

Complaints, Comments and Compliments

This guidance provides information regarding the complaints procedures about the Fostering Service. Alongside our formal complaints procedures, we encourage comments and contributions from foster carers which can inform and assist us with improving practice and service development. We have established routes for carers to provide feedback and make contributions to service development, including carer stakeholder groups and via our relationship with carer representatives from the Leeds Foster Carer Association (LFCA).

We welcome your feedback about our services, including how we might have done things better. We will always look to see if we can resolve any issues you may have as quickly as possible on an informal basis first providing we are able to and you are happy for us to do so.

1.

Resolving Complaints Informally

It is hoped that the people immediately concerned with a complaint or issue can resolve the majority of these informally. Foster carers are encouraged to discuss any concerns or complaints in the first instance with either your supervising social worker or with the child's social worker - whichever is most appropriate according to the circumstances of the case and the nature of the complaint. Issues are often resolved at this stage, sometimes with the assistance of team managers or, if appropriate, the involvement of a service delivery manager.

Foster carers may also wish to pursue issues and concerns via their foster carer representatives from their support group and / or via the LFCA (Leeds Foster Care Association).

The Fostering Service and assistant head of service (looked after children) meet carer representatives regularly at the Foster Carer Liaison Group (FCLG) and discuss and resolve a range of carer issues and concerns.

1.1 Formal Complaints – Procedures

If informal routes have failed to resolve issues, foster carers wishing to formally complain about the service in respect of children or young people placed with them should use the procedure outlined below in Section 1.2. For children / young people who wish to complain about their care or services received, the procedure in Section 1.2 will also apply.

Carers may also complain on behalf of a child or young person that they care for and again the same procedure will be followed as Section 1.2.

Foster carers who have issues regarding their foster carer agreement and / or terms and conditions (where applicable), payments or other related fostering service issues should raise the matter initially with their supervising social worker and / or with the fostering team manager. If dissatisfied with the response, please follow the procedure outlined in section 1.3 below.

If the complaint relates to disagreement between the fostering service and the carer regarding terms of approval and suitability, this will be considered by the fostering service and a report presented to a fostering panel. (See section 1.4 below).

1.2 Complaint by a child, young person or a foster carer regarding the service for children or young people placed with them

If unresolved informally, children or young people in foster placements wishing to make a complaint about any aspect of the service, (including their foster home) should use the children's complaints procedure. This procedure is clearly set out to meet national regulations together with clear expectations on how children and young people are assisted during the process.

This can include children and young people having access to an advocate from Leeds Children's Rights (contact details at the end of this document) who can assist with the complaint and act as their advocate.

Foster carers should ensure that any child or young person placed with them has access to a copy of the children's complaints leaflet, relevant to their age. Those children who cannot read, but who are able to understand the process, should have it explained to them. If a foster carer needs help with this they should contact their supervising social worker or the child's social worker.

Any allegations of abuse in the foster home will be dealt with under Leeds City Council's safeguarding procedures. Foster carers are provided with separate guidance and advice on allegations procedures. Support and advice information for foster carers subject to allegations (including independent support) is available via the foster carer's supervising social worker.

The 3 stage procedure for the investigation of complaints from children and carers regarding children placed with them

Stage 1:

The customer relations service will ask a manager responsible for providing the service to look into the issue / complaint you have raised and they may ask to meet with you or talk to you on the telephone. They should respond to you within 10 working days of receiving the complaint to let you know the outcome of their investigation and what they are going to do.

If your complaint is complex and this isn't possible, then the response will be within 20 working days. You will also subsequently receive a written response.

If you (or the child / young person in question) feel that the response at stage 1 has not fully and fairly responded to the issues raised then you can ask for your complaint to be considered at stage 2.

Stage 2:

At least one independent investigating officer will be assigned from outside of the fostering service to thoroughly investigate your complaint. You will receive a response from the adjudicating officer (a senior manager within children's services) within 65 working days, together with copies of the investigating officer's report and, if assigned, an independent person's report.

If you (or the child / young person in question) still feel that your complaint has not been resolved you can request to move to stage 3.

Stage 3:

You can ask (within 20 working days) for an independent review panel to review the investigation and the response. The panel will make recommendations to the director of children's services within 5 working days of this review and the director will give you a final response within 15 working days.

Although this is the end of the complaints process, you may also have the right to ask the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) to look into your complaint. The customer relations service will provide you with the LGO contact details once stage three of the complaints process is completed.

1.3 Foster Carer Complaints regarding the Fostering Service

Foster carers wishing to formally complain about their foster carer agreement, terms and conditions (where applicable), payments or other issues regarding the fostering service should raise the matter initially with their supervising social worker. If this remains unresolved, the following route can be taken:

Stage 1:

You should bring your concerns to the attention of the appropriate fostering team manager.

