The Guide to Foster Care

THIS GUIDE IS PROVIDED FOR THE FOLLOWING GROUPS OF STAFF AND OTHERS:

Social Workers

Staff

Managers in the Children’s Services

Foster Carers

Young People

Other Agencies involved with Children and Young People in Foster Care

THIS GUIDE IS DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE THE FOLLOWING OUTCOMES:

• Placement choice for children who need to be looked after

• Quality Care for every child who is placed in foster care

• Positive outcomes for children who are looked after in substitute families – in terms of:-
  Being healthy
  Staying safe
  Enjoying and achieving
  Making a positive contribution
  Achieving economic wellbeing

  The reader is referred to the Every Child Matters website

• Consistent practice and procedure based on research, lessons learnt and high standards

The following documents are associated with this guide and should be referred to in conjunction with relevant chapters:-

10032 - Foster Care
10009 - Promoting the health of Looked After Children -
10025 - Supporting and Looking After Children who may need alternative care
10037 - Children's Services - Section 20 Accommodation Panel
10005 - Pathway - Assessment, Planning and Review of Care Leavers

20041 - Information Requirements for identifying and at the start of placements
20031 – Supporting and Looking After Children who may need alternative care
20054 - Children’s Services - Section 20 accommodation panel
20012 - Promoting the Health of Looked After Children
Introduction

This guide has been prepared with a number of areas in mind:-

To provide staff and foster carers with a reference point for all areas involved in foster care practice

To bring together the plethora of documents and guidance prepared and implemented in recent times

To meet the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for Foster Care and the related regulations

To facilitate guidance in electronic format

It is recognised that no guide will address every eventuality or set of circumstances in an area as complex and diverse as the placement of children with families in the community. This document seeks to provide guidance and the ‘tone’ of good practice, which will assist with issues not specifically addressed.

The guide will be produced in electronic format for staff and available on the E-library but can be downloaded into MY DOCUMENTS for ready use by individuals. It will be provided to foster carers on CD with advice about how to access. The main guide contains a number of hyperlinks to other documents which are relevant to the placement of children with foster carers.

The Service strives to provide for the placement needs of all Looked After Children, both on a short term basis and for those who require permanent substitute care. Many of the carers recruited to provide for children will care for children whose best interest will be served by adoption. Separate procedures have been drawn up in respect of adoption in Cumbria as
dictated by the National Standards. However, there will be many places where the two documents overlap and the good practice ethos will be similar in both.

The material can be made available in tape or CD form if this was required by an individual with visual impairment.

The relevant material can also be made available in another language for anyone whose first language is not English.

For translation or specialist formats please contact Brenda Powe on 01946 852830 or Brenda.Powe@cumbriacc.gov.uk

These procedures have been brought together in five chapters and cover all aspects of placing children in foster care:

**Chapter 1.** Management and Delivery of the Foster Care Service

**Chapter 2.** Securing and Promoting the Welfare of Children in Foster Placements

**Chapter 3.** Recruiting, Assessment, Supporting and Training - Foster Carers

**Chapter 4.** Record Keeping, Use of Premises and Financial Arrangements

**Chapter 5.** Approval, Review and Termination of approval of Foster Carers – (the role of the Adoption and Fostering Panels).

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Chapter 1  Management and Delivery of the Foster Care Service

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Chapter 1

The Management and Delivery of the Foster Care Service

1.1 Statement of Purpose

This document sets out the objectives of the Family Placement Service and how these are delivered. It is required by the National Minimum Standards for Services and is ratified by the elected members of the Cumbria County Council. A copy can be accessed on the County Council E-library and the document is updated on an annual basis.

The statement of Purpose covers the following areas:-

Aims and Objectives of the Service
Services Provided
Services to Foster Carers
Services to Children in Placement
Education of Children Looked After
Health of Children Looked After
Children with Disabilities
Staff in the Service
Management of the Service
Statistics relating to the Service
Safety of Children in Foster Care
Multi-agency working

1.2 Management of the Service

The Service Manager - Fostering is the responsible and Registered Manager of the Service with Ofsted.

The post holder is required to undergo an examination by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to ensure they are a fit person to manage such a service, a Criminal Records Bureau enhanced check initiated by the CSCI and to notify the CSCI of any convictions they receive while holding the post. The post holder is managed by the Co-ordinating Manager – Looked After Children Services

The management structure of the service will be subject to development as the delivery of the service changes to meet new demands and expectations. The posts below are in place to facilitate:-

- Line Management Accountability
- Recruitment, Supervision, Training, Appraisal and Support of Staff
- Quality Assurance in Placements
- Financial Responsibility
- Development of the Service to meet the needs of Looked After Children
- Reporting to Senior Managers, Elected Members and the CSCI

Multi-agency working for the benefit of children

The key principles which guide the delivery of the service are contained in the Statement of Purpose and the Policy Statement – Foster Care
**Team Manager – Fostering**

The holder of this post is responsible for the overall day-to-day management of the service in a division of the county. The primary focus must be the provision of sufficient, quality foster placements to meet the needs of Children Looked After in their locality and to contribute to meeting the needs of children with challenging needs across the county. At a county level they play a significant role in the development of the service.

They are supervised by the Service Manager, Foster Care and, in turn, manage the senior practitioners and are responsible for the work of the fostering team and also carry responsibility for promoting the work of the team within Children’s Services and in the local community and in the multi-agency field. A key part of their role is managing the local interface between Children’s Services and the community of foster carers.

**Senior Practitioner**

The senior practitioner in each fostering team assists the team manager to ensure sufficient and quality foster carers are provided to meet the needs of Looked After Children in the local area. They provide management oversight for the team in the absence of the team manager and supervise some staff. They have a specific role in relation to the chairing of foster carer annual reviews and ensuring the development of supervision, support and training for foster carers.

**1.3 Workforce Planning**

The managers of the service are required to review the staffing structure as the service develops and ensure that staff are used cost effectively and with high standards of practice relating to the welfare of children as the guiding principle.

It is essential for a significant proportion of the workforce to hold a qualification in social work, as many of the issues relating to the assessment and supervision of carers require skills and interventions practiced by this group of professionals. However, where there are tasks which can be undertaken by personnel from different backgrounds and with different skills, this will be a feature of workforce analysis and planning.

Administrative support to the fostering teams is a key feature, given the sophisticated nature of the service delivery and the need to service and keep records and statistics on over 300 foster carers and 400 children.

**1.4 Monitoring and Control – Quality Assurance**

An essential component of the management structure is the use of quality control systems to monitor levels of practice and establish any trends developing in order to take corrective action where necessary.

Key aspects of the systems established in the fostering service are:-

- Panels Process for approval and review of carers
- Annual Reviews of Foster Carers
- Exemption Certificates for carers caring for children outside their approval
- Safety of Children in Public Care Monitoring forms
- Utting sheets on Foster Carer files
- Notifications to the CSCI
- Supervision and Appraisal of staff
- File audits
Statistical returns

The processes for these systems are detailed below in these procedures.

Each layer of management must take their role in this area very seriously and ensure that it is an integral part of their working day

Individual managers may develop other systems with their staff to monitor particular issues.

1.5 Expectations of Staff

Staff in the fostering teams must observe the following principles in their conduct:-

- Respect for Professional Boundaries – ensuring that activity outside their employment does not conflict with the requirements of the service
- Dress and interaction to reflect the sensitive and serious nature of the task
- Respect for foster carers and other professionals
- Positive work planning and time management to maximise effectiveness
- Adherence to all departmental and corporate procedures

Attention is drawn to Codes of Practice document prepared by the General Social Care Council.

Support for Staff

Staff in the fostering service can access support from a variety of sources:-

Their line manager
The corporately provided 24-hour helpline (0800 146010)
A recognised trade union or professional organisation
Team members and colleagues

1.6 Workload Management

A system of workload management in the Service is important to ensure that the work is managed to meet the needs of the service. Pieces of work need to be allocated on a fair and equitable basis to ensure that staff are not put under undue stress. Assistance with time management and work planning is available from each line manager. The procedure to be followed is The Operation of the Workload Measurement/Management scheme in Children's Services - Social Care Teams

1.7 Recruitment, Selection, Verification Procedures for Staff

It is essential that all personnel employed in the fostering service are safe and caring people with appropriate qualifications and skills for the range of complex tasks they need to undertake.

Recruitment in the fostering service must be completed following corporate guidance with regard to equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice. All managers
involved in the recruitment and selection of staff need to have undertaken these corporately provided courses:

When advertising for staff and making new appointments, managers must adhere to the guidance in the Recruitment Process Flow Chart on the Human Resources section of the County Council intranet and be mindful of guidance following the Warner report and the Bishard enquiry.

Advertisements for appointments must be placed on a cost effective basis, taking into account the target audience and level of qualification and skills required. A clear explanation of the post and the essential requirements from the person specification need to be included.

The chair of the panel for all appointments must be a line management position, 2 positions above the posts being selected for. One panel member should, wherever possible, be at an appropriate level outside the fostering service. In some appointments it will be appropriate and helpful to involve the relevant fostering team, one or more foster carers or a young person in the selection process. All panel members should be consulted on the shortlisting process and 2 full weeks needs to be allowed between notifications to personnel in Capita of those to be interviewed and the interview date.

Panel members must agree a list of appropriate questions drawn from the areas identified on the person specification, a marking system and an agreed pass mark. Panel members need to independently score each candidate.

Candidates should be made as comfortable as possible given the circumstances and have the selection process explained to them. Where the post will require some element of public speaking, candidates should be asked to deliver a timed presentation and, in some circumstances, may be asked to undertake a written exercise. Such processes need to be effectively managed with appropriate equipment and administrative support.

Decisions in respect of staff appointments cannot be made subject to references but can only be made when references have been received and evaluated.

All applicants should be notified of the outcome at the earliest opportunity. Where the person is unsuccessful, they should be offered an appointment with the panel chair to discuss areas where they did not meet the required standard.

**Verification**

It is essential that, during the appointment of new staff, the service verifies that the applicant is who they say they are and that what they tell us about their past experiences and employment history is correct.

The following items are essential steps in the verification process:

**Examination of a completed application form** – any issues which arouse concern should be taken up with the applicant, either before or during the interview e.g. if the applicant has not included a complete employment history since leaving school then they should be asked to supply the missing information before the interview, if the applicant mentions an offending history or previous ill health in their form or interview, these issues should be explored with the person and, where appropriate, their permission sought to speak with others, such as previous managers.
Examination of all certificates of original qualifications including driving licences - Originals need to be seen not photocopies. Any concerns arising need to be addressed with the applicant or authority e.g. a seal from the college or university should be visible and a series of driving offences will need to be explored.

Verification of references - the references received in respect of a candidate with a qualification and employment history should reflect this and should be on appropriately headed paper and with a signature. Where a candidate is being considered for employment, and before an offer is made, telephone calls must be made to both referees to check their authenticity and explore fully any issues in the references or arising in the selection process with which the referee may be able to assist. Two references are required and need to be from the current or last employer and from people with a position of responsibility. Character references from personal friends or neighbours are not acceptable as professional referees.

Criminal Records Bureau - the document verification form needs to be completed at the time of interview by an appropriately trained individual and passed to Personnel in Capita for processing.

No newly appointed member of staff can start work prior to receipt of a satisfactory Enhanced Disclosure from the Criminal Records Bureau and satisfactory health clearance.

Overseas Police Checks - where prospective employees have worked abroad for more than 3 months, they must be asked to provide a satisfactory police reference from the relevant country. The same principles should be applied as for foster carers and adopters; see section Chapter 3.4

Essential guidance is now contained in the packs distributed by Personnel in Capita prior to interviews for prospective employees - all selection panel chairs must ensure that the guidance is followed and all checks completed and issues followed through
**Sessional Independent Assessors**

The Family Placement Service often engages social workers on an independent basis to undertake pieces of work, such as assessments of foster carers or adopters. It is important that the use of such workers adheres to certain safeguards:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Independent Assessors</strong></th>
<th><strong>Job Specification</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Essential</strong></td>
<td><strong>Desirable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualifications</strong></td>
<td>DpSW or recognised social work qualification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experience</strong></td>
<td>At least two years experience in a child care setting.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experience of assessment work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training</strong></td>
<td>Willingness to undertake training. Assessments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge/skills</strong></td>
<td>Ability to engage people in the assessment process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>attributes</strong></td>
<td>Evidence of working with a minimum of supervision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to present evidence of assessment in a clear way.</td>
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<td>Evidence of written reports.</td>
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<td>Ability to maintain accurate records.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Knowledge of National Standards in Adoption and.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ability to organise time effectively</td>
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<td>Ability to work independently.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ability to travel – this post requires the use of own vehicle.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Terms and Conditions

Applications for the post will be made on the Cumbria County Council application form. Candidates are expected to provide the names of two referees.

Candidates will need to be CRB checked. Appointments are made subject to a successful interview. If invited to interview, candidates will be expected to provide evidence of their written work and analytical ability.

1.8 Induction and Training for new Staff

Induction programmes

All staff joining the fostering service must experience an induction programme in accordance with the corporate induction procedure – Cumbria County Council : Human Resources : HR Admin Procedures and Forms : Induction Probation and Appraisal Procedures Plus the information and training detailed below:-

The Induction, Preparation and Training Requirements for all Levels of Staff in the Service

Included here are the following groups of staff:-

Service Manager – Fostering service
Team Managers – Fostering
Senior Practitioners – Fostering
Social Workers - Fostering
Recruitment Officers
Training and Support Officers
Sessional Support Co-ordinators
Sessional Workers

E-library

Much of the documentation referred to in the induction packs for staff are available on the County Council E-library – all staff should be introduced to and be trained to access material in this way.

Service Manager – Fostering Service

1) In Service Key Skills in Management or management course leading to a qualification.

2) Level 4 NVQ in Management or equivalent or above.

3) Annual appraisal identifies current needs to meet personal and service requirements.

Part of the role of the occupant of the above post will be to keep abreast of developments in the field of fostering and access to external conferences is essential.

Team Managers – Fostering Service

1) For new entrants to Cumbria County Council – Corporate Induction Package.
2) Induction Pack
   - Foster Care Procedures
   - Safe Care booklet
   - Good Practice in FP
   - FP Handbook
   - Foster Care Handbook
   - Child Protection Procedures
   - Allegations against carer procedures
   - STOP, LOOK, THINK booklet
   - Supervision and Appraisal protocols
   - Statement of Purpose
   - Adoption Statement of Purpose

3) Induction appointments with staff/departments relevant to the post.
   - Service Manager, Adoption
   - Service Manager, Residential Care
   - Service Manager, Pathways
   - Service Manager & Team Managers for Children Looked After teams
   - Adoption Adviser,
   - Children’s Service Administrator

Training Courses: –
   - Key Skills in Management
   - NVQ Level 4 or equivalent
   - Staff Requirements and Selection
   - Appraisal and supervision of staff.

Senior Practitioners

1) Corporate Induction Package – if new entrants to SSD

2) Induction Pack  - Adoption Procedures
   - Foster Care Procedures
   - Safe Care
   - Good Practice in FP
   - FP Handbook
   - Foster Care Handbook
   - Child Protection Procedures
   - Allegations against carer procedures
   - STOP, LOOK, THINK booklet
   - Supervision and Appraisal protocols
   - Statement of Purpose
   - Adoption Statement of Purpose

Induction appointments with staff/departments relevant to the post.
   - Service Manager, Fostering Service
   - Team manager, CLA
   - Adoption Adviser
   - Children Service Administrator
- Media Team
- Administration

3) **Training Courses**
- Child Protection
- Caring for a Sexually Abused Child
- Attachment Theory and Assessment
- IT/Care First/PowerPoint
- Staff recruitment and selection
- Supervision of Staff
- Appraisal of Staff
- Key Skills in Management

**Social Workers - Fostering**

1) **Corporate Induction**
   - For new entrants to Cumbria County Council within 6 months of arrival

2) **Induction pack for**
   - Material to be given within 3 days of starting
   - Adoption Procedures
   - Foster Care Procedures
   - Safe Care
   - Good Practice in Family Placement
   - Family Placement Handbook
   - Foster Care Handbook
   - Child Protection Procedures
   - Allegations Against Carers Document
   - STOP, LOOK, THINK Booklet
   - Statement of Purpose
   - Adoption Statement of Purpose

Preparation appointments to be set up prior to arrival with the following staff/Department:

- Children Service Administrator
- Team Manager/ Team for CLA
- Adoption Adviser
- Team/Manager, Fostering
- Coordinator Sessional Support Scheme
- Local Residential Care Managers
- Family Centre
- Administration

3) **Training Courses**
- Child Protection Awareness
- Core Groups and Conferences
- Introduction to Child Sexual Abuse
- Caring for a Sexually Abused Child
- Health and Safety Basic Course
- Risk Assessment/Management
Attachment Theory and Assessment
- Therapeutic Crisis Intervention or equivalent
- Life Story Work
- Permanency Planning
- IT/Care First/PowerPoint

Post Qualification Child Care Award

All qualified social workers in the fostering service need to be given the opportunity to achieve the award in the timescale laid out and allowing for the needs of the service. Each team should develop a rolling programme of priority for staff. The BAAF module specifically designed for fostering staff should be considered as an option.

Recruitment Officers

1) Corporate Induction – If new entrant to Cumbria SSD

2) Induction Pack
   - Information pack for foster carers and adopters
   - Previous publicity material
   - Preparation group material for foster carers
   - Foster Care procedures
   - Statement of Purpose

   Appointments to be set up prior to arrival with the following staff/departments
   - Team Manager – Fostering
   - Administration
   - Team Meeting
   - Meeting with the other Recruitment Officers
   - Media Team

3) Training Courses
   - Using the media
   - Public Presentations
   - Outlook PowerPoint
   - Child Protection Awareness
   - Preparation course
   - Risk Assessment/Management
Training and Support Officers

1) Corporate Induction - If new entrants to Cumbria SSD

2) Induction Package - Foster Care Procedures
   - Family Placement Handbook
   - STOP, LOOK, THINK
   - Statement of Purpose

3) Induction appointments to be set up prior to arrival with Staff/Departments
   - Children’s Service Administration
   - Team Manager – Fostering
   - Coordination Sessional Support
   - Fostering Administration
   - Team Meeting of FP Team
   - Staff Development Officers

Training Courses
- Public Presentation
- Outlook/Care First/PowerPoint
- Preparation Course
- Risk Assessment/Management

Coordinators – Sessional Support to Foster Carers

1) Corporate Induction – For new entrants to SSD

2) Coordination Sessional Support - Induction Pack
   - Safe Care Booklet
   - Family Placement Handbook
   - STOP, LOOK, THINK Booklet
   - Respond Handbook
   - Child Protection Procedures

Induction appointments to be set up prior to arrival with the following Staff/Departments:-
   - Team Manager,
   - Administration
   - Team Meeting
   - Meeting with other coordinators
   - IT Specialist Respond System
   - Health and Safety Officer

3) Training Courses
   - Foster Carers Induction Course
   - Risk Assessment/Management
   - Recruitment and Selection of staff
   - Supervision and Appraisal of Staff
   - Financial Accounting System
   - Respond/IT
Sessional Workers – Support to Foster Carers

1) Corporate Induction

2) Induction Pack
   - Foster Care Procedures
   - Safe Care
   - FP Handbook
   - CP Procedures
   - STOP, LOOK, THINK Booklet

Induction Appointments
   - Senior Practitioner
   - Foster Carer Support Group

3) Training Courses
   - Sessional Worker Training Course (before any work is undertaken)
   - CP Awareness
   - Risk Assessment
   - FC Induction (optional)

1.9 Supervision and Appraisal of Family Placement staff

The Management hierarchy in the service provides for each member of staff to receive a session of formal supervision each month and an annual appraisal and this must be adhered to. The County Council guidance and process supervision and appraisal scheme should be followed and the appraisal template used.

Supervision must be more regular for staff where:-

- They are new in post
- A member of staff is dealing with particularly complex issues
- A member of staff is under severe stress
- The Manager has concerns in respect of a worker’s performance

Each supervision session must be recorded for both worker and supervisor and should be used as a basis for reviewing progress at the next session. During supervision case files must be inspected and the supervisor should audit at least 2 of the worker’s files prior to each supervision session, using the file audit format giving written feedback on the standard observed and any deficiencies which need to be rectified.

Each assessment/foster carer must be discussed regularly during supervision sessions and the recording of the discussion and agreed action must be signed and dated and placed on the carer’s file as evidence of managerial oversight and professional practice.

Appraisal must be an annual, meaningful event which reviews performance, establishes targets for the next period and informs the worker’s and team’s Training Needs Analysis.

The reader is referred to the guidance on Supervision and Appraisal and the required format – see hyperlinks above.
1.10 The Management of Annual Leave, Time Off in Lieu and Sickness

**Annual Leave**

All staff are issued with a sheet with their annual entitlement and on which they must apply for annual leave. Requests for leave should be made on the basis of good planning and thinking ahead with encouragement for staff to spread their holidays throughout the year to avoid overtiredness and stress.

The leave sheet must be submitted to the line manager for signature approval. At times of high demand for leave e.g. school holidays/Christmas etc each team of workers and managers need to plan ahead to ensure adequate cover at all times. Managers must make efforts to be fair and equitable in respect of leave arrangements.

It is acknowledged that all staff will on rare occasions be subject to emergencies requiring the taking of emergency leave – on such occasions a direct phone call with the line manager is required.

Extraordinary leave such as compassionate and maternity leave must be requested in writing.

**Flexi-time and T.O.I.L**

All staff must use the Corporate Flexitime Scheme.

The nature of work is such that a good deal of work must be undertaken out of normal weekday daytime hours e.g. assessments, visits to carers, training events. Staff are not required to keep regular hours except where specific duties dictate – e.g. Office duty, team meetings, placement meetings, training responsibilities etc.

Staff keep a careful note of the time they work outside the parameters of the Flexitime system. Staff must not accumulate excessive amounts of TOIL but should sensibly plan their week around a 37-hour commitment to include their duties after hours and at weekends. Any period of more than half a day being taken as TOIL should be discussed with the line manager.

Staff must always ensure that the team secretary is aware of their movements and availability. Mobile phones must be kept switched on except when driving or in interviews with carers/training sessions etc. Staff must check their phones regularly for messages from the office.

**Sickness**

All staff needing to take sick leave must inform their line manager as soon as possible and arrange for their appointments to be cancelled. When the staff member returns to work they must be the subject of a ‘return to work’ interview with their line manager and they must complete a sickness return form.
Managers who have concerns about the levels of sickness with particular staff members will follow the corporate guidance in the Positive Attendance Policy issued October 2003 and seek advice from their line manager and/or the Human Resources Consultancy.

1.11 The Management of Poor Performance and Disciplinary Issues

Supervision and appraisal of staff is designed to ensure that staff members have a full grasp of their role in the delivery of the service and are able to meet the required standards and targets.

Where the performance of a staff member is a cause for concern an increase in the regularity and intensity of supervision will be instituted and the concerns shared with the individual concerned. Any training needs will be identified and supplied wherever possible and closer guidance in terms of work planning and performance will be given.

Where performance continues to be an issue, advice from the Human Resources consultancy should be sought and the appropriate guidance followed. Where the issue needs to be dealt with as a disciplinary issue, the appropriate corporate guidance will be followed.

1.12 Preparation for the annual Inspection of the Fostering Service by the Ofsted

Ofsted regularly inspects the Fostering Service to see that the service complies with the national standards and regulations. The inspectors normally give a few weeks notice of their visit during which time a significant amount of material must be prepared.

