbursed. Your telephone provider will provide, on request, an itemised bill.

Social calls to friends, made by the child, should be treated as part of the normal experience of family life. No extra payment can be made for these. Although children should be encouraged to use the telephone, it is recognised that carers may have to exercise some control and set limits which would normally apply within a family in connection with social calls.

Expenses incurred through use of a child's mobile phone cannot be reimbursed through the service. Foster Carers should set limits regarding the cost of children's mobile phones.

Other Allowances

Payment for any other expenses should be requested through the child's social worker. The consideration of other allowances is fairly broad, so that each case can be judged on its own merits. For instance, a child may pursue sport competitively, or have a particular talent for music and this may require an additional allowance in order that the Foster Carer can nurture the child's talent. Similarly, they may be considered for school trips and holidays.

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Recommended Clothing Requirement for Looked After Children/Young People

A *clothing allowance* is paid over and above the *Fostering allowance* and should be used to buy suitable and appropriate clothing and footwear for each child/young person in your care.

The weekly clothing allowance is as follows: (2007-2008)

| | |
|-------------------|--------|
| 0 – 4 years old | £13.31 |
| 5 – 10 years old | £17.26 |
| 11 – 15 years old | £21.64 |
| 16 + years old | £24.14 |

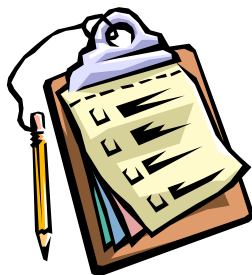
The minimum clothing requirement for boys:

| | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 6 pairs socks | 1 waterproof jacket/coat/anorak |
| 6 pairs pants | 1 pair shoes |
| 2 pairs pyjamas | 1 pair trainers |
| 1 dressing gown | 1 pair slippers |
| 3 shirts/t-shirts | toiletries |
| 2 jumpers | brush, comb, toothbrush |
| 2 pairs jeans/trousers | Wellington boots |

The minimum clothing requirement for girls:

| | |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| 6 pairs socks | 2 pairs jeans/trousers |
| 6 pairs pants | 1 waterproof jacket/coat/anorak |
| 3 bras | 1 pair shoes |
| 2 nighties/pyjamas | 1 pair trainers |
| 1 dressing gown | 1 pair slippers |
| 3 blouses/t-shirts | toiletries |
| 2 jumpers/cardigans | brush, comb, toothbrush |
| 2 skirts or dresses | Wellington boots |

Clothing is part of a child's concept of self, fundamental to his/her sense of identity and self esteem. For this reason, it is generally not encouraged for Foster Carers to buy second hand clothing for children who are in foster care. Foster Carers should involve the child and his/her parents in choices about clothing. When the child leaves the placement, the Foster Carer should ensure that the child leaves with at least the minimum of clothing listed above.



Health and Safety Checklist – Foster Homes

Under 10 years old

Indoor and outdoor equipment should be kept safe, clean and well maintained and to a good, hygienic standard.

The house should be free from hazards and be reasonable well organised with sufficient storage for toys and equipment.

Whenever possible, there should be an outside play space and this should be safe and secure.

The home must be heated to a comfortable temperature. This requirement is satisfied as long as there is a fixed gas fire/open fire/central heating and the fire is fitted with a permanent form of ventilation to supply adequate air. All fires MUST be fitted with fixed fireguards.

Rooms should be well lit with both natural and artificial light.

Rooms should be well ventilated. Having some windows open and a generally “fresh” atmosphere would satisfy this requirement.

Account should be taken of the amount of space available for children to play in and the appropriateness of the layout.

Toilet and washing facilities must be accessible to children and should be clean and well maintained. Non-slip flooring is recommended. There should be no electrical appliances in bathrooms except those worked by a pull cord switch. Exceptions are only made for shaver points and electric shower units.

There must be a facility for food to be stored, prepared and served hygienically. There is an expectation that looked after children will eat meals seated at a dining/kitchen table as opposed to eating in front of television sets. When appropriate, provision for sterilising feeding bottles, utensils etc for the preparation of baby foods.

There should be space and furniture available for children to have comfortable and undisturbed naps during the day if appropriate to their age. Cots should be provided for children less than 2 years.

Cot duvets should NOT be used for babies under 12 months.

Locks must be fitted to balcony doors and doors leading to balconies. The key must be kept safe to hand and out of the reach of small children.

All windows above ground level should be secured so as not to open more than 4 inches (10cm) wherever the window opens and keys kept safely out of reach of small children.

Where there are double glazed sealed units without casements, alternative exits should be provided and advice sought from the Fire Brigade if necessary.

Impact absorbing materials must be used under climbing equipment, swings and slides whether indoors or outdoors, e.g. cushions, carpet, grass, safety surfaces.

Alcohol and all medication whether prescription or bought over the counter MUST be stored safely out of reach of children – preferably in a medicine chest fitted with a key.

Over 10 Years Old

The same basic rules apply as for under 10 years old children with these additions –

Car keys should not be left lying around, but should be put away securely.

Sniffing of glue and aerosols is very dangerous. Carers need to be aware of the risks and ensure that materials are locked away or give thought to purchasing alternative non-toxic products.

Carers should attend training in drug awareness to enable them to recognise both the substances and the symptoms.

Tools, e.g. screwdrivers and hammers, as well as kitchen knives, may be used by young people who wish to harm themselves or others. Carers should consider how they could make their home safe whilst allowing young people to use tools properly under supervision.

Under no circumstances should guns or other firearms be kept on foster carer's premises, except where explicitly agreed by the Head of Children's Services following careful risk assessment.

Pesticides, toxic materials and weed killers etc must be secured out of reach of children. Adolescents sometimes have a desire to experiment with alcohol so it is important that they are shown a responsible example at home. Alcohol should, therefore, be suitably stored to prevent small children getting access to it, and older children being tempted to try it.



Placing Children with Dog-owning Families

This leaflet is designed to offer some guidance to social workers, carers and members of Temporary and Permanency panels on the question of dogs in foster families and adoptive families.

It is estimated that there are over six million dogs in Great Britain today. This means that approximately one in four homes has a dog. Dogs are, therefore, a prominent feature in our society. Children often have a marked interest in animals, especially dogs, may well have been brought up with dogs prior to becoming looked after and, for many, the dog is a significant member of the family and a very real friend.

