



Concerns, Complaints and Allegations Policy and Procedure

This policy relates to concerns, complaints and allegations raised about foster carers. Anyone of these can be raised internally or from outside bodies, children are also able to raise these. All negative feedback or issues regarding foster carers **must** be recorded and passed on as laid out in these procedures. For the process of complaints and allegation against foster carers please refer to the Flow Chart relating to complaints or allegation against foster carers.

This policy is also applicable for foster carers who wish to make a complaint, e.g. about Nationwide Fostering staff, Local Authority staff, any third-party staff related to Nationwide Fostering.

This Policy and procedures are drawn up in line with the National Minimum Standards, namely NMS 22 (Handling allegations and suspicions of harm) and the Fostering Service Regulation 2011 18 (1).

The complaints procedures are given to all foster carers (Foster Carer Handbook) and all children and young people are informed of their right to complain and the procedures are outlined in age appropriate language in the children's handbooks. Any comments by carers or children upon these procedures or the policy are taken account of.

Nationwide Fostering is motivated to draw learning from any concerns or complaints raised against them. No child or foster carer making a complaint or raising concerns will be subject to any reprisals from Nationwide Fostering.

Responsible Person

The Registered Manager is the designated person for managing allegations. He has, in accordance with NMS 22.5, responsibility for liaising with the LADO and keeping everyone involved in the allegation informed of progress and development.

Recording and Retention

A comprehensive summary of the allegations or complaints is kept on the person's file. The summary includes details of the allegation, how it was followed up, how it was resolved, actions and decisions taken. A copy of this summary is given to the person as soon as the investigation is concluded.

Information relating to allegation is kept until a person's retirement age, or for 10 years if this is longer.

Panel

After an allegation is made against a Nationwide Fostering foster carer, the foster carer's approval may be reviewed depending on the nature and severity of the complaint or the allegation. The case is presented to the panel for the consideration of their approval.

An Investigation Report is presented to the panel so as to inform them of the details of the allegation, the investigation, as well as the outcome and actions and decisions which were made. In some cases additional reports (i.e. AFCD, additional report by an independent social worker) are presented alongside the investigation report.

The Responsible Individual takes the recommendation of the panel into consideration, when making a decision about the approval criteria of the foster carer.

Definitions

Concerns – relates to negative feedback regarding a foster carer that does not relate to abuse, neglect or serious issues relating to the standard of care. Feedback may be received verbally to any member of staff and may originate from a looked after child, fellow foster carer, member of Nationwide Fostering staff, Local Authority Social Worker, another professional involved in the care of a child, or a member of the public. An example of a concern is that the foster carer is not making themselves available to visits by the agency on an ongoing basis; they have missed appointments with staff; they constantly arrive late for training or they are displaying negativity about a child. This list is not exhaustive.

Complaint – Complaints should be received formally, therefore if a professional is raising serious concerns about the standard of care of a child (not abuse) or the professional conduct of a foster carer this should be put in writing to Nationwide Fostering. If a child is raising the issue a clear recording of what the child has stated should be made using the language the child used. Any formal complaint will be investigated by the designated complaints officer or an independent worker. An example of a complaint may be about how the foster carer terminated a placement, dealt with a fellow professional or birth family. This list is not exhaustive.

Allegation – Definition of an allegation: An allegation consists of information or a suspicion that a person may have:

- a) behaved in a way that has, or may have, harmed a child;
- b) possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or
- c) behaved towards a child in a way that indicates he or she is unsuitable to work with children.

To elaborate on this further: An allegation refers to a concern regarding suspected abuse, serious neglect of a child, or poor standard of care on a severe level. It may also include that the foster carer is allegedly engaged in criminal activities, this may include benefit fraud. It is likely that the investigation of an allegation will be guided by the Local Authority involved and Nationwide Fostering's Child Protection Policy, or

investigated by an outside body. It is Nationwide Fostering's standard policy to use an Independent person or Senior Manager to investigate the allegation.

Process

All issues raised must be reported to the Registered Manager (RM) and the Safeguarding Officer (SGO) at the earliest opportunity. The notification must state whether it is a complaint, concern or an allegation. If it is ambiguous then it will be for the Registered Manager to define the issue. There will be two logs, one for allegations and complaints relating to Ofsted Notifications (Ofsted Notification Folder), and one for complaints which do not require a notification to Ofsted (Complaints Folder).

At the time an allegation is made the foster carer is 'suspended', meaning no other children will be placed with this foster carer until all issues are investigated, addressed, resolved and the case is presented to the fostering panel. The relevant authorities are notified, including those Local Authorities with children in placement with the same foster carer and the LADOs. All relevant stakeholders are kept updated where appropriate until the allegation is fully investigated and the matter closed.

Any notifiable events under Schedule 7 of the FSR 2011 must be recorded in the Ofsted Notification Folder. In accordance with NMS 29 the Registered Manager ensures all relevant persons and authorities (including LADO, LSCB, Ofsted) are informed within 24 hours of the relevant event. Any verbal notification is followed up at the earliest opportunity in writing. Nationwide Fostering uses the Ofsted Online Portal for notifications to Ofsted. In case of technical difficulties or problems at the time of writing the Ofsted Notification, a word document of the notification can be completed and posted to Ofsted instead. This method is only to be used where the Online facility is not available.

The Registered Manager needs to be notified once any action required as part of the investigation is completed and the outcome. The Registered Manager will be reminded regularly of any outstanding responses.

