

FOSTER CARE SERVICES NORTH WEST

A GUIDE TO THE AGENCY FOR CARERS

This brochure is intended to provide information to prospective Foster Carers who have expressed an interest in Foster Care Services North West (FCSNW).

Some relevant policies and procedures are included, but a complete volume of all policies and procedures, which apply to our agency staff and Carers, is available in its entirety, upon request.

Whilst every effort has been made by agency staff and Carers to compile an informative guide to all our services, we are aware that the reader may still be left with unanswered questions, and your comments and feedback will be most welcome.

September 2009

CONTENTS

Preface

1. Statement of Purpose 1

Section 1

1. Recruitment & Assessment of Carers 13
2. Training 14
3. Foster Care Agreement 15
4. Letter of Engagement 18
5. Annual Reviews 25
6. Appeals Procedure 26

Section 2

1. Holidays & Activities 27
2. Annual Leave & Short-term Breaks 28
3. Babysitting 28
4. Policy for Carers Annual Leave 29
5. Policy & Procedure for Short-term Breaks 31
6. Support. 33

Section 3

1. Payments to Carers 34
2. Guidance on Carers' Expenses 35

Appendix

1. Smoking policy and advice 40
2. Pet ownership 43
3. Complaints & Representation Procedure 49

PREFACE

FOSTER CARE SERVICES NORTH WEST

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Mission Statement

At Foster Care Services North West (FCSNW) our aim is to promote the welfare of children in the “looked after” system. We believe that all children and young people should have the opportunity to benefit from family life. For those who, for a variety of reasons, cannot live within their own family, for either short or long periods of time, an appropriate alternative should be available to them.

We believe that children who have been badly affected by severe abusive and neglectful experiences can still benefit from what life in a family has to offer. In order to sustain such placements, it is necessary to provide 24 hour support to our Professional Carers and a flexible package of short-term breaks and other resources, including education and health support, to ensure the best possible outcome for the child or young person.

We aim to provide a wide range of placement resources for all age groups and to address the need to recruit families for children from different cultural and ethnic minority groups. Placements will vary in length and aim, from emergency and short-term placements through to long-term placements. Some placements will be specifically task centred with the aim of bridging a child or young person to adoption or permanent placement. For others the aim will be a return home to their family of origin. We are committed to working in partnership to enable children in placement to return to their own parents or other family members where this is the plan.

We understand that children and young people who must live apart from their own family have a great need to maintain close and positive links with their parents and other family members and with their friends during those periods. Our staff and Carers are committed to furthering positive family contact and will work in partnership with local authorities and with parents to enable contact to take place.

Foster Care Services North West (FCSNW) does not aim to duplicate fostering services already in place within local authorities. We see ourselves fulfilling a specific role in working alongside local authorities, to fill the gaps in provision which are needed in order to cater for a group of children and young people who remain “difficult to place.”

To this end we are committed to maintaining and strengthening our already well established working relationships with local authorities primarily within the North West, North Wales and surrounding regions.

Status & Constitution

Fostercare Services Limited is a private limited company registered under the Companies Act 1985 (Company Number 5448746) trading as Foster Care Services North West. Fostercare Services Limited is owned by By the Bridge Holdings Limited. Foster Care Services North West is registered as an Independent Fostering Agency with Ofsted.

Organisation structure

The appointed Responsible Individual is Steve Adkin and the Registered Manager is Liz Dent

The Company Director is Steve Adkin. He is one of the five appointed Directors of By the Bridge Holdings Limited.

The appointed Board of Directors meet ten times a year. The responsibilities of the Board are as follows:

- The development of the organisation.
- The continual review and development and approval of the organisational structure.
- The review, development and approval of the organisational structure.
- The approval of the group business plan.
- The allocation of budgets.
- The review of performance and compliance.
- The regular monitoring of outcomes.

Board members

John Parker (Chairman)

John Parker was until recently the President of Europe for Cardinal Health. The group employs 6000 people and operates in twenty countries. Previous to this position John was the Chief Executive Officer for The Intercare Group which he transformed from a small but sprawling healthcare conglomerate with a market capitalisation of £15 million in 1995 to £238 million in December 2003 upon the sale to Cardinal Health Inc of the USA. Intercare transformed itself into a focused pharmaceutical business in the UK, Belgium and France, having been a disparate healthcare company operating in Holland, UK, Germany and South Korea. A combination of strong organic growth and 17 Merger and Acquisition deals were the key drivers for success.

Sir Cyril Chantler

Cyril Chantler is Chairman of the Board of the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust and of the Kings Fund, London. He is Chairman of the Beit Memorial Fellowships Board, Chairman of the Shared Medical Record Committee of NHS Connecting for Health, a trustee of the Dunhill Medical Trust, and a member of the Council of Southwark Cathedral. He is a member of the Editorial Board of the Journal of the American Medical Association. He is an adviser to the Associate Parliamentary Health Group and to Apposite Capital. He is a trustee of the Media Standards Trust. He has been and is involved in a number of inquiries into the provision of acute paediatric services in various parts of England.

Cyril Chantler was Dean of the Guy's, King's College and St Thomas' Hospitals' Medical and Dental School, where he was the Children Nationwide Medical Research Fund Professor of Paediatric Nephrology until his retirement in 2000. He was an Honorary Consultant to Guy's Hospital (1972 – 2000). Previously, he was Principal of the United Medical and Dental School of Guy's and St Thomas's Hospitals (1992 – 1998).

His other previous appointments include General Manager of Guy's Hospital (1985-88) and non-executive Director of the Guy's/Lewisham Trust (1991-92) and of the Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Trust (1993-97).

In addition, he served as a member of the Member of the NHS Policy Board (1989-1996), President of the British Association of Medical Managers (1991-1997), and as Chairman of the Council of Heads of UK Medical Schools and Faculties (1998 – 1999). He was also a Member of the General Medical Council (1994 – 2003), where he was Chairman of the Standards Committee.

Steve Adkin

(Apposite-Capital, General Partner - Healthcare Services) is responsible for the Healthcare Services investments of Apposite and has strong finance and healthcare sector experience from his time at ZS Associates, the pharmaceutical consultancy, where he worked before joining Nomura International's Healthcare Corporate Finance team in 1998. At Nomura, Steve gained extensive Mergers and Acquisitions and Initial Public Offering experience, co-leading the healthcare corporate finance team, which managed most of the recent European biotech IPOs. He has a Masters Degree in Engineering from Oxford University.

Dr Gerald Bereika

Dr Gerald Bereika has a PhD in Clinical Psychology and more than 25 years experience in the planning, delivery and senior management of social and health care services in both the United States and the UK. He has previous experience of both state and independent foster care provision in the USA, and was an early member of the important Foster Family-based Treatment Association (www.ffa.org) who still use his pioneering definition of and work on Treatment Foster Care. More recently, he founded, developed and sold his own UK company called Lifeways, which developed support services for people with learning difficulties, mental health needs, challenging behaviours and other specialist needs.

Nicola Tunbridge

Managing Director

Nicola has a background in sales and marketing, initially working to fulfil agency sales contracts for a variety of multi-national FMCG-related companies from 1985-1989.

In 1989 Nicola moved into pharmaceutical sales and the sales and marketing of infant and childhood nutritional products. A further remit was to develop and deliver training programmes on infant and child nutrition to health professionals, students and parents.

In 1997 Nicola became a foster parent for an independent provider and cared for ten children with a range of challenging behaviours and traumatic life experiences. In 1999, as a Project Manager, of specialised services including education and therapy. Nicola designed a training programme for project carers.

Nicola, a member of the founding team, managed services and training during the three years of development of By the Bridge. Nicola is in the final year of her MA in Professional Practice in Health and Social Care at the University of Greenwich and has a Certificate in Attachment in Fostering and Adoption from Futures Consortium. Having previously taken the lead on new projects she remains enthusiastically involved in the development of new services amidst her Managerial responsibilities.