Dogs do present dangers and risks, of course, and these must never be minimised. There have been occurrences where children have been injured, or, tragically, even killed by dogs. Inevitably, such incidents, although rare, receive high media attention which, while warranted, has not always been well informed, has frequently been sensationalised and emotive and has often singled out specific breeds as “killers” or “devil dogs”. Such high profile and dramatic coverage has caused many social work agencies to introduce policies on dogs and some, for example, will not approve substitute families owning a Rottweiler.

Many more use foster care agreements which require notification to the agency should the family at any point own a dog which is or becomes registered under the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. Adoption and fostering panel members have become understandably worried about recommending the placement of children in dog-owning families and in an attempt to address such worries, some agencies have developed checklists or questionnaires for assessing social workers to use to provide information on the dog, its temperament and the arrangements for its care. Fears that a child may be attacked, therefore, or that his or her health may be compromised by the household dog, have justifiably brought consideration of substitute carers who own a pet dog under even closer scrutiny.

Canine characteristics

Dogs are fundamentally pack animals. In pack formations, there is always a pack leader, usually a male but not infrequently a female, the “alpha” bitch. Thereafter, there is normally a hierarchy or pecking order and to prevent squabbling or jostling for position, the owner of two or more dogs needs to be identified as the pack leader and bolster his or her position. The owner should always be the ultimate “pack leader”, of course, with every other human member of the household holding a “pack position” above any of the dogs.

In an increasingly urban society, most people spend less and less time in close proximity to dogs and opportunities to observe canine behaviour and to understand it are restricted. It is essential, nevertheless, that social workers find out something of the owners perception of their dog, its disposition and behaviour.

The dog in the home

It will be useful for social workers to obtain information on certain key areas, however, not simply when carrying out assessments of prospective carers but also to assist in making placements of children and subsequently monitoring them.

- Confirm what breed the dog is.
- Establish if the dog was acquired from a reputable breeder, from commercial kennels, a pet shop, a rescue centre or some other source.
- Older dogs acquired from rescue centres often have a history of neglect, ill treatment or abandonment.
- Find out how long the dog has lived with the family and whether, in fact, this is its first home.
- Find out who is mainly responsible for looking after the dog.
- Determine the feeding arrangements for the dog – is the dog food kept out of reach of a child? etc.
- Be clear about where the dog sleeps.
- Check on exercise and “toileting” routines.
- Obtain some information on health care – is the dog vaccinated and wormed regularly?
- Observe how the dog behaves when you visit.
- Clarify the dog’s age.
- Explore how the family will cope, if, after placement, the combination of dogs and children proves untenable.
- A number of foster carers and adopters earn their livings from dogs as kennel owners, breeders, dog handlers etc – it is vital that the possible impact of a new child or children is closely examined.

Further information on these issues may be obtainable from referees who will often have visited the applicant’s home, perhaps even with their own children and who may prove to be a valuable source of objective comment.

Introducing the child to the home

When actually introducing the child and dog for the first time, some thought should be given to how and where that is done. If the dog is territorial and barks or guards when strangers visit the home, it may be better for a first meeting to take place outside or on the child's home ground. Rehearsing the meeting with the child in advance may be necessary and some children will need to be taught how to approach a dog. Most dogs like to be approached from the front, offering a hand to sniff and then progressing to scratching under the dog's chin. Few dogs, especially small dogs, appreciate someone looming over them or trying to pat them on the top of the head at a first meeting. The dog should be on a lead at this point, certainly not on the owner's lap, where the guarding instinct may come to the forefront, and should have room to move away if need be. At all times, an adult should be supervising and this will be essential in the first weeks of the placement as well. Even after child and dog appear to be settled, it is up to the adult, preferably the adult with main responsibility for the dog, to remain vigilant when the dog and the child are together. After an initial "honeymoon", many children in permanent placement can direct more challenging behaviour towards the new family this can extend to the canine family member as well.

Temporary fostering

Much of the foregoing will also apply in temporary fostering situations. The planned element will frequently be absent, of course, so families offering temporary care need to be helped to give careful thought to the impact of the sudden arrival of frightened, distressed or even angry children on themselves, their own children and the family dog.

Most children who require temporary care are already known to social workers, even if the admission itself takes place in emergency circumstances. Any information on the child's attitude to dogs, therefore, needs to be established if the child has a history of allergies, is very afraid of dogs, has mistreated animals or his or her culture views dogs in a certain light. All these issues might rule out a possible placement.

The information passed to the child's social worker on the selected foster home also needs to include basic details on the dog so that some initial preparation of the child can take place before arriving on the doorstep to be greeted by a large, boisterous dog. Once the placement is made, adult vigilance is again required at all times to ensure that both child and dog remain safe. Most dogs in temporary foster homes have learned to cope with new, sometimes demanding children but there is never any room for complacency.

Death of a dog

There is always the possibility that, particularly if placing a young child in a family with a mature dog, the animal will die while the child is still relatively young. Carers obviously need to give this matter some thought in advance. If an old dog is failing or in pain, decisions may need to be taken about euthanasia. How will this decision be taken? Will the child be involved? Will the vet come to the house or will the dog be taken to the surgery? Afterwards, what is to happen to the body? Will the vet make arrangements for disposal or will the dog come home for burial in the garden? There are now a number of companies which organise pet interments or even cremations and the opportunity for a child to grieve and participate in the rituals of mourning may be very beneficial. Sharing in the family's grief can be an inclusive, unifying experience and can even prove a trigger for exploring past losses to help assist in their assimilation.

Disadvantages of dogs

- There are some minor health risks for children associated with dogs. Routine canine health care and sensible hygiene precautions should eliminate all of these.
- Some children may be allergic to dogs. In such cases, even the most rigorous cleaning regime may not prevent allergic reactions and placement in a dog-owning household may simply be out of the question. It is never worth just making the placement and hoping that the child will become accustomed to the dog's presence and build up resistance. The risk of disruption, for either dog or child, is simply too high. It is worth noting, however, that some breeds, for example, poodles, with their harsh, tightly curled coats seem to produce less of an allergic response than others.
- A child may be simply so afraid of dogs that life with a dog may be impossible.
- The dog may be at serious risks from the child. Because of earlier, damaging experiences, a child may tease or hurt a dog, which may then retaliate with dire consequences. Any information on a child's previous behaviour with animals must be carefully considered prior to placement in a household with pets.
- Children get bitten by dogs. Adults need to realise that circumstances may combine to produce inappropriate behaviour in the child and an uncharacteristic response in the dog, then the animal may find itself constantly on the receiving end of attention even when it's feeding or needs to sleep and the risk of a biting incident is high. Some degree of supervision by adults is essential at all times.