The following areas will require attention for each inspection:-

Files and filing systems – all files of foster carers must be in order.

Statement of Purpose – this must have been updated within the previous year to include new and upgraded statistics, staff lists and new developments.

Monitoring Systems – these will need to be up to date and produce the required statistics e.g.

- Register of Carers
- Register of Children in placements
- Ethnicity of children and foster carers
- Number and Availability of foster carers
- Gains and losses of foster carers
- Types of referrals and placements made
- Siblings not placed together
- CRB checks on staff and foster carers
- Allegations and investigations against foster carers
- Referrals to the Protection of Children list
- Episodes of restraint
- Disciplinary action against staff
- Notifications to the CSCI
- Safety of Children in Public Care forms
- Utting Sheets
Exemption certificates
Reviews of carers
Panel business reports
Staff recruitment and retention
Training provided for staff and carers
Medical treatment of children in placement

It is essential that all staff in the service follow procedures to ensure that these issues are recorded to facilitate the extraction of appropriate information – the processes detailed in the _Business Systems Manual_ must be adhered to at all times.

### 1.13 Health and Safety issues

This is a significant area for regular and effective consideration in the Service in terms of staff, carers and children.

#### Staff

All risks to health and safety need to be considered and any preventative measures required put in place and their adherence to monitored regularly. All staff and managers have a responsibility to ensure that agreed safety measures are followed as a matter of daily practice.

On an annual basis each manager should update the generic team risk assessment in consultation with the team members and forward a copy to the Health and Safety Officer. This should cover such areas as office equipment and lay out, driving, use and transport of equipment, stress management and should include measures to reduce the risks.

Lone working is a particular issue for social workers although less of an issue for Staff than those involved with more unpredictable client groups. However, there are occasions when some concern may arise in respect of an initial visit to prospective foster carers and adopters and when this occurs steps should be taken to protect the worker concerned by e.g. office appointment, joint visiting, use of lone working scheme through the fire service.

#### Foster Carers

The placement of children with foster carers is designed to give them a normalising experience as near to children who live with their own families as possible. It is in this context that the issues relating to health and safety need to be considered in such placements. Although we cannot transpose the health and safety culture of the work place to a carer’s home we must recognise that many accidents do occur in the home and steps need to be taken to help carers protect themselves and the children in their care.

The following steps need to be followed as a matter of course in respect of each foster carer:

- Each carer’s home must be assessed using the health and safety checklist as part of the assessment of their ability to care
The above checklist needs to be reviewed and updated on an annual basis as part of the review.

On an annual basis an unannounced visit needs to be made and health and safety issues will form part of this inspection.

Each foster carer needs to undergo the induction training which highlights basic health and safety issues.

Each foster carer must be issued with and discuss the booklet entitled ‘Stop, Look, Think’ which gives guidance on safety in the home, everyday activities outside the home and adventurous activities.

Where a family identify their intention to engage the child or children in their care with ‘adventurous activities’ then a full risk assessment needs to be undertaken involving the Health and Safety Officer and any indicated expertise.

**Children**

Many of the children placed with foster carers will be particularly vulnerable to accidents and health issues as they may not have had the appropriate care and attention from caring adults who will have explained simple issues to them such as crossing a road or the dangers of hot water. It is with this in mind that those involved in the placement and care of children need to ensure that we are particularly careful and ensure that potential incidents are eliminated as far as possible.

This is not to say that children in placements should not be allowed to learn and develop and to have exciting and positive experiences. They should, however, always be given the message that their health and welfare are most important and that we are concerned that they should not come to harm and have all dangers explained to them.

**Safe Care**

It is a sad fact that some children because of their own experiences may pose a risk to their carers, the carer’s children or other children in placement. It is important that all families caring for children are aware of the need to take sensible precautions to protect themselves and other children in their household from aggression, bullying or inappropriate sexualised behaviour.

All foster carers must:-

- Receive a copy of the booklet – Safe Care
- Establish a written Safe Care Policy for their home and family – this may need to be adjusted as different children are placed.
- Follow the guidance on Bullying in the Good Practice Guide.
- Ensure that they discuss any concerns or issues arising in this area with their Social Worker - and the child’s social worker as a matter of urgency.
1.14 File Auditing

File auditing is an essential management tool in ensuring that Social Workers - understand their role and accountability and the need to evidence good child focussed practice. The procedure for file auditing foster carer files in the service is detailed in a new procedure which will be placed on the E-library shortly but not in time for the publication of this guide.
CHAPTER 2

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Chapter 2

Securing and Promoting the Welfare of Children in Foster Placements

Cumbria County Council is committed to maintaining children and young people safely and effectively within their family and community.

The Children’s Services will only accommodate a child to be ‘looked after’ following a full assessment and a rigorous examination of all the alternatives within the extended family and wider community.

If any service or accommodation is provided, it will be for specific and agreed time periods and subject to regular and planned reviews, with a view to the earliest possible safe and effective return to the birth family.

2.1 Standards in Foster Homes

The Service recognises that Foster Carers are drawn from all sections of the community and will have a variety of lifestyles and cultures which reflect the diversity of Cumbria. At the same time it is essential that foster homes provide a high standard of care to the vulnerable children for whom they are responsible. Many children who require foster care will have experienced poor physical and emotional care and it is a key feature of the task to help the child regain their potential in respect of their health, educationally and in their emotional well being.

Standards in the home are important to provide each child with a nutritional diet, promotion of a positive self image with a high standard of clothing and equipment, appropriate sleeping arrangements and space to call their own. It is important that all foster carers provide appropriate toys and opportunities for learning as well as age appropriate activities within the home, outside and in the community.

Children in foster care will have a wide variety of experiences and many will have a distorted view of the world and the role of adults. The key task of foster care and the related services is to assist the child to understand their world and to help them develop the resilience they will require in the challenges ahead. Talking to children, explaining what is happening and how things work and preparing them carefully for new events is as important as providing quality physical care.

2.2 Equality and Diversity

2.2.1 Looked After Children with a Black or Minority Ethnic Heritage

All staff and carers involved in the placement of children need to ensure that this issue is given due regard in respect of all children. On occasions children in Cumbria are placed from different social, religious and cultural backgrounds to the majority of the Cumbrian population. There is less awareness in Cumbria than in other more cosmopolitan areas of the country of the ways in which we can all demonstrate respect for people from a different ethnic background, their lifestyle and values. It is important that staff and carers are aware of the potential for causing serious offence to children and their families by ignorance of issues of importance to black people or those with a different lifestyle or belief system. It is essential that children in our care can rely on social workers, staff and foster carers to challenge discriminatory comments and behaviour.
The document Expectations of the Service in Respect of Children with a Minority Ethnic Heritage and its associated action plan provides detailed guidance on the steps to be taken in the Service to ensure the needs of the small number of children requiring placement. The measures in this strategy range from Guiding Principles to how to respond to an enquiry about from someone whose first language is other than English to the availability of resources to assist children in placement.

2.2.2 Children who are looked after who have a disability
Many children who are Looked After have some form of disability - either physical or learning - and some have multiple areas. The Service seeks to treat children as children first and offer the same types of care and security, while identifying individual extra needs and seeking to meet them. It is essential that we have the same high expectations for children with a disability as for others in terms of high standards of care and attention and opportunities and encouragement in all areas. A recent Equality Impact Assessment has pointed to the need for further development in this service here.

Cumbria has a very diverse culture where there are significant elements of prejudice between one area and another. It is important that staff and carers do not perpetuate the stereotyping and give children positive messages about their home area and the culture within it. This can be quite meaningful to children whose self-image has been damaged by their experiences. Foster care seeks to help every child to develop a positive view of themselves and their origins so that their development is not hindered by feelings of poor self worth.

Some children in foster care will be gay or lesbian and will require appropriate support. The policy on sexual health is helpful in this area.

2.2.3 Recruitment of foster carers from minority ethnic groups, those with a disability or who are gay or lesbian

Recruitment of carers from minority groups is a key challenge for the service and significant efforts must be made to ensure an inclusive non-discriminatory approach is adopted at all times. Recruitment methods and literature need to be imaginative to meet all sections of the community and responses to enquiries must be positive and welcoming and facilitate communication.

Assessment of the caring potential must be based on the needs of children who are looked after and the capacity of potential carers to meet these. Part of any assessment process must be an evaluation of the carer's attitudes to ethnic minorities, disability, sexual orientation and their preparedness to challenge discrimination.

The strategy for meeting the needs of children who are looked after with a black or minority ethnic heritage gives detailed guidance in this area.

2.3 Matching Children with appropriate Foster Homes

Foster carers are approved to care for a wide range of children. Approval details concentrate on the type of, numbers of children who can be placed, age of children and sex. However, all those involved in the placement of children need to be aware that matching a particular child’s needs with a particular foster home involves many more sensitive considerations. The following list of issues need to be discussed and addressed when any placement is being considered:-
**Age of the child** – where will the child fit with others in the household? Will the child be competing with other children of similar age for attention and recognition? – will meeting the child’s needs conflict with the needs of other children? Research tells us that many placement breakdowns have as one factor the closeness in age of two or more children. Has the foster carer skills and experience with this age group?

**Sibling groups** – strenuous efforts should always be made to maintain groups of brothers and sisters together to minimise the loss each child experiences and to preserve attachments. Where siblings cannot be placed together placements should be sought where regular informal contact between the siblings can be established.

**Nearness to home** – Many children who require care will have lived in a limited world and not had wide experiences and the feelings of alienation will be minimised by maintaining the child near to their home and in an environment with which they can relate. This also facilitates ease of contact with parents relatives and friends.

**Continuity of education** – Every effort should be made to ensure that the child’s education is not disrupted by becoming ‘looked after’. Continuity of schooling can provide the consistency which will help the child deal with the other changes and feelings of loss more effectively. A child, subject to a separation from their family and a change of school, has effectively lost all stability in their life and will take longer to regain their equilibrium. Consistency of schooling is also essential for educational achievement which is recognised as the key factor in avoiding aspects of social exclusion for the child as he develops into an adult.

The foster carer’s ability to support the child in his/her education is also a crucial factor in matching appropriate placements.

**Cultural stability** – Wherever possible the placement should reflect some of the aspects of the child’s cultural heritage. This needs to be considered with all children, not just those with an obvious cultural difference. Where a child’s religion and lifestyle has not been possible to match, consideration needs to be given to the ability of the foster carers to give the child positive messages about their culture and heritage and their willingness to look at ways of keeping these alive for the child. Children who are placed some distance away from their home environment, for example in a rural setting when they have been brought up on a large estate in town, may need help in adjusting to their new surroundings and also if the move is in reverse. The strategy to meet the needs of Looked After Children with a Minority Ethnic Heritage details measures and issues requiring attention here.

**Keeping safe** - The carer’s ability to keep the child safe and safeguard their wellbeing will be a major consideration – this is particularly important where some form of abuse has been reported or is suspected and the skill of the foster carer in this area will be crucial to the success of the placement. The carers must have appropriate ‘safe care’ strategies and must be prepared for how to respond if the child starts to talk about or act out experiences of ill-treatment.

**Health** – Many children who become looked after have not experienced the appropriate level of attention to their health both in terms of healthy lifestyle and in terms of individual needs requiring professional attention. This issue is very important in ensuring that the care experience for the child maximises the opportunities to establish any areas of concern and ensure that these are addressed both within the foster home and by the multi-agency forum. Foster carers need to recognise that the input and follow up in
these areas needs to be that consistent with a responsible parent who acts as advocate and ensures all guidance is followed.

**Behaviour** – It is essential to have a clear picture of the child’s likely behaviour prior to placement so that this can be considered alongside the behaviour of other children in placement, any safety issues and the carer’s ability to manage and/or bring about change.

**Contact** – The potential for ease and comfort in the contact arrangements for the child with his/her parents, siblings and extended family must be a key consideration in any placement. Ideally the child should see a positive relationship between his carer and his family and whether this can be established will depend on the skill and acceptance of the foster carer as well as the willingness of the parents.

In order to ensure that these issues can be given appropriate consideration prior to placement, it is essential that as much information is made available about the child, his family and his needs so that an open and honest discussion can take place with potential foster carers.

It is unlikely that many placements will be blessed with all the above areas perfectly matched but this should always be the aim. The analysis and discussion between the social worker, Social Worker - and foster carer will identify the areas where additional input may be required to ensure that the child’s needs are met.

The Matching Report Form forms part of the process for placement identification and selection. The social worker for the child must complete the child’s needs part of the form to allow the placement duty worker to match with the skills of a potential foster carer. The form will help identify matching deficiencies which may require other interventions to support the child. The procedure Foster Care - Information requirements for identifying and setting up foster placements must be used here.

A copy of the form must be placed on the child’s file and the foster carer file to evidence the quality of the matching consideration.

### 2.4 Protection from Abuse and Neglect.

The Service has a serious responsibility to contribute to the protection of children in the community and those who are looked after by the local authority. Similarly, foster carers need to be fully conversant with the principles involved in safeguarding the welfare of children and play their part in the multi-agency response to children who are at risk.

**All staff must:**

Be aware that their first responsibility is to the protection of children in placement and to have this in mind when visiting foster homes and speaking with children.

Undertake appropriate training on the protection of children and caring for children who have been abused.

Familiarise themselves with Cumbria Safeguarding Procedures

The document entitled ‘What to do if you’re worried a child is being Abused’
When any staff member becomes aware of concerns take the appropriate action and inform the relevant people.

When concerns arise in respect of the care and safety of children within a foster home the role of the Service Staff is several fold:-

To ensure that all the relevant information of previous concerns and evidence of good practice is available to any investigation
To ensure that the welfare of the child is paramount
To ensure that the foster carer is supported while clarifying that the staff member cannot say or do anything to prejudice any investigation
To ensure that if there is an investigation the foster carer has a copy of the investigation procedure
To ensure that the foster carer has access to independent advice

All Foster Carers must:

Be aware of the importance of keeping children safe and the significance of their role in this area.

Undertake relevant training to develop their skills in identifying possible signs of abuse and the Safeguarding procedures and how to care for a child who has been abused

Familiarise themselves with:-

- The Cumbria Safeguarding Procedures – see above
- Guidance for Foster Carers on the control and discipline of children and young people in their care (See Section 2.23)
- The investigation of allegations of abuse against foster carers approved by Cumbria County Council Fostering Service (See Section 2.20)
- The leaflet – ‘What to do if you are worried a child is being abused.’ See above

Each Team Manager – Fostering must ensure that each member of staff and foster carer has the required documentation detailed above and that systems are set up which ensure that these are issued to new staff members and are part of the approval pack for all foster carers.

Any allegations involving a child in foster care are investigated following the procedures laid down in Section 2.20. Service staff will assist in bringing together all relevant information and ensuring the minimisation of delay in starting and completing such investigations. They need to approach each allegation with an open mind and ensure that the foster carer’s needs and wishes are made available to any strategy meetings and the investigating social worker. It is essential that the Social Worker - provides support to the foster carers but does not say or do anything which may compromise the investigation.

**Safety of Children in Public Care Forms**

These forms are a key part of the quality assurance and monitoring systems in the Service and should be completed following any episodes of the following in a foster home:-

Allegations against a foster carer or adopter or a member of their family
Concerns about practice in a foster or adoptive home
Complaints by or in respect of a foster carer or adopter
Children missing from placement
Episodes of restraint in placement
Violent incidents in placement
Accidents and serious illnesses of children in placement

The forms must be signed or electronically approved by the Team Manager, when he/she is satisfied that the appropriate action has been taken. The form is then forwarded for the attention of the Service Manager – who monitors and analyses the statistics and trends and follows up any concerns and queries with the staff involved. A follow up form, detailing the outcome of the investigation and any follow up action is completed one month later and also forwarded for the attention of the Service Manager – and noted on the Utting form on the foster carer’s file.

Utting Sheets

These are yellow sheets which can be found at the front of all foster carers’ files and are used to provide a summary of previous allegations and concerns raised in respect of foster carers so that:-

a. When concerns are raised it is possible to have an immediate picture of any previous issues.
b. The precise location of the material relating to previous investigations and action taken is readily available
c. Any patterns or trends in the concerns can be easily identified.
d. The preparation for the Foster Carer’s annual review can readily involve a summary of issues raised.
e. The foster carer, when viewing their file will be aware of the issues recorded.

All issues of concern raised in Children in Public Care Monitoring form should be recorded on the Utting sheet on the carer’s file, and all entries on the Utting sheet should be entered on a Children in Public Care Monitoring form.

The Team Manager, has a multiple role in ensuring that all concerns or allegations are dealt with properly employing the following principles:-

Liaison and assistance to the investigating team
Sharing of any relevant knowledge held within the Service.
Respect for the Foster Carer
Minimisation of delay
Support and Supervision for the Social Worker - Monitoring of procedures
Provision of advice and mediation for the carer where appropriate
Notification to the National Care Standards Commission
Informing the Service Manager - where appropriate

The Utting forms are also used for recording specific commendations about the work of the carer.
2.5 **Information for Children and seeking their views**

Children and Young People should be as involved as possible in decisions affecting them and their views should always be sought. They also require child friendly information about services they may receive or they may wish to access.

**Children’s Guide to Foster Care**

This guide should be given to all children when they are being prepared for foster care and explained to them by their social worker. It is important that any queries about issues in the guide or any other questions they have are answered honestly and in an age-appropriate way. When a child comes into placement the foster carer should check that the child has a copy of the guide and understands it.

When a placement is under consideration for a child the leaflet in respect of the proposed foster carer or carer’s where a choice of placements is possible must be transmitted to the social worker plus the Children’s Guide to Foster Care for them to discuss with the child.

The guide contains details of how a child may deal with any concerns or complaints and how to contact the Children's Rights Officer, Childline and the Commission for Social Care Inspectors.

**Information in respect of Foster Carers for children**

Each family must prepare a child friendly leaflet of their domestic make up and lifestyle which can be shared with the child to prepare them for meeting the prospective carers. This profile should be maintained on the shared drive and as a word document which can be e-mailed to any office in the county to provide access for the social worker to share with the child.

**Placement Choice**

Wherever possible the child should be offered a choice of placements and have the differences, pros and cons explained to them and helped to make an informed choice. All children will have fears and wishes which they may find difficult to articulate and those involved in arranging placements need to provide every assistance for them to share their views.

**Children’s feedback about their care**

The child should be provided with a variety of opportunities to express their views about their placement and how it meets their needs. These should include:

- In regular discussion with their social worker
- At the time of their statutory review
- At the time of the review of their foster carers
- At the end of their placement
- As part of the CSCI inspection process

It is important that any views expressed are taken seriously and any concerns investigated and the outcome fed back to the child in an appropriate manner.
Children and Young People often are able to make sensible and practical suggestions about how the service can be improved from their perspective and opportunities for them to express their views and give feedback on proposed developments should be maximised.

2.6 Promoting Contact

The guidance here is an upgraded version of the approach in the booklet - Good Practice in Family Placement.

1. Basic Principle

Contact between children and their families is essential to their emotional well being and should be positively promoted in all situations, except where the child’s safety would be seriously compromised.

2. Planning

2.1 All contact arrangements should be well considered and have a child centred focus and be part of the Care Plan.

2.2 Contact should be considered at the point of referral for a family placement and reviewed at all stages and the plan should be confirmed at placement agreement meetings, statutory reviews and Child Protection Conferences.

2.3 Foster carer reviews will not change the planning in respect of contact, but the impact of contact should be considered as part of the review discussion.

3. Court Requested Contact

Social Workers and members of the Legal Department, when negotiating contact packages in the Court setting, need to have had prior discussion with the carer and staff in respect of what is safe, manageable and in the interest of all children in the placement. This discussion should be incorporated into the written proposal put before the Court within the Social Worker’s statement.

4. Risk Assessment

Any discussion regarding contact should always address the risks involved for the child/children, carers, other household members, parents/relatives and any other individuals involved. This assessment needs to take account of unfolding information and changed circumstances. (Suggested format attached).

5. Reactions in Children

It is to be expected that children may, at times, exhibit a reaction to contact with parents or family which might cause those observing the reaction to question the value of the contact. However, research and experience evidenced by foster carers, social workers and children says that contact is essential for a child’s long term well being, identity and emotional development. There would have to be considerable evidence of risk to the young person to curtail contact.
Foster carers will need the opportunity to share their feelings and perceptions and the stress caused by the reactions in children. Promoting contact can be one of the most difficult tasks faced by carers and can also be one of the most rewarding.

An important element in creating a positive experience for the child is for all the adults involved to demonstrate a positive commitment to making contact work.

6. Recording and Feedback

6.1 Supervised contact – the supervisor will need to provide a detailed record of the contact. The Social Worker needs to advise the supervisor as to nature and content of the recording required.

6.2 Unsupervised contact – the carer should record the contact within their normal diary recording, paying attention to significant issues or events before, during or after contact. If contact did not occur, this should be recorded, and why, if known.

6.3 The carer, Social Worker, and Social Worker - need to agree what level of immediate feedback is required, according to the circumstances of the case, e.g. if a case is subject to care proceedings and parents fail to attend, the Social Worker would need to know the same day. The same prompt feedback would not be required for a long term placement where contact is following a regular pattern and plan.

6.4 Carers may find the events before, during and after contact distressing and concerning and will often need to talk through and reflect on the impact upon themselves and other household members. The Social Worker - and Social Worker will want to be responsive to this need.

6.5 The child may need the opportunity to explore their own feelings and experiences. Carers and Social Work staff need to be sensitive to the child’s need to do this at their own pace and in their own way.
# RISK ASSESSMENT FOR CONTACT - to be completed by the Child's Social Worker

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of Risk</th>
<th>Who or What is at Risk</th>
<th>How Serious is the Risk</th>
<th>How Likely is the Risk</th>
<th>Precautions in Place or to be Taken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stress of Child</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>Quite Likely</td>
<td>*Child and all parties prepared with expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress of Parent/Relatives</td>
<td>Parent/Relatives</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>*Child and all parties with expectations and alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress of Staff</td>
<td>Staff/Supervisor</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>Quite Likely</td>
<td>*Child and all parties with expectations and alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress of Foster Carer</td>
<td>Foster Carer</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>Quite Likely</td>
<td>*Child and all parties with expectations and alternatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Abducted From Session</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>*Choice of Supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Choice of safe and appropriate venue with backup facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Abused in Session Physically, Sexually or Emotionally</td>
<td>Child</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>*Choice of safe and appropriate venue with backup facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accident in Session</td>
<td>Child/parents/relatives/staff/foster carer</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>*Preparation and arrangement of facilities, food, drinks, toys, rooms etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accident on way to Session</td>
<td>Child/parents/relatives/staff/foster carer</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>*Appropriate and safe transport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Time of session chosen to maximise positive contact and minimise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress to other children in foster home</td>
<td>Other children</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abuse of foster carer or supervisor</td>
<td>Foster Carer/Supervisor</td>
<td>Significant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Relevant to all Risk
2.7 Views of Parents and Carers

Parents

The Service has a responsibility to seek the views of parents of children placed with foster carers as to the service provided.

The views of parents whose children are Looked After must be canvassed in respect of changes and developments proposed and required in the service.

In relation to individual children the views of the parent in relation to proposed placements and the care plan need to be canvassed and taken into account when an assessment of the child’s best interest is being made.