Operational staff team

The Principal Manager has the responsibility for the development and management of Foster Care Services North West and the service provision. The Principal Manager is the Agency's Registered Manager.

The Deputy Manager has the responsibility for management in the Principal Manager's absence.

The Social Work Team Manager is the Deputy Manager, and has responsibility to manage the team of Social Workers, support services and co-ordination of training.

The Business Development Manager has responsibility for managing the contracts for service provision, insurances and liability, publicity and liaising with authorities requesting to commission fostering placements.

The Deputy Team Leader and Project Manager has responsibility for managing the recruitment of Foster Carers, and to deputise in the Social Work Team Manager's absence.

The Management Team will normally convene monthly; the meetings will:

Review performance and set targets

Plan service developments

Receive reports in respect of recruitment, placement referrals, advertising and publicity, specific service areas, representations from staff members.

Regular operational meetings are held as described below:

- Fostering Panel - monthly with prepared agenda and reports, chaired by independent person
- Staff Meeting - weekly for all staff, chaired by Principal Manager
- Social Work Team Meeting - monthly, chaired by Team Manager
- Inter-agency Meetings between FCSNW & National Teaching & Advisory Service - Half-termly, chaired by Deputy Team Manager

The Service Provision:

Fostering Placements

FCSNW provide a wide range of placements with Foster Carers for children and young people of all ages. Placements are 'matched' to promote the best possible outcomes for children and young people, taking into consideration their needs and the skills and experience of the Foster Carers, to meet those needs.

All placements are provided at the request of the child or young person's responsible authority, who will initially provide details to our duty system.

Foster Care Services North West are members of a number of local authority accreditation schemes and these include:

Placements Northwest, which has 21 participating authorities, West Midlands (13 authorities), and Children's Commissioning Support Resource (22 Welsh authorities). In addition, local authorities in the East Midlands, Yorkshire and London.

We have a designated Business Manager who will be the first point of contact for commissioning our service.

Range of placement provision

The Foster Carers will be able to provide a wide range of placement type:

- Long-term/permanent placements
- Bridging placements
- Assessment placements
- Temporary/task centred placements
- Emergency placements
- Parent and baby placements
- Specialist placements

Placement monitoring and regulation

All placements of children and young people are made in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations which means that:

- All Foster Carers are approved, have signed Foster Carers' Agreements and are individually reviewed.
- Each placement will be made using an individual 'Foster Placement Agreement', which will include essential information, placement planning and identification of specific tasks.
- Wherever possible, pre-placement planning is completed and will include introductions between Foster Carer and child/young person. In emergency situations, the placement planning will be done immediately, and information requested to complete the placement agreement as soon as possible within the legislation.

The Services

Service delivery from:

- the social work service and support workers.
- the education support service.
- The specialist health promotion.

Foster Care Service North West started in 1998 and since then has been able to demonstrate to local authorities with whom we work, a service that consistently attains positive outcomes for children and young people.

The Social Work Service

The delivery of social work services is managed and led by the Social Work Team Manager. The team's membership comprises Deputy Manager/Project Manager, five full-time and one part-time Supervising Social Workers, one Foster Carer Support Worker who is employed part-time.

The Team Manager, Deputy and Supervising Social Workers are skilled and experienced in the field of Child & Family social work, and all hold particular expertise in the provision of fostering services to children and young people. They are qualified in social work, registered with the General Social Care Council and have evidence of continuing professional development.

The Social Work Team bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to our service.

Every fostering household is supervised and supported by a Supervising Social Worker. The Supervising Social Worker provides supervision to each Foster Carer following an agreed contract and formal agenda.

The level and frequency of social work contact for supervision and support will be determined by the circumstances of each household and needs of the individual placement. Regular meetings are held to review and monitor each placement, and records are provided six-weekly of the placement's progress and outcomes.

The Social Worker will maintain records in respect of each Foster Carer and each placement they are allocated.

The Social Work Team and Social Work Managers provide via a rota, a 24-hour advice and support service to all our Foster Carers and all their placements.

Additional Support

- a) Foster Care Support Workers are appointed to provide relief to the fostering household, usually to undertake specific activities with the placement to enable the Foster Carers to have time for their own family.
- b) Support groups for Foster Carers are organized on a regional basis, facilitated by a Supervising Social Worker. Every Foster Carer attends their local support group, which meets 6-weekly.
- c) Short-term breaks; specifically recruited and approved Foster Carers will provide placements to enable full-time Carers to take annual leave, where appropriate, and to provide relief to enable a demanding placement to continue.
- d) An Agency holiday is arranged and provided by the Agency. This will be at a U.K. destination and enables fostering families to meet together socially and to strengthen their support systems. Fostered children and young Carers also have the opportunity to meet and network.
- e) Social events, organized by the Agency staff to enable fostering families, children and young people and staff to meet informally.
- f) Junior Carers are encouraged to meet for mutual support; meetings and activities are organised by the Project Manager to facilitate this.

The Education Support Service

FCSNW considers that the quality of educational opportunities afforded to children and young people should be given paramount importance. Our experience of the impact of educational failure on children in the care system generally, and on fostering services in particular, has been a major motivating factor in re-appraising the level and nature of services we provide to children and careers. We have witnessed the damaging effect of educational failure, which is endemic in the care system, and the extent to which school breakdown and disruption lead to placement breakdowns and intolerable burdens on Foster Carers. We are mindful, too, of the retrospective concern of many adult care leavers with regard to their educational experiences whilst being looked after by local authorities. FCSNW invests heavily from within its own resources to ensure that all children placed with us, regardless of their previous educational experiences, not only attend school regularly but realise the highest possible levels of educational achievement. To this end we have a Contract for Service with The National Teaching and Advisory Service.

The National Teaching & Advisory Service (NT & AS) is a national organization for looked after children and children in need. This service provides the practical means through which children facing significant difficulties are successfully included within mainstream schools and are able to access high quality education and the opportunities this brings.

The contract we have with NT & AS to provide a full education casework service ensures the children and young people in our placements achieve consistently high outcomes in education compared to the national average for looked after children.

All children in placement receive the services of a named casework teacher, where appropriate, and agreed by the placing local authority. The individual support is reviewed on an ongoing basis so that the services are tailored to the changing needs of the looked after children in our placements.

Reports and ongoing data in relation to outcomes in education is maintained on our files and sent to the placing authority.

The contract with NT & AS also ensures the provision of expert advice, training and development on educational matters to Foster Carers and Agency staff.

Full details of the NT & AS service is provided with our Prospectus and to each purchasing local authority.

We are fully committed to continue this partnership approach that has been successful in supporting children, Carers and social workers with the educational issues known to impact on looked after children.

It is important to note that the contract with the National Teaching and Advisory Service does not provide alternative educational facilities, such as separate schools or schoolrooms. We know from our experience that the provision of such facilities usually serves only to prolong the exclusion of children in the care system from mainstream schools and from normal school experiences.

Specialist Health Provision - Promotion and Monitoring of Health Care

The impact upon the health care of children, as a result of their experiences prior to and during their period in the looked after system, is well documented. We are mindful of the number of children and young people whose health care needs have not been sufficiently well monitored or met over the years and who have suffered in their physical development as a result of this. We are also mindful of the support young people and their Carers need to address such issues as sexual health and development of relationships, drug and alcohol abuse etc.

We have a Child Health Care Specialist who is a member of our Fostering Panel. The Child Health Care Specialist is also available to provide advice and consultancy on health matters and to assist us in monitoring health care provision and the outcomes.

The Health Care Specialist will assist the agency in providing training opportunities to Carers and staff which focus on the health care needs of children and young people in placement.

Number of Foster Carers

Foster Carers - 1.4.08 to 31.3.09

The Agency currently has 45 registered Carers. This includes 4 Carer families who offer short-term care to children placed with the Agency's full-time Carers. There have been 2 Carer families recruited over the last 12 month period. There have been 5 Foster Carers who have resigned/retired over the same period.