The Registered Manager ensures that a summary of all complaints and allegations made against Nationwide Fostering is included in the Quarterly Monitoring Reports and provided to Ofsted (quarterly).

Any foster carer against which an allegation or serious complaint has been made is presented to the Nationwide Fostering 'fostering panel'. See above for details.

For further details on processes relating to the Review Process and the involvement of Panel please refer to 'Foster Panel Procedures and Roles'.

Complaints Leaflet

Nationwide Fostering has a Complaints leaflet (see below) which is made available to children, foster carers, parents, Local Authorities and anyone else who has an interest and role in the welfare of the children placed with us or in the running of our organisation.

It is important to note that Nationwide Fostering will always advocate engaging in a constructive dialogue when faced with a complaint or concern. Most complaints can be resolved by way of meeting face to face and addressing issues openly.

The policy and procedure of how a formal complaint, once received, is dealt with is described in the leaflet below.



Complaints, Comments, Compliments

Guide and feedback form

At Nationwide Fostering we strive to provide the highest standard of service to children, parents, foster carers and Local Authorities.

We encourage feedback from everyone who receives services from us. We are proud to note that over the years we have received overwhelmingly positive reactions.

Maybe you feel we have done something badly or should have provided something in addition to what you received. Maybe you want to make a comment about a particular issue or pay us a compliment about something we have done really well.

Who can make a complaint?

- a) Any child who is being looked after by Nationwide Fostering or a person acting on their behalf.
- b) A parent of his or her or person with parental responsibility.
- c) Any Nationwide Fostering or family member.
- d) Any Nationwide Fostering staff member.
- e) Any person which Nationwide Fostering considers has sufficient interest in a child's welfare to warrant his or her representations being considered by them.

How to make a complaint?

You can call our office and ask to speak to the Complaints Officer (Nationwide Fostering, The Atrium, 4th Floor, 1 Harefield Road, Uxbridge, Middlesex UB8 1EX). Tel - 0203 6000 750

Email - enquiries@nationwidefostering.org.uk

If they are not available, speak to a Senior Manager on 0203 6000 750. Alternatively, you can use this leaflet and return it to us at the above address.

The complaints procedure

There are a maximum of three stages, but a complaint can be resolved and completed at any stage, depending on whether the people involved agree on the outcome.

Stage 1 (informal)

Most complaints are resolved at this stage. Nationwide Fostering will always try and resolve a complaint at stage 1 by meeting face to face with the complainant and if

appropriate a mediator. The meeting should take place within 10 working days from the time of receiving your complaint.

If the problem cannot be resolved informally and the complainant wishes to take the matter further, the complaint will move to stage 2. If the complainant is a child, he/she will be given help to express his/her views clearly, with the help of an advocate if necessary.

Stage 2 (formal)

The complaint will be investigated by the Nationwide Fostering Complaints Officer, or in some cases this may be an independent investigating person, who would consider the complaint and formulate a response within 28 days. Before the expiry of the 28-day period the agency should inform the following persons:

- a) The complainant.
- b) If different, the person on whose behalf the complaint was made unless the agency considers he/she is not of sufficient understanding, or that it might be likely to cause serious harm to his/her health or emotional condition.
- c) The independent person
- d) Any other person whom Nationwide Fostering considers has sufficient interest in the case (e.g. in the case of a looked after child, the responsible authority).

The information should include the proposed result of the agency's consideration of the complaint. At the same time, the complainant should be informed of his/her right to ask, within 28 days, to have the complaint referred further to a complaints panel if he/she is unhappy with the agency's decision.

Stage 3 (formal)

If the complainant does exercise his/her right to stage 3 and informs the Agency (in writing and within 28 days of completion of stage two) that he/she is dissatisfied, the matter should be referred to a complaints panel, where he/she may be able to have their complaint considered. The panel should include an independent person (who may not necessarily be the same person who acted as an independent person at the first stage). Within 24 hours of the panel meeting their recommendations and their reasons for reaching such recommendations should be sent to:

- a) The Directors of Nationwide Fostering.
- b) The complainant.
- c) The (original) independent person, if different from the independent person on the panel.
- d) Any other person whom the agency considers has sufficient interest in the case (e.g. the Local Authority).

Appointment of Independent Persons

Nationwide Fostering will appoint an independent person to take part in all formal stages of the Agency's consideration of a complaint.

If a complaint is made against the Responsible Individual, then the other Nationwide Fostering Directors / COM will be involved in identifying an independent senior person to act as a Complaints Officer who is totally independent of the Agency. Any recommendation made by the independent person or complaints panel will be considered by the other directors for the appropriate course of action and Ofsted will be informed of the outcome immediately.

Contact details of Ofsted:

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate 4
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Tel. 0300 123 1231

Children's Commissioner for England

Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Tel: 0800 528 0731 email: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

Nationwide Fostering

Complaints Officer
The Atrium, 4th Floor
1 Harefield Road
Uxbridge, Middlesex
UB8 1EX

0203 6000 750

enquiries@nationwidefostering.org.uk

Online enquiry: www.nationwidefostering.org.uk

Complaints, Comment and Compliment Form

I am making a (please tick one box):

Complaint

Comment

Compliment

Your Details: Title _____ First Name _____

Last Name _____

Address _____

_____ Post Code _____

Telephone _____ Mobile _____

Email _____

I am a (please tick one box):

Foster Carer

Child/Young Person

Local Authority

Other, Please specify _____

Your Complaint, Comment or Compliment

(If you are making a complaint, please be specific what you are complaining about. Tell us what in your v

Please use a separate sheet of paper if necessary.