Advantages

- Dogs provide a real source of companionship and unconditional affection.
- They have been identified as an element in providing a "secure base" for a child thereby enhancing self-esteem and promoting resilience (Gilligan, 2001).
- Very occasionally, a dog may have accompanied a child through a placement or have been accommodated in kennels while plans were being made for a child's future.
- Dogs provide a source of fun and interest. Children can derive great satisfaction from exhibiting their dogs at shows or taking part in dog training or agility competitions or simply teaching their dogs to do tricks.
- They offer a child the opportunity to demonstrate care and exercise responsibility that again increases resilience and helps develop a robust self-image.
- The dog can provide a focus for shared events in the new family. Simply going for a walk together or visiting the vet or playing games in the garden.
- Many children joining a new family may be anxious or afraid to make overtures to the humans in the household. The dog may be a much less threatening proposition and its ear may appear more inviting for a child's troubles.

Summary

Many families own dogs. There are dangers in making assumptions about specific breeds either in terms of their unreliability or their good temperament. Each dog needs to be assessed as an individual animal and its position in the family acknowledged.

Potentially dogs pose a number of dangers to children and these need to be acknowledged and guarded against. Sensible hygiene arrangements and appropriate adult supervision will eliminate or significantly reduce most risks but there is never room for complacency.



Reducing the Environmental Risks of Tobacco Smoke for Looked After Children and their Carers

The British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) published Practice note 51 2007 with new recommendations for Adopters and Foster Carers.

1. BAAF (1993) advised that children under 2 years old should not be placed with carers who smoke because of the potential risk to health. This age limit should be increased to **all children less than five years old**. This is because of the particularly high health risks for very young children and **toddlers** who spend most of their day physically close to their carers.
2. All children with a disability which means they are often unable to play outside, all children with respiratory problems such as Asthma, and all those with Heart Disease or Glue Ear should not be placed with smoking families.
3. In all long term fostering, Kinship and adoptive placements, the additional health risks to the child of being placed in a smoking household need to be carefully balanced against the available benefits of the placement for the child. This is because the significant risks of exposure to passive smoking increases with time.
4. Children from non-smoking birth families should not be placed with substitute carers who smoke.
5. All older children, who are able to express a view, must be given a choice to be placed with a non-smoking family.
6. All carers should be advised about the risks of buying cigarettes for adolescents. Cigarettes should never be used as a reward for good behaviour in adolescents.

7. The National Safety Council (NSC) (2004) has produced guidelines for parents on what practical steps they can take to minimise children's exposure i.e. Carers, Adopters and Child Minders should follow these guidelines, which will also be incorporated into preparation courses. This includes the following advice:

Don't smoke around children or permit others to do so. Their lungs are particularly susceptible to smoke.

Keep your home smoke free. Because smoke lingers in the air, children may be exposed to smoke, even if they are not around you when you are smoking.

Smoke only outside the house.

If you must smoke inside, limit smoking to a room where you can open the windows for cross-ventilation. Be sure the room in which you smoke has a working smoke detector to reduce the risk of fire.

Never smoke in the room where your child sleeps and do not allow anyone else to smoke there.

Never smoke while you are washing, dressing or playing with your child.

Never smoke in the car with the windows closed, and never smoke in the car when children are present. The high concentration of smoke in a small, closed space greatly increases the exposure of other passengers.



Internet Use Guidelines

The Internet is a great source of information and can help children with their homework and school projects, as well as make friends in chat rooms. But the fact that it is virtually impossible to police means carers have to take some precautions when children/young people log on. Experts suggest that you:

- ◆ Supervise the young person's computer time the way you would keep an eye on what they watch on T.V. This applies not only to the Internet but also to 18 certificate electronic games, which may also contain images unsuitable for children.
- ◆ Have the computer if possible in a family/living room where you can more easily supervise.
- ◆ Never allow children to give out personal information online, including home telephone number, address, and last name or school; passwords or bank/credit card details.
- ◆ Remind young people/children that the person in the chat room may be lying to them and telling them false information about themselves.
- ◆ Clearly explain to the child/young person that they must never arrange to meet anyone they have met in a chat room.
- ◆ Teach and encourage children to come to you if anything makes them uncomfortable, e.g. a request to meet.
- ◆ Limit surfing time.
- ◆ Find out about "parental control" software, which allows you to regulate the type of sites children /young people can visit. Some of the most popular include Cyber patrol, NetNanny and Surfwatch.



Record Keeping Information for Foster Carers

Recently there has been greater recognition of the important and unique role foster carers play in the partnership between agency, children and parents. Carers are now regularly required to keep detailed records of children placed with them and to participate in the planning of services for children.

Carers are sometimes asked to attend court and case conferences and routinely participate in statutory reviews, etc.

There is a clear need for a method of recording day to day events in the home that may, at a later stage, assist in recalling events accurately. Although carers may never be able to ensure complete protection against the risk of allegations being made against them or members of their family, there is nevertheless a strong argument for doing all they can to provide an accurate record of events.

Such records form a 'relevant filing system' and are regulated as personal data by *The Data Protection Act 1998*. This Act ensures that Foster Carers can record data in this way, due to the fact they are protecting the vital interests of data subjects or others. In keeping records it is imperative that the information is not excessive but is kept to that which is relevant. Record keepers must ensure that records are accurate and kept up to date.

The part that Foster Carers play in the process of gathering information about a child is enormous. Carers can make a unique contribution as a result of their daily observations of a foster child within their home. Carers sometimes know more about a child (habits, likes and dislikes, current worries and wishes for the future) than many of the other professionals involved with them. It is therefore important that carers are able to record and convey these observations accurately and that, as far as possible, they reflect both positive and negative aspects of the child's daily life.

Important certificates and records should be copied and kept. Original documents can, inadvertently, become lost so appropriate security measures must be adopted with regard to original records. It would be a breach of *The Data Protection Act 1998* to lose a file in this way, regardless of whether it had been copied or not. All those involved with young people who are looked after have an obligation to ensure that appropriate technical and organisational measures are taken against accidental loss or destruction of, or damage to, personal data. Record keepers must therefore ensure that their records are securely stored.

Some carers may find the prospect of keeping daily records too time consuming or daunting, and may think that they are expected to know and use all the latest jargon used by the other professionals they are in contact with. However, language used should be kept simple and jargon or slang should be avoided. It is likely that at some stage the information may be shared with the child, their parents or future carers.