Approximately 60% of our Carers have fostered with us for 5 years or more.

We are currently recruiting to meet the ongoing and increasing need for skilled Carers. Recruitment is via advertising, open days, drop-in centres and other opportunities which we are able to develop in particular areas and communities.

Number of Children Placed As At 31.3.09

Total = 65

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Number</u>
0 - 4	6
5 - 10	25
11 - 15	24
16+	10

Inclusive of 1 Mother & Baby

Number of boys placed - 45

Number of girls placed - 20

Number of Children Placed Between 1.4.08 and 31.3.09

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Number</u>
0 - 4	9
5 - 10	7
11 - 15	25
16+	3

Inclusive of 2 Mother & Baby

Number of Children Left Between 1.4.08 and 31.3.09

<u>Age Group</u>	<u>Number</u>
0 - 4	2
5 - 10	9
11 - 15	26
16+	9

Inclusive of 2 Mother & Baby

Procedures & Processes for Recruiting, Approving, Training, Supporting and Reviewing Carers

As an Agency, we promote fostering and we encourage both general enquiries about foster care and specific applications to be approved as a Foster Carer for us.

A member of the social work team co-ordinates recruitment and is able to deliver an immediate response to enquiries, following this up with a personal contact visit.

Steps followed:

- On receiving an enquiry, initial information is taken and a pack is sent out giving details about the Agency including a job description for Foster Carers.
- Continued interest will be followed-up by a Social Worker visiting the home and having an initial discussion with the prospective Carers.
- An application form is completed that provides detailed information (we use the form provided by Fostering Network).
- Pre-approval checks and enquiries are completed.
- Skills to Foster Induction Training is provided. This is mandatory for all applicants.
- An assessment of the application is completed by a Social Worker with the prospective Carers. The format we use for this is the BAAF Form F. A written report is prepared alongside a portfolio of evidence of the applicants' knowledge, skills and experience.
- The application is presented to the Fostering Panel. Applicants will attend Panel with their assessing Social Worker.
- The Panel will make a recommendation about the suitability of the applicants to be approved and the terms of appointment of each application.
- The Agency Decision Maker will make an approval decision based on the Panel's recommendation.
- The applicants will be informed verbally of the Panel's recommendation and they will be informed in writing of the decision.
- When a Foster Carer joins our Agency, we provide a number of services and benefits that will support them. This includes a level of financial support that values the skills of Foster Carers and recognises the job they do. They will be members of Fostering Network, which provides information, advice and guidance on all fostering related matters.

Review of Approval

Systems are in place to review the appointment of FCSNW Carers on an annual basis. Circumstances may arise to indicate the need to review at less than the 12 month interval i.e. the outcome of a complaint investigation or other significant change in the household.

The review will determine whether the household remains suitable and if there should be any change in the Carers' appointment.

As part of the review process, and before the review meeting is held, reports are requested from the following: the Carer/s, the FCSNW Supervising Social Worker, the Social Worker for the child/ren in placement and the NT & AS teacher working with the child/ren in placement. These, together with post-placement reports from the previous 12 month period, are considered at the review.

Administration systems are in place to update all statutory references and medical examinations every three years.

The review meeting is chaired by an Independent Social Worker, employed on a freelance basis by FCSNW.

The review is held at FCSNW offices and is attended by the Carer/s, their Supervising Social Worker and the Reviews Administrator. The Chair records the outcome and makes recommendations for action and approval for the next 12 months. The first review of approval is presented to the Fostering Panel who make a recommendation as to the Carer/s approval for the next 12 months.

The annual review document is sent to the Carer/s and retained in the FCSNW Carer file.

Relevant Local Authorities are notified about the Carer/s approval.

The Agency has a Foster Carer Appeal Procedure to follow if a Carer is dissatisfied with the outcome of the annual review, or a decision of the Fostering Panel.

As part of the Agency procedures to support and supervise Carers, the Supervising Social Worker visits on a regular basis, this, as previously described, being no less than one visit each 2 months. This forms the basis of the monitoring of care. Internal Planning Meetings to review and plan the work being undertaken with and on behalf of the child take place on a regular basis as the need arises. Agency monitoring forms are completed to record placement outcomes and inform ongoing plans.

Training provided for Foster Carers

Training is provided for Foster Carers and is an important part of the support made available. Training needs will be identified during the pre-approval assessment, and on an ongoing basis post-approval as part of Carers' continuing professional development, and to meet specific demands to manage placements.

The majority of our training to Carers is provided to small groups at our offices, delivered by specialist trainers courses. Delivered in the period April, 2008 to April, 2009 were:

HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, MRSA & TB – 1 day
Recording Skills for Foster Carers – ½ day
Internet and Sexual Offending 'Safe Surfing'—1 day
Children in Special Education – ½ day
Safe Handling & De-escalation Skills – 2 days X 1
First Aid – 1 day

Carers can, in addition, access training locally with our support, for example NVQ Level 3, First Aid, Parenting Skills and Managing Disability.

We can be flexible with arrangements to meet different needs.

Quality Assurance

The Complaints & Representation Procedure at Foster Care Services North West encourages and places an emphasis on resolving complaints at a local level. The process for handling concerns and complaints is explained in leaflets for all Foster Carers, Staff, Service Users, Children and Young Persons, and full details are provided in company publications.

The Fostering Panel, which has five Independent Members, meets monthly, and fulfils an advisory function to all aspects of the service delivery. Foster Carer applicants attend the Panel Meetings. The Panel receives regular information about young people in placement.

The Agency has a contract with RateUs, an Independent Provider of an evaluation system that enables all children, young people and staff to rate our service. This is a confidential system with the ability to alert management to a serious complaint.

Feedback about our service is encouraged during the Foster Carers' annual review process, which is chaired by an Independent Social Worker. We also regularly evaluate the views of Foster Carers by using questionnaires.

When complaints are received that cannot be resolved at a local level, or where the complainant has elected to invoke stage 2 direct, an Independent Investigator is appointed.

In the period 1st April, 2008 to 31st March, 2009, one complaint was received; this was resolved at local level.

May, 2009

SECTION 1

RECRUITMENT, ASSESSMENT AND APPROVAL PROCEDURE.

Prospective Carer(s) will be sent an Information Pack including a job description and Carers Handbook. To further the enquiry the prospective Carer(s) will contact the office and, if it is then felt appropriate, a full application form will be sent to the Carer(s) to initiate the process. These will include forms of consent to police and other statutory checks, references and medical health check, Health & Safety checks etc.

The criteria for consideration of applicants are as follows :-

1. Previous fostering experience of children and young people with significant problems would be desirable but not essential.
2. Relevant experience, e.g. working with children in a residential setting.
3. An ability to demonstrate an understanding of the needs of the children we work with.
4. A commitment to working as part of a professional team.
5. A commitment to training and support groups.

An agency social worker will be allocated to carry out a full Form F assessment. This will take up to 6 months to complete. During this assessment period, the applicants will also be visited by representatives of N.T.&A.S.. Carers will also be expected to attend the basic induction training course, during this period of time. Upon completion of the Form F, the full assessment report will be submitted to the Fostering Panel for consideration. Carers are requested to attend the Panel Meeting, and will be informed of the Panel's recommendation immediately.

TRAINING

Training forms an integral part of the service and there is an expectation that Carers who join the agency will attend and participate in Carers training sessions.

Each Carer will keep an up to date personal training portfolio, containing certificates and documentary evidence of training attended.

It is envisaged that eventually ALL Carers working with this agency will have achieved NVQ Level III (as recommended by the National Standards), and indeed, some may opt to progress to become assessors.

The agency will encourage Carers (and also contribute towards the funding) to attend any courses in their area, which relate to the fostering task. Carers are also regularly invited to suggest topics and issues which they feel should be covered in future training events. This will also be addressed at individual Carers' annual reviews.