Foster carers should be encouraged to engage parents in discussion about issues relating to the care of their child wherever possible.

Views of Foster Carers

Foster carers in their role as the day to day carers of children will have views in respect of the needs and best interests of the children concerned. Social Workers and Staff need to ensure that their views are listened to, recorded and treated with respect when plans are being formulated in the child’s best interest. Foster Carers should expect that their views will be taken seriously and taken into account in the decision making processes but that on occasions they may have views which differ from the agreed plan. The Social Worker and Staff should take time to share with the carer the reasons behind the agreed plan.

2.8 Positive Health

Many children who are placed in foster care will have specific health considerations. Many may have suffered poor nutrition and an element of neglect in relation to medical conditions which require ongoing attention both within the home and by medical professionals. Every opportunity needs to be taken while a child is in foster care to promote the child’s health in all respects. The document Promoting the Health of Looked After Children is helpful here:

Positive Nutrition

All children in foster care need to be offered a varied diet which includes fresh fruit and vegetables. As with all children they will have likes and dislikes and these need to be taken into account and new foods introduced sensitively. Children should never be forced to eat food they do not like or have these foods re-presented at future meals. Children should be given time to eat their meal and with some children this may require imaginative and sensitive strategies.

If a child shows a particular interest in a healthy food e.g. bananas or carrots, efforts should be made to ensure that the food is available to the child regularly.

Children in foster care should be taken out for the occasional meal and have treats and sweets but not to the extent where this undermines positive nutrition.

Some children may find it difficult to sit at a table and eat in full view of others and this needs to be handled sensitively, particularly in the early days of placement.

Withdrawal of food must never be used as a punishment!

Exercise and Weight
Children should be encouraged to take part in all types of exercise and an eye needs to be kept on their weight as medical research suggests that obesity in childhood contributes to poor self esteem and health problems in adulthood.

**General Practitioners**

It is essential that all children in foster care are registered with a GP. Where the child is placed within easy reach of their own GP this should be maintained. If this is not the case then the child should be registered with the carer’s GP as soon as possible. It is helpful for foster carers to discuss their role as a foster carer with their GP and enlist their support and help and a sympathetic attitude to the needs of children in placement.

Any health concerns should be treated appropriately and GP advice sought if any doubt exists. Any medication prescribed or advice given should be followed to its full extent and any health concerns made known to the child’s social worker. Where there are recurring or chronic conditions every effort needs to be made to ensure they receive the best possible attention and treatment. Any changes to treatment prescribed must only be made following consultation with the doctor and child’s social worker.

**Medical Consultations**

Attendance for hospital appointments need to be prioritised. If the foster carer has difficulty keeping an appointment this should be discussed with the social worker and Social Worker - to see if other arrangements can be made. Any further treatment needs to be followed through. Where possible parents should be involved in such appointments.

**Dental Care**

It is the foster carer’s responsibility to ensure all children in their care are registered with a dentist and attend regular 6 monthly appointments. Any dental treatment recommended should be followed through. Children should be encouraged to clean their teeth regularly and have the dangers of too many sweets and sugary drinks explained to them.

**Health Assessments**

It is important that all children who are looked after have a comprehensive health assessment shortly after they come into foster care so that any health issues are identified early and any treatment or follow up required can be put in place. The Procedure for Promoting the Health of Looked After Children identifies the importance of the foster carer responsibility to take the child for the health assessment and to follow the recommendations of the Health Care Plan.

It is essential that the child’s social worker and the Social Worker - ensure that the medical system in place is informed of the child’s entry into the system and the placement name and address so that the child can be called for the appointment.

This health assessment needs to be reviewed annually and the child should be called for this process. Details of the current local arrangements can be obtained from the office.

Some older children may prefer not to have a health assessment. They should be offered every encouragement and support to participate and have the positive agenda explained to them. If they continue to refuse to attend it is important that all other opportunities for positive health care are followed through.
Consents to Medical Treatment Health Assessments, Medical Examinations, Immunisations and Dental Treatment

Whenever children become looked after, the Foster Carer should be given a copy of the Placement Information Record signed by the parent giving consent to medical and dental treatment, as well as immunisations. Wherever possible, this consent will be given by the parent at a placement agreement meeting prior to the placement, where the parent will be able to explain any ongoing health concerns for the child that will need follow up treatment. If the child needs any form of examination and treatment, the Foster Carer should contact the Social Worker for advice if they do not have a copy of the signed parental consent. The Foster Carer should always contact the Social Worker or Out of Hours Service if the child/young person needs emergency medical treatment following an accident or as a result of a serious illness.

Child’s Health Records

This record should follow the child and should be kept up to date with details of immunisations and health issues arising. Foster Carers need to ensure that they maintain this record while the child is in their care and pass it back to the parents or future carers.

Contraception

If a young person is considered to be sexually active then the issue of contraception needs to be considered between foster carer, social worker and Social Worker -. If a danger of pregnancy is considered to be significant then this issue needs to be explored with the child and where appropriate medical advice sought.

It is important to explore with young people the importance of "Safe Sex" and protection from HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.

First Aid and medication

If a child is administered first aid in the foster home for minor injuries the service must be notified of the occurrence. If the child is prescribed medication or treatment at home by a medical practitioner then the foster carer must notify the child’s social worker and the office. This also applies to medication given to a child by a foster carer e.g. aspirin for a headache. The service is required to keep detailed records of all treatment administered to children in foster placements. This information must be entered on the folder in the shared drive entitled - Childrens Health and Treatment in Foster Care\Monitoring

Looked After Children Health Teams

In each area of Cumbria there is a nurse and doctor responsible for monitoring and promoting the Health of Children who are Looked After at the time of writing these are:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOCTORS AND NURSES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>East</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Specialist Nurse for Looked After Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Jean Mason</th>
<th>Liz Cameron</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workington Community Hospital</td>
<td>Ulverston Community Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Park Lane</td>
<td>Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workington</td>
<td>Stanley Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cumbria CA14 2RW</td>
<td>Ulverston</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tel: 01900 705016</td>
<td>Cumbria CA12 7BT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:Jean.Mason@cumbriapct.nhs.uk">Jean.Mason@cumbriapct.nhs.uk</a></td>
<td>Tel: 01229 484013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:katrina.lowrey@cumbriapct.nhs.uk">katrina.lowrey@cumbriapct.nhs.uk</a> or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:katrina.lowrey@cumbriacc.gov.uk">katrina.lowrey@cumbriacc.gov.uk</a></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Specialist Doctor for Looked After Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dr Catherine Pattinson</th>
<th>Dr Ramesh</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Central Clinic</td>
<td>Workington Community Hospital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victoria Place</td>
<td>Park Lane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carlisle CA1 1HP</td>
<td>Workington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>01228 603270</td>
<td>Cumbria CA14 2RW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tel: 01900 705016</td>
<td>Tel: 01900 705016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:Liz.Cameron@cumbriapct.nhs.uk">Liz.Cameron@cumbriapct.nhs.uk</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### East

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dr Steven Cade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Consultant Paediatrician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Royal Lancaster Infirmary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ashton Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lancaster CA1 4RP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2.9 Educational Achievement

The educational progress of children who are ‘Looked After’ is extremely important and must be considered whenever there is any suggestion that a child will become looked after or have a placement move. Stability of schooling can have a significant effect on a child’s ability to cope with other changes in their life and their educational achievement. It is very important for social workers, Staff and foster carers not to fall into the trap of suggesting that educational issues come secondary to placement issues.

When a placement is being sought for a young person it is essential that their educational needs are seen as one of the primary considerations in selecting the right placement. We need to recognise that a change of school at the time of placement will subject a child to instability, separation and loss in every sphere of their life. Maintaining a child at his/her school will help the child overcome feelings of powerlessness and insecurity and allow them to regain their equilibrium more readily.

It is also essential that every child in foster care is given every opportunity to reach their potential educationally. Academic achievement leads to higher self esteem, greater employment opportunity and avoidance of deprivation in adulthood. Many children in foster care will need a great deal of encouragement and support to realise their potential and it is important to have high expectations while offering the child every facility to support their progress.

As part of the assessment of a child’s needs it is important to identify any educational needs or aptitudes in order that these can be supported both with encouragement but also with equipment, special lessons etc.

**L.A.C.E.S.**
The Looked After Children Education Service is designed to support and assist with difficulties encountered by Looked After Children in the educational setting. The team of teachers all have experience of negotiating within the school system and providing support at times of crisis for a child.

The LACES staff need to be kept abreast of placement moves and developing difficulties in the education field at an early stage. They can give advice to social workers, staff and foster carers on education issues and also on how to work with teachers and schools and get the best for the child.

They can be contacted on the following numbers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Work Address</th>
<th>Work Phone/Fax</th>
<th>Work Mobile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fraser Livesey</td>
<td>LACES Austin Hall Block County Offices Busher Walk Kendal, LA9 4RQ</td>
<td>P (01539) 773117</td>
<td>07971 446143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting Team Manager</td>
<td></td>
<td>F (01539) 77 3492</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Pipe</td>
<td>LACES Austin Hall Block County Offices Busher Walk Kendal, LA9 4RQ</td>
<td>P (01539) 773168</td>
<td>07812 972917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisory Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>F (01539) 77 3492</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna Coutts</td>
<td>LACES Austin Hall Block County Offices Busher Walk Kendal, LA9 4RQ</td>
<td>P (01539) 773197</td>
<td>07772 112818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Welfare Officer</td>
<td></td>
<td>F (01539) 77 3492</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penny Crudge</td>
<td>LACES The Newbeck Centre Wigton Road, Carlisle CA2 6LB</td>
<td>P (01228) 606819</td>
<td>07812 972990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisory Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>F (01228) 601230</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pat King</td>
<td>LACES The Newbeck Centre Wigton Road, Carlisle CA2 6LB</td>
<td>P (01228) 606848</td>
<td>07967 469965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisory Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>F (01228) 601230</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Prudhoe</td>
<td>LACES Melbreak House, Main Street, Hensingham, Whitehaven, CA28 8TH</td>
<td>P (01946) 852674</td>
<td>07968 545555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advisory Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>F (01946) 595869</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Wright</td>
<td>LACES 19-24 Friargate, Penrith CA11 7NX</td>
<td>P (01768) 242061</td>
<td>07973 811185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Welfare Officer</td>
<td></td>
<td>F (01768 242070</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca Raw</td>
<td>LACES 19-24 Friargate, Penrith CA11 7NX</td>
<td>P (01768) 242061</td>
<td>07973 811222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Welfare Officer</td>
<td></td>
<td>F (01768 242070</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne Moore</td>
<td>LACES The Newbeck Centre Wigton Road, Carlisle CA2 6LB</td>
<td>P (01228) 606907</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Admin Assistant</td>
<td></td>
<td>F (01228 601230</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
School Attendance

Many children who become looked after may have already missed some educational opportunities and it is essential that attendance at school is maximised. Any suggestion that a child with have time off school for other than illness or treatment must be authorised by the Head of Service and staff and social workers should actively promote positive attendance.

2.10 Preparation for Adulthood

Young people who are looked after in foster care need a great deal of assistance in preparing for adult life. Many who have survived well until adolescence experience a further crisis as they start to re-question their circumstances and also begin to face the prospect of life without the support of their birth family but also possibly after foster care.

Wherever possible young people need to be given the message that they can remain within their foster home until they themselves decide they are ready for independent living. In permanent placement arrangements it is likely to be the expectation of the foster carer and the young person that the placement will continue until the young person has completed any further education and has started earning and is financially independent. Where placements have been of a shorter duration this may be a less secure arrangement and will require negotiation and support. The reader is referred to 10005 Pathway Assessment, Planning and Review of care leavers1

Pathway Planning

This service runs from the Pathway Service which has a small team of Personal Advisers and a manager in each division of Cumbria who are trained to assist young people in thinking ahead and helping them devise a plan of the direction in which they wish to go in terms of accommodation, education, employment and social supports. The service provides support, financial assistance and links to other services. The personal advisers do their best to maintain contact with individuals and help them problem solve difficulties.

It is very important for Staff, Foster Carers and Personal Advisers to work well together ensuring consistent supportive messages to the young person and to achieve the best coordinated package to facilitate progress in education, employment and social integration.

Details of financial assistance to foster carers and young people as they develop levels of independence are contained in 20033 Financial arrangements for Care Leavers further procedure in respect of payments to carers is being developed

2.11 Requests for placements
All requests for foster placements other than those involving legal proceedings must be referred to the countywide Section 20 Accommodation panel.

If after consideration the child’s social worker and the Team Manager assess that an emergency admission to care is essential to safeguard the child this needs to be authorised by the Service Manager.

The procedure for accessing placements forms part of the Looked After Children ICS procedure set up on the Protocol electronic system and the information needs for identifying and matching placements is known as the **FP1**.

The Placement service will seek to identify a suitable placement using the matching criteria and discuss the needs of the child with the carer. The social worker will normally then be asked to speak to the carer directly to discuss the reasons for the placement and the child’s needs and expected time of arrival.

The child must be as fully prepared as possible before the placement and the foster carer leaflet plus the children’s guide to foster carer must be transmitted to the social worker so that they can discuss with the child what they can expect from the placement.

### 2.12 Risk Assessments for Placements

In all placements of children with foster carers some elements of risk will be involved. It is important that these are identified early and appropriate steps taken to manage the risks.

The Placement of Children Risk Management Format is made up of three parts:

Part 1 identifies the risks associated with the carers and this forms the second part of the Foster Carer Profile and Risk Assessment which is used to match the lifestyle and skills of a foster carer with the needs of a child or sibling group. This form is a crucial component of ensuring the selection of the best possible placement for the child which will be most likely to lead to a positive experience for the child and the placement will be most likely to meet the terms of the child’s care plan.

The Foster Carer Profile and Risk Assessment must be completed and updated

- After each new child is placed
- When each child leaves the foster home
- After each annual foster carer review
- Following any significant change in the foster carers circumstances

The completed and updated form must be placed on the Shared Drive folder entitled: **Foster Carer Profile and Risk Assessment** which is accessible to all Service staff

Part 2 of the Risk Assessment which relates to the risks assessed by the social worker in respect of the child requiring placement and this forms part of the **FP1 procedure** which must be completed by the social worker to identify the needs of the child for matching purposes and risks associated with the child or his/her family.

The issues below are those dealt with in the form
Part 3 of the risk management strategy brings together the issues arising in parts 1 and 2 and the Placement Officer will in conjunction with the child’s social worker address the issues thereby arranging measure to manage the risks posed by this child in this placement.

**Part 2 - RISK ASSESSED BY THE SOCIAL WORKER IN RESPECT OF A CHILD REQUIRING PLACEMENT**

This would need to be completed by the Social Worker at the time of referral of all children requiring a placement, and would need to be updated after each LAC review, and with any change in circumstances or newly identified risk factors:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Date of Birth:</th>
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</thead>
</table>

Questions to be addressed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are there any health and safety issues posed by this child, e.g. health requirements, disabilities, learning disabilities, behaviour difficulties, allergies, intimate care etc?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the child had, or likely had, any previous experiences which make them particularly vulnerable, e.g. physical, sexual, emotional abuse, alcoholism in family, separation or loss, bereavement, bullying at school or in other placements?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the child’s experience or/reaction to previous adult carers, e.g. abusive, nurturing, frightened of men, poor relationship with women, etc?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the child's experience of/reaction to living with other children, e.g. positive relationships, competitive, evidence of bullying, sexualised behaviour, etc?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the child’s behaviour outside the placement pose any risks, e.g. offending, sexual activity, substance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

abuse, etc.

Will the child be able to maintain links, e.g. attend some school, keep contact with family/friends, etc?

Are there any risks associated with contact with family/friends/social network?

Signature: Date:
PART 3  STRATEGY FOR MANAGING THE RISKS POSED BY THIS CHILD IN THIS PLACEMENT

Name and Age of Child: .................................................................

Name and Address of Carer: ..........................................................

Questions to be addressed:

1. Are all parties aware of the risks, has full information been shared with the key players, eg Social Workers, Carers, Social Worker - ?

2. This document needs to be completed prior to the start of all placements - a copy to be placed on the child's file and one on the carer's file. Any risks which emerge during the placement will inform an updated assessment.

3. What measures can be taken to minimise health and safety issues? Do we need expert advice? Does safety equipment need to be provided, eg doctor, OT, H & S Officer. Do we need to provide aids/adaptations/training in lifting and handling, etc?

4. Can we build in a period of introductions to avoid rushed decision making and allow preparation of child, parent and carer?

5. How will contact be managed to minimise the risks while attempting to facilitate working relationships?

6. Will the carer need extra help eg extra levels of support, respite, sessional work, advice on drugs, offending, etc.

7. What measures can be taken to minimise any risks associated with:
   - others living in the household - children and adults
   - transport issues
   - outdoor activities
   - religious activities, etc?

8. Is an exemption certificate required? (The risk management strategy should form the basis of the report for this).

9. Should there be a time limit on the placement, given the nature/degree of risk involved?

10. What will be the monitoring/support arrangements from SOCIAL WORKER - /SW and how will the risk factors identified be discussed?

11. Are the risks identified too great to allow the placement to proceed?
2.13 Section 20 Accommodation Panel

This countywide panel meets an essential function in scrutinising which children should become Looked After and seeks:-

- To ensure appropriate gate keeping of the Looked After system
- To ensure that all possible alternatives have been explored before a decision to provide a placement is made.
- To ensure that the scarce placement resources available are allocated to the children accorded greatest priority.
- To ensure that appropriate time scales are agreed on placements provided.

The Service Manager, Fostering is a member of this panel:

- To contribute to the professional discussion and decision making to ensure children are accommodated appropriately and after all other alternatives have been explored
- To give informed view about the prospects for potential placements
- To ensure that emergency placements authorised are discussed at the next available panel.
- To give feedback on the progress of placement finding for previously agreed cases.
- To contribute to the development of the panel process.

The procedure of this panel is available on the E-library see 2.11 for hyperlink

2.14 Planned Placements and Introductions

Placements of children with foster carers will have more chance of success if planned in a proper way, giving the opportunity for preparation of the child, parents and foster carers.

It is important for all the parties to have some opportunity to adjust to the proposed placement and prepare themselves for the disruption and distress. Children should, wherever possible, feel that the adults around them and the events which take place are in control. This will not take away the pain of loss and separation, but it will take some of the confusion and fear away if a child has time to gain an understanding of what they can expect.

The reader is referred to the chapter entitled Placement Beginnings and Endings in the Good Practice in Family Placement booklet.

2.15 Emergency placements

Emergency placements should be avoided except where life and limb are at serious risk. Children who are removed from home in an emergency or who have a move of placement without preparation experience serious distress and often remember the experience as very negative and are often overwhelmed by the anxiety displayed by the adults involved. All those involved in the care of children have a responsibility to ensure that they have decisions and actions explained to them in an
age appropriate way and that they have time to prepare themselves and the opportunity to say goodbye to those who figure large in their lives.

Sometimes the complexity of situations can suggest that urgency is the most important factor and it is possible to miss the opportunity to help the adults help the child understand and prepare for the move. It is necessary to weigh up the risks involved in seeking a planned change and the risks to longer term emotional wellbeing in precipitating a crisis.

All those involved in requests for emergency placements should ask the following questions:-

- Why does this need to be an emergency?
- Could we work towards a planned move?
- Are there relatives/friends known to the child who can assist?

All placements made in an emergency need to be agreed and authorised by the Service Manager and be reviewed at the next available Section 20 Accommodation Panel unless legal proceedings have been agreed via the Legal Decision making process.

Where an Immediate/Emergency placement of a child is made with friends or relatives, the procedure relating to this in the Child Care Handbook is followed. Approval for such placements requires a report to the General Manager for his/her signature.

Such a placement, if it is to last for more than six weeks, must be discussed at the next Panel and a timescale for a full assessment of the Friends or Family as foster carers be agreed.

2.16 Placement Agreements:

It is essential that each child placed in a foster home is the subject of a placement agreement meeting on the day of placement or within 4 working days of the start of the placement.

This meeting is required to clarify the purpose of the placement and the arrangements for the child’s care to ensure that all those involved understand their role in meeting the child’s needs.

It is also an opportunity to help the child, parent and carer understand that the child’s welfare is the focus and this will require positive involvement of the parents and any significant others.

The Duty Social Worker - is responsible for ensuring this meeting takes place for any emergency placements and the carer’s link Social Worker - for planned placements.

The Looking After Children - Placement Information Record must be completed as fully as possible to clarify expectations and actions and to ensure that each of the child’s areas of need area explored and measures agreed to address these.

2.17 The role of the child’s allocated social worker in respect of children in foster placements:

The child’s social worker plays a crucial role when a child is placed with foster carers and there are several key responsibilities:-

- To ensure that the child is safe in the foster home
- To ensure that the child’s well being is safeguarded in the placement
- To ensure that the child’s care plan is progressing
- To ensure that the carer is able to meet the child’s needs and, if not, seek ways to address this

- To ensure that the multi-agency support group are aware of the child’s needs and their responsibilities in delivering the care plan

- To act as a link between the child and his family - keeping the child informed about events at home and the family informed about issues relating to the child

- To manage the contact arrangements between the child and his/her family

- To ensure that the child’s wishes and feelings are understood and taken into account in decision making

- To ensure that the child is kept informed of decisions affecting him and is properly prepared for any proposed changes to his circumstances

- To treat the foster carer and his/her family with respect and listen to their opinions about the child’s welfare

- To keep the foster carer informed of plans and events in respect of the child

- To deal promptly with requests for extra financial assistance to meet a particular need for the child

- To liaise with the Social Worker - to promote high standards of care for the child

When a child is in foster care, regulations state that the child must be seen as a minimum:-

From time to time as circumstances may require

When reasonably required by the child or foster carer.

In the first year of placement, within one week from its beginning and then at intervals of not more than six weeks

Subsequently, at intervals of not more than three months.

It is important that the child is seen regularly on his/her own to talk confidentially and share any concerns they may have with their social worker and that the visit is clearly recorded.

It is essential that at the start and throughout the placement that the carer is provided with appropriate written material relating to the child’s welfare and progress. Before or at the start of a placement the carer must be provided with the following items and asked to sign a form to say they have received them:-

ICS Child and Young Person Care Plan
ICS Core Assessment Record or Referral and Information Record
ICS Placement Information Record
Medical/Dental/Health Records
2.18 The role of the Social Worker - in respect of children in foster placements

When supervising a foster carer who is providing care for a child or children the Social Worker - has a variety of responsibilities:

- To ensure that the carer is providing high standards of care and that the child’s needs are being met
  - To ensure that the placement agreement is made and that the carer understands the expectations
  - To provide the carer with support and assistance to meet the terms of the placement plan and agreement
  - To help the carer with preparation and performance in meetings relating to the child
  - To ensure the carer has written material relating to their role as a foster carer and the Looked After Children at the time of their approval and any subsequent material and that they understand it
  - To ensure that the carer undertakes the Induction training course and the Rolling Programme of training post approval
  - To provide the carer with advice and guidance in respect of meeting the needs of particular children, particularly with behaviour management
  - To ensure that the carer has considered the Safe Care issues as they relate to particular children and that the family have a written safe care policy
  - To ensure that there is good communication between the carer and the child’s social worker
  - To ensure that the carer understands their role in relation to the health issues identified for the child and is taking steps to promote positive health for the child.
  - To ensure that the carer is affording the child every support and encouragement with their education, liaising well with the school and attending school events appropriately
  - To ensure that the carer is receiving appropriate payments and has the necessary equipment to care for the child

2.18.1 Role of the Social Worker – in respect of the foster carer role – not necessarily related to the care of a particular child

- To ensure that the carer undertakes the Induction training course and the Rolling Programme of training post approval
- To coordinate and prepare the carer for their annual review
To ensure that the training needs of the foster carer are explored with them and fed into the system for collating training needs

To ensure that all concerns about practice or allegations against the carer are treated seriously and following the correct procedure

Ensure that the carer when under investigation is treated with respect and provided with appropriate support which does not undermine the enquiry

Ensure that a Safety of Children in Public Care Form and the Utting sheet on the carer’s file is completed and processed properly when concerns arise

Ensure that any incidents arising in the foster home which require notification to the National Care Standards Commission are notified using the form in appendix 2.17

Appropriately record contact with the carer and issues arising and discussed

2.18.2 Visiting frequency

The service aims to ensure that each foster home is visited by a member of the service staff at least once per month. The frequency may need to be increased in certain circumstances:-

- When a placement is under stress
- When the carer is unwell or stressed
- When the carer is subject to an investigation or complaint
- If there are significant changes occurring in the carer’s circumstances

In certain circumstances negotiation between the service and a foster carer may result in an agreement for less frequent supervision in a situation of a very settled placement where the child is making positive progress in all areas and where the carer has enough experience and confidence to contact the service should the arrangements change.