It is not necessary to make long or detailed notes; enough to enable you to recall events accurately is appropriate. It is essential that the facts should be recorded, but if you feel you also need to record opinion then make sure you clearly state that it is your opinion.

A daily record will help to:

- accurately recall behaviour or incidents (including dates), either positive or negative, and provide a balanced picture of particular events
- assist in looking at the progress of a placement, and help, over time, in developing a picture of the child's pattern of behaviour in various situations
- Inform decision making at reviews, placement meetings, planning meetings and case conferences
- help you to review your practice
- provide the information needed for giving evidence in, or writing a report for, the court. You will be allowed to take a record into court for reference and will find that this helps when answering questions
- support an application for additional help, e.g. therapy for the child and /or family, by providing examples and frequency of type of behaviour
- reduce the risk to you and your family of allegations or complaints while the child is in your care, and in some circumstances after the child has moved on. Allegations can be made some time after a child has moved, and foster carers may, several years after the alleged incident, be asked to provide evidence in court regarding their involvement with that young person

Confidentiality

Separate daily records should be kept for each child or young person in your care. Records are confidential and it is vital that they are kept safe and secure along with any other information relating to the placement, e.g. forms, agreements, minutes of reviews, etc.

It is a good idea to use a small notebook for making daily notes for each fostered child to ensure that information about other children is not inappropriately shared. This should be stored securely as well as kept in a convenient place.

Writing up records

It is important to keep your records up to date and as far as possible, to write down what has happened on the day of the event so it is fresh in your mind and as accurate as possible. The date should always be entered next to each recorded entry.

Sometimes a child may have different points of view that should also be recorded and, if they wish, written down. Remember to respect the child's right to confidentiality, and share the information only with the appropriate people.

It is important to record any event or circumstances that affect the well-being or safety of any member of your family including fostered children, but also remember to record all the positive and funny things that happen to children. You may be the only person who can help recall these for the young person in years to come. Try to keep factual information and don't be judgemental. If you record a personal opinion, make it clear that this is opinion and not fact.

What should I record?

- Any positive improvements, achievements and humorous things that happen that the child enjoyed.
- Try to include names of people who foster children have spent their time with.
- Dates from when the child is away from the foster home, including dates when they are with family, friends, school, foster carers or are missing.
- Comments that a child makes that give you cause for concern. Wherever possible use the child's own words.
- Details of a child's behaviour if it is causing you concern, the actual behaviour you observe, and what was happening before it started. Record your reactions. Over time you may build up a picture of what triggers behaviour, and also what brings it to an end.
- Details of specific incident, events or changes of circumstances of any member of the family. It is also important to include details of any complaints or disagreements that may, at some stage form the basis of a formal complaint against you.
- Dates for reviews, family meetings etc.
- Dates of medical or dental appointments, and records of treatment or medicine given to the child.
- Any contact with the child's school.
- Details of any contact with the child's family, including telephone calls, texts, e-mails, letters etc. Try to include the child's reaction to the contact.
- Details of meetings with social workers and any other professionals.
- Any involvement with the police, noting the date and the police officer involved and the nature of the involvement.

Make sure you date every entry and sign each entry as you finish. Records must be kept in a secure place, preferably a locked filing cabinet.

Confidentiality

During the time that Foster Carers are fostering for the Shetland Islands Council they will come into contact with children, their families and other professional agencies, all of whom may disclose confidential information. Foster Carers may also have access to information regarding an individual's personal or family circumstances.

It is very important that Foster Carers are aware of the impact of having access to this type of information, and therefore treat the information with the utmost sensitivity and respect.

Information regarding a child, young person or their family should never be divulged without consent. Management advice should be sought if need be.

Storage of Confidential Information

Carers are advised to keep all reports and other papers relating to the children they are looking after, or reports from Social Work in a file under lock and key. Any Foster Carer who does not already have a lock fast file should contact the Fostering and Adoption Team. When a temporary placement ends, it is the responsibility of the Carer to return all information, (papers, reports, review minutes, etc) relating to the child's placement. This should be given to the Child's Social Worker or the Fostering and Adoption Team.

Confidentiality with Other Carers

Confidentiality must also be respected within the Foster Carer Support Groups. Carers regularly share appropriate information about the child in their care with others in Support Groups. They need to feel confident that such information is not discussed with others outside the group. On occasions when Carers either provide periods of Respite or look after the child for a longer period of time, they need to know information about the child and the situation. Such information can be shared with alternative Carers in conjunction with the child's Social Worker. The Social Worker must be a part of such information sharing.

Enquiries from the Media

Under no circumstances should Foster Carers give information about a child in their care to members of the Press or other media organisations. No child who is looked after can be photographed for the purposes of publicity or featured in a newspaper without his/her parent's consent (i.e. accommodated under Section 25 or Section 70 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 or without the authority of the Head of Children's Services – if Social Work holds Parental Responsibilities).

Any media enquiries must be immediately referred via the child's Social Worker to the Head of Children's Services. Obviously, in a small community, confidentiality is harder to maintain, but there may be occasions when a Looked After Child wins an award or is part of a group photograph through activities such as sport or school. A Foster Carer should always make sure that permission is given prior to publication.



Temporary and Permanency Panels

Each Local Authority must convene an Adoption and Fostering Panel as part of its assessment and approval process for foster carers. The Panel also plays a role in monitoring and developing local fostering policy, procedure and practice. In Shetland we have two Panels with the same membership, the Temporary Panel and The Permanency Panel.

All the information gathered during your assessment is presented to the appropriate Panel. The Panel is made of representatives from Social Work, Education and Health Services as well as a Voluntary organisation. A Foster Carer may sit on the Panel. You will be asked to attend part of the meeting to discuss your application. Your Social Worker will also be there. Individual Panel members may choose to ask you questions about your application or to broaden some of the information contained in the assessment. The Panel will make a recommendation about your suitability to Foster.

Decision

The Panel recommends approval for all foster and adoption applicants, and following your attendance at the Panel, your application requires to be approved and signed by the Agency Decision Maker. The Agency Decision Maker is also Head of Children's Services.

Following this process, you will receive a letter from the Agency Decision Maker to inform you whether your application to become a foster carer has been successful.

If you disagree with the decision made by the Panel, you can appeal to the Agency Decision Maker who will consider whether the Panel has heard all information in relation to your application. If this is not the case any new information will be presented to the Panel for further consideration and recommendation.