There is an on-going rolling programme of training. Efforts are being made to provide sessions also at weekends or in the evening, to enable attendance by Carers who have commitments on weekdays. The courses are led by the agency's social work team, and the services of external trainers are also brought in.

A comprehensive list of topics and courses currently offered is available on request from the agency office.

FOSTER CARE SERVICES NORTH WEST

CHILDREN ACT 1989

ARRANGEMENTS FOR PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN
(GENERAL) REGULATIONS 1991

UNDERTAKING AND AGREEMENTS BY FOSTER PARENTS
REGULATION 3 (6) (B)

THE FOSTERING SERVICE REGULATIONS 2002
REGULATION 28 (5) (B)

Name of Carer/s _____

Address _____

Acceptance to care for : Number of placements : _____

Gender : _____ Age range : _____ (as per panel decision)

Having been accepted by FOSTER CARE SERVICES NORTH WEST (FCSNW)

on _____ as Foster Carers, agree to the following conditions :

1. To comply with the terms of any foster placement agreement, to care for the child/children placed as if he/she were a member of our family and to promote his/her welfare, having regard to the long and short-term plans and any particular arrangements agreed with the Local Authority and Foster Care Services North West (FCSNW).
2. To notify the responsible Authority immediately of any serious illness of the child/children or of any other serious occurrence affecting the child/children.
3. To comply with the policies and procedures of FCSNW as issued under regulations 12 and 13 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.
4. To co-operate as reasonably required with Ofsted and in particular to allow a person authorised by Ofsted to interview him and visit his home at any reasonable time.
5. To allow any child placed to be removed from the foster home if Regulation 36 applies.

6. To give written notice to Foster Care Services North West forthwith, with full particulars, of :
 - a) any intended change of address
 - b) any change in the composition of the household
 - c) any other change in personal circumstances and any other event affecting the capacity to care for any child placed, or the suitability of the household; and
 - d) any request or application to adopt children, or for registration for child minding or day care.
7. To ensure that any information relating to any child placed, to the child's family or to any other person, which has been given in confidence in connection with a placement is kept confidential and is not disclosed to any person without the consent of the responsible Authority and FCSNW.
8. Not to administer corporal punishment to any child placed.
9. To keep FCSNW informed of any changes, progress or problems with a placement and to notify the agency immediately of any significant events affecting the child.
10. To partake in mutually agreed training programmes.
11. To attend Carer's support groups on a regular basis.
12. To keep a diary of significant events throughout a placement and to maintain a daily record of the progress of each child and young person in placement.
13. To keep medical records for each child during their placement which provides dates of medical, dental and optical checks.
14. To attend any significant meetings regarding a child's life.
15. To support the educational attainment of a child or young person in placement and to work in partnership with The National Teaching and Advisory Service for Looked After Children.
16. To liaise where appropriate with other professionals.
17. To bring up foster children according to the UN convention on Children's Rights.
18. To implement the child's agreed placement plan as far as is possible.
19. To work in partnership with birth parents where appropriate.
20. To give 28 days notice in writing to a FCSNW if a child has to leave the placement unless in very exceptional circumstances.
21. To be reviewed annually as a Foster Carer, by Foster Care Services North West.

In acceptance of the above it is understood that :

22. FCSNW offer Carers the opportunity to take a total of 14 nights paid leave per annum.
23. Foster Care Services North West (FCSNW) undertake to pay the Carers the agreed fee on a fortnightly basis.
24. FCSNW is committed to providing a high level of support to Carers via supervision and support from a qualified and experienced Social Worker who will undertake to visit the family on a fortnightly basis. (see Policy and Procedure)
25. The training needs of Carers will be identified via supervision and via Carer annual reviews. Training profiles will be developed for each Carer and opportunities to meet training needs will be provided both "in house" and via courses run by other organisations.
Carers will maintain their own portfolio of training and development and complete a CWDC workbook within the required timescale.
26. Placements will be made only after discussion with the Carer and the Supervising Social Worker, taking into full consideration the matching criteria of child and Carer.
27. FCSNW provide Public Liability insurance to a maximum of £5,000,000 in respect of all Carers and indemnify against their liability at law for compensation and claimant costs and expenses in respect of injury to the foster child, subject to the conditions of the policy. All Carers are required to have appropriate and adequate household insurance and for their insurers to be aware of their Foster Carer status.
28. All Carers have access to the Complaints Procedure and/or to pursue any dissatisfactions or to make representation to the agency via their Supervising Social Worker or a manager within the Agency. All matters raised will be responded to as quickly as possible to secure a satisfactory resolution.
29. This undertaking should be read and agreed in conjunction with the Carers' Letter of Engagement.

Name SignatureDate

Applicant 1 _____

Applicant 2 _____

Witness _____
(FCSNW)

FOSTER CARE SERVICES NORTH WEST

LETTER OF ENGAGEMENT FOR PROFESSIONAL

SELF-EMPLOYED FOSTER CARERS.

THIS IS AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN F.C.S.N.W

AND _____

PROFESSIONAL SELF-EMPLOYED FOSTER CARER(S)

F.C.S.N.W. AGREES TO THE FOLLOWING :-

1. To pay the Carer the current weekly fee for the placement of a child as agreed on the 1st April of each financial year. This fee will be expected to cover the cost of the child's care as detailed on the attached fee sheet.
2. To reimburse **authorised** mileage at the rate agreed on the 1st April of each financial year.
3. To reimburse any other **authorised** expenditure as agreed with the Agency.
4. To pay for the Carers' membership of the Fostering Network.
5. To provide the Carer with a total of 14 nights paid annual leave entitlement and to provide short-term breaks for any children in placement when leave is taken. Subject to the agreement of the placing authorities.
6. The Agency's Financial Administrator will provide annual statements of earnings to the Carer for tax purposes.
7. The Agency will function within and abide by the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and within the National Minimum Standards for Foster Care and by any other Government legislation.
8. The Agency will make every effort to make appropriate placements with Carers and to maintain usage of the vacancies within the foster home. Where difficulties arise in making placements, the Agency's Policy & Procedure on Retention of Carers will be followed.
9. To provide support to Carers and children in placement via the FCSNW Social Work Team, and provide a 24 hour support service.
10. To provide a service via National Teaching & Advisory Service to support and enable the child in placement to reach their education potential. This service will work alongside Carers and all others involved in the child's care.
11. To provide a training programme for Professional Carers.
12. To provide a suitable venue and social work support and administration for Support Groups for Carers.
13. The agency will provide insurance for Carers, as outlined in the agency's Insurance Document (previously supplied).

AGREE/S TO THE FOLLOWING :

1. To provide care to children in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002, and within the U.K. National Minimum Standards for Foster Care and any other relevant Government legislation and guidance and within the Policies & Procedures of Foster Care Services North West.
2. To ensure that a Carer is in post at all times to fulfill the fostering tasks.
3. To attend Foster Carer Support Groups and to provide valid reasons for any absences.
4. Training needs will be established via the Carer and their Supervising Social Worker. Attendance will be agreed and valid reasons for any absences must be provided.
5. To provide a minimum of 28 days notice if wishing to cease appointment with Foster Care Services North West.
6. To take into consideration the impact of notice given on any existing placements and to complete a notice period which is focused at all times on the best interests of the child.
7. To give three months notice of any annual leave which is to be taken at school holiday periods.
8. To inform insurance companies providing household cover that they are fostering.
9. To have comprehensive motor insurance cover with business use for all car drivers in the household. Carers must have a fully taxed, roadworthy vehicle, which is suitable for transporting children in placement and a valid driving licence.
10. To keep financial records for accountancy purposes.
11. To keep confidential information, including children's records, in a safe place. (The Agency will contribute 50% of the cost of a lockable filing drawer).
12. To return confidential information to the Agency when a placement ends.
13. To maintain a daily record of the progress of each child in placement.
14. To provide written reports for children's statutory reviews and for any other meetings where a written contribution would be appropriate e.g. when a conference is convened for a child.
15. To keep medical records for the placement of each child which provide dates of medical, dental and optical checks. Copy of form included in Policy & Procedures Manual.