The fostering service should then consider mediation and conflict resolution and how this can be achieved in consultation with you at this stage (and at all other stages). The fostering service should make an attempt to resolve matters within 20 working days (unless an extension is agreed with you.) You will then receive a formal response.

If you feel that the consideration of your complaint has been unsatisfactory once a formal response has been received, you can proceed to Stage 2.

Stage 2:

You should write to the service delivery manager (SDM Fostering) and explain the reasons why you believe that the consideration of the complaint has not resolved your grievances. The SDM Fostering should provide a written response within 28 working days. If, in exceptional circumstances, the SDM Fostering feels it is more appropriate for an independent person to investigate the matter, they will inform you about this and arrange for this to take place.

If you still feel dissatisfied with the response from the SDM Fostering, you can proceed to Stage 3.

Stage 3:

You should write to the head of service (looked after children) with reasons why you wish to take the matter further. The head of service will provide a written response within 28 working days. If it is felt that it would be beneficial, an independent review panel can be appointed to review the investigation and response. In this case, the panel will make recommendations to the head of service within 5 working days of the review taking place and then the deputy director (safeguarding, specialist and targeted services) will give you a final response within 15 working days.

1.3.1 Externally employed Foster Carers

Foster carers who are employed by external fostering agencies (including IFA's - Independent Fostering Agencies) but caring for children in the care of Leeds City Council who wish to make complaints about their own fostering service should, in the first instance, approach their own agency. If the complaint is about the care or wellbeing of a child, you can approach Leeds City Council directly.

1.4 Foster Carer Terms of Suitability and Approval.

If the complaint relates to a disagreement between the fostering service and a carer regarding terms of approval and suitability, this will be the subject of a report provided by a supervising social worker and considered by a fostering panel.

The fostering panel will then make a recommendation to the agency decision maker (ADM), who must then write to you informing you of his/her views and giving you 28 days to outline your response in writing. Your response will then be considered by the ADM and may then be presented back to the fostering panel for further discussion. The panel may either make a different recommendation or uphold their original recommendation. The ADM has to take note of the recommendations of the fostering panel before proceeding to make his/her decision.

If you are unhappy with the ADM decision, you have the right to appeal to the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM) within 28 days. The fostering service can provide details of how to apply to the IRM and how the process independently reviews and makes decisions on complaints.

1.5 Compliments

Everybody likes to get a compliment and we're no exception. But apart from just knowing that our services and staff are doing well, generally receiving compliments can be beneficial.

They help inform us about what we are doing well and that can really make a difference for foster carers and the children they care for. We will always respond to you when you send us a compliment, even if it is just to say thank you.

1.6 Safeguards

1.6.1 Confidential Advice

We recognise that making a complaint can be challenging. We also acknowledge that if you are making a complaint during the assessment process and prior to your approval, this can sometimes be even more so.

We should re- assure you that your right to complain does not affect any decisions or relationship between you and us. However, we acknowledge that you may wish to speak to someone before you consider complaining and receive confidential advice.

You can call our customer relations service on (0113) 3785111 for confidential advice before you decide to go ahead with a complaint. (We would only release information without your consent at this stage if you were to disclose information that might mean someone was at risk if we did not act).

1.6.2 Harassment or Victimisation

The Council recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make, not least because of the fear of possible reprisal from those who are the subject of the concern. We will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take action to protect you when you raise a concern in good faith. (This does not mean that if you are already the subject of an investigation, that those procedures will be halted as a result of your complaint).

If at any time, either during or after the investigation, you feel that you have suffered any detriment as a result of your having raised a concern or complaint you should contact customer relations on (0113) 3785111.

1.6.3 Anonymous Complaints and Allegations

Complaints can be made anonymously. However, this policy encourages you to put your name to any complaints you make, as concerns expressed anonymously are often much more difficult to investigate. For example, we may need to contact you to obtain further information or verify the details you have already given us.

Anonymous allegations will be considered wherever possible at the discretion of the council service receiving them. The factors to be taken into account when determining whether an investigation in such a case can proceed would include:

- the seriousness of the issues raised (including children's safeguarding)
- the creditability of the concern; and
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation from other, attributable sources

Contact information:

Customer Relations (Complaints, Comments, Compliments)
P O Box 837,
Leeds, LS1 9PZ Tel: (0113) 3785111

Leeds Children's Rights Service
Low Wood
Clarence Road
Horsforth, Leeds LS18 4LB Tel: 0800 6527212