Children's Hearings (Scotland) A Foster Carer's Guide

Many of the children and young people now in foster care in Scotland are subject to a supervision requirement made at a Children's Hearing. Consequently, more and more foster carers are coming into contact, directly or indirectly, with the Children's Hearings system, or 'the panel' as it is often called. It is therefore important for foster carers to know about Children's Hearings and how such placements are made within the Children (Scotland) Act Regulations and Guidance 1996.

The Children's Hearing makes decisions about children, such as where they are to live, and agrees work by social workers and others and contact with parents. As carers, you have a part to play and you should discuss your views on what is the best for the child with social workers and parents and at the Children's hearing.

Why Children's Hearings?

The Children's Hearings system is unique to Scotland and has been in operation since 1971.

The system has key responsibilities for children and young people who may be in need of compulsory measures of supervision.

This includes children and young people who have committed offences, who are beyond parental control or have persistently failed to attend school, and children and young people who have been abused or neglected. It is cases of abuse or neglect that increasingly involve foster carers, either in emergency placements whilst allegations are investigated, or in more permanent placements which may involve carers in attending reviews at Hearings.

The Reporter to the children's panel, an independent official appointed by the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration, is responsible for the day-to-day running of the Children's Hearings system. Any member of the public concerned about the welfare of a child can contact the Reporter.

The majority of referrals come from the police, social work and education authorities. The Reporter, when receiving information, will make enquiries about the children and young people referred and may initially seek reports from social work on the circumstances of the child and family. This process is the same whether the referral concerns offences allegedly committed by the child or young person, or where the child is thought to be 'at risk'.

The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 specifies the conditions to be considered regarding the need for compulsory measures of supervision. These are known as the 'grounds of referral'. Following this initial investigation, the Reporter will only convene a Children's Hearing if compulsory measures of supervision are thought necessary and, when this is done, the local authority social work service will provide a report to be considered at the Hearing.

What happens at a Hearing?

The law provides special arrangements for Hearings. They take place in a relatively informal setting, often around a table, but not in courtrooms. Parents, guardians and other 'relevant persons', who can in certain circumstances include foster carers, have a right to attend the Hearing, and are obliged to attend unless the Hearing agrees otherwise.

At the Hearing, the child or young person, parent(s) and other relevant persons will be introduced to three members of the local children's panel.

Panel members are people from the local community who volunteer their services. They receive training, both before and during their service as panel members, and are appointed by Scottish Ministers. At each Hearing there must be one male and one female panel member.

A Children's Hearing does not concern itself with questions of guilt or innocence, or whether the child has offended or been offended against. Any dispute about the 'grounds of referral' is referred to the sheriff court for proof. The aim of the Hearing is to consider all the circumstances with the child and family and to decide whether there is a need for compulsory measures of supervision.

The Reporter and the child's social worker will also be present. A friend of the family – perhaps a relative, neighbour or youth leader – can accompany the child or parents as a representative. The child or young person and parents can have separate representatives.

Foster carers who have looked after a child or young person for a period of time may now be recognised as relevant persons in the Hearing system. This means that they have a right to be notified of a Hearing, receive all relevant papers, attend the Hearing, and appeal against the decision if they are unhappy with it. They may also take a representative to the Hearing.

The Hearing can only start discussing the case if the child or young person, parents and relevant persons agree to the grounds of referral.

If the child is too young to understand, or if there is any dispute or doubt about the grounds, the matter has to go to the local sheriff court to be proved.

Once the grounds are established, the Hearing will openly discuss – on the basis of reports provided – how best to help the child or young person. Relevant persons, including parents and foster carers, and children and young people over a certain age, now have a right to see reports presented to the Panel.

It is up to the Hearing to decide, giving reasons, whether compulsory measures of supervision are required. If so, they will make a supervision requirement that may contain any conditions relating to the child, which have been imposed by the Hearing. The social work service supervises most children at home, but others will be supervised in a residential establishment or with foster carers.

Safeguarder

A safeguarder is a person (from amongst a panel of approved persons) appointed by the chair of a Hearing, or by the sheriff, to provide additional information on what decision would be in the interests of the child.

Each Hearing must decide whether it is necessary to appoint a person to safeguard the interests of the child in the proceedings. There does not need to be a conflict of interest between the child or young person and their parent.

The safe guarder will provide an independent report to the Hearing/court, and will speak to it as required in the Hearing.

Deciding on a foster home

The decision to place a child or young person with foster carers as a condition of a supervision requirement rests with the Children's Hearing. For this to happen, the local authority will have to provide a report to the Hearing that gives appropriate information about the placement and its suitability for meeting the needs of the child or young person. This report should also confirm that the foster carers have been approved within the requirements of the Regulations. A report will not, however, be required if the placement is only made under a temporary warrant issued by the Hearing.

Can carers attend?

Foster carers' status, rights and responsibilities in the Children's Hearing system have changed since a court of session appeal judgement in February 2002 (S v N), which included foster carers in the definition of 'relevant person' in the Children's Hearing system.

Prior to this decision foster carers did not have a right to attend the Hearing but could be invited by the Reporter, the chair of the panel or the child or young person or their parent as their representative. However, in practice many reporters were inviting foster carers and recognising their role in the Hearing system. '**Relevant person**' is a legal definition in the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and can include relatives, friends and now foster carers. 'Any person who appears to be a person who ordinarily (and other than by reason only of his employment) has charge of, or control over, the child'. (Section 93 (2))

The relevant person's rights and responsibilities include:

Before the Hearing

- To be notified of any business meeting, to make comments to be passed to the meeting and to be notified of the decision.
- To receive formal notification of the Hearing and all the reports that panel members are given, in the same timescale.

At the Hearing

- Has the right and duty to attend each hearing, except business meetings.
- Has the right to submit a written report to the hearing.
- Has the right to accept or reject grounds of referral.
- Has the right to take a representative to the hearing, e.g. a friend, solicitor, etc.
- Has the right to participate in the hearing.
- Has the right to be told of the decision, the reasons and the right of appeal.

After the Hearing

- Has the right to receive in writing the supervision requirement, the reasons and be told of the right of appeal.
- Has the right of appeal, which must be done within three weeks.
- Has the right to request a review Hearing three months after the last decision.

At Court

- Has the right to attend a proof Hearing.
- On appeal, has the right to be heard by a sheriff.
- Has the right to appeal to a higher court.

The Scottish Children's Reporter's Administration (SCRA) has issued Guidance to Reporters about how the court decision should be put into day-to-day practice.

The guidance says that foster carers who have a child living with them as a result of a supervision requirement should be treated as relevant persons when the situation has become 'a settled factual arrangement'. Each case will be looked at on its own circumstances.