16. To maintain a training portfolio giving details of all training undertaken whilst with the Agency.
17. To abide by the Foster Carer Undertaking as agreed and signed on the date of appointment to the Agency.
18. To work as a member of a team of professional staff within the Agency, including the National Teaching and Advisory Service.
19. To provide adequate and appropriate equipment to enable them to cater for the children they are looking after.

In signing this document, the terms and conditions herein are agreed and accepted.

Signed on behalf of Foster Care Services North West

Name : _____

Position : _____

Signature : _____ **Date :** _____

Signed by Professional Foster Carer/s

Name/s : _____

Signature/s : _____

Date/s : _____

FEES

The weekly fee includes:

- a) basic maintenance.
- b) replacement clothing allowance.
- c) pocket money for child/young person.
- d) birthday and Christmas allowance.
- e) annual holiday expenses up to £300.
- f) up to £10 per school trip.
- g) Carer responsibility for transport of child/young person (within 10 mile radius of foster home) for education and contact.
- h) attendance at statutory reviews, placement agreement meetings, planning meetings and meetings requested by local authorities, education departments and the agency.
- i) attendance at support group meetings.
- j) attendance at Foster Carer training sessions.

NB. See the relevant policy document for the agency's minimum requirements regarding expenditure upon children in placement.

The basic placement fee does **NOT** include:

- a) initial/emergency clothing allowance.
- b) initial school uniform allowance
- c) costs in excess of £10 per school trip.
- d) dental, ophthalmic or any other medical treatments which would not be covered by normal standard routine charges.
- e) transport for young person which exceeds the 10 mile radius of foster home.
- f) damage to property inflicted by the child inside or outside the Foster Carer's home.

The above items will be subject to negotiation with the placing authority.

February, 2003.

FCSNW EXPECTATIONS OF FOSTER CARERS IN RELATION TO THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE.

Education is an important factor in the development of all children placed with the agency, and our education support service, provided by National Teaching & Advisory Service, is an integral part of the services we provide.

The agency expects all Carers to be committed to supporting children and young people in placement to reach their full educational potential, and to working alongside the staff of NT&AS, and the staff of the individual schools or colleges concerned, to enable this.

1. We expect all FCSNW Carers to:

- Work with NT&AS allocated teacher and local authority social worker to identify the best school placement for the child, and to be involved in the application and interview process for a place at the school.
- Make contact with relevant personnel at the school at the start of the child's attendance so that there is a known contact. This needs to be in place before any potential difficulties arise.
- Keep in regular contact with school to support efforts being made there on behalf of the child/young person.
- Inform the appropriate contact at school of any issues which may impact on the child's situation at school. Also to inform the NT&AS allocated teacher of such issues.
- Be willing to meet with school and NT&AS staff in order to maintain continuing progress or address any areas of concern or need.
- Attend parents' evenings, education reviews, meetings, etc.

2. FCSNW expect Carers:-

- To be aware of school rules and expectations and to support a child/young person to operate within them.
- To encourage and check that the child/young person has the correct uniform and equipment available at all times.
- To notify the school of any authorised absences due to illness etc.
- To avoid making appointments for doctors, dentist etc. in school time.
- To arrange family holidays during school holiday periods.

3. FCSNW expect Carers:-

- To transport children and young people to and from school where necessary. This will not always be linked to age, and may be necessary to support the child/young person successfully into the school placement.
- Where a child's school is some distance away from the Foster Carer's home, Carers are expected to be willing to support school attendance by transporting the child until alternative arrangements can be made. In those situations where a change of school is not in the child's best interests the Carers may be in a position to and be in agreement to transport the child with reimbursement of mileage being provided. If this is not possible, it would be the responsibility of the local authority to organise a taxi service.
- To be available to the child/young person at the end of the school day, to encourage and support their progress.
- To provide a suitable area and equipment for completion of homework.
- To be prepared to help with and check completion of homework etc., and to sign diaries where necessary.
- To be vigilant regarding any difficulties being encountered by the child/young person and to communicate with the school and NT&AS to enable the problem to be alleviated.
- To be prepared to provide daily support at home where appropriate for learning tasks such as reading, learning tables etc.
- To encourage the child/young person to take advantage of opportunities to extend their reading and learning by joining the local library and/or using other resources.

4. FCSNW expects Carers:-

- To undertake training to enable them to increase their knowledge and understanding of the education system and thereby better support the child/young person in their care.
- To attend compulsory induction training as new Carers to the agency, and ongoing training for professional development on a range of issues including education, as determined by the management of the agency.

ANNUAL REVIEWS

Foster Carers will be reviewed on an annual basis, or more frequently if Fostering Panel deem this to be appropriate. As part of the review procedure, local authorities who have used the services of the Carer will be requested to contribute a written reference to be considered as part of the review procedure. Carers and their FCSNW supervising social worker will also provide written documentation and End of Placement reports completed by social workers and children/young people placed will also be given consideration. The Review will be chaired by an Independent Social Worker and the reports and recommendations will be signed by all parties. Foster Carers will be provided with a written copy of their Review and will have the opportunity to comment upon it. The documentation from the Review will be placed before the Fostering Panel for their recommendation.

A Review may also be held following a complaint, allegation or other problem, or at the Carer's request, as stipulated in the Fostering Regulations.

Where there is a dispute between the Carer and the Agency following a Review, the Carer will have access to the use of the Appeals Procedure.

FOSTER CARERS' APPEALS PROCEDURE

Policy

If a Foster Carer is dissatisfied with the outcome of their Annual Review, or a decision of the Fostering Panel, they may use the following Appeals Procedure.

Procedure

1. They may, after seeing the review papers, wish to make representation to the Reviewing Officer c/o Foster Care Services North West. They should do this in writing, within 10 days of receipt of the review papers.
2. If they are dissatisfied with a decision to terminate their appointment as a Foster Carer, they may appeal within 28 days of receipt of written confirmation of the decision by writing to the Chair of the Fostering Panel c/o Foster Care Services North West.
3. The Chair of the Panel will then appoint an independent social worker, not previously involved in the decision, who will interview the Carer and members of staff involved.
4. S/he will make a response in writing, within 14 days, to the Chair of the Panel.
5. If the independent social worker feels that the Carer has been unfairly treated, s/he will refer the matter back to the Fostering Panel, who will be expected to give serious consideration to it.
6. The Carer will be invited to attend the Fostering Panel when it considers the independent social worker's report. The Carer may bring someone with them to support them if they wish.
7. The decision of the Panel will be communicated to the Carer in writing within 14 days.
8. If the Fostering Panel does not uphold the appeal, this decision is final and the Carers' termination of appointment will be upheld.
9. Whilst consideration is given to an appeal the Carers' income from the agency will not be affected. Cessation will only occur when the Panel have reached their final decision.

SECTION 2

HOLIDAYS AND ACTIVITIES

FCSNW arranges organised holidays and activities for the Carers and their placements. The Holiday Working Party, which is made up of Carers and a social work representative undertake the organisation of these events, and attempt to meet the needs and requests of Carers and young people when booking and making the necessary arrangements.

Each family is accommodated as a family unit, and Carers retain responsibility for their own placements; however, there will always be agency staff on site to assist in the event of an emergency or problem.

These holidays are restricted to Carers, their placements and immediate family who constitute the household to which the foster children are accustomed. The foster children have the opportunity to meet other young people in similar situations, and also have the chance to meet our short-term break Carers, with whom they may, at some point stay.

The agency will meet the costs of the holiday for all foster placements and junior Carers up to the age of sixteen. Owing to the large number of participants, good discounts are usually available for Carers.

ANNUAL LEAVE & SHORT-TERM BREAKS

Annual leave

Foster Carers are self-employed; self-employed workers do not receive remuneration when they are not working. However, this Agency offers Carers 2 weeks paid leave.