No foster carer should be without a visit from the service for more than 3 months and this only under arrangements agreed as above. Where a foster carer does not have an allocated Social Worker – the Team Manager should keep in touch with the carer and ensure that they are visited once every 3 months.

2.18.3 Foster carers without a supervising worker

The decision by a Team Manager – Fostering to remove the supervising worker from a foster carer must be the subject of a risk assessment which takes into account the following issues:-

- The level of experience of the carer
- How settled the placements are and how well the children are progressing
- How well supported the child and carer are by the child’s social worker
- The level of previous competence of the carer including and review of previous concerns and allegations

The Team Manager must keep the carer informed of the position vis a vis the provision of a worker and ensure that they have access to support when necessary

2.18.4 Visits by Social Workers – to newly arranged permanent placements

The following guidance was drawn up following detailed consideration of the JAZ enquiry following the death of a child in an adoptive placement
**Proforma/Checklist for Social Workers when visiting a permanent placement after a child or children are placed**

**Purpose of the visit:**

The purpose of the Social Worker’s visit is to provide supervision and support and guidance to the carers, but an essential part of the visit is to check on the welfare of the child. It is important not to accept what you are told at face value, but establish supporting evidence and, if the evidence suggests a difference to the account being given, to examine it closely.

1. See all family members if possible but particularly the child.
2. Take note of the child’s responses, clothing, belongings, physical and emotional presentation, e.g. is there evidence of closeness or attachment with the carers, has the child any injuries.
3. Talk to the child (if of an age) about their toys, bedroom, school, siblings – engage them in an activity, e.g. drawing a picture of their new house.
4. Talk to the carers about the child:
   - eating, sleeping, going to bed, bath time, playing, showing of affection, school, health, contact issues, places they have visited – people the child has met, behaviour patterns, behaviour problems, strategies.
5. Talk to the carers about how they are feeling. Open questions:
   - Is it how you expected it would be?
   - Which parts of the caring are you enjoying most?
   - Which parts of the caring are most difficult?
6. Is the placement causing the carers serious stress? Is this within manageable limits? Are there things we need to do to help?
7. Arrange date of the next visit.

**Issues to address after the visit.**

1. Where possible, write up report of visit the following day or as soon as possible, addressing the above issues and send a copy to the child’s social worker.
2. Contact Social Worker within 24 hours if you are concerned about the child’s welfare or the placement is in jeopardy and discuss with Line Manager.
3. If concerns were raised in the visit, maintain telephone contact with the carers until your next visit.

**2.19 Exemption Certificates**

The purpose of Exemption Certificates are to ensure that foster carers are not overloaded and that all risks have been considered in any proposals to place a child or children with foster carers over the normal limit of three or outside the approval details of the carers.

The guidance relating to the issuing of exemption certificates is:-
1. The limit for the number of children who may be placed in a foster home is three, except where the children to be placed are siblings.

2. The placement of a child/ren should consider his/her/their needs, it is therefore not appropriate to consider that foster homes can take three children simply because they have been approved for that number.

3. The service can give a dispensation to that limit provided that consideration has been given to:
   
   A. the number, age and circumstances of children whom the carer proposes to foster
   B. the arrangements the carer proposes for the care and accommodation of the fostered children
   C. the intended and likely relationships between the carer and the fostered children
   D. the period of time for which he proposes to foster the children
   E. whether the welfare of the fostered children (and if any other children who are or will be living in the accommodation) will be safeguarded and promoted
   F. the incidence within the home of any other childcare activities (e.g. childminding which might influence a foster carer’s capacity to provide sufficient care for children fostered).

4. Dispensation should only be considered in exceptional circumstances and every effort should be made to discuss placements with all of the social workers involved with the children already placed.

5. Dispensation is authorised by the General Manager, Looked After Children after all the above issues have been considered.

Regulations state that “the usual limit” is no more than three children in any household unless those children are siblings. This does not mean that placement of three in a foster home should be taken to be the norm.

In many cases the welfare of a child needing placement will be best served by being the only foster child in the family. Where more than one child is to be placed, the interests of both must be carefully considered and weighed. The needs of the foster carer’s own children must also be considered.

In considering any request, the General Manager will look to see which additional support needs for the foster carer(s) have been identified and it is planned that these will be provided. Exemptions may only be granted in respect of a named child; written notification of the exemption must be sent to the foster carer(s) within five working days of the exemption being granted. All exemptions if they extend beyond the date of the next local Panel must be reported to the appropriate panel.

**The procedure for requesting an Exemption Certificate is:-**

1. Request for a foster placement results in identification of placement which would involve carer(s) exceeding their current approval registration.

2. Discussion takes place between Social Worker - and Team Manager - establishing that carers identified for a particular placement(s) would need to exceed the number of placements they are approved to take, or where the children are outside their approved age range and that a Certificate of Exemption would need to be issued.
3. Social Worker - prepares a report for the Team Manager setting out the reasons why a
Exemption should be agreed including the following issues:-

a) The number, ages and circumstances of children whom the person proposes to foster
   (ie what makes the proposed arrangement the best possible way of meeting a
   child/children’s needs in the circumstances).

b) The arrangements which the person proposes for the care and accommodation of the
   fostered child (eg bedroom capacity including any bedroom sharing scenarios).

c) The intended and likely relationship between the person and the fostered child or
   children.

d) The period of time for which he/she proposes to foster the child(ren).

e) Whether the welfare of the fostered children (and of any other children who are or will
   be living in the accommodation) will be safeguarded and promoted to include specific
   issues of abuse affecting children already in placement together with how any risks will
   be managed.

f) The incidence within the foster home of any other child care activities (e.g.
   childminding which might influence a foster parents’ capacity to provide sufficient care
   for children fostered).

4. The Team Manager - after careful consideration and if in agreement passes to the General
   Manager – Looked After children (in his/her absence the Service Manager – ) who if in
   agreement signs the ‘Dispensation of Limit of Placements’ form - a copy of which is placed on
   the carer(s) file.

5. The Social Worker - will prepare a letter for the General Manager to sign confirming the
   exemption as regards the carer(s) approval registration which will be sent to the carer(s)
   together with a copy of the ‘Dispensation of Limit of Placements’ Form.

6. A copy of the Social Worker -’s report together with a copy of the Dispensation of Limit of
   Placements Form to be sent to Service Manager -

7. Social Worker – for the carers involved to take report to next available Panel if the certificate
   is still required.

The format for the letter which needs to be sent to the foster carers if the request is granted is:-
Dear Carer

CURRENT PLACEMENTS:- NAME(S) & DOB
RE: NAME(S) & DOB - NEW CHILDREN

As you know: we contacted you recently to see whether you would be prepared to accept a placement which would take you outside your current approval registration which is ........................................................

We are sending you a copy of the form which confirms our decision to let you go over the number of children set out in your approval as a Foster Carer.

The conditions attached to this exemption are described as follows:-

* that arrangements you propose for the care and accommodation of the fostered children are acceptable to the Service

* that the relationship between you and the children is that of Foster Carers

* that the period of time which is proposed for the placement is for *

* that the welfare of all the children in placement is safeguarded and promoted

The Service may vary the above conditions of exemption or indeed cancel the above exemption, if appropriate.

In conclusion we would like to thank you for making yourselves available to assist us regarding this placement.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you need any more information or help regarding these arrangements.

Yours sincerely

General Manager
Looked After Children

*indicates period of time
Exemption Certificates should only be requested and granted in exceptional circumstances and should not be seen as a method of dealing with placement shortages. The Team Manager - when considering a request should give consideration to the likely timescale for the proposed placement and the 'exit' strategy and also the measures proposed to manage the potential risks.

All exemptions extending over the period of the next panel should be discussed at panel.

The paperwork used to request the certificate should be presented to panel and the supervising social worker needs to be present to give an update and view in respect of the arrangements.

Where a permanent arrangement is proposed over the limit or outside the foster carer’s approval this can only be considered where there is an existing relationship between child and carer and the arrangement would need to be considered by panel before placement

**Requests for Exemption certificates from other agencies**

Where another agency requests Cumbria to grant an exemption certificate the same paperwork and process as within the county should be followed.

It is Cumbria’s policy not to provide such certificates in an emergency; a week is required to conduct the detailed enquiries required. Any certificate granted would be referred to the next panel within Cumbria with the appropriate staff from the placing authority and agency involved.

2.20 The investigation of allegations of abuse against foster carers approved by Cumbria County Council Fostering Service

At the time of finalisation of this Guide to Foster Care the new procedure is under consultation and in draft form – it is included here on the basis that the final document may be changed to some small extent. When the finalised document is published it will be available on the E-library and sent to all foster carers.

1. **Introduction**

This procedure has been drawn up as part of the "Cumbria's Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) Procedures on managing allegations of abuse made against those who work with children" and details the action to be taken when an allegation of abuse is made against a foster carer who is approved by Cumbria County Council Fostering Service. The procedure also addresses the handling of serious concerns about a foster carer's standard of care or practice.

The primary focus of any procedure to deal with allegations of abuse must be the safety and welfare of the child. The children cared for by foster carers are particularly vulnerable and it is very important that all suggestions of abuse by foster carers are treated with appropriate care, attention, sensitivity and speed and that any actions required to safeguard the child, while an investigation takes place, are considered carefully.

Foster carers provide an invaluable service but, by virtue of caring for vulnerable children in their own home, place themselves in a situation of high risk. During the course of any investigation, they must be respected, supported and kept informed at each stage of the process.
2. **Key Principles**

2.1. The Fostering Service recognises the importance of full and thorough assessments of foster carers, prior to approval, to ensure that their suitability to foster is fully researched and any issues of vulnerability identified.

2.2. The verification process, as part of the assessment of foster carers, cross references information from a variety of sources to ensure that any issues of concern are identified in the assessment report which is considered by the Fostering Panel. The variety of information comes from:

- Criminal Records Bureau
- Protection of Children List
- Protection of Vulnerable Adults List
- Education 99 List
- Children's Services Departmental Records
- Education Service
- Health Service
- General Practitioner
- NSPCC
- Probation
- CAFCASS
- Personal References
- Previous Partners
- Previous Employers where work with children was undertaken

2.3. The Fostering Service recognises that the placement of vulnerable children with foster carers and their families is a high risk activity and, as such, values a risk management strategy which identifies the risks identified with the fostering family, risks associated with the child to be placed and his/her family and then seeks to put in place measures to manage the risk factors identified.

2.4. The Fostering Service recognises that children's needs are complex and individual and a key principle in positive placement is matching the needs of the child with the skills and competencies of approved foster carers. Few placements are a perfect match but, systematic attention to the child's needs will assist in selecting potential carers who can provide an appropriate placement.

2.5. Cumbria County Council approved foster carers are prepared for and encouraged to adopt a "Safe Care" approach within their home, which defines practices designed to reduce the risk of allegations. When each child is placed, the family safe care plan must be updated on the basis of any identified risks associated with the child.

2.6. The Fostering National Minimum Standards and Regulations 2002 provide the regulatory framework for the provision of Cumbria's Fostering Service and standards of care and practice and are a key feature of the service delivery. The Commission for Social Care Inspection (OFSTED from April 2007) inspects the service annually.

2.7. The Fostering Service recognises the importance of allegations of abuse against its foster carers being thoroughly and objectively investigated.

2.8. The Fostering Service also recognises the importance of ensuring that any investigation is carried out, having due regard to the need for respect, support and information for the foster carer and his/her family.
3. **Management and Roles in the Fostering Service**

The Fostering Service is required to appoint a **Senior Manager** referred to in these procedures as the **SMO** who takes a key role in the procedures. This is the **Service Manager - Fostering**.

The **Team Manager - Fostering** in each division of Cumbria also has a key role to play in the referral and investigation of allegations against foster carers.

The **Social Worker - Fostering** who has the allocated responsibility for supervising the approved foster carers concerned also holds significant responsibilities in this process.

The **Fostering Panel** that makes recommendations to the Fostering Service Decision Maker in respect of the approval of foster carers has an important part to play. The key decisions in respect of foster carers' approval and the removal of children from a foster carer is taken by the Fostering Service Decision Maker - currently the Head of Children's Social Care.

The **Local Authority Designated Officer** has responsibility to oversee all allegations and investigations against people who work with children and he/she will give advice on the course of investigations and appropriate actions where required.

4. **Allegations of Physical, Sexual, Emotional and Social Abuse or Neglect by an Approved Foster Carer or a member of his/her family:**

4.1 The framework of *Working Together* paragraphs 6.20 to 6.30 of Appendix 5 makes provision for allegations that might indicate that a person is unsuitable to work with children in their present position, or in any capacity. It applies when it is alleged that a foster carer or member of their family has:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child,
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or,
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with children, in connection with the person’s employment or voluntary activity.

4.2 Within the *Working Together* framework, there may be up to three strands in the consideration of an allegation against a foster carer:

- a police investigation of a possible criminal offence;
- enquiries and assessment by Children’s Social Care about whether a child is in need of protection or in need of services;
- the operation of the Fostering Service’s procedure concerning a review of a foster carer’s suitability to foster, and the decisions of the Fostering Service’s Panel and decision-maker, in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Depending on the circumstances, it may be necessary for these strands to operate in parallel. For example, the fostering service may decide to suspend a foster carer from receiving further placements while a police investigation and/or enquiry by children’s social care is taking place, and pending a review of the carer’s approval to foster.

Allegations of abuse against foster carers may come from a variety of sources:

- the child
- a parent
• a relative
• a foster carer
• a social worker
• independent visitor or advocate
• a fostering worker
• another child
• a teacher
• a member of the public

They may also reach Children's Services in a variety of ways:

• by letter
• telephone call
• e-mail
• visit in person

The allegation against an approved foster carer or his family may also be reported to a variety of organizations and/or parts thereof:

• the Fostering Service
• Children's Social Care
• the child's school
• the police
• senior management
• county councillors

The important issue is that the matter is referred for investigation thoroughly and appropriately and that the matter is treated with due regard for speed and agreed timescales. It is important that any allegations and investigations are reported and monitored appropriately by the Local Authority Designated Officer whose advice can be sought where appropriate.

5. **Steps to be Taken**

5.1 If the Fostering Service is informed of an allegation against a foster carer, which meets the criteria:

• behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child,
• possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or,
• behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with children, in connection with the person’s employment or voluntary activity.

The member of staff, after consultation with the Team Manager - Fostering, must inform the child's social worker in Children's Social Care. The Team Manager – Fostering must inform the SMO at the same time.

5.2 The Team Manager responsible for the child in Children's Social Care will consider the information available in accordance with the LSCB Procedure for Managing Allegations against those who work with Children and decide whether a strategy meeting or discussion is required to decide whether an investigation is required and/or whether to inform the police that a criminal offence may have been committed and seek their view.

5.3 In some circumstances the Team Manager in Children's Social Care may take the decision to refer the matter back to the Fostering Service to be treated as a serious concern about a foster carer's
standard of care or practice. This process is detailed later in section 9. Or the Team Manager may
decide to make further enquiries including asking a social worker to speak directly to the child before
deciding on the most appropriate next step.

5.4 Where the Team Manager in Children’s Social Care takes the view that an investigation may be
required, he/she must arrange a strategy meeting inviting the SMO in the Fostering Service and the
social worker - fostering responsible for supervising the foster carer. (The Team Manager - Fostering
may deputize for the Service Manager - Fostering (SMO) if they are unable to attend).

The strategy meeting will consider the issues outlined in Sections 7.5.7 to 7.5.12 of the LSCB
procedures ‘Allegations against those who work with children’ specifically addressing

- The police will confirm if a criminal investigation is required and decisions made as to how this
  is conducted (Section 7.5.7.of LSCB procedure)

- Children’s Social Care will decide if an investigation is required in respect of the child who is
  the subject of the allegation. (Section 7.5.8 of LSCB Procedure and Section 6 of this
  procedure below)

- The strategy meeting will need to consider if there are other children in the household who
  may be at risk. These may be foster children and other children within the fostering
  household and decisions need to be made as to whether they should be subject to parallel
  actions and/or actions to protect them from harm. (Section 7.5.9 of the LSCB procedure) Any
  recommendations for removal of foster children should however be referred to the Head of
  Service in accordance with the process outlined in section 6.4 of this procedure below.

- The procedures for information sharing to prevent multiple interviews of children who may
  have suffered abuse in section 7.5.10 of the LSCB procedure apply.

- In line with section 7.5.11 of the LSCB Procedures the strategy meeting may wish to make
  recommendations as to whether other foster children should be placed pending the outcome
  of the investigation or, if a decision is made that a police investigation and/or a safeguarding
  investigation is not appropriate, may make specific recommendations to the Managers of the
  Fostering Service in respect of issues which need to be addressed if the incident raises
  serious concerns about the foster carers standards of care or practice (see Section 9 below.

- The strategy meeting will also need to decide at what stage the foster carer is advised of the
  allegation (see section 8 below) and their needs for support and advice (see section 9 below).

- The strategy meeting will also need to consider how and when the parents or legal guardian
  of the child should be informed of the concern and their support needs.

- The strategy meeting will also need to consider the support needs of the child during any
  investigation.

5.5 The Role of Fostering Service Staff in the Planning and Investigatory process
Fostering Service staff must ensure that the following information is available to the strategy meeting
that plans the investigation:

- the original approval documentation of the foster carers and approval details
- full list of children placed with the carers since their approval
- the current approval details - number of children, sex and fostering type
• the latest complete annual foster care review form and any comments/recommendations from the Fostering Panel.
• any relevant exemption certificates.
• a full list of any previous concerns in respect of the carer’s care of children.
• current assessment from the Fostering Service of the foster carer’s functioning.

The role of the Team Manager - Fostering is to:

• ensure that the strategy meeting has full information as detailed above.
• to ensure that the SMO is informed, as a matter of urgency, and kept informed of developments in the investigation.
• to provide support and supervision to the social worker - fostering and ensure that they approach the investigation with an open mind and maintain an appropriate professional stance, while acknowledging their concern for the foster carer.
• to ensure that the foster carer’s need for respect, support, advice and representation forms a significant element in the planning of the investigation.
• to oversee the completion of a safety of children in public care monitoring form and to inform Ofsted where appropriate.

The role of the Social Worker - Fostering is to:

• research the foster carer records and ensure that all relevant information concerning the foster carer is made available to the strategy meeting.

• to ensure that current issues in relation to the foster carers are made known to the strategy meeting, e.g.:
  
  o children currently in placement - progress and sensitivities.
  o any current stress factors not related to fostering, eg illness in the family, redundancy, etc.
  o contact arrangements/day care arrangements/ or any other fostering related expectations of the carer.
  o to ensure the foster carer’s needs in respect of information, support, advice and representation are considered appropriately.
  o to use supervision with the Team Manager - Fostering to assist with the stress and role conflict issues inherent in the circumstances.
  o to complete the Safety of Children in Public Care Monitoring Form and pass to the Team Manager.

6. **Safeguarding Investigations**

Children in Foster Care are Looked After and, as such, are very vulnerable and may already have been subject to abuse in the past. Each Looked After Child has a nominated social worker whose role is to ensure that the child is safe and the child’s welfare is being promoted in their placement. When an allegation is made against a foster carer in respect of a child who is Looked After, the Strategy Meeting may decide that formal section 47 enquiries are not required because the alleged abuse did not occur within the child’s family home but a full investigation by a social worker is still required as to what happened so that recommendations can be made in respect of the child and carer. This is referred to a ‘safeguarding investigation’ within these procedures whether or not conducted under section 47 of the Children Act 1989.
Where there is evidence of a series of allegations against an individual or evidence of that the abuse may have planned or organized by more than one abuser, consideration should be given to following the LSCB Procedure for complex and multiple abuse.

6.1 The Investigatory Process

The Team Manager will identify a social worker to conduct the safeguarding investigation. Normally this will be the child's named social worker but in some cases it may be appropriate for the investigation to be undertaken by another social worker. In exceptional circumstances the strategy meeting in consultation with the LADO may recommend an independent investigation by an agency outside Children’s Services. This would only be appropriate where the complexity of the allegations was such to suggest the need for a greater degree of independence than detailed above.

The Team Manager will supervise the social worker in planning and executing the investigation. The investigation must follow LSCB guidance and seek to clarify the following issues in the attached checklist as appropriate.

(a) What abusive episode is alleged to have occurred, when and where?
(b) Who reported it and how did they know about it?
(c) Does the child, when asked open questions, confirm that abuse took place?
(d) What supporting evidence is there e.g. injuries, witnesses, and opportunity?
(e) What is the view/attitude/response by the alleged perpetrator?
(f) Does the alleged perpetrator provide any supporting evidence?
(g) Does the episode, along with other incidents involving the foster carer/member of staff, suggest a pattern of behaviour?

To ascertain the above the social worker may need to interview a variety of people in a well thought out sequence:

- the informant/referrer
- the child
- any medical practitioner who has examined the child
- any others who were present or who may have salient information to contribute e.g. other children, teacher, neighbour, parent
- children previously placed in the foster home
- the foster carer/member of staff
- other members of the foster carer's household

The team manager must ensure that the social worker is provided with appropriate support and guidance to ensure that the matter is investigated fully and speedily.

6.2 Analysis, Conclusions and Recommendations following the Investigation
It is essential that, when all the parties have been interviewed and the necessary information gathered, an analysis is undertaken from which appropriate conclusions and recommendations can be made. It may be appropriate to reconvene the strategy meeting to discuss the relevant issues and appropriate safeguarding measures for the child.

6.3 The Investigation Report

The social worker must prepare a written report, countersigned by the team manager that details the investigatory process and the information gleaned and ends with Conclusions and Recommendations. This should be written on the ICS Record of outcome of section enquiries form (or an equivalent format for the enquiries if these were conducted outside the framework of formal section 47 inquiries)

Appropriate Speed of Investigations

Section 12 details the timescales which need to be adhered to:

7. Reporting and Monitoring of Allegations of Abuse against Approved Foster Carers or Members of their Family

7.1 The Fostering Service must ensure that their SMO is informed without delay of all allegations and serious concerns about standards of care and practice and the investigations as they progress.