In practice, if a child has been placed with foster carers on a supervision requirement, the carers will normally be treated as a relevant person at the next review Hearing, unless that takes place only a few weeks later, when the arrangement could be said not yet to be a settled one.

Remember, if you are a relevant person, you have a right to be notified of and to attend the Hearing of any child or young person placed with you and/or submit a written report. If your views conflict with those of social work you should discuss this with your social worker and the child's social worker. However, the Panel will want to hear all views and weigh these up in reaching a decision, which they believe is in the best interests of the child.

Who brings the child to the Hearing?

The Reporter is responsible for seeing that the child or young person attends a Children's Hearing. Usually, the child will be notified directly.

Occasionally for younger children the notification will be to social work. If it is considered that the Hearing will be too distressing for the child, or the child is too young to understand, an application can be made to dispense with their attendance.

Foster carers who are relevant persons should be notified directly of the Hearing.

Follow-up Hearings

One of the concerns of foster carers, especially those taking children on an emergency or short-term basis, is the number of Children's Hearings some children have to attend. It is possible for a child to have to go to several Hearings before a final decision is made. This can be a worrying time, not only for the child but also for the foster carer.

Reasons for the delays and the subsequent hearings are numerous and understandable, such as the need for the child's case to go to the sheriff for proof. Sometimes, delays occur when a parent does not attend, or occasionally a Hearing can be continued to another date for specialist reports or to facilitate the attendance of a particular teacher, social worker or childcare expert. The delay in making firm decisions to allow planning for the child in care can be frustrating for all.

However, remember that the well being of the child is what really counts.

Once the Children's Hearing has made a supervision requirement, another hearing must be held – within a year – to review progress. That Hearing can continue the supervision requirement as it stands, vary it or bring it to an end. As long as the supervision requirement is running, the child, parents or relevant person can ask the Reporter to arrange a review after three months from the last Hearing. The social work department can request the Reporter to arrange a review at any time. A review will always take place within a year of the last Hearing, until the Hearing decides to end the requirement.

Removal from a foster home

A Children's Hearing can end a foster placement of a child on a supervision requirement. No child should continue to be subject of a supervision requirement longer than necessary in the interests of promoting or safeguarding his or her welfare. Such a decision would not be taken without a lot of careful thought and reports from social workers, school, etc. The Hearing will always consider a social work recommendation, whether it is to continue or end a foster placement, but may ultimately come to an alternative conclusion.

For longer-term placements, a decision to terminate placement and its timing can cause much anguish, for both foster carers and the child or young person. Preparation is essential, and most Children's Hearings will recognise this, although there have been instances in the past of Hearings' decisions to end long-term fostering being implemented immediately and without preparation.

Conclusion

As carers, you want to understand the legal process for any child in your care to enable you to offer the best possible advice on the rights of that child in the Hearing, and to make sense of the whole decision-making process.

Remember that the child's social worker influences the decision-making, and you should carefully consider whether any legal advice or representation is needed for the child. The child will also have questions, and will need to be helped to make sense of this (at times) complicated and lengthy process. As carers, you can help if you take time to find out and answer questions yourself.

You should ask yourself whether you know what the child's views are. Have you tried to find out? How can you best ensure that the child is involved in the process. ***Remember that it is the child or young person who is most directly affected.***

If you have any queries please feel free to contact the *Children's Reporter*:

Kate Gabb
13 Hill Lane
Lerwick
Shetland
ZE1 OHA
Tel: 01595 692436



Supporting Foster Carers

It is important for all those involved in fostering to recognise that fostering is only one part of Carer's lives, and that they do, and should have other aspects to their lives which are important to them. In reality, fostering, particularly in the case of those caring for a number of children on a temporary basis, tends to take over Carer's lives with little space or energy available for other activities. Such situations can lead to stress and general tiredness, making it difficult for Carer's to do their best for their own or foster children.

The following advice should help Carers to recognise and deal with stress, before it gets too strong a hold on the placement situation.

Recognising and Dealing with Stress

At some point Carers may feel that they have taken on too much as a Foster Carer and that they are overloaded with responsibilities and demands. This is the first stage of stress and if Carers recognise what is happening they can begin to deal effectively with it. Stress is not always a bad thing. We probably need some stress every day to keep us going. However, when demands on one's resources get too much, particularly demands for the kind of things we don't feel too confident about, one can begin to react badly to stress. Knowing what you and your partner are good at and not so good at is one way of avoiding stress and the initial assessment as a Foster Carer, and subsequent Carer Review, should help Carers to learn more about their capabilities.

Stress can reveal itself in many ways. There can be physical signs such as stomach pain and headaches or disrupted eating habits; emotional signs like irritability or mood swings, and sometimes, just an inability to sort out thoughts and feelings. Carers should never ignore these signs in the hope that they will go away. They may not, and the result for the Carer, the family and any child placed with you might end in a placement disruption and a sense of failure.

If you feel under stress, talk to your partner, if you have one. It is very wise for Carers to tackle any personal difficulties head on, to make time to be together, and to regain the sense of closeness, which may have been eroded by the stresses of fostering. The more Carers can do to maintain a strong and secure relationship with each other, the more quickly the whole family is likely to recover from the stressful situation. Also share your thoughts with your Social Worker or the child's Social Worker. They may not see things entirely your way, but you are entitled to spell out how you see any problems, and you are entitled to support.

Respite

A decision to use respite as a means of assisting the carers, rather than benefiting the child, must always be carefully considered. Respite from a child who is making exceptional demands should only be considered in situations where other methods of supporting the carers have been tried, and where there is a clear need for the carers to have a break from the exceptional demands made by the particular child. The child must be helped to understand that it is not because he or she has been bad that he or she is spending some time away from the foster home, but that all parents, whether birth family or Foster Carers, occasionally need time for themselves to recuperate from the strains of caring.

Time out

Such a rest can help Carers recharge their batteries, and face fostering tasks in a more positive way. A need for time out for Carers who have been fostering a large number of children, or particularly difficult and demanding children – or for a continuous number of years, should be discussed with Carers at Carer Reviews. Carers can themselves ask for time out, when their own personal or family circumstances make it difficult for them to continue fostering.

Foster Carer's Own Children and Other Children in the Foster Home

Many Foster Carers have children of their own, and it is often the children of foster families who take the greatest strain in fostering. New foster children who arrive into the Carer's home impinge on the existing children by sharing both the practical and emotional resources of the family. The children's territories inevitably invaded, their toys and treasures may be broken and their time with their parents decreases. Children often find themselves embarrassed by the behaviour of the foster child outside their home and even feel responsible for him or her.