Short-term breaks

It is sometimes acknowledged that certain difficulties may arise, and it would benefit the child or young person and their Carer to have a short-term break.

Short-term breaks are provided in particular circumstances, and if agreed by the FCSNW Supervising Social Worker and the child's Social Worker, as being in the child's best interest.

BABYSITTING

Babysitting

Many Carers already have someone they can rely on to baby-sit or child-mind. (This must be a named individual where a CRB disclosure has been obtained).

FCSNW will meet the costs of babysitting/child-minding when the Carer has been involved in agency business. The agency will meet half the costs of baby-sitting, once a month, to assist the Carer attending a personal/social activity.

CARERS' ANNUAL LEAVE POLICY

FCS Carers are entitled to 14 nights annual leave; this does not have to be taken in one block, but may be broken down, for example, into long weekends.

It is clearly in the best interest of the child, if Carers could take their annual leave when a placement has ended, prior to a new one commencing. The Agency recognises that by doing so, the Carer would be financially disadvantaged. Therefore, the Agency would be prepared to compensate Carers, who choose to take holidays when there are no children at all in placement, by doubling the relevant retainer payment.

The Agency realises that more and more Carers are actually taking on long-term or permanent placements.

It is the agency's view that in making a commitment to care for a child for a lengthy period of their childhood or until an age of independence Carers are accepting the child as a member of their family. We therefore expect Carers to involve those children in family events, including the family's annual holiday.

Carers who have been with the Agency for five years or more may receive a contribution of £200 per week per child for a maximum of 2 weeks **provided** that the holiday takes place during school holiday periods.

Also, where a placement has been through and accepted by a permanency panel, those Carers will be eligible for the same contribution, irrespective of their length of service.

With regard to Carer's annual leave we have, consequently, to attach certain conditions which also take into account the best interests of the children and young people in placement:

1. Where ever possible, Carers do not take their annual leave during school term time; recent government legislation requires that children are not taken out of school during term-time, for the purpose of holidays. Even if the placements are to remain within the main Carers home with respite Carers, the change in routine can be unsettling, and therefore it is preferable for Carers to take their leave during holiday periods, when they are looking after a foster child.
2. The agency is given at least 3 months notice at main holiday times of Carers leave, so that satisfactory arrangements can be made and discussions and agreements take place with the local authority social worker. Ideally, there will be an opportunity for the children/young people to have introductions with their respite Carers if they do not already know them.
3. Every effort needs to be made for there to be consistency for the placement, and to this end, endeavours will be made for the same respite Carers to be involved with each family.

Revised : June, 2008

POLICY & PROCEDURE

PROVISION OF SHORT-TERM BREAKS TO CHILDREN IN PLACEMENT WITH FULL TIME CARERS

Short-term break care is provided in particular circumstances and if agreed by the FCSNW Supervising Social Worker and the child's Social Worker as being in the child's best interest. These circumstances are as follows:-

1. a) Carers are entitled to 14 nights paid annual leave. During this time, any child/children in placement, if possible, will be matched and placed with an FCSNW Short-term Break Carer for the period of the Carer's leave, or in exceptional circumstances and with the agreement of the Local Authority, with a relative or friend of the full time Carer, provided that all statutory checks have been completed.
 - b) Carers will be required to give 3 months notification of holidays to be taken during the summer period (June, July, August) to allow time for planning and to enable the Agency/Carers to experience the best and most efficient use of Agency resources.
2. Short-term breaks will also be provided when it is assessed by the Supervising Social Worker and the Principal Manager that the demands of a particular placement are high and where such provision may help to avoid a placement breakdown. In such circumstances, a short-term break will be identified and agreed by all parties and will be provided on no more than one weekend in four, this being seen as a maximum in normal circumstances. In exceptional circumstances, and in order to manage a move from an unsustainable placement more effectively, a special package of support may be put together on a time-limited basis. Such a package would need to be agreed at Director level.

All decisions relating to such short-term break arrangements will be made in discussion with, and with the agreement of the child's Social Worker. All decisions will be made with the best interests of the child as paramount.

3. The Main Carer will be required to pass on LAC forms and relevant information about the child's day to day care and any specific issues which may arise during the short-term break.
4. It is the responsibility of the Main Carer to transport the young person to their short-term break placement. If this is not possible, the Main Carer should contact the agency for appropriate arrangements to be negotiated, taking into consideration the welfare of the child as paramount.

SUPPORT

FCSNW Foster Carers benefit from a 24 hour support service every day of the year. This means they will always be able to access support and advice from an agency social worker.

Every Carer has an allocated supervising social worker, who will visit regularly, and also have regular telephone contact. Carers are issued with the mobile telephone numbers of their supervising social workers, who are all qualified social workers.

Ideally, Carers will have their own support networks, but there is also an expectation from the agency that Carers have a full commitment to attending Support Group Meetings.

Where possible a Foster Carer Support Worker will provide support to the Foster Carers, (4 hours a month) spending time with the placements to enable the foster family to have time together.

Support Groups

Support groups meet every six weeks organised by geographical location. Each group is facilitated by a supervising social worker, who will initially agree and negotiate ground rules for the individual group.

SECTION 3

PAYMENTS TO CARERS

(From 1st April 2009)

Carers are paid fortnightly the sum of £385.00 per week, per placement.

As Carers are classed as self-employed, they are responsible for making their own arrangements relating to tax and national insurance. Carers also need to be aware that they need to give consideration to their pensions and insurances. Advice is available from your local tax office.

The weekly amount paid to Carers includes elements for maintenance, clothing, pocket money, birthday and festival expenses, holiday costs, local travelling costs and the normal day to day expenses involved in looking after a child or young person.

Carers looking after expectant mothers receive £574.00 per week .

Carers looking after mother and baby placements receive £668.50 per week .

GUIDANCE REGARDING CARER'S EXPENSES

Carers receive a weekly fee to cover the maintenance of the child and their income as Professional Foster Carers.

Carers are not able to claim for mileage involved in transporting children to and from activities, clubs, work experience etc. Nor are they able to claim for mileage involved in attending organised trips, activities or holidays.

Carers will be reimbursed for the following expenses:

MILEAGE

Mileage can be claimed for the following journeys (**less 10 miles for a one way journey, 20 miles for a return journey**). Mileage is claimed at 30p per mile.

- Attendance at Support Group and Training Events.
- Attendance at Placement Agreement Meetings, Planning Meetings and Statutory Reviews when these are not held in the Carer's home.
- Attendance at Education Meetings.
- Attendance at Court.
- Transporting a child to facilitate family contact. (Where this entails exceptionally frequent contact, negotiations may be made with the L.A. to fund such journeys.)
- Transporting a child to Dental, Optical, Doctor and Hospital appointments.
- Transporting a child to and/or from school if the journey is beyond a ten mile radius of the Carer's home. (In some instances negotiations may be made with the Local Authority to fund such journeys.)
- Transporting a child to and/or from short-term breaks.

An example of a mileage claim form is attached for your information.

N.B. : Carers must have valid car insurance (fully comprehensive and business use) for all drivers of a vehicle which will be used to transport foster children, and ensure that such insurance specifies cover for the fostering task.

OTHER EXPENSES

Childminding/Babysitting - When a Carer is asked to attend a meeting and requires a babysitter to care for a child in placement whilst they do so, the Agency will pay the sum of £5 per hour for this task.

Furniture/Beds/Bedding/Car Seats - Full-time Professional Foster Carers are expected to be equipped to cater for the children they are looking after, just as any other self-employed business person. This means that Foster Carers are responsible for providing and maintaining equipment appropriate to the needs of the age range and physical abilities of the children covered in their approval.

However, in certain circumstances, where a Carer is requested to provide care to a child who would normally be outside their remit, the Agency would loan equipment for the duration of that placement, on the understanding that the equipment would be returned to the Agency at the end of the placement.