7.2 The SMO must ensure that the Local Authority Designated Officer is informed of the allegation within one working day and progress of the investigation. The SMO must also ensure that the Head of Service and the Fostering Service Decision Maker is also informed. The SMO must keep a record of allegations reported to them in order to allow oversight by the LADO of the management of allegations against foster carers.

7.3 The Team Manager in Children’s Social Care who is coordinating strategy discussions/meetings and the investigation will keep the Local Authority Designated Officer informed of developments.

7.4 Any decision to remove a child or children from a foster carer, pending the outcome of an investigation must be referred through the Divisional General Manager and the Coordinating Manager, Looked After Children to the Head of Service in their role as Fostering Service Decision maker.

7.5 The Social Worker - Fostering will ensure that a Safety of Children in Public Care Form is completed and that the issue is entered on the yellow Utting sheet at the front of the foster carer's file.

7.6 The Team Manager - Fostering will oversee the completion of Safety of Children in Public Care forms, sending to the appropriate administrator and informing Commission for Social Care Inspectors (OFSTED from April 2007).

7.7 It is essential that appropriate consideration is given at each stage to keeping the foster carer concerned, and his/her family, informed of the progress and their opportunities for support, advice and representation.

7.8 Any proposal to review the approval of a foster carer, following an investigation, or to refer a foster carer to the PoCA list, must be discussed with the Local Authority Designated Officer.
8. **Information to the Foster Carer and/or his/her family**

8.1 The foster carer must be informed that an allegation has been made against them. However, the timing of this will be influenced by:

- any suggestion of a criminal offence having been committed and associated police investigation.
- any action required to safeguard children in the household.

8.2 It is essential that the foster carer and his/her family are kept fully informed of the steps and progress of the investigation and further action planned, except where careful consideration suggests that this should be briefly delayed because of:

- the need to safeguard children in the household
- the need to ensure that any police investigation is not compromised

8.3 The foster carer must be informed of any decision to suspend further placements of children with the foster carer, pending the outcome of the investigation - this must be followed in writing.

8.4 The foster carer must be clearly informed of the details of the allegation and how they have been reported. They must also be informed under what procedure they are being investigated, i.e., safeguarding investigation, police investigation or serious concern about care or practice - this must be followed in writing.

8.5 The foster carer must be kept informed of the progress of the investigation and of any outcome as soon as possible - both verbally and in writing.

8.6 If the outcome of the investigation indicates that the foster carer's approval needs to be reconsidered at the Fostering Panel, the foster carer will be notified of an extra-ordinary review of their approval and see the report prepared for panel and have the opportunity to make their own representations as detailed in the fostering panel procedures.

9. **The Foster Carer's need for Support, Advice and Representation**

The Foster Carer must be kept informed of opportunities for independent support, advice and representation at all times during an investigation. The following sources are available.

9.1 Fosterline 0800 0407675 - a government funded advice line provided by the Fostering Network available each weekday 9.00-5.00 pm except bank holidays.

9.2 Advice and Mediation Service - Lynne Woodhouse on 01642 789637 - this is part of a contract which the Fostering Service buys into to provide independent, telephone, home visit and representational assistance to foster carers when required.

9.3 Foster carers at times of crisis may also wish to turn to members/officers of their local foster care association for assistance at this time.

9.4 Foster carers may also wish to continue to receive support from their allocated Social Worker - Fostering, but need to understand that this person can say or do nothing to prejudice the investigation.

9.5 Foster Carers, by virtue of their membership of the Fostering Network, also have access to independent legal advice and may, in some circumstances, wish to consult a solicitor.
10. **Serious Concerns about a Foster Carer's Standard of Care or Practice**

Some allegations made or, concerns raised about foster carers, do not meet the threshold for investigation under Cumbria's Safeguarding Procedures and, after consideration by the Team Manager responsible for the child or children in placement, will be referred back to the Fostering Service for investigation and appropriate action. The LADO will need to be informed.

There are two triggers to such an investigation. One is that a decision is made initially that the threshold for a safeguarding investigation and/or criminal investigation are not met but concerns are identified at this stage. The second is that the safeguarding investigation is complete and a decision has been made not to pursue a prosecution, but that serious concerns remain about the carers’ standard of practice. Issues included in these may be:

- Poor hygiene standards in the foster home.
- Inappropriate safety measures in the home.
- Inappropriate control and discipline measures.
- Inadequate attention to the health or educational needs of a child.
- Inadequate supervision of a child or children.
- Inappropriate use of alternative care arrangements for a child.
- Inadequate respect for a child's cultural or religious heritage.
- Inadequate safe caring measures in the home.

Such issues need to be considered by the Social Worker - Fostering and the Team Manager - Fostering with due care and attention for how the issue will be investigated and appropriate action and within an appropriate time frame.

10.1 **Investigations in respect of Serious Concerns in Respect of Standards of Care or Practice by a Foster Carer**

It is important to ensure that full facts about the concern are established and the Team Manager - Fostering and the allocated Social Worker - Fostering must consider the steps required to do this, eg interview with the referrer, discussion with the child/children, any other witnesses or people likely to have relevant information, eg nursery, school, doctor and discussion with the foster carer and assessment of their understanding of the issue. Where a safeguarding investigation and/or criminal investigation has taken place, the details will already have been established and shared with the Fostering Service and care must be taken to avoid duplication of interview, especially with children.

The information gathered must be assessed carefully by the SMO and in the light of any previous issues following consultation with the LADO and appropriate action agreed and implemented. Options may be;

- letter to the carer explaining the concern from the team manager and clarifying positive practice.
- recommendation for the carer to undergo training or input related to the area of concern.
- review of the carer's approval.

10.2 **The Foster Carer's Need for Information, Support, Advice and Representation**

The same measures to ensure the carer is treated with respect and provided with information about sources of support and advice as in sections 8 and 9 above are necessary.
11. **Outcome of Investigations into Allegations against Foster Carers:**

The outcome of any safeguarding investigation by children's social care and/or the police and any resultant prosecution must be reported to the SMO who will need to decide on the next possible steps in light of the specific findings of the social worker and/or the police investigation. The possible outcomes include:

- no further action
- a recommendation that an investigation takes place by the Fostering Service in respect of a serious concern in respect of standards of care or practice by the foster carer and appropriate further action as detailed in section 9 above.
- A recommendation to the fostering panel that the approval of the carer is terminated on the basis they committed an offence or may have committed an offence against a child have harmed a child or are unsuitable to work with children.

The SMO for the Fostering service will in consultation with the Team Manager - Fostering the Coordinating Manager, Children Looked After and the Local Authority Dedicated Officer and decide on the course of action to be taken in respect of the foster carer.

12. **Timescales**

It is essential that allegations of abuse against foster carers or residential staff are investigated and concluded with appropriate focus and speed in order that the position of the foster carer can be resolved as soon as possible. The following timeframes must be adhered to:

- from completion of a safeguarding investigation, section 47 enquiry or the Fostering service investigation into concerns about care or practice, the SMO will make a decision as to further action in respect of the foster carer within 3 days
- the carer must be informed of the agreed action within 24 hours of the decision being taken
- a letter must be sent to the foster carer confirming the action to be taken within 3 days
- any training or input required for the foster carer must start within one month of the letter to the carer
- any referral to the fostering panel for consideration of the foster carer’s approval will take place within 6 weeks of the carer receiving the letter
- a referral to the POCA list will take place within 2 months of the letter to the carer.
- the foster carer must be informed of the nature of the allegations within 24 hours of the strategy meeting, unless exceptional reasons prevent this. (Such reasons must be clearly recorded in the notes of the strategy meeting).

13. **Referrals to Protection of Children List**

A safeguarding investigation, or the investigation of serious concerns in respect of a foster carer's standards of care or practice, may result in the decision to review the approval of a foster carer.
Such a review may result in a recommendation from the Fostering Service to the Fostering Panel to terminate the approval of a foster carer on the grounds that she/he has:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child;
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or,
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with children, in connection with the person’s employment or voluntary activity

In these circumstances, referral to this list must be considered and Chapter 2.31 of the Foster Care Procedures outlines the process for this. Any proposal to refer to PoCA must also be the subject of consultation with the Local Authority Designated Officer.

2.21 Children Missing from their Foster Placement

Children in foster care who go missing need to be treated with urgent and appropriate seriousness. Many children who are looked after will be more vulnerable than other children because of experiences they have had and their acceptance of situations outside the norm. It is very important that these children are schooled effectively about the dangers of talking with strangers and the need to protect themselves and share any incidents of concern.

How quickly we involve the police will depend on :-

- The age of the child
- The child’s normal pattern of behaviour
- The child’s level of vulnerability
- Any guidance already agreed with the Child's Care Plan
- The state of mind of the child and any perceived risks

However, if in doubt, a discussion with the Social Worker or Social Worker - should produce appropriate caution.

A rough guide would be:-

- Child under 5 missing – immediate report to the police
- Child 5 to 8 – search appropriate places and report to the police within half an hour
- Child 9 to 12 – search appropriate places and report to the police within an hour – this might be extended if there is a previous pattern and after discussion with Social Worker, Social Worker - or Out of Hours Social Worker
- Young Person 13 to 15 – search appropriate places – seek advice from SW, SOCIAL WORKER - or Out of Hours, but report within 3 hours – this could be extended after advice if a pattern of behaviour is established and depending on the time of day.
- Young Person 16 to 18 seek advice but in some instances a missing report to the police would wait until 11.00pm

Some children and young people are exceptionally vulnerable e.g. those with learning difficulties or where they have been previously abused. Such issues will need to be taken into account when decisions are made.

Foster Carers need to obtain advice from the Social Worker or Out of Hours about the manner in which the parents will be informed that the child is missing.

Foster Carers need to be aware that a report to the police of a child missing may result in the police requesting to search their home. The police will want an up to date photograph of the child, a description of their clothing, names and addresses of relatives, friends, school etc.
When a child or young person is found or returns the foster carer should try to control their own anxiety and give the child the message that they are very pleased to see them and that they have been very worried about their safety. Carers should avoid a confrontation and ensure that the child feels cared about with food, bath, sleep etc.

It is essential that the foster carer notify those who will be concerned about the child who have been made aware of them being missing e.g. police where appropriate, social worker, Social Worker -, Out of Hours, parents and other relatives, friends, school etc.

When everyone is calm and the child has had a chance to recover, the carer needs to helpfully talk to the child about the period they were missing and where they were and how this came about. The carer should tell the child about the actions they took to find them and how worried they were and how the situation might be avoided again.

The child’s social worker needs to take steps to interview the child and discuss the episode and why it occurred and ensure that the behaviour was not related to unsatisfactory arrangements in the foster home.

2 **Missing Overnight**

If a younger child is missing overnight the police will have taken charge of the situation and will liaise with the social worker and managers in the Children’s Services about appropriate action.

However, with older young people the situation may not be as clear cut. Sometimes young people have developed a pattern of staying out or we may have an idea of whereabouts they might be. The network of relatives and friends may produce sightings or news of the young person.

All situations where a child or young person has been missing overnight must be reported to the General Manager and Head of Child and Family Care and the General Manager, Children and Families Support Services. Again the action taken will depend on the age of the child, their vulnerability and previous patterns of behaviour as well as if they are alone or with someone known to them.

3 **Longer periods**

On very rare occasions young people may be missing for several days. After 48 hours the Head of Children’s services needs to liaise with the police and make a decision in respect of a public appeal. If such a course is under consideration the foster carers and young person’s relatives need to be kept informed.

2.22 **Joint Protocol**

A joint protocol has been agreed between the Police and the Children’s Services and the reader is referred to this document.

2.23 **Control and Discipline in Foster Care**

1. Control of children's behaviour should normally be based on positive relationships and the statement of clear boundaries. Children should be made aware, in a way which expresses care for them, which behaviour is acceptable and that which is not.
2. Foster Carers need to be sure that they are addressing the physical, educational, social and emotional needs of the child or young person in their care. They also need to be aware that difficult behaviour is often a sign that the child's need for attention or stimulation is not being met to a satisfactory degree. A child who has experienced physical or sexual abuse may be further damaged by inappropriate chastisement.

3. Positive behaviour should be encouraged by the use of rewards and praise rather than the use of sanctions and displeasure wherever possible.

4. The encouragement of positive behaviour and the method in which this is carried out will very much depend on the age and level of understanding of the child and whether he is likely to put himself or others at risk if the behaviour is not kerbed. Careful judgements about such matters will be required, any confusion or doubts should be discussed with the child's social worker or your Social Worker - .

5. When the need for some form of sanction has been identified and agreed on with the social worker, such methods should be limited to:

- Withdrawal of part of pocket money - usually to pay for wilful damage
- Withdrawal of privileges
- Withdrawal of treats
- Early beds - of a reasonable time and number
- Grounding - of a reasonable time

The imposition of such sanctions should be recorded clearly in the carer's diary with the circumstances and discussion with the child.

6. The use or threat of the following methods of punishment are not acceptable under any circumstances:

Corporal punishment (this includes smacking, slapping, pinching, squeezing, shaking, throwing missiles or rough handling, punching or pushing in the heat of the moment).
Deprivation of food and drink
Restriction or refusal of visits or communication with the child's family
Requiring a child to wear distinctive or inappropriate clothing
The use of withholding of medication or medical or dental treatment
The use of accommodation to physically restrict the liberty of any child
Intentional deprivation of sleep
Imposition of fines (except to contribute towards the cost of wilful damage)
Intimate physical searches
Removal of clothing
Any method which could be interpreted as denigrating or degrading.

**Restraint in Foster Care**

Restraining a child is a very serious matter and should only be undertaken in very particular circumstances where a child is likely to hurt himself or others or is likely to cause serious damage to property. The restraint itself needs to be seen as a last resort only employed when all other attempts to help the child calm down have failed. It must use the minimum of force and last for the shortest time possible.

Restrainment of a child needs to be distinguished from safety measures with younger children e.g. preventing a child running out in front of traffic.

Foster carers need to be aware that restraining a child when they are on their own can be potentially very damaging as they will not have a witness to the circumstances or indeed the method and force
used. If in the process the child is injured in any way the carer may find him or herself the subject of an allegation.

If a foster carer engages in an episode of restraint they should record the event and circumstances and inform the child’s social worker and their Social Worker - at the earliest opportunity. A discussion about alternative methods of control for the future may be required.

If a particular child is requiring restraint on a regular basis and alternatives are not available it may be necessary for the carer to be specially trained in an appropriate form of restraint and to have other safeguards put in place to assist at times of stress e.g. the availability of a support worker in an emergency.

The Social Worker - will need to ensure that every episode of restraint is entered on a Safety of Children in Public Care monitoring form.

2.24 Bullying in Foster Care

The following guidance should be followed:

AVOIDING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN FOSTER CARE BEING BULLIED AND DEALING WITH A BULLYING SITUATION

This guidance has been produced for Children and Young People, Foster Carers, Social Workers and Social Worker - s.

Principles

Foster Care should provide a safe and positive environment for all children and young people placed in it.

All children and young people need to be treated with respect and understanding and be able to participate in activities free from intimidation.

Many foster homes care for several children and young people, all of whom will have experienced difficulties – all of whom need to be protected.

On rare occasions bullying episodes will occur in a foster home as is the case in school, children’s homes and other situations. Those involved need strategies to deal with this, which are speedy and effective.

Why it is important to Act:

Bullying is always damaging to those involved. The victim, the bully and those who witness or even know about the bullying are affected.

Victims:

Victims spend their lives in fear. They often feel isolated from their peers and may believe that it is something about themselves, which has led the bully to pick on them.
The victim's life may be characterised by unhappiness, a sense of desperation and exclusion from normal social experiences. These feelings may lead to a strong desire to escape the situation by running away from home, truanting from school, and in some cases, self-harming or taking their own life.

**Bullying Behaviour:**

Bullying behaviour is not a natural part of growing up and should not be seen as such. Children and young people who bully are likely to experience difficult and unhappy relationships with both peers and adults and frequently need to overcome these difficulties.

Children and young people who bully are unlikely to stop while they can continue unchallenged.

**What is Bullying**

**Bullying can be when someone deliberately:**

- Hits or hurts you:
- Regularly ignores you or leaves you out:
- Steals or damages your things:
- Embarrasses you with comments about sex:
- Calls you racist and sexist names:
- Make fun of you because of the way you look or speak:
- Is nasty about your family and friends:

**This can happen in the following ways:**

- Verbal (being called names / nasty comments)
- Social (being left out of things / no one talking to you)
- Material (possessions stolen / property damaged)
- Physical (being assaulted)

**This can make you feel:**

- "Angry and upset"
- "Very lonely and scared"
- "Sad and angry"
- "Alone, like no-one wants you"
- "Terrible"

**SIGNS OF BULLYING**

The behaviour of children, young people and adults is not always easily understood. Changes in behaviour may have many causes. Being bullied can be one reason why a child or young person's behaviour changes.

There is a need to be alert to the possibility that bullying is occurring.

These are some signs, which need to be looked into sensitively.

The child or young person may:

- Become withdrawn, clingy, moody, aggressive, uncooperative or non-communicative.

- Behave in immature ways, e.g. revert to thumb sucking or...
tantrums.
- Have sleep problems or appetite problems.
- Have more difficulty concentrating.
- Show variation in performance.
- Have cuts, bruises or aches and pains without adequate explanation.
- Request extra money or start stealing.
- Have clothes or possessions, which are damaged or lost.
- Complains of illness more frequently.
- Show a marked change in a well established pattern of behaviour e.g.
  * a sudden loss of interest in a previously favoured activity
  * changing times of coming to and going from the home
  * a reluctance to (or no longer) wishing to leave the home
  * a request to change residential unit, school, etc
  * a refusal to return to a place or activity

SOME VICTIMS OF BULLYING DO NOT APPEAR TO REVEAL ANY OUTWARD SIGNS

WHAT STEPS SHOULD I TAKE IF I BECOME AWARE OF A BULLYING SITUATION IN A FOSTER HOME?

1. Make sure you record what you have seen, heard or been told and share it with all the parties - social worker, foster carer, Social Worker - .
2. Ensure that bullying is a subject discussed within the foster home and its effects on both victims and bullies.
3. Talk to the young person who is being bullied about support you can provide to help protect them.
4. Challenge the bully in a positive manner helping them to look at episodes when they have been intimidated.

ADVICE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE SAFE AND THE RESPONSIBILITY TO KEEP OTHERS SAFE

If you are being bullied?

- Talk about it to someone who will listen, your foster carer, teacher, or social worker.
- Ignore the bullies themselves completely.
- Stick to facts and bring a witness.
- Stay in a group, especially at school.
- Be firm, if they pressure you shout "NO"; it'll get attention.

- If you don't feel you can talk write it down and send it to an adult you trust.

- Contact the Children's Rights Service or the Complaints Officer if you don't feel you are being listened to.

What you shouldn't do:

- Don't ignore the problem.

- Don't join in because you are frightened you might be picked on or if everyone else seems to be.

- Don't fight back, seek advice and help.

- Don't pick on others or tease.

- Don't name call.

- Don't forget your responsibilities to other young people.

DON'T LET BULLYING HAPPEN IN YOUR FOSTER HOME.

ANTI-BULLYING ADVICE FOR CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

HELPLINES/ADVICE

REMEMBER, YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE SAFE AND HAPPY. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO EXPECT OTHERS TO HELP YOU.

If you feel there is no one to talk to, sometimes it can help to talk on the phone to a Helpline. Always try talking to someone you know first, your foster carer, Social Worker - , social worker or a teacher.

If you want to make a complaint you can:

- Telephone the Complaints Officer on 01228 607140

  The Complaints Officer wants to help you and will listen carefully to what you have to say. The Complaints Officer will not judge you or tell you that you are wrong.

- e-mail the Complaints Officer at susan.burke@cumbriacc.gov.uk

  Please complete the form.

- Contact the Children's Rights Officer on 01539 773362

- e-mail the Children's Rights Officer at lindy.ketchen@cumbriacc.gov.uk

  Please complete the form.

- Childline - free phone 0800-1111

  Childline is the free national 24-hour telephone helpline for any child in trouble or danger. It is a confidential counselling service, which offers information and help to children and young people.
Childline also runs separate Helpline for children in care on 0800-884444, open daily from 6pm-10pm.

- Who Cares Trust Telephone Linkline - 0500-564 570

This free call telephone linkline service provides support and information to children and young people in care. It is open Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 3pm - 6.30pm.

2.25 Violent Incidents in Foster Care

A violent incident in a foster home needs to be treated with appropriate concern. It may have resulted in trauma for the child or young person, the foster carers and their family or for other children in placement.

The foster carer should if necessary to protect themselves, their family or to avoid serious damage to property involve the police. In any event they should inform the child’s social worker and Social Worker - at the earliest opportunity.

The social worker will need to visit the child and discuss the event, its circumstances and the implications of the behaviour.

The Social Worker - will need to visit the foster carer the same day to offer support and assist with the documentation – Violent Incident form P25 in and Insurance claim form if appropriate and discuss ways of avoiding a recurring incident. Where the police have been involved liaison will be necessary to ascertain what action they intend to take and they are aware of the background circumstances. If the police intend to take further action the Youth Offending team will need to be alerted to the circumstances.

Every effort should be made to maintain the child in the placement but if it is necessary to discuss a move of placement then this should be on a planned basis with opportunities for introductions and goodbyes. An angry young person will only be more angry if he feels that he and those around him are out of control. If necessary measures may need to be taken to provide additional support and back up for the foster carers at this time.

2.26 Notifications to OFSTED

Introduction

There are certain events in foster care that the Service is obliged by statute, to notify the Ofsted. The table below indicates which events need to be notified.

With the exception of complaints by Foster Carers/Adopters and reports of incidents of restraint in foster care, the other issues contained in the Safety of Children in Public Care Monitoring Forms are issues which would need to be reported to CSCI. Consequently the first step in notifications to the Commission for Social Care Inspection would be the completion of the relevant sections of the Children in Public Care Monitoring Form by the relevant Supervising Social Worker (or in her/his absence, by the relevant Team Manager – ). For details of the various sections of the Safety of Children in Public Care Monitoring Form - see section 2.4 above……..

Action
• Where there is an occurrence which corresponds to one of the sections in the Safety of Children in Public Care Monitoring Form, the relevant Supervising Social Worker – will fill in the relevant section(s) of the Monitoring Form as soon as possible and ensure that his/her Line Manager receives it as soon as possible (if there is no Supervising Social Worker – the relevant Team Manager - is responsible for completing the form appropriately). The Monitoring Form is then sent to the Service Manager – .Copies of these forms should be retained on the relevant carers file).

• If the Monitoring Form indicates that the occurrence needs to be notified to OFSTED, the relevant Team Manager - Fostering is responsible for completing the Notification Form and sending it to OFSTED. A copy of the notification should be sent to the Service Manager - Fostering and both the relevant Team Manager and the Service Manager should retain copies.

The form which must be used to notify OFSTED of notifiable incidents – **this form** can be printed off and must be sent hard copy by post the address below.

The Team Manager - Fostering must phone the National business unit on **08456404040** and let them know about the notification. They are open 8am-8pm. Outside of these times you can leave a message. You must state that you have a schedule 5 notification from The Fostering Service which is a Cumbria County Council service. Tell them the date and time and the return phone number. Give your name. Do not go into detail about the nature of the notification on the voicemail. This will be picked up with them when they phone back.