In addition, children who are placed in families bring with them a great deal of confusion and pain, which spills over to other members of the carer's family. It is often the Carer's own children who act as recipients of distressing amounts of abuse, neglect and violence which may have happened in the foster child's family. This can arouse strong feelings in the Carer's children, which may be difficult for their children to manage without help.

How much can Carers tell their own Children

Carers face the difficulty of finding a balance between meeting the needs of their own children and respecting the confidentiality of the foster child and his or her parents. Carers may wish to protect their own children from the more distressing details of the foster child's case by not giving them too much information, but carers should consider the risk of them finding out such details from another source.

In the knowledge of a foster child having been sexually abused by a parent, the Carer's own children may struggle with issues such as being uncomfortable in their own parent's company, or by feeling confused about why the foster child behaves in a sexually provocative way. It is important that Carers continually involve their own children in discussions on how fostering is affecting their lives and how adults in the family could relieve some of the stresses carried by the children.

Role of the Family Placement Social Worker and the Child's Social Worker

The child's Social Worker should try to get to know all the children in the foster home in order to understand what impact this particular child is having on the dynamics of the foster home. The Fostering and Adoption Social Worker should include the foster carer's own children in discussions of placements before they begin and to see them during placements to assess the impact of the placement on the Carer's own children – and to take views of the carer's children into account in the context of Post Placement Reports. The regular Foster Carer Reviews should consider the views of the Carer's own children before making any recommendations for changes in the approval category or the age range of children the Carer should take.

Safety Of Carers

Shetland Islands Council has a specific Policy and Code of Practice on the prevention/management of violence towards Social Work Staff. There is a recognition that Foster Carers are no different from members of Social Work staff in potentially having to deal with violent behaviour in carrying out their duties, and, as such, much of the Code of Practice is of reference to them. More specifically, Foster Carers have a right to know if a child has a history of violence and should be given the relevant information. Guidance on what action should be taken if a child is violent should be given. All Foster Carers will have contact with their Social Workers and will be provided with telephone numbers to use in an emergency.

It should be stressed that the frequency of incidents of violence within care placements is low, however, when there is a known history of violence, specific strategies may need to be agreed at the commencement of the placement.

Other Means of Support

Shetland Islands Council recognises the importance of support to all Carers regardless of the type of fostering or kind of placement. However, the level of support and the way it is offered depends on the type of fostering, issues of the children who are placed, the stage in the placement and the Carer's needs.

As a general rule, more support is offered to Carers who are new to fostering, those caring for a large number of children, or particularly difficult and disruptive children. Support during the early stages of a placement is of vital importance. Carers are entitled to ask for more support or different kinds of support if they feel that their support needs are not being met.

The out of hours emergency service is available to all foster carers throughout Shetland. Carers are encouraged to contact the Out of Hours Service on any issue relating to Child Protection or the safety of the children in their care. Carers should contact the Out of Hours Service in situations, which although not quite at crises stage may develop into such unless advice is sought.

Other Agencies

The Health Service offers a number of support services to children of all ages with medical and health needs, as well as children with disabilities. Carers are advised to make use of these services in the community.

Support Groups

Foster Carers are encouraged to attend their support group, which provides support, training, information sharing between carers and also keeps carers informed about developments affecting Foster Care in Shetland.

THE FOSTERING NETWORK

The network was started in 1974 by Foster Carers, Social Workers and others interested in fostering. It promotes Fostering in Britain, and seeks to achieve a high standard of practice by those directly involved with children in care. Shetland Islands Council Social Work Service is a corporate member of The Fostering Network. Individual membership is also provided to Foster Carers and will entitle carers to receive their own copies of all publications, and receive information about all aspects of fostering.

The Fostering Network (TFN) also offers a counselling and conciliation service to all its members. This can be particularly helpful in situations where an allegation or a complaint has been made against them.

Foster Carer Reviews

We are required by the Scottish Government (who have developed the National Care Standards) to carry out reviews on all foster carers. This review system is in place to make sure that carers are able to continue to provide good quality care.

It is the responsibility of the Fostering Agency to review all foster carers on an annual basis after their initial approval to be foster carers. The statutory basis of these reviews is from **Regulation 10** of the **Fostering of Children (Scotland) Regulations 1996**.

The purpose of a review is to assess how foster carers and their families are coping with fostering and to look at and discuss the implications of any changes in the carers personal or family circumstances. It is also an opportunity to assess whether carers have been getting an adequate service from Social Work.

Carers should discuss any impending changes or difficulties with their Fostering and Adoption Workers. Carers should also report any offences committed by them or immediate family members involved with fostering.

Some changes in circumstances may impact on a carer's ability to provide an adequate standard of care or to look after the number of children they have. The Fostering & Adoption team may be able to offer practical assistance to help carers through periods of stress or illness rather than consider moving children/young people who are well settled in the foster home. A decision in this type of instance could be to hold an early review, but a number of factors would be considered, including the carer's own thoughts on the matter.

- ▶ Preparation work for the Foster Carer review should be carried out taking into account current and changed circumstances, training, support, information provided and any other issues that arise.
- ▶ Foster carers must always have access to all the information, and can choose to be present for the review.
- ▶ The Fostering and Adoption Team will present the review to the Temporary or Permanency Panel and will share the outcome of the review with the foster carers.

If there is any change to the approval of foster carers the Panel will then make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker.

If foster carers disagree with the outcome of the review they can put this in writing to the Agency Decision Maker.

Shetland Islands Council values the work undertaken by foster carers and the review is an opportunity to acknowledge this as well as to consider achievements and difficulties that may have arisen.

Matters that will be considered at a review will generally come within the following areas:

- ▶ Have there been any changes in circumstances?
- ▶ What use has been made of the foster placement?
- ▶ Relationship with the department and the support needed by the Carer.
- ▶ Have the Carers been able to meet the needs of the child/young person?
- ▶ What has been the progress/development of the Foster Carers?
- ▶ What are the Foster Carers' training needs?
- ▶ Any issues arising.



Dealing with Complaints

Foster Carers are encouraged to raise any matter of concern to them.

Complaints from Carers about Child's Placement

Matters of concern relating to any aspect of the child's placement should first be discussed with the child's Social Worker. Carers should make it clear to the Social Worker that they have a matter of concern to discuss and invite them to call at a time when they are able to speak undisturbed.