Initial Clothing - Should a child arrive in placement with inadequate clothing, the Local Authority will be requested to provide an Initial Clothing Grant. This will normally be addressed at the Placement Agreement Meeting. Authorisation must be given by the Local Authority prior to purchase. Receipts must be provided for all purchases, and an expenses claim form completed noting the name of the person from the Local Authority authorising the purchases. **Replacement clothing is the responsibility of the Carer.**

School Uniform - The Local Authority will be requested to provide a school uniform grant when a child starts a new school or when a child moves from primary to secondary school. The procedure will be as that for an initial clothing grant. Replacement school clothing is the responsibility of the Carer.

School Equipment - This will be supplied by the Carer.

School Trips/Holidays - These will be paid for by the Carer. If the cost is in excess of £10, negotiations will take place between FCSNW and the Local Authority to meet the cost.

Holidays - A holiday payment of £300 per year is included in the Carer's payment.

Damage - Carers need to ensure that they have informed insurance companies providing household cover that they are fostering. The agency strongly recommends that households take out adequate and appropriate insurance.

NOTE - Expense claims for items other than mileage should be accompanied by receipts.

Expense claims need to be received by the Friday prior to Carer's payment date to ensure prompt payment. Payment can only be made for claims incurred during the immediate prior three months.

APPENDIX

FOSTER CARE SERVICES NORTH WEST

POLICY WITH REGARD TO SMOKING

Statutory Framework

Local authorities have a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of all looked after children.

Children Act 1989 S22 (3)

A responsible authority shall not place a child with a foster parent unless it is satisfied that:-

A placement with a particular foster parent is the most suitable placement having regard to all the circumstances.'

Fostering Services Regulation
2002 33(b)

Improve children's wellbeing, defined by reference to the Five Outcomes. Every Child Matters.

(a) Be Healthy – Aims – Healthy Lifestyles – Inspection Criteria – Children & Young People are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse and supported in giving up.

Children Act 2004 Section 10

Position Statement

There is increasingly strong medical evidence to support the view that smoking and passive smoking have a detrimental effect upon the health and development of children.

This Agency believes that a smoking environment should be avoided, in the best interest of children who are to be placed away from home, and we are working towards a position where the looked after child will live in a smoke-free home.

All applicants and each carer, together with any person who lives or frequently reside or visit the family home will be subject to enquiries about any smoking habit. Foster carers where there is a smoker(s) in the household will be required to determine a Home Smoking Policy as part of their Safe Care Policy. This will be monitored regularly by their Supervising Social Worker and formally addressed at their foster care annual review.

Policy

1. Children under the age of five and older children with asthma or other respiratory problems will not usually be placed with carers who smoke.
2. Where applicants to foster do smoke, discussion will take place with them and information be provided early in the assessment process and again at annual reviews on the dangers of passive smoking to the health and development of children.
3. Where applicants have given up smoking, a child in the high risk group (see 1) will not usually be placed with them until they have given up smoking successfully for a minimum of 12 months.
4. Approved foster carers need to know that if they do smoke; placing Social Workers are more likely to choose non-smokers for preference. Foster carers will be asked to seriously consider giving up, to have the widest choice of placements.
5. Children will not usually be placed with carers who smoke, particularly those from non-smoking birth families, unless there are other very significant matching factors which would override this.
6. Currently approved foster carers who smoke and/or have frequent visitors who smoke will be encouraged to create a smoke-free home and to follow the guidance attached.
7. The Agency will record smoking habits on the foster carers' file.
8. Where foster carers are looking after a child or young person who smokes, the Agency will agree a plan with the local authority about how this is managed.
9. This Agency will encourage attendance at 'stop smoking' sessions offered by local health services in order to support them.

March, 2008

FOSTER CARE SERVICES NORTH WEST

GUIDANCE NOTES TO SMOKING POLICY

- 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 while you are smoking.
- There should be no smoking inside the house.
- If you must smoke inside, limit smoking to a room where you can open 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 a child sleeps and do not allow anyone else to smoke there.
- Never smoke while you are washing, dressing, playing with a child or cooking.
- 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.

March, 2008

FOSTER CARE SERVICES NORTH WEST

POLICY STATEMENT ON PET OWNERSHIP BY FOSTER CARERS

In its work as a Fostering Agency, Foster Care Services gives paramount consideration to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child throughout their childhood. Within this context, the Agency is happy for prospective foster carers to have household pets. However, it is recognised that some pets, particularly dogs, can pose dangers, therefore the Agency will not accept anyone as a prospective foster carer who possesses a pet listed as dangerous in legislation.

For all applicants who do possess a pet, the assessment process will highlight the need to protect children and to raise awareness of safety and pets with the applicants. It will be the responsibility of the assessing Social Worker to make a judgement as to the safety of a child in a household where pets are kept, and to ensure to the Agency and the Panel that the issues of ownership and safety have been fully considered.

In all cases, the Pet Ownership Questionnaire will be completed and will form part of the full assessment. The completed questionnaire will be kept on the applicant's file, along with the BAAF Form F. and all other necessary documentation.

PET OWNERSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PROSPECTIVE FOSTER CARERS

1. Why do you have pets?

Pet Working animal Breeding Member of the family

2. Number of pet(s) in household

3. Type of pet(s):-
Breed –
Sex –
Size –

4. Age of pet(s)

5. Has your pet been trained? Yes No

6. Who trained your pet(s)?

7. If a professional trainer, what is the qualification of the trainer?

8. Are your pets healthy and regularly wormed?

9. In which areas of the house are the pets allowed? Identify pet and where e.g. kitchen, living room, dining room, master bedroom, small bedroom, other.

10. Are carpets and furniture kept free of pet hairs?

11. Which areas are exclusive (if any) to other pet(s)? i.e. kennel, caged area, garden, tank, other – please specify. Identify pet and area.

12. Does locality of area present any safety risks?
State where cages/tanks etc. are kept for pet(s).

13. Where do pet(s) sleep at night?

14. Where do pet(s) sleep during the day?

15. How are pets kept under control?
 - i) within the home

 - ii) outside the home

16. Temperament of pet(s), identify pet and note:- boisterous, usually placid, playful, possessive, nervous, docile/submissive, protective of persons, protective of property.

17. Where does pet(s) toilet?

18. Are gardens free from pet urine and excrement?

19. If you breed pet(s), state which, and where this takes place.

20. What happens to them, are they kept/sold?

21. Does the pet(s) fight with other animals? Yes No

22. Does the pet(s) worry other people in public or visiting the home?

Yes No Not applicable

23. If yes, identify pet and context of concerns.

24. Have the pet(s) ever snapped, snarled at or hurt anyone?

Yes No

25. If yes, identify pet(s), context of incident and what treatment was needed, if any.

26. What contact/experience has pet(s) had of children?
Identify individual pet(s).

27. When present pet(s) dies, do you intend to replace it/them?

28. How would you recognise and manage conflict between pet(s) and child/infant?

29. If there was conflict where a child got hurt, would you do any of the following?

Pet to any agency

Pet to a friend/relative

Pet put down

Request removal of the child

30. Where is the pet fed?

31. Are feeding bowls and litter trays out of reach of children?

32. Does your pet(s) need exercising?

Yes No

33. If yes, identify pet, who normally exercises pet, how many times a day and duration.

34. Any other information you consider to be relevant.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR PET OWNERS APPROVED AS FOSTER CARERS
BOTH PRIOR TO PLACEMENT OF CHILD AND AFTERWARDS**

1. No matter how well you feel you know your pet, they are animals and can demonstrate behaviours you may never have seen if they feel frightened, or under threat. As a potential carer of children, you must accept this as a possibility.
2. Consult your vet for advice.
3. Do not change the routine of the pet(s).
4. Do not change pet(s) eating/exercise habits.
5. Consider areas pet(s) is allowed into, the pet has established its territory and change would be unwelcome to it. However, it may be necessary to instigate change due to safety or health issues i.e. pet sleeping in bedroom. It is therefore important to introduce any changes at an early stage to avoid association with arrival of child.
6. Do not muzzle the pet(s).
7. To integrate child and pet(s) may be a slow process:-
 - increase affection shown to your pet(s) after placement to lessen jealousy of a child.
 - Avoid pet(s) witnessing all of the affection being shown to a child, to avoid exclusion from attention given.
 - Introduce your pet to the child slowly. A large dog may be friendly to you, but can appear terrifying to a young child. Safety gates may need to be used for a while until both get used to each other.
8. If in any doubt consult your vet for advice about the behaviour of your pet(s).