Post the new notification form to:-
**OFSTED National Business Unit,**
**Royal Exchange Buildings**
**St Ann's Square**
**Manchester**
**M2 7LA**

Also send a copy to the Service Manager – Fostering and the child’s social worker.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Column 2 To be notified to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of a child placed with foster parents</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral to the Secretary of State pursuant to section 2(1)(a) of the Protection of Children Act 1999(a) of an individual working for a service</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious illness or serious accident of a child placed with foster parents</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outbreak at the home of a foster parent of any infectious disease which in the opinion of a registered medical practitioner attending the home is sufficiently serious to be notified</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allegation that a child placed with foster parents has committed a serious offence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement or suspected involvement of a child placed with foster parents in prostitution</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious incident relating to a child placed with foster parents necessitating calling the police to the foster parents' home</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absconding by a child placed with foster parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any serious complaint about any foster parent approved by the agency</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instigation and outcome of any child protection enquiry involving a child placed with foster parents</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.27 Children’s Belongings

Many children who are looked after may enter foster care with very little clothing and belongings or indeed mementoes of their home and family. All those involved with such children must ensure that their clothing outfit is brought up to standard and they are provided with the necessary equipment for daily living from toothbrush to hockey stick. Efforts should also be made to build up a stock of gifts and possessions which help them to feel valued and appreciated. Their belongings need to be treated with respect and under no circumstances should a child be moved with their clothes and effects in black plastic bags. Each child should have a suitcase or holdall and they should be helped to move with dignity and feeling that those around them value them and their belongings.

2.28 Life Story Books

Many children looked after will undergo a period of work to help them understand their experiences and the plans for their future – this is particularly important for children who cannot return to their families and where a permanent placement is considered in their best interests.

At the same time it is important that children who are living away from their families have a record of their life during this time with photographs, paintings and drawings they have done, mementoes from events they have attended or taken part in – such as programmes, song sheets, small toys. Foster carers should be encouraged to help the child create a collection of such mementoes to take with them and help retain some of the good things he or she may have experienced.

2.29 Children Staying over with Friends (Sleepovers)

Most children and young people enjoy and benefit from staying over with friends and relatives at times. In respect of children who are looked after, there are certain safeguards we need to consider:

1. In general terms, if the foster carer is familiar with the family concerned and would not have concerns about their own child ‘staying over’ at this home, then they can consent to the child staying over.

2. If a carer does not know the family concerned, they should make contact with the host family and satisfy themselves as to the suitability of the arrangements, accommodation and supervision.

3. Police checks will not normally be required, but should any circumstances require this, then the looked after child will, as far as possible, have the reasons explained to them.

4. In determining whether to agree sleepovers or not, carers will exercise their judgement on all the circumstances at the time.
5. Where foster carers are in doubt about the proposed arrangement, having spoken to the family concerned, they should consult with the Child’s Social Worker, or in exceptional circumstances the Out of Hours Service.

6. The contact details and arrangements need to be clearly recorded in the foster carers diary.

2.30 The Protection of Children

All those involved in the care of and safeguarding of children have serious responsibilities to ensure their protection. The following advice was circulated to all foster carers in July 2003.

GUIDANCE TO FOSTER CARERS IN RESPECT OF CARING FOR CHILDREN WHO HAVE, OR MAY HAVE BEEN, ABUSED:

The Children in Foster Care:

Some of the children who become Looked After by the Local Authority and cared for by Foster Carers will have been abused either physically, sexually or emotionally. With some children the Social Worker will have clear information about what form of abuse the child has suffered and will inform the foster carer accordingly.

Some children who become Looked After for other reasons may have been abused in some way, but we may not know this at the time of placement.

On some occasions some form of abuse may be suspected, but the details or form of abuse may not become apparent, either before the child becomes Looked After or during the placement.

The Foster Carer Role:

Foster Carers should be aware that children in their care may have been abused and be alert to indications of it, but should not engage in any action or questioning to investigate.

If a child says or does something which may indicate some form of abuse, it is important not to overreact or give the child the impression that you are shocked or upset. It is useful to gently ask OPEN questions to help the child express themselves such as:-

- Where did that happen?
- Was anyone else with you?

It is very important not to ask CLOSED questions such as:

- Was it your Daddy who did that?
- Did this happen to your sister as well?
You should write down what the child has said and contact the Social Worker and your Social Worker - at your earliest opportunity to discuss your concerns.

It is important to write down what the child told you and what you said and did as soon as possible after the child has told you something of significance.

The guidance on page 35 of the Child Protection Procedures, which all foster carers have received, is very helpful in this area.

Caring for children who have, or may have been, abused requires skill and great sensitivity. Children who have been abused may be deeply affected by their experiences and need a great deal of positive care to re-establish their trust in adults.

They may also have mixed feelings about their own family – still loving and caring for them but pleased to be safe from the abuse. Carers with children in this situation need to be exceptionally sensitive in the messages they give to the child about the abusing parent. The child needs to feel it is acceptable for them to see and care about their family members, but that the child needs to be safe.

Some children who have been abused may exhibit very unusual behaviour which may be difficult to understand or deal with. Discussion with your Social Worker and SOCIAL WORKER - about the nature of the behaviour, the possible reasons for it and strategies for helping the child will be very important.

Safe Care:

It is very important that foster carers are aware of the need to keep the children in their care safe. At the same time they need to ensure that they themselves engage in safe practices to ensure their own well being and that of their own children and any other family members, including other foster children.

At the time of placement foster carers should be made aware of any risks posed by the child, his or her experiences or their family and these should be discussed with the Social Worker and safe practices agreed for the home and the care of the child.

The guidance in the Safe Care Booklet published by the Network and issued to all foster carers is very helpful with this area. Foster Carers should familiarise themselves with the principles of safe care and agree with the child’s Social Worker and Social Worker - how this will be interpreted for the particular child.

Other Children outside the Foster Home:

If you suspect a child outside your home is suffering some form of harm, it is very important to ensure that this is reported to the Children’s Services promptly so that appropriate enquiries can be made.
2.31 Referrals of previously approved foster carers to the Protection of Children List

Introduction

The Protection of Children Act 1999, imposes a duty to establish a list of people considered to be unsuitable to work with children. This is the PoCA List.

It also requires what are defined as Child Care Organisations to submit names of such people to the Secretary of State for inclusion on the list in defined circumstances and also any employer to check against the PoCA List when proposing to appoint someone to a child care position, paid or voluntary. This is also applicable to Foster Carers. It is not lawful to employ someone whose name is included in the PoCA List in a child care position. If someone employed in a child care position is found to be included in the PoCA List, it is not lawful to continue to employ them in that position.

In the case of a Foster Carer who has had their approval terminated on grounds of misconduct which harmed a child, or placed a child at risk of harm, should be referred to the PoCA List. In addition, where an individual resigned or retired in such circumstances, which would have led to such a termination of approval (or serious consideration of termination), a referral should be made to the PoCA List. It would also cover where a Foster Carer was “on hold” due to concerns of this nature.

The guidance regarding what constitutes ‘misconduct’ involving referral to the PoCA List makes it clear that it is for the relevant Children’s Services Department to decide. It also says that “simple incompetence” or in relation to past history “youthful indiscretion” (which is not clearly defined) is not intended to be included. The Department would be expected to make a referral from a child care position, where any action or inaction on the part of an individual harmed a child or put a child at risk of harm. This includes acts of omission and commission – examples given are serious sexual abuse, physical abuse (including intentional, inappropriate restraint and/or poor child care practices in contravention of the Departmental Codes of Conduct).

Action to be taken by Officers of Cumbria Children’s Services

In the event of an incident occurring which may warrant notification to the PoCA List, it is the responsibility of the Team Manager – , of the relevant Social Worker – , to notify in writing the Service Manager – who will in turn, notify the responsible Senior Manager within the organisation. (The Senior Manager within the organisation, or SMO – as defined in the DfES document “Working Together to Safeguard Children 2006”, is a Senior Manager within the organisation whose role is to give advice on the management of allegations against staff and Foster Carers as well as ensuring that the appropriate procedures are followed.) If the SMO decides to make a referral to the PoCA List, then he/she should inform the subject of the referral in writing.
Information Required

Minimum information that the SMO will require is as follows:

a) Full name, address, date and National Insurance Number of the individual.
b) Confirmation that the individual occupied a child care position within the meaning of the Act.
c) Full details of the alleged misconduct.
d) Detailed explanation about how – by his/her misconduct, the individual harmed a child or placed a child at risk of harm.
e) Details of any investigations carried out to date and their conclusions.
f) Details of the action taken against the individual e.g. termination of Foster Care approval or where a strong recommendation for termination of approval has been made.
g) Information on any Police involvement (or the involvement of any other Agency).
h) Details of proposed further action, e.g. dates for Panel, timetable on further investigations etc.
i) Any other information considered relevant to the circumstances of the alleged misconduct.

On receiving a POCA referral from the Service Manager –, the SMO will decide whether to refer the matter to the Secretary of State for Education for inclusion on the PoCA List.

If a referral is made to the Secretary of State for Education, all the information above in the Information Required section, will also be required by the Secretary of State.

All referrals (and any correspondence relating to the operation of the PoCA) should be sent to:

Children’s Safeguarding Operations Unit (PoCA)  
Department for Education and Skill  
Ground Floor Area E Staindrop Road  
Darlington  
Co. Durham  
DL3 9BG  
Tel: 01325 392030  
Fax: 01325 392178  
Email: mailbox.poca@dfes.gsi.gov.uk

The Secretary of State will initially examine the quality of the information submitted with a referral. She/he may decide either not to proceed if the case is clearly not suitable for inclusion (e.g. the individual was clearly not in a child care position, or it is evident from the outset that no children were harmed or put at risk of harm by the actions of the individual), or to seek out more information from the organisation before considering whether to proceed with a decision to include, provisionally, the name on the PoCA List.

The Secretary of State will be looking to make decisions about the provisional listing of individuals as quickly as reasonably possible. Should he/she require
more information from the referring organisation, he/she will expect her/his request to be considered as a matter of utmost priority by the organisation and would normally expect the organisation to be able to respond within seven working days.

Having satisfied herself/himself that the information provided with the referral (either with or in the original letter, or as a result of subsequent correspondence) is complete, the Secretary of State will decide about provisional listing.

**Action following provisional listing of an individual:**

- If a name is included on the PoCA List provisionally, the Secretary of State will confirm this with the organisation (the person who made the referral) and will immediately inform the individual by letter sent by recorded delivery. The individual will then have the opportunity to make written representations direct to the Secretary of State as to why their name should not be retained on the PoCA List. The Secretary of State will provide the individual with a copy of the information submitted by the referring organisations.

- The individuals will be given 28 days in which to make written representations, or to indicate that he/she intends to make representations within a reasonable period. Persons provisionally included in the PoCA List may not be used as a Foster Carer within a child care organisation. Other organisations should also pay particular regard to the fact the person is provisionally included in the list when considering them being a Foster Carer.

Before a name may be retained on the PoCA List, the Secretary of State will need to be of the opinion that:

- The referring organisation reasonably considered the person placed to be guilty of misconduct, which harmed a child or placed a child at risk of harm (whether or not in the course of acting as a Foster Carer) and that the individual is unsuitable to care for children.

- Thus all representations made by the individual will be passed to the referring organisation for comment. Similarly, the Secretary of State would expect to be able to copy to the individual, all responses submitted to her/him from the referring organisation.

- The process of information and exchange will continue for as long as it takes for the Secretary of State to be satisfied that he/she has sufficient information to enable her/him to come to the opinion she/he is required to reach.

It should be noted that some people may be included on the PoCA List even though the facts that the Secretary of State takes into account do not lead to conviction for any offence.

Where a person has been provisionally included in the PoCA List pending the recommendation for Termination of Approval of a Foster Carer, the Secretary of State will not form her/his opinions about confirming the name on the list.
until the outcome of the Panel process is known, the Agency Decision Maker has made a decision and all appeals have been dealt with. However, even if the Secretary of State has been unable to reach a conclusion, the person provisionally on the PoCA List will have a right to appeal.

**NB:** A procedure in relation to the PoCA List and child care employees of the Department is currently being prepared.

### 2.32 Placement Disruptions

Where the placement of a child with foster carers comes to an end prematurely or ends in an unplanned way a Placement Disruption meeting must be held involving the foster carers, the child’s social worker, the social worker – and the child where appropriate. This meeting is designed to examine the issues and any lessons which need to be learnt for future practice and not to apportion blame. The meeting must be chaired by someone independent of the case and should cover the following issues:-

- The setting up and terms of the placement
- Progress of the child in placement
- Child’s care plan and placement plan
- Education and health issues
- Social work contact with the child and carers
- Social worker – – contact with the carers and child
- Foster carers practice and perspective
- Reasons for the ending of the placement
- The move and how this was handled for the child
- Lessons learnt

Where a permanent placement ends before the child reaches the age of 18 years the minutes of the Disruption meeting should be referred to the panel for discussion.

The reader is referred to the Chapter 5 – Avoiding and Managing Potential Disruptions in Family Placement in the document *Good Practice in Family Placement* for assistance in the area of managing placements under stress.
Chapter 3:

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Chapter 3.

Recruitment, Preparation, Assessment, Supervision, Support and Training for Foster Carers.

3.1 Recruitment of Foster Carers

The recruitment of new carers is crucial to the functioning of a successful Service. If it is to be successful it needs to be well planned, strategic and cost effective in terms of finance and staff time. It is essential that it targets the areas of greatest need in terms of placement requirements.

Publicity Campaigns

Experience has shown us that single campaigns with a simple message spread across a wide variety of publicity outlets are the most useful. It is important to plan a series of campaigns over the year to meet the various needs identified e.g. short term, adoptive and permanent placements, teenage placements, shared care.

Free publicity

The best campaigns are those which have a theme, clear and positive enough to capture the attention of the media – TV, Radio, Newspapers who will see good coverage in presenting our message.

It is essential to be well prepared for media interest as they work on very short timescales and can be very demanding. Foster carers, children or parents who are prepared to be interviewed on camera, radio or by a newspaper need to be lined up. These situations have some element of risk as we will not have editorial control but for the most part the media when engaged have been very positive.

Where any level of child exposure is being considered it is essential to think about:-

- What will be the effect for the child
- Views of the social worker and their manager
- Parental consents
- Informing anyone who may be affected e.g. other relatives, previous carers etc

To take advantage of free publicity we need to be able to prioritise the recruitment agenda for short periods and be prepared to think and act very quickly, with imagination and a willingness ‘to push the boat out’ and take some risks. This does not mean that we do not have to consider all the angles and be prepared to cover all eventualities.

When foster carers, children or parents are being interviewed by the press it is always necessary to have a staff member from the department present to ensure that what is being said is not outside the agreement in respect of confidentiality or potentially damaging to one of the parties or the County Council.
The media team

The team of press officers will be only too glad to handle press releases and seek media interest and they are very skilled in this area. It is important to help them understand the message in the campaign and any sensitive issues involved. They treat material as very confidential. They also are used to operating with very short timescales and will require very quick responses on the basis of previous preparation.

Television, Radio and Newspaper Advertising

This can be very cost effective in terms of inviting interested parties to make contact and should be part of any campaign launched. Advertisements need to be well targeted, with a simple positive message.

General Publicity

It is also important to ensure that material informing the public about the need for foster carers is readily available to them all through the year as well as during specific campaigns. Leaflets and posters in a variety of outlets are very important e.g. doctors surgeries, dentists, libraries, hairdressers, SSD and related agency reception areas. These need to be kept up to date and replenished regularly.

Recruitment Activities

Many activities can be considered in an attempt to obtain free publicity and/or engage the public in discussion about the need for foster carers. Here are some examples:-

- Well presented and informative talks to groups e.g.WI, Parent/Teacher Associations, Neighbourhood Forums, Church groups etc, etc
- Football tournaments
- Stalls at shows, carnivals, fetes etc
- Market stalls
- shops
- Balloon launches
- Helium Blimp launch
- Foster carers’ party
- conference
- Celebrity launches

Each activity needs to be well considered in terms of :-

Use of staff time
Costs incurred
Likelihood of publicity
Potential for reaching the target audience
Contact arrangements
Advertisements seeking carers for individual children

This is a tried and tested technique which can be very successful for some children. It should only be considered when other ‘in house’ options have not produced a suitable family. Care needs to be taken to ensure that the child is not damaged by the experience and detailed discussions need to take place with the child’s social worker to decide how involved the child should be in the process. It is normal practice to use a substitute name for the child but care needs to be taken as the child may be identified by other features in the publicity. Where a child is being featured it would be essential for the social worker to discuss and prepare the child’s parents and any interested relatives.

The social worker needs to prepare an honest appraisal of the child’s needs and issues on which an advertisement can be based. The following guidance is helpful:-

- Avoid social work jargon
- Highlight the positives
- Be honest about the issues
- Remember the target audience
- Keep it simple and short
- Give clear guidance about contact details
- Include some form of illustration
- Include the Cumbria logo
- Arrange backup to field the response
- Ensure that all enquiries are quickly followed up

Initial Enquiries

It is essential that a well designed and resourced system is set up to deal with any interest from the public. It is essential that every expression of interest is treated with due respect and the person concerned is given the following messages:-

We are very pleased you have called/contacted

We have a well oiled machine that will respond to your interest speedily and appropriately

We have good quality information which you should see to help you make an informed decision about which type of caring you would be best suited for

We operate a non-discriminatory policy towards applicants for and applicants with a black or minority ethnic heritage or who have a disability will be assisted to access information and follow their interest through

We invite all applicants to attend a series of group sessions where you will learn more about the task and the needs of the children. Only after attending this will you be able to make the best decision about caring for you and your family
We need to ensure that people offering to care for children are safe and caring individuals and to help establish this we take up a number of references

Applicants are treated with respect and encouraged to take an active part in the assessment process

When you have looked at our information we would like to meet you to discuss your interest further and discuss your particular circumstances and interest in – this could be either in the office or at your home

the procedure to be followed in respect of intial enquiries is contained in the – Business Systems Manual February 2007

It is essential that all telephone enquirers speak directly to a Social Worker - or someone who has been specifically trained to take enquiries. If the system to field the response is overloaded, a member of the Administrative staff should take the caller’s number and pass to an appropriate so that a call back can be made within an hour.

The post and website must be monitored for contacts on a daily basis and a prompt reply with the above messages and requests for information sent the same day.

Information pack despatch

A standardised pack of information about and adoption opportunities and what the enquirer can expect in the process should be sent out within 3 working days The information pack invites enquirers to respond with an expression of further interest and detailed information about themselves and their family within 2 weeks The procedure for processing the Feedback form FOST 4

Initial Assessments

Arranging an initial meeting needs to have in mind a number of things:-

• When will it be convenient and at a time when the enquirer will be able to talk
• It is useful to be able to see the home but this is not the only consideration at this stage
• Is there any indication that there are any risks involved in visiting the home alone

If there is any indication of risk such as:-

• Previous history indicates any suggestion of abuse or violence
• The enquirer is a man living alone
• The enquirer lives in a remote rural setting and can only arrange an appointment in the evening
the following guidance should be followed:-

- Seek to negotiate the first meeting in the office or
- Arrange to visit with a colleague

It is very rare for a member of the Family Placement team to find themselves in a position of danger when responding to initial enquiries but the potential for danger should not be ignored. Any staff paying visits to new places at night should always set up a backup system before setting off so that their wellbeing can be safeguarded. This may involve the lone worker arrangements with the fire service, an arrangement with their line manager or a colleague. A well charged mobile phone should be carried at such times.

The Initial Assessment Visit or meeting

This session is designed to allow a preliminary assessment of whether the person or family have any potential to adopt or foster as well as the person or family having their first face to face contact with the Service.

It is important that they experience the service as:-

- Non-judgemental
- Professional
- Child Focussed
- Applicant respectful
- Customer friendly
- Informative
- Empowering

It is also essential that we obtain certain information and complete FOST 6 with the help of the applicant. It is important to explain the purpose of the visit and if there are obvious serious issues to discuss their implications, such as:-

Health issues – these may indicate that an early reference from the GP should be sought.

Previous convictions – this may indicate an early CRB check.

Rented accommodation – the applicant will need to consult the landlord.

Limited accommodation – we will need to discuss the implications of this.

Previous involvement with the Children’s Services may indicate some concerns and the issues relating to this will need to be explored.

The form FOST 6 must be completed and the recommendations should be prepared for the Team Manager or Senior Practitioner within one week. The options for recommendations are:-
3.2 Information for Applicants

It is essential that applicants for are given as much information about the process they are entering into as possible. We need to understand that members of the public will feel very powerless when dealing with a large organisation such as the Children’s Services. Telling them what they can expect and then ensuring that the service lives up to its promises is very important. It is very important that applicants are told what to expect and how to complain if their expectations are not met.

The guidance as to the information in the pack to be sent to enquirers needs to be agreed and consistent on a countywide basis to ensure that the same details and standards are adhered to in all parts of the county.

The following items need to be included:-

- Information about the various opportunities in the and adoption field
- Details of the Children’s Services and services it provides, with particular details of the Service
- Clear suggestions as to what the enquirer might do next
- Clear statement of what we will do next
- Details of the preparation and assessment process
- Dates of the preparation groups planned around the county for the next 12 months
- Contact details of Foster Carers and Adopters who have agreed they can be contacted to tell the enquirer about the caring experience
- Thank you for their enquiry explaining that many carers take a while before they feel able to make that commitment and inviting them to re-contact when they feel their circumstances are right
- How to make a complaint if they feel the service has not met the service commitments made in the information sent out
- The agreed priorities for the service at the time.

Information at the Initial visit or meeting

It is important that this session is a two way conversation where the worker gains information about the applicants but where they also learn more about the experience and the expectations.

It is useful when sending out confirmation of the appointment to explain the purpose of the session and the following sheet can be helpful:-

Purpose of the Initial Visit or Meeting

This is an important session where we explore with you what you feel you can offer as a foster carer and any issues in respect of you or your family which might need further discussion before we can proceed to
the next stage. While I am with you I will need to complete a form 12. A copy of this form is attached to help you prepare for the session. You will also want to ask some questions about the type of caring you are considering. I will then make a recommendation to my manager about whether the Service is able to proceed with your application.

It is very helpful if you are able to arrange things so that we can talk freely and where all adult family members can be present – if this is not possible it may be best to ring to rearrange an appointment.

Following our meeting I will write to you within 2 weeks informing you of the recommendation and the next step. On some occasions the initial meeting or visit helps clarify something that suggests that it is not appropriate for you or your family to become carers. Sometimes it is simply not the best time for you or your family and you need to wait a while until your circumstances have changed.

If it seems appropriate for you to proceed to the next step we will write to you within 2 weeks inviting you to attend a series of sessions with other people who are at the same stage. At these sessions we will tell you much more about the task and you will learn much more about the needs of the children who need care. At the end of these sessions you will be in a much better position to make an informed decision about which type of caring would suit you and your family best.