Should the matter remain unresolved after the Social Worker has responded to the Carer's complaints, then the Carer should arrange to see the Senior Social Worker responsible for the child's case to discuss the matter further.

If the matter still remains unresolved, the next step is to make an appointment to see the appropriate Social Work Manager.

Complaints from Foster Carers on General Policy and Practice

Matters relating to general policy and practice, which are not related to a specific child, should always be discussed in the first instance with the Fostering and Adoption Social Worker. If resolution is not reached at that stage, the matter should then be discussed with the Senior Social Worker and Managers responsible for Adoption and Fostering.

Formal Complaints Procedure

There may be occasions when Carers wish to make a complaint about the service, or lack of service they receive. Carers may also feel it to be appropriate on occasions to register a formal complaint on behalf of a Foster Child. This can be done within Shetland Islands Council's formal Complaints Procedures. Young people can also make formal complaints to the Children's Rights Worker.

Complaints against Carers

The task of caring for other people's children is a complex one, requiring a high degree of co-operation from the various people involved with the children and their families. Foster Carers have day-to-day responsibility for the care of the children for whom Education and Social Care as well as Health Board will be involved.

Good communication and an ability to understand and respect the differing roles each has to play are essential if children are to receive the highest standards of professional care. Good understanding of what is expected of Carers, and observance of good practice will help protect Carers from complaints being made against them.

There may be occasions when a formal complaint is made against Carers by a member of the public, staff members from another agency, the child's parents, the child or anyone else. If a formal complaint is made against the Carers, this is dealt with according to Shetland Islands Council's Formal Complaints Procedure.

Complaints against Carers, or about an aspect of their fostering activities are relatively rare.

The Fostering Network has produced an excellent guide - **MANAGING ABUSE ALLEGATIONS AGAINST FOSTER CARERS**, which is accessible on the Fostering Network website or from the Family Placement Team.

If you wish to make a formal complaint write down your complaint and send it to:
Executive Director, Education & Social Care Department, Hayfield House, Hayfield Lane, Lerwick, Shetland ZE1 0QD
or
contact the Executive Director, Education & Social Care Department on: 01595 744000.

Within 5 working days you should receive an acknowledgement of your complaint and within 28 working days of your complaint having been received you will receive a response to your complaint.

If you are not satisfied with the reply you may ask for your complaint to be referred to the Complaints Review Committee. You will be advised how to do this and offered any assistance that may be necessary. You may also wish to contact the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care – contact details follow:

The Care Commission (SCRC)

Shetland Local Office
2nd Floor Charlotte House
Commercial Road
Lerwick
Shetland ZE1 0HF
Tel: 01595 696661
Fax: 01595 697231



National Standards in Foster Care

Section one of the National Standards in Foster Care covers the following topics, which are designed to ensure the specific needs and rights of every child and young person in foster care are met and respected.

Equal opportunities and valuing diversity: Children, young people and their families are provided with foster care services, which value diversity and promote equality.

Assessment and the needs of the child or young person: An assessment of the child or young person's needs **is** made prior to any placement, communicated to all parties concerned and updated regularly.

Care Planning and reviews: A written care plan is prepared for each child or young person placed in your foster care; all aspects of the plan are implemented, it is received regularly and any changes are made only as a result of a review hearing.

Matching carers with children or young person: Each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting their assessed needs.

A safe and positive environment: The foster home provides a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for the child or young person.

Safe Caring: Each child or young person in foster care is protected from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation.

Recording and access to information: 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 their life events. Relevant information from the case record should be made available to the child and to anyone involved in their care.

Contact between children and their families and friends: Each child or young person in foster care is encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships as set out in their care plan and placement agreement.

Health care and development: Each child or young person in foster care receives health care which meets their needs for physical, emotional and social growth. They should also be given information and training appropriate to their age and understanding to enable informed participation in decisions about their health needs.

Educational needs: The learning and educational needs of each child or young person in foster care are given high priority and they are encouraged to attain their full potential.

Preparation for adult life: Each child or young person in foster care is helped to develop the skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living; They receive appropriate support and guidance for as long as necessary after being in foster care.

Section two seeks to ensure that each Foster Carer provides effective and appropriate care:

Assessment and approval of foster carers: Each foster carer is subject to, and participates in, a comprehensive assessment of their ability to carry out the fostering task. They must be formally approved by the appropriate authority before a child or young person is placed in their care.

Supervision, support, information and advice for foster carers: 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. This will enable them to provide consistent high quality care for each child or young person placed in their home.

Training of foster carers: Each foster carer is provided with the training necessary to equip them with the skills and knowledge to provide high quality care for each child or young person placed in their care.

Annual reviews with carers: A joint review is conducted with each carer at least one a year in a manner that –

- a. Satisfies the Authority of the continuing capacity of the carer to carry on fostering.
- b. Provides the carer with an opportunity to give feedback.
- c. **Contributes to essential information on the quality and range of services provided by the Authority.**
- d. Forms recruitment, assessment and training strategies.

Payment of allowances and expenses associated with caring for fostered children: Each foster carer receives an allowance and agreed expenses, which cover the full cost of caring for each child or young person placed with them.

Section three notes that each authority is responsible for the provision of public care for children and young people, and the requirement to offer high quality foster care service for all who could benefit from it by ensuring -

Effective Policies: Each authority has effective policies in place to promote and plan the provision of high quality foster care for children and young people who could benefit from it.

Management structures: Each authority has effective structures in place for the management and supervision of foster carers services, staff and foster carers.

Professional qualifications and appropriate training for social workers: all social work staff responsible for the provision of fostering services 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.

Recruiting and retaining an appropriate range of carers: Each authority ensures access to a supply of foster carers, which meets the range of needs of the children and young people within its area.

Reward payments to carers: Each authority considers the implantation of a reward payment scheme for foster carers.

The foster care panel: Each authority convenes a fostering panel as part of its assessment and approval process for foster carers, which also plays a role in monitoring and developing local fostering policy, procedure and practice.

Placement of children through other authorities or agencies: An authority may contract out any aspect of the provision of foster care for a child or young person. When doing so, the authority responsible for the care of the child must ensure that legal requirements for their care are met, and that the care provided meets national quality standards and regulations for the foster care service.

Representation and complaints procedures: Children and young people, their parents, foster carers and other people involved are able to make effective representations, including complaints about any aspect of the fostering service, whether it is provided directly by an authority or by a contracted authority or agency.