Signed: _____

_____ **Applicants**

_____ **Date**

_____ **Supervising
Social Worker**

Date: _____

FOSTER CARE SERVICES NORTH WEST

COMPLAINTS AND REPRESENTATION PROCEDURE

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Service Regulation National Minimum Standards require that a fostering agency shall have procedures in place to consider complaints and representations made by or on behalf of children or by any other individual who is unhappy with any aspect of the service provided by the agency or its staff.
- 1.2 The children and young people who are placed with FCSNW Carers will be “looked after” by local authorities who under legislation will have their own complaints procedure. It is important to note that these procedures are not intended to replace the complaints procedures provided by local authorities. Complainants will be consulted about which procedure it is appropriate to use, and where a child is making the complaint the Local Authority responsible for that child or young person will be consulted also.
- 1.3 These procedures are not intended to replace child protection, grievance or disciplinary procedures.
- 1.4 We encourage our Carers and staff to be receptive at all times to dissatisfaction or representation and complaints made about our service. No individual or organisation is perfect, and we can always learn from what people have to say about us. To fail to respond promptly and sympathetically to a complaint in its early stages can lead to serious problems at a later date. We therefore regard these procedures in a positive light, and see them as an important tool whereby we can monitor and evaluate the standard of services we give to our children and their families.

2. Policy

2.1 We have based our procedures on the principles listed below:

We seek to create an ethos in which a child, parent or Carer or other responsible adult can confidently make a representation or complaint knowing that it will be dealt with promptly and with fairness.

The procedure should be easily understood and made available to children, parents and Local Authority staff in pamphlets written in appropriate language.

Any complaint should be resolved as near to the point at which it arose as possible.

The level at which the complaint or representation is dealt with will reflect the seriousness of that complaint or representation.

Regardless of who made the representation or complaint, the views of the child will be sought and taken into account in the light of their age and understanding.

An independent element is seen as an essential part of the procedures.

All representation and complaints will be recorded in writing and made available to the relevant authorities.

The outcome of a complaint will be placed before the Fostering Panel, and any necessary action will be taken by them.

3. The Procedures

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 clearly envisages three stages in the procedure:

- i) Informal problem solving
- ii) Introduction of an independent element
- iii) Appeal to a Panel consisting of three persons at least, one of whom is independent of the agency.

Stage 1

4. Informal Problem Solving

- 4.1 Carers and staff are encouraged to pay attention at all times to those expressing dissatisfaction with the service in the foster home or, in any other area associated with their care. They are asked to seek, where possible, to resolve matters as part of their normal daily routine and duties, but where they are unable to do so, they are instructed to make the Complainant aware of these procedures and assist them in pursuing the complaint.

- 4.2 In the event of a Carer or other staff members receiving a complaint which they are unable to solve themselves, they are required to encourage the Complainant to pursue the complaint procedure and to ensure that the child or young person has a copy of the leaflet "Your Right to Complain". They are asked also to advise him/her of their rights to have independent advice on the issue which concerns them. If required they will assist the Complainant to put his/her complaint in writing and ensure that it reaches the Designated Officer.

Stage 2

5. Investigation by a Senior Manager

- 5.1 Not all complaints will be dealt with in the same manner. Depending on the nature of the complaint, different responses will be required. An initial screening process will be undertaken by the Designated Officer to decide which route is appropriate.
- 5.2 The majority of day to day concerns will be dealt with by those with responsibility for the management of the fostering service. Issues to do with standards of care, safety and attitude are best dealt with by the Supervising Social Worker, overseen by their Team Manager in the first instance.
- 5.3 Formal complaints made about standards of care will be investigated by a Senior Manager who is independent of those involved in content of the complaint. The Manager will interview the Complainant, ideally within 24 hours of receipt of the complaint, but if this is not possible, it should be dealt with within one week.
- 5.4 Similarly the Carer or other staff member who may be the subject of the complaint will be informed of the complaint within, ideally 24 hours of its receipt. They will be given information on how the complaint will be investigated.
- 5.5 Complaints about standards of care need a careful and prompt response from the Agency. They will be taken by the Supervising Social Worker and the Manager investigating the complaint, visiting the Carer and jointly discussing with the Carer the nature of the complaint.
- 5.6 Such meetings must be fully recorded and the outcome clearly communicated to all parties.

- 5.7 A report of the outcome of the investigation will be completed and given to the Complainant and the Foster Carer. One copy will remain on file. This report must clearly state the intended future relationship between Carers and Agency.
- 5.8 Any commitment to change, e.g. a particular way of working, or manner of care of a child etc. should be monitored and Carers informed of the outcome of the monitoring.
- 5.9 The complaint and details of its outcomes will be placed before the Fostering Panel, and any necessary action taken.
- 5.10 All papers relating to unfounded complaints will be filed separately from the Carer's main file.

Stage 3

6. Independent Investigation

- 6.1 In circumstances where the Complainant or Carer is not satisfied with the outcome of the above internal procedure, an Investigator totally independent of the Agency will be appointed to further consider the complaint.
- 6.2 Any such appointment will be discussed and agreed with all parties prior to the commencement of this independent investigation. Local Authority Social Workers will be informed of the progress of the investigation and its outcome.
- 6.3 The Independent Investigator will ensure that the Complainant is aware of his/her right to complain under various procedures and advise most suitable. Where appropriate, this will include making the Complainant aware of his right to seek advice from his Solicitor, Member of Parliament, Local Councillor, Local Government Commissioner and the various voluntary bodies such as ASC and other advocacy services who seek to represent the interests of children in care and their parents.

- 6.4 The Independent Investigator will have the right (subject to the necessary permissions) to examine any relevant documents held by FCSNW, and to interview Carers, staff and witnesses as appropriate. The method of the investigation will be at her discretion and will not be interfered with by the management of FCSNW.
- 6.5 If the Complainant chooses an alternative to the FCSNW procedure, then the Independent Investigator will assist the Complainant in making his/her complaint to the relevant authority.
- 6.6 The Independent Investigator will report to the Designated Officer in writing within 48 hours of completing her investigation. A copy of her report will be sent to the Complainant, the Social Worker, and if appropriate, other relevant parties.

7. Appeal Procedure

- 7.1 Where a Complainant remains dissatisfied with the response at Stage III, they may request that an Appeals Panel be set up to reconsider the complaint.
- 7.2 The Panel will consist of two Directors of the Agency and an independent person. The Complainant and the Independent Investigator may make representation to the Panel, who will respond in writing within 24 hours to the Complainant and the Independent Investigator.

8. Fostering Panel

- 8.1 On completion of an investigation, a report of the complaint and its outcome and any recommendations will be placed before the Fostering Panel. Panel will take any necessary action.

9 Designated Officer

The person designated as the Complaints Receiving Officer is Liz Dent, Principal Manager. Her responsibilities are:

To oversee the investigation of complaints that cannot be resolved informally.

To inform the relevant authority of any complaint made by or on behalf of a child who is “looked after” and to determine when it is more appropriate to use that authority’s procedures.

To ensure that the Complainant is aware of the avenues of complaint open to him/her.

To ensure that the relevant parties receive copies of the Investigator’s report.

To establish a register to record complaints and the details and results of the investigation. To collate such information as is available to incorporate in the Agency Statement of Purpose.

To inform OFSTED of all complaints and their outcome.