3.3 Preparation of Applicants

The purpose of preparing applicants for the task is several fold:-

i. To help them make an informed decision about whether they are committed to the task, whether this is the right time for them and their family and also which type of they are best suited to.

ii. To ensure that they understand the following areas:-

- Why children need to be looked after
- All children who are looked after will have suffered separation and loss, many will have also suffered abuse and neglect
- The needs of foster children are likely to be greater than those of children in their own families – they need extra levels of protection and high standards of care
- Love and care may not be enough to help them heal – foster carers also need to have insight and be able to employ strategies to help children
- Foster Care is subject to National Standards and expectations and we are inspected against these standards
- Attendance at ongoing training is part of the deal
- The fees paid to foster carers are a reward for work done and the rise in fee level accompanies skill development
- Children have rights and they need to be helped to understand their circumstances and to express a view about their future
• Carers need to understand the principles of safe care and practice and adhere to Health and Safety guidance
• Allegations against foster carers and concerns about their practice will be investigated thoroughly but fairly and appropriate action to safeguard children will be taken
• Positive support for children to maintain contact with their families is required
• Children who are fostered may be subject to discrimination and foster carers need to challenge this
• Foster Carers’ children are very important in the experience and their needs and wishes need to be considered at all times
• The Service assessment process is rigorous as our first responsibility is to ensure that children in foster care are safe and well provided for

iii. To help the Service, as part of the assessment process, to develop some understanding of the applicants’ attitudes, behaviour and ability to learn

iv. To help the applicants and the Service identify issues which need detailed exploration in the assessment process

Preparation Sessions

All applicants who are recommended to proceed following the initial visit or meeting will be expected to attend a series of sessions to help them understand the above issues. These sessions are arranged throughout the year in different parts of the county. The Service recognises that applicants circumstances vary and times and venues need to reflect this. The dates and venues of foster care preparation sessions are posted on the County Council website for the year April to March. Applicants will be invited to the next series of sessions nearest to their home but they can choose to attend a series in another area if this suits them better. It is important for applicants to attend each session and complete the course. Where the applicants are a couple it is important for both parties to attend.

Skills to Foster

All applicants are required to undertake this course.

Their attendance and participation on the course is summarised in their assessment report and forms a small but significant component of the consideration for approval.

Topics covered include:-

What do Foster Carers do?
Who are the Children and Young People?
Working Together
Safer Caring
Understanding Behaviour
Moving On

This course, plus the opportunity for discussion with an experienced foster carer and further exploration in the assessment sessions, is designed to meet the preparation needs of those carers who are wishing to provide short to medium term placements for children.

Additional Preparation

For foster carers who are wishing to provide for a more specific need amongst children they need additional input about their chosen area:

- Short term/respite care/day care
- Specialist placements for teenagers
- Permanent foster placements for children who require a permanent home
- Shared Care placements for Children with Disabilities

There is a need for additional input for carers identifying one of the above as their chosen area and this will be provided separately.

3.4 Assessment of Foster Carers

This section needs to be read in conjunction with the procedures in the – Business Systems Manual February 2007, which provides more detailed guidance in respect of the business processes to be followed and the documentation required.

This is a crucial area in providing a quality service to children who need to be looked after and ensuring that carers are safe and caring individuals. No assessment process can guarantee that those who are recommended will always provide quality care but we have a responsibility to do everything we can to minimise the risks.

When we place children in foster care we are hoping to provide the best care and as normal an experience for children as living in their own loving and caring families might have been if their circumstances had been different. We do not expect carers to be paragons of virtue but we do expect them to have the capacity to think about the child’s needs and feelings and how their own responses and behaviour can affect the child. We also need a range of carers who can provide a range of options for the wide range of children with differing needs we are required to place.

In the assessment process we are required to address the following areas:

- To establish factual information in respect of the applicants and to find ways of verifying the accuracy of these
• To look at the history of each applicant and assess the ways in which this will affect their ability and style of meeting the needs of children

• To look at the functioning and lifestyle of the family and form a picture of the kind of life any child placed would experience

• To form a recommendation in respect of the applicants’ ability to meet a child’s needs

• To agree with the applicants the type of caring they would be best suited to in terms of:
  
  Type of
  Age, sex and number of children

  The needs they are able to meet/needs they are unable to meet

  Positive Strength areas

  Areas which will require future monitoring or where training is required

Prioritisation and allocation of assessments

At any given time the Service will need to prioritise the work undertaken in order to ensure that the areas of greatest need in child placements are prioritised. This will vary from time to time on the basis of the analysis of need and the placement strategy. Assessments must be allocated in accordance with the identified priorities and applicants who seem to have the potential to meet the needs of a particular child or children will always come first.

It is important that applicants who have to wait for allocation of their assessment are treated with respect and kept informed of the reasons why they are waiting and are given the message that we value their offer and will process their application as soon as we are able. A user friendly letter or phone call to them at least 3 monthly will indicate that we have not lost sight of them and keep them informed of the position.

Assessments of foster carers must only be undertaken by qualified social workers. There may be some factual sections which could be dealt with by other suitably trained staff e.g. Health and Safety audit, reference check forms, but the exploration of the carer’s history and circumstances and how this relates to caring for foster children must be undertaken by a qualified social worker. A final year student on a social work qualifying course would need to be very closely supervised and a third of the assessment sessions would need to be undertaken in the presence of the practice teacher, who must be experienced in Family Placement assessment.
It is essential that any applicant entering the assessment process knows what to expect and that their help is enlisted in ensuring that the process is as businesslike as possible while allowing for sensitive issues to be discussed and a trusting relationship to form. At the start of the process an agreement about the process should be reached based on the needs of the family and the priority accorded to the application within the Service.

All applications should be allocated a priority by the Team Manager or Senior Practitioner e.g.

A = Top priority requiring fast tracking assessments of carers for specific hard to place children would come into this category
B = Medium priority requiring speedy assessment Assessments of carers for children in the identified priority group would come into this category
C = Lower priority requiring assessment within the six month timescale

Timescales for Assessments

It is important that assessments are well organised and subject to the minimum time delay from the point of allocation to presentation to the panel.

At the time of allocation the Team Manager or Senior Practitioner should identify a target panel based on the priority accorded to the application:-

- Priority A - 3 months from the date of allocation
- Priority B - 4 months from the date of allocation
- Priority C - 6 months from the date of allocation

Any significant delay outside these timescales needs to be explained in the report to panel and signed by the applicants.

The Assessment Process

The following is the basis of an agreement between the assessor and the applicant(s) – this should be completed at the start of each assessment and a copy given to the applicants and one placed on their departmental file. Applicants should be encouraged to complete the feedback forms to facilitate:-

- Feedback to the assessing worker
- Empowerment for the applicants
- Managerial monitoring of performance standards
ASSESSMENT AGREEMENT BETWEEN APPLICANTS AND ASSESSING WORKER

This agreement should be completed on the first visit of an assessing worker to the applicant’s home and forms the basis on which the progress of the assessment can be assessed by both the applicants, the assessing worker and the Service.

Name of applicants: ..............................................................................

Address: ................................................................................................

...........................................................................................................

...........................................................................................................

Name of assessing worker: .................................................................

Date of completion of this document:
...........................................................................................................

Target date for presentation of application to Panel: ....................... 

Dates of planned visits between now and presentation at panel:

Date: ....................... Length planned for visit: ....................

Date: ....................... Length planned for visit: ....................

Date: ....................... Length planned for visit: ....................

Date: ....................... Length planned for visit: ....................

Date: ....................... Length planned for visit: ....................

Date: ....................... Length planned for visit: ....................

The number of dates and the length of the visits will depend on a number of issues. Visits can be organised in quick succession or for lengthy periods if they take into account the following:

• The priority status of the application.
• The convenience for the applicants.
• The worker’s other work commitments.

The applicant(s) agrees to do their best to ensure that the planned sessions can take place uninterrupted and in appropriate circumstances.
If the applicants are unable to keep a planned appointment, they will inform the worker as soon as possible.

The assessing worker agrees to do their best to ensure that they arrive for planned sessions on time and are able to conduct the session uninterrupted.

If the worker is unable to keep the appointment, they will inform the applicants of the reason why as soon as possible, offering an alternative arrangement before the next session wherever possible.

The assessing worker will come to all appointments prepared for a focussed session on a section of the assessment process.

The applicants agree to do their best to undertake any tasks requested of them between sessions, by the worker.

Applicants and workers are reminded that, where it is convenient and cost effective, some sessions can be conducted in the office, or at a suitable appropriate venue. In such circumstances, the worker will ensure that the arrangements are satisfactory to both parties.

Signed: …………………….. 1st applicant date: ………………

Signed: …………………….. 2nd applicant date: ………………

Signed: …………………….. Assessing worker date: …………

A copy of this form must be given to the applicants and one placed on the applicant’s file.

Attached are two feedback forms, which the applicant(s) is invited to complete, the first half way through the planned assessment on …………………………………….. and return to the assessing worker.

The second should be completed at the end of the assessment after your application has been discussed at panel. This is planned to be:

Target panel date………………………………………………..
Feedback Assessment form A for applicants.

Please complete this form after the third assessment session with your assessing worker:

Is the Assessment proceeding in a business like manner and making progress?   Yes/No

Any comments…………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

Is your assessing worker

On time?

Organised?

Open and honest in their communication with you?

Informative about the /adopting task?

Any comments…………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

Please complete and return this to your assessing worker at your local office. If you are unhappy about the progress of your assessment at this stage you can choose to send this form and your comments to the Team Manager – so that they can discuss your concerns with the worker concerned.

Feedback Assessment form B for applicants

This form should be completed at the end of your assessment visits and after you have had the opportunity to discuss with your assessing worker the written assessment report.

Did the assessing worker keep to the visiting pattern arranged at the start? Yes/No

Were you able to keep to the times arranged? Yes/No

Is the target date for the assessment completion achieved Yes/No
Any comments on the above areas:- ...........................................
......................................................................................
......................................................................................
......................................................................................

Did you experience the discussions in your assessment visits as:-
Informative? Yes/No
Open and Honest? Yes/ No
Thought Provoking? Yes/No

Any comments on the above areas:- .................................
......................................................................................
......................................................................................
......................................................................................

Please return this form to the Team Manager – at your local office.

Thank you for completing these two forms and returning them – the feedback process is designed to help us improve our service delivery and your views will be treated with respect.

**Information gathering**

The assessment information gathering must follow the guidelines in the BAAF form Fs and cover all the areas outlined in Part 1 and Part 2. There are a number of different form Fs to suit the nature of the assessment:

- Form F1 for applications to become foster carers or adopters
- Form F2 for applications relating to a specific child
- Form F3 for applications as intercountry adopters

There is an additional part 3 which must be completed when the applicants are indicating a willingness to care for children with a disability.

The best assessments are based on a positive working relationship between applicant and worker but where the worker remains professional and finds sensitive ways to explore complex and sometimes difficult and painful issues.

The purpose of the information gathering and report writing is to:-

- Gain and give a picture of the applicants and their lifestyle
• To find the evidence to support or refute the picture we are presented with and what we are being told

• To undertake a realistic analysis of the strengths of the application and areas of concern and how these fit with the needs of a range of children

The first of these can be undertaken by following the guidance in researching information with the applicants and observing their responses, interaction and levels of insight. Their ability to take on board information and to learn is crucial as well as their problem solving capacity.

The second issue is largely dealt with by the taking up of references and the procedures for this are detailed in the Business Systems Manual February 2007 which must be set in motion at an early stage so that any issues emerging as a result can be addressed with the applicants at an appropriate stage. It is essential that the assessing worker retains an open mind and examines information coming forth fully and critically and making links with other sources. If there is a mismatch between information received this must be discussed with the worker’s line manager and fully explored.

The third part of the assessment requires a high skill level to ensure that the applicants understand on what the analysis is based and why understanding is crucial to ensure that they are matched with the right child but also so that their ongoing supervisor has a good understanding of their areas of vulnerability. The Social Worker’s assessment needs to be very thorough and reasoned and should not be presented as totally positive and complacent.

**Verification Procedures**

This is an area which has reached prominence in recent years as the need to check out information we are presented with has become more accepted. This has come about due to greater understanding of the elaborate skills employed by those who pose a danger to children and also by a number of high profile cases where improved procedures and checks may have prevented abuse of children.

Verification is largely covered in foster carer assessments by the extensive system of references we undertake. The critical issue is that the information gleaned in the taking up of the references is closely examined, links identified and discrepancies followed through.

It is important to use the ASSESSOR PACK AND USER GUIDE and its contents including the ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

**References Required**

The following references must be taken up in all assessments:-
**Criminal Records Bureau** – The prescribed form must be used to gather the correct facts and verify the documents and reference numbers to facilitate and enhanced disclosure for all applicants. It is essential that this task is treated with appropriate seriousness and no corners are cut. The verification of information here forms the basis of the identity checking which will ensure that any convictions plus any other concerns relating to the safety of children may be revealed.

It is essential that this check is carried out with all household members and any grown up children over the age of 17 years.

**Overseas Police Checks** – More and more applicants have now spent some time living and working abroad and for the periods they have been outside the UK we need to do our best to establish some form of check with the authorities in the country or countries concerned. We need to ensure that they have not been identified as posing a danger to children while abroad. It is recognised that obtaining such information can be time consuming, expensive and frustrating and, from some countries whose systems are poorly developed, information may be impossible. The following guidance should be adhered to:-

**OVERSEAS POLICE CHECKS IN ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARER APPLICATIONS**

In line with the procedures and policies of Cumbria County Council, the Service seeks to establish satisfactory police references for all fostering applicants as part of the assessment of them as suitable carers for vulnerable children.

British Criminal Records Bureau enhanced disclosures are obtained for all applicants. These checks will in future, be undertaken on a three yearly basis for all approved Foster Carers.

When applicants have lived abroad, all reasonable steps will be taken to obtain a police reference from the Country in which they have resided. The following arrangements will appertain:

1. Fostering applicants who have lived abroad for more than three months in the last ten years will be expected to obtain and provide a satisfactory police reference from any Country where they have lived. Any expenses incurred will be the applicant’s responsibility.

2. Applicants who have lived abroad within the last ten years who are unable to obtain a satisfactory reference are not approvable as Foster Carers or adoptive applicants.

3. Where applicants have lived abroad more than three months between ten and twenty years prior to the application – every effort should be made to obtain a satisfactory police reference from the Country of residence. If this is not forthcoming, then testimonials from employers or other appropriate contacts of standing should be obtained, addressing the issue of conduct in the Country concerned.

In the latter case, whether these are acceptable given other information and evidence in respect of the applicant, will be considered by the
Fostering Panel, which will make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker in respect of approval.

4. Where applicants have lived abroad over twenty years ago, it is accepted that evidence gathering in respect of the last twenty years will suffice, as police references in many Countries for so long ago will be very unreliable.

5. It is recognised that some Countries, accurate records will not be obtainable for a number of reasons:
   a. The systems in the Country are not reliable.
   b. It may be dangerous to draw attention to the person concerned for his/her family

In these cases, an “in principle” discussion should take place at the Fostering Panel prior to assessment, where a recommendation should be made to the Agency Decision Maker.

6. It is recognised, that prior to the approval of this policy, some applicants will have been approved as Foster Carers with less scrutiny. The scheme of checks would not need to be retrospective and approval would not be in question because of this.

Children’s Services records – a check will have already been made at the time of the initial enquiry. However, a second check must be made when we have more detailed information regarding previous names, other names of household members and previous addresses. When this information is gathered it should be passed to the Senior Clerk in the Family Placement team for a thorough check of departmental records. Any knowledge relating to any member of the family should be fully researched and any issues of relevance explored in the assessment. Letter FORM 17 needs to be sent to the Children’s Services if applicants live in another local authority.

Education – a request for information must be sent to the education department using letter and form FP16.

Schools - where the applicants have children at school or who have left school within the last two years an arrangement should be set up to speak to someone from the school who would have knowledge of the applicants and their parental approach. This is a very useful window on how a family support their children and their ability to work with school authorities and should be accorded due relevance. The prescribed letter and form are useful here.

Health - Letter and form FP16 should be sent to the appropriate health authority seeking any knowledge held within the health service in respect of the applicants and family members. It is important that we are aware of any physical health issues as well as any concerns with regard to mental health in the family and also a view is requested from the health visiting services where this is relevant e.g. where applicants have had children under the age of 5 years in recent years. Community Psychiatric nurses may have had involvement with the applicants and have knowledge which may be relevant to the application.
**General Practitioner** – The prescribed letter and form should be sent to the applicants GP seeking their views. Where the GP raises issues or declines to complete the form efforts should be made to discuss with him face to face his reservations. It may be necessary to discuss with the doctor the nature of the caring proposed and any likely physical and emotional demands.

**Probation** – Letter and Form FP16 needs to be sent out. This is designed to elicit any knowledge from the probation department in respect of criminal activity or knowledge from the court welfare service. Where applicants have been engaged in legal custody disputes a probation officer may have prepared a report for the court in respect of the welfare of any children concerned and it will be essential to research this thoroughly as salient information as to the applicants previous contact may be available. Certainly, it is important to gain a picture in respect of their child welfare views and responsibilities at the time and whether these are at variance to the picture being painted in the application.

**NSPCC** – *Letter and form FP16 must be sent to the NSPCC who may have information in respect of child protection type concerns.*

**SSAFA** – Where applicants have spent any time in the armed forces this reference needs to be taken up using form 22.

**Personal referees** – the applicants must be asked for a range of six referees to include:-

- A relative who is a regular visitor to the house
- Someone outside the family who visits the home regularly
- Two people who have known one or both applicants for more than 10 years
- Someone with children who has seen the applicants in the presence of children

The assessing worker must select from the list supplied at least three of the most relevant referees to the application e.g. in an application from a childless couple it will be important to look at any evidence of their contact with children, it is important to be able to gain from the referees some corroboration of the family lifestyle and the history of the applicants.

The referees selected should all be sent a letter and form 28 to complete and return. Also, arrangements must be made to interview them directly if they live in Cumbria. If they live outside Cumbria a telephone conversation may suffice but if there is any significant concerns are expressed a visit may need to be arranged by either the assessing worker or via an appropriate third party e.g. a social worker from another authority or an independent social worker. Eliciting appropriate information from personal referees is a skilled operation and an important feature in any application. It is important that the referee understands that our primary focus is the safety and welfare of any children who might be placed with the applicants. The interview should not be conducted on the basis of confirmation of the picture in the assessment and questions need to be constructed to establish the level of knowledge and understanding of the task and the applicants the referee has.
The referee interview needs to be written up on a referee interview sheet within three days of the event. The recording should establish the credentials of the referee and the assessors opinion of the value of the reference as well as any new information or discrepancy in the picture previously gained. Where the latter is significant the issue needs to be carefully considered and a strategy for further researching the matter and dealing with it with the applicants will need to be devised.

**Previous Partners, Children the applicants have cared for and employers where the applicants have worked with children:** where applicants have had previous significant relationships, cared for their own or someone else’s child or children, or worked with children then we need to establish whether their conduct gave rise to any concerns. Obviously this is a very sensitive area and requires skilled and balanced judgement.

To help the assessing social worker make a judgement about where to draw the line the following guidance may be useful but when in doubt a discussion with the line manager will be appropriate:

- Applicants who have been in a stable relationship for 10 years or more and where all other indications are positive – only previous partners who they had lived with for more than two years or anywhere they were involved in the care of children may need to be contacted.
- For applicants who have not been in a stable relationship for more than 10 years all previous partners who they have lived with for more than 3 months need to be contacted.
- All previous partners need to be contacted if they have had the care of children within those relationships
- All birth children of the applicants need to be contacted
- All adults who were children cared for by the applicants during a relationship with their parent or carer need to be contacted
- All employers where the applicant has worked with children need to be contacted

To assist with this delicate process leaflets and letters have been devised to assist.
Dear

RE: .................................................................

This person has applied to look after children in his/her own home. The enclosed leaflet explains why I am contacting you.

I should be very grateful if you would answer the following questions:

Would you have concerns about this person having time on their own with children?

☑ YES    ☐ NO

Please tick appropriate box.

If YES can you tell me about your concerns.

Do you think that a child would be safe in the care of this person?

☑ YES    ☐ NO
If NO can you tell me why you think this.

Do you know if this person has ever been violent?

Can you describe your relationship with this person.

It may be helpful to talk some more about what you have written (face to face or on the phone).

Please say if you would prefer this. If I need to speak to you I will contact you again.

Please return this form in the prepaid reply envelope.

May I take this opportunity of thanking you for your time and interest in the welfare of children.

Yours sincerely

Social Worker -
Leaflet 20 which explains why we need to contact previous partners, children and employers where applicants have worked with children.

Leaflet 20

CONFIDENTIALITY

We recognise that all the parties involved in this will be concerned about confidentiality and we will do our best to preserve this.

We will not share your personal details with the people we contact.

Any partner and children or previous employers contacted will be told by the Social Worker - that you have applied to look after children in your own home.

Similarly, the people contacted will be told that the views they express will remain confidential – except where the safety and welfare of an identified child may be concerned. The welfare of children will always be our first priority.

WHY WE NEED TO CONTACT PREVIOUS PARTNERS AND CHILDREN AND EMPLOYERS (If you worked with children)

Information for People wishing to ADOPT or FOSTER CHILDREN

This leaflet will have been handed to you on the preparation course or by the Social Worker - undertaking your assessment.

The purpose of the leaflet is to help you understand why we need to speak with your previous partners and any children you may have cared for. If you have worked with children we will also contact your employer.
WHY

Our primary focus must be the safety and welfare of any child placed with foster carers or adopters.

You may be aware that a small number of children have died at the hands of their foster carers or with adopters. Thankfully, it is very rare. In several of these cases, it later became known that previous partners and children had concerns but were never asked to give a view.

Contact with previous partners is one of the ways for us to verify some of the information you have given us.

When we assess people wishing to adopt or foster children, one of the areas we are most interested in is any experience of looking after children. Obviously we will need to rely heavily on what you tell us and your views about caring for children. It is also important that we have the opportunity to verify what we are being told. Your previous partner and child or children will be asked only to give a view about your capacity as a parent and whether they would have any concerns about your caring for other children.

If you work with children now, or have in the past, we also contact your employers to ask their view.

WHO WILL BE CONTACTED

Here is the list of people we will want to contact:

- Previous partners.
- Your children either grown up or of an age to express a view.
- Children of previous partners whose care you were involved with.
- Previous employers where your work involved care or contact with children.

SENSITIVITY

We recognise that this can be a very sensitive area. Some previous relationships may have ended very unhappily and you and your previous partner will still have difficult feelings about each other. Similarly, relationships with your children may be complex.

We have no wish to open old wounds or create any further tensions. Most people are interested enough in the welfare of children to take their role seriously in this matter and not use it to their own ends.

Seeking information from these people does not give them the right of veto over the outcome. We will consider carefully what they say in the light of all the information we have about you.
Leaflet 22 which explains to previous partners, children and previous employers why we are contacting them.

Leaflet 22
CONFIDENTIALITY

Information we receive will remain confidential. However, you may tell us things which may cause concern for children and it would be important for us to be able to explore these issues with the person concerned, or possibly take action to protect a particular child. You will be informed if this proves necessary before we take action.

The material you share with us will be handled sensitively. The welfare of children is the main consideration.

Information for previous partners,
children and employers
in respect of individuals
who are applying to care for children
in their home.
WHY DO WE NEED TO CONTACT YOU

Someone known to you has applied to look after children in his/her home. We need to be sure that this person poses no threat to the safety and welfare of any child.

We understand that you have lived with or worked with this person in the past and therefore you have experience of his/her temperament and ability to care for others.

We need to know whether your own experience would lead you to be concerned for the welfare of children, with whom this person may be looking after in the future.

SENSITIVITY

We realise that your relationship with this person may have ended unhappily and you may not be on good terms. We hope that you will not see this as an opportunity to settle any old scores.

It is our experience that most people have the welfare of children at heart and will take this responsibility seriously and act reasonably when responding to questions.

We will consider carefully what you tell us in the light of all the information we have.
Where an applicant is reluctant to allow this process, a detailed discussion needs to take place clarifying why we need to do this and how this practice has come about. The applicant needs to be given the opportunity to explain their objections and given time to reconsider. They should be given copies of both leaflets and the letter which is sent out which may help them understand. If they continue to refuse to cooperate, the assessor's line manager should be brought in to help them reconsider. If there appear to be reasonable grounds why it may be appropriate to waive the requirement, these should be brought before panel for a decision as to whether an exception can be made.

**Recording on Form F's of Contact with Previous Partners where children have been involved**

1. It is crucial that the Form F contains clear evidence of any contact or interview which has taken place.

2. On page 3 of Form F1, Part 1A, one of the checks for which a date is required is Previous Partner(s). The date(s) of any interview or telephone conversation with any previous partner(s) should be inserted here.

3. In the section underneath on page 3, details of the action taken in respect of contact with previous partners, previous children for whom the applicant has had care, grown up children and employers where the applicant has worked with children, should be detailed here. This should include dates of letters and leaflets sent and dates of replies received and dates of any interviews or phone conversations. Details should also be included of any considerations between the applicant, assessing Social Worker and Manager, in respect of any decision not to contact previous partners or children.

4. The content of any written replies, interviews or phone discussions should not be recorded here. These should be recorded on a separate sheet headed - Summary of Response, Discussion, Interview with Previous Partners, Previous Children Cared for, or Employers where the applicant worked with children. This separate sheet should be treated as confidential to the person concerned and not disclosed to the applicant.

At the bottom of the summary, the assessing Social Worker after discussion with their Manager, should give their assessment of any information given and how and why it has influenced the overall assessment.

5. The summary of the contact on the separate sheet and the assessing social worker's comments should be submitted to panel with the Form F.

**OFSTED** – where an applicant has been a childminder or worked in an inspected facility for children e.g. day nursery, children's home, the appropriate inspecting agency should be contacted to clarify if any concerns were raised in respect of their practice.

The reader is referred to the  – Business Systems Manual February 2007, which details the procedures in respect of the references

**Members of the Household**

All members of the household need to be interviewed privately in order to ascertain:-
Their views in respect of
Whether they are likely to pose any threat to a child placed
Their likely role with any child placed
Undertake their CRB check

**Adult children living outside the home**

All adult children need to be seen to ascertain:-

Their views about the applicants' intention to foster
Whether they are likely to pose any threat to a child
Their views about the applicants as parents/care givers
Their likely role with any child placed
Undertake their CRB check where their role is likely to be significant

**Significant others**

Some families have people who do not live in the family home on a permanent basis but who play a significant role in the family pattern of life. Such people may range from the next door neighbour, to an elderly parent who comes to stay regularly or for prolonged periods, to a friend of the family who spends a great deal of time in the household. These people need to be interviewed to ascertain the same areas as above.

Some families are able at the time of their assessment able to identify friends or relatives who they may call upon to provide short term care or 'babysitting' arrangements foster children. Ideally these people should be the subject of Criminal Record Bureau checks plus a level of assessment by the assessing worker. At the time of writing CRB checks are not an option but the assessing social worker will need to meet with the named people and make an assessment as to whether they can provide appropriate care for vulnerable children.

**Confidentiality in respect of references**

Those people providing information and opinion in respect of the suitability of applicants to foster children need to feel that their input is valued and that they are contributing to a wider process which has at its heart the welfare of children. They need to be given the message at the start of the process that what they tell us will be treated with due respect and sensitivity but they also need to understand that the information they give us which gives rise to concern in respect of the care of children may need to be discussed with the applicants. This discussion needs to strike the balance between encouraging the person to be open and honest but also to ensure that they will not at a later stage claim that they were promised complete confidentiality. If a decision is taken that the information and its source does need to be shared with the applicants then the provider of the information needs to be made aware of this prior to the event and offered appropriate support.

**Preparation of Assessment Reports, Analysis and Recommendations**

This is a crucial skill by the assessing worker and requires commitment and self discipline. Form Fs are available electronically and hard copy
It is essential that all sections on Part 1 are completed fully and as early as possible in the process. It is helpful to give the applicants a copy of the blank form at the start of the assessment and to identify areas where they can prepare material themselves. It is important to have a balanced approach to the amount of detailed information about the applicants to enter into Part 2. We need to have a picture of the applicants enough to support the analysis of strengths and weaknesses and the type of caring they are best suited to, but it is important not to overload the report with detail that is not applicable to the argument or judgement.

It is very important to include the following:-

- A Family Tree
- An account of a typical day in the family life
- A diagram of the applicants' support network
- Assessment of safety in the home and family

The following aspects need to be carefully evaluated as part of the assessment of applicants:-

- Health and Safety Checklist – to identify any risks posed within the accommodation
- Risk Assessment posed by the applicants – this will form the first part of the risk management strategy when any child is placed
- The Applicants' understanding of the issues relating to risk and safety measure
- The Applicants' understanding and attitude to safe care of children

Recommendations

The Assessing Social Worker needs to undertake a SWOT analysis with the applicants examining the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that can be identified in the application. This is a clear opportunity to:-

Establish open and honest communication
Put difficult issues on the table
Establish the positive areas
Establish risk factors
Identify early training needs
Agree the approval details to be recommended – type of, age, sex and number of children
Prepare the ground for the supervising worker post approval
Summarise the most salient points to be considered at panel

The Social Work Assessment needs to undertake an evaluation of the carer’s ability to meet the needs of children using the items listed in the assessment framework:-

Basic Care
Ensuring Safety
Emotional Warmth
Stimulation
Guidance and Boundaries
Stability

Health

Education

Emotional and Behavioural Development

Identity

Family and Social Relationships

Social Presentation

Self Care Skills

And also an evaluation of any contra-indicators, eg

Areas of Family Conflict
Poor Communication
Troubled histories
Poor understanding of the learning agenda
Over-confidence
Negative views of Children’s Services, Social Worker, people in difficulty.

Second Opinion Visits

Second opinion visits may be undertaken by a Senior Practitioner or other Manager when specific issues which may give cause for concern have been identified through the assessment process and via supervision.

Supervision of assessments

It is essential that all workers undertaking assessments are provided with regular and well informed supervision to:-

- Check the progress of the application and the reasons for any delay
- Ensure that the assessing worker has the opportunity to explore any concerns and reservations in the application
- To provide guidance and support to the assessing worker with issues arising in the application

Sharing reports with applicants

All applicants for must see the report prepared in respect of them and be allowed to comment on its contents and make suggestions for alterations. Where there is a difference of opinion between the applicants and the assessor, this should be identified and clarified as part of the report. Applicants should then be asked to sign and date the report as an essential part of the process.

3.5 Approval of Foster Carers
Approval of Foster Carers is dealt with by the Panel which meet on a fortnightly cycle in the north and south of the county of Cumbria.

Chapter 5 details the procedures relating to the panels and approval processes and the Agency Decision Maker.

Prospective Foster Carers must be informed verbally of the recommendation of the panel within 24 hours and in writing within seven days following the decision of the Agency Decision Maker.

Following formal approval within one week the Foster Carer must receive an Approval Pack containing the approval letter and all booklets and documents relating to good practice and standards in foster homes.

### 3.6 Supervision of Foster Carers

Supervision of Foster Carers involves several components:-

- Monitoring Standards of Care in the following areas:-
  - Nutrition
  - Clothing, sleeping arrangements, equipment
  - Stimulation – in and outside the home
  - Emotional Warmth
  - Encouraging Educational Achievement
  - Positive Health
  - Positive Identity Development

- Developing the carer’s skill level and understanding of the needs of particular children
- Initiating and processing the annual foster carer review – making recommendations to changes to the approval status and updating the carer’s training needs analysis
- Encouraging and supporting the carer and developing their confidence in their role
- Liaising and problem solving with the child’s social worker to enhance the care the child receives

This is a skilled area of work and should be undertaken or overseen by a qualified social worker with appropriate experience of child placements. Much of the work involved is centred around the foster carer but the goal is to ensure the best possible experience and care for each child Looked After.

### Visits to Foster Homes

Staff who need to devise a plan of regular visits to their caseload of foster carers. The regularity of visits will depend on:-

- The nature of the work being undertaken by the carer
- The stability of the placement
- The number of children being cared for
- The risks identified in any placement and the role of the Staff in managing these risks

Each Social Worker - Fostering should discuss their visiting plan with their supervisor and their carers and prepare a visiting schedule for each quarter of the year. On some occasions some carers will require weekly or even daily visits while others will survive with only a visit once every six weeks or so.

It is important that Social Worker - Fostering meet all the family members regularly and that they see and talk to children in placement and that the child knows who they are and why they visit. The primary role with the child will be that of the social worker but it is only possible for standards of care to be monitored if the child and carer are seen in interaction in the care situation.

**Babysitting and friends and relatives providing short term care**

Some families in the course of placements identify friends or relatives who they may call upon to provide short term care or ‘babysitting’ arrangements for foster children. Ideally these people should be the subject of Criminal Record Bureau checks plus a level of assessment by the assessing worker. At the time of writing CRB checks are not an option but the assessing social worker will need to meet with the named people and make an assessment as to whether they can provide appropriate care for vulnerable children.

**Telephone and E-mail contact**

Foster carers often appreciate telephone contact to see how they are and to ensure that issues/occurrences are reported in. Again the regularity of phone calls can be agreed according to the carer’s circumstances, notwithstanding the need for emergency contact on occasions. Many carers now have E-mail available and this may also develop as a means of quick and easy communication. Phone calls and E-mail must never be seen as a substitute for regular visits to the home.

**The Visiting Agenda**

To assist with addressing the issues identified above the Support Visit Record Sheet has been developed which asks the following questions:-

Checklist B

**SUPPORT VISIT AGENDA**

1. Are there any issues arising from agreed tasks at our last meeting?
2. Are there any issues concerning the child(ren) placed?
   re: (a) behaviour, (b) education, (c) contact, (d) health and hygiene, (e) social skills (f) clothing.
3. Are there any issues concerning the progress of the placement?
4. Is the Carer under stress? If so, what is the cause and what steps can be taken to alleviate this?
5. How is the Carer’s family coping with the placement?
6. Are there areas of practice that Carers need help and assistance with?

7. Are the frequency of visits and support adequate from (a) the child’s Social Worker and (b) the Social Worker - Fostering

8. Are there any safe caring or health or safety issues?

9. Are the practical arrangements regarding the placement satisfactory, ie (a) transport (b) respite (c) appointments (d) equipment?

10. Are the financial arrangements regarding the placement satisfactory?

11. Are there specific training needs at present or for the future that need identifying?

12. Are there any issues regarding the Carer operating at a skill level appropriate with their approval criteria?

13. Are there any Compliments/Complaints that need noting?

14. What action needs to be taken before our next meeting and by whom?

These should be filled in at each supervisory visit and signed by the Social Worker - and the Carer. A copy is then left with the carer while the other copy is passed to the line manager for perusal and follow up of any issues arising and signature before being placed on the carer’s file.

**Permanent Placements**

Where children are placed in placements designed to meet their needs until they are grown up and independent the supervision of their care needs to be particularly astute and child focused. Many people who apply for this type of caring have little experience of living with other people's 'children' and we will only have had the assessment process and time to get to know them, whereas many approved foster carers have had years of experience and we will have a greater understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. It is important that, in newly created permanent arrangements, any indications of poor practice or stress are given great attention and that the liaison between Social Worker – Fostering and the child’s Social Worker is well coordinated and analytical rather than only supportive. The guidance in Chapters 2.16 and 2.17 above should be followed in respect of the frequency of visits and the issues which need to be addressed.

**Recording of contacts with and issues relating to children in placement and foster carers.**

The discussion at a Supervisory Visit to a foster home will be recorded on a Support Visit Record sheet and after signing by the line manager for the worker will be placed on the carer’s file. In addition to this it is very important to keep a running account of all contacts on a Case Record sheet of all visits, telephone calls, discussions, written material received and sent relating to the foster carers and /or the children in placement. This record should refer to documentation elsewhere with detailed accounts but should give enough indication as to the sequence of events and issues arising. An example of how a running record should read is below:-
5/1/04 Supervisory visit see case record sheet.

6/1/04 Discussed progress of child A’s care plan with social worker

7/1/04 Mrs B approached by duty officer to provide respite for child D for the coming weekend

8/1/04 Form C received, completed and passed to the Children’s service administrator

Spoke to Mrs B about the weekend placement and acknowledged this is outside her approval details. Discussed ways of ensuring safety and adequate care.


9/1/04 Spoke to Mrs B – child D has arrived and all well. Her husband and elder daughter are at home to assist over the weekend - they have plans to take the children out and about.

13/1/04 Telephone from social worker saying that mother has alleged that child D told her he was smacked by Mr B.

Strategy meeting held – see notes.

Visit with social worker to discuss with Mr and Mrs B.

Detailed recording in reports section

14/1/04 Discussed outcome with PSW. Completed Utting sheet, Children in Public Care form and Notification to NCSC.

15/1/04 Review of strategy meeting held see notes. Home visit to discuss issues again and offer support to carers – see detailed recording

19/1/04 Copy of Letter sent by PSW to carers following the investigation with agreed outcome – see file.

20/1/04 Telephone call from Mrs B – very distressed – arranged to visit the next day.

**Transfer Summaries**

An accurate and up to date account of the circumstances of the carer, the work undertaken by the Social Worker - Fostering and tasks still outstanding is essential when carers are passed from one worker to another. The following headings should be followed:

- Length of time and current carer approval details
- Current children placed and purpose of the placement
- Progress of the care plan and carer’s ability to meet the child’s needs
- Tasks recently completed by Social Worker – and tasks outstanding
Date of last review and the training needs analysis
Any other salient issues

It is important that Staff ensure that their recording on file is in line with departmental policy, procedures and practice guidance in respect of User Participation, Opinion, Language and content. The reader is referred to the approved documents on Case Recording in Children's Services which can be found in E-library.

3.7 File format and management

The Foster Carer file is an important tool in managing a resource and needs to be kept up to date. All workers need to have in their mind:

‘If I was incapacitated for a period my manager and other Staff would know from my files where I am up to and what needs to be done with each carer’

Similarly, in future years should a review of the file be required or the carer request to see their file it is important that the documentation is in good order and where the sequence of events is easily followed.

All foster carer files must be in orange jiffex files with dividers indicating the following sections:-

Foster Carer Approval Information
Foster Carer Information
Administration
Forms
Correspondence
Diary Recordings
Foster Carer Diary Sheets
Confidential
Inside Back Cover

Items must be filed in the correct part of the file:-

FOSTER CARER FILE FORMAT (orange)

(Place a copy of this format inside the front cover of every foster carer file)

**In front of dividers**
Yellow Utting sheet
List of children placed
FP1/3 Foster Family Profile
FOST 60
FOST 61
FOST 62
Foster Carer Front Sheet - Care First Generated

1. **Foster Carer Approval Information**
FOST 4 (Form returned by applicant from information pack and used to register on Care First.
Checklist - FOST 5
Application to Foster Form - FOST 10
Initial Interview - FOST 6
2. **Foster Carer Information**
   - Part 1 of Risk Assessment Form FOST 64
   - Foster Carer Reviews (latest to the front) FCR7
   - Feedback on Placements (Also place here any feedback from child placed or birth parent) FCR 2, FCR 3, FCR 4, FCR 5
   - Reports for progression to Level 2 and 3
   - Panel Minutes referring to above
   - Report/s requesting dispensation of placement limit/Exemption Certificate
   - Dispensation of placement limit and letters to carers FOST 64 and 65
   - Record of training courses attended (with dates)

3. **Administration**
   - Form 66s
   - Change of Circumstance Forms
   - Core brief on sleep overs No 1

4. **Form Cs and C2s**
   - Most recent to the front

5. **LAC Forms**
   - These are now placed in the child's purple file held in the team.

6. **Reports Relating to Children Placed**
   - Matching reports
   - Risk Management Forms Parts 2 and 3
   - FP1 With risk assessment attachments
   - CPCC Minutes
   - Planning Meeting Minutes
   - CAA24C Adoption Planning Meeting
   - Care Plan
   - Core Group Minutes
   - Contact Plans
   - Safety of Children in Care Monitoring Forms
   - Any other reports which relate to children placed

7. **Correspondence**
   - All those official letters sent out in connection with the application (FOST 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 28, 30, 33
   - Letters inviting carers to training courses and reply slips
   - General letters
   - Outlook or EMail messages
   - Handwritten notes (if important to record)

8. **Diary Recordings (attach Form A agenda to the divider)**
   - Supervision Notes (kept at front of section)
   - Form As (pro forma)
   - Care Record Sheets noting other important contacts eg phone calls

9. **Foster Carer Diary Sheets**
10. **Confidential**
Letter confirming CRB enhanced disclosure.
Statutory References from NSPCC, Education, Probation, Health
FOST 31 Adult Health Report
Letter of reply or note of phone call from employer where applicant has
worked, or is working, with children
Letter of reply or note of phone call from schools attended by applicant's
children
Form F confidential section relating to references
Returned Reference Questionnaires - FOST 19, FOST 25, FOST 27

**Inside Back Cover**
Transparent envelope for photos etc.

The responsibility for the keeping of an orderly file, which is up to date and
reflects the nature of the importance of the document and the work
undertaken, rests with the social worker - . Administrative staff may place
material in the file and should be encouraged to follow the guidance on the
file format, but the file is the responsibility of the designated worker.

Managers in the fostering service have a responsibility to review the files held
by their supervisees on a regular basis. See the procedure – File Audit in the
Fostering Service. The worker will receive feedback as to their performance
in file management on the basis of this and will be expected to take on board
the lessons and generalise the learning to all their files.

All foster carer files and material relating to children and carers must be
securely stored and maintained in a manner designed to preserve their
confidentiality.
3.8 Training for Foster Carers

Training is an essential part of becoming and developing as a foster carer. All approved carers must undergo the induction training programme at the first opportunity after approval and then undertake the rolling programme of training as training events become available. The agreement between carer and the County Council specifies that each carer should attend at least 4 sessions of training per year. Foster Carers who are keen to progress on the Foster Care Career Structure and develop their own practice will be taking steps to develop a system of support which allows them to undertake regular training. Staff need to be discussing options in this area with their carers in order to maximise their opportunities.

Induction training

It is essential that newly approved foster carers are provided with the basic information required to provide care safely and effectively to vulnerable children. Where it is not practicable to engage a carer in a group training process with other newly approved carers individual input must cover the essential items in:-

Safe Care
Health needs and care of looked after children
Educational needs and achievement of looked after children
Health and safety issues
Fostering service procedures
Looked After Children reviews
Foster Carer reviews
Payments and financial arrangements

Ongoing Training

Input on the following areas should be made available to carers as soon as possible after approval:-

Safeguarding children
First Aid
Promoting educational achievement for Children Looked After
Promoting independence skills for Children Looked After
Caring for a Sexually Abused child
Appropriate methods of de-escalation and control and discipline
Life story work
Developing resilience
Equality and Diversity

National Vocational Qualifications

All foster carers must be offered the opportunity and appropriate support to undertake the NVQ in Caring for Children and Young People
AKAMAS training

This is an E-learning package developed in partnership with Cumbria’s Fostering Service and is designed to enhance foster carer practice and develop skills. It provides an opportunity for carers to obtain a B-Tech qualification and each year a cohort of carers should be encouraged to enrol and progress on the programme. It is essential that Social Workers – Fostering and Training and Support officers provide appropriate support and assistance to carers wishing to undertake this valued course.

At the annual review of foster carers the Training Needs Analysis may identify other more specialised training needs. Such a need may be met by individual input from a specialist, reading material or individual attendance at a specialist course. If a number of carers identify the same need then it may be appropriate to arrange a local training event to address the issue.

Where a carer is reluctant to attend training this often suggests an issue regarding their self esteem and they may need additional support and assistance to participate. The Social Worker - Fostering needs to take a consistent problem solving approach to this issue and discuss strategies with their line manager. It needs to be part of any review discussion also.

The Social Worker - Fostering needs to keep abreast of training carers are undertaking and make an assessment of the degree of helpful learning which has taken place.

The Training and Support Officer in the team is responsible for ensuring that carers are invited to training which meets their identified needs and that their attendance is monitored.

3.9 Support to Foster Carers

Children is a unique activity where people are caring for children, often with exceptional needs, in their own homes without the support and backup present in many work situations outside the home. It does not start at 8.00am and finish at 5.00pm and the day off or weekend does not come very frequently. We ask our carers to act as professionals in terms of providing standards of care, developing insight into a child’s experiences and feelings, modifying behaviour and so on. At the same time we ask them to love and care and provide the most normal of experiences. In order to achieve all these aspects carers need a great deal of encouragement and support. They will not always get it right and they should get the message that we understand this. What we are looking for is:

- The ability and willingness to learn
- The ability to recognise our own feelings and how they influence our behaviour, both as adults and children
- The ability to examine our own practice critically
- The ability to think ahead and devise a strategy and carry it through

Many of us, as social workers and other professionals, struggle with a number of these areas and need a great deal of support to develop and resolve them.
We need to understand that in the same way most foster carers will struggle on a daily basis with their thoughts, feelings and behaviour.

This is not to condone poor practice or inappropriate actions but as with ourselves, children and parents it is necessary to think about what is happening for this carer what are the issues for them and how can we tune into these.

There are several types of support available to foster carers:

1. **Social Worker** - the support offered here should be in the context of a warm but professional relationship based on an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the family and their interests and skill areas. The support given should be designed to build confidence and also to facilitate other forms of support. It is important that the carer understands that the relationship is not unconditional and the goal will always be to help the carer provide the best care for the child placed. At the same time care is expressed for the carer and any stress or anxiety they are experiencing.

2. **The child’s social worker** – the primary focus of the social worker will be the welfare of the child and the progression of the Care Plan. However, in the contacts and visits it is important to convey support and understanding for the carer and the work they are doing and to liaise closely with the Social Worker to ensure an appreciation of any factors affecting the carer.

3. **Sessional Support Workers** – are managed and arranged by the Coordinators for Support to Foster Carers and these workers can be used for a range of tasks, including:
   - Babysitting to allow carers a night out
   - Child care to allow a carer to attend training or a meeting
   - Help in the home with practical tasks
   - Taking a child out to allow the carer and the child some space
   - Out of hours support in a crisis

4. **Support groups** – these are run in each division of the county to provide the opportunity for carers to get together to share difficulties, solutions and support for each other.

5. **Fostering Network** – each approved foster carer is enrolled by the Service as a member of the national organisation which promotes. A regular magazine and leaflets are forthcoming as is the access to independent advice and support.

**Advice and Mediation service** – this is available to carers who are the subject of allegations and or disputes with the County Council. Cumbria is a participant in a scheme involving a number of other northern authorities and managed by the Network. Foster carers can access this service direct for advice and assistance as can staff – the contact number at the time of writing is 01642 789637 and the worker is Lynne Woodhouse.
Fosterline – this is a service commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills to provide support and advice to foster carers and is open between 9.00am and 5.00pm Monday to Friday except bank holidays. Contact details are freephone 0800 040 7675, textphone 0800 040 7675, e-mail fosterline@net.

6 Out of Hours – the emergency duty team provides advice and consultation for foster carers who are experiencing difficulties in the evening or at weekends – they are very unlikely to be in a position to visit but will offer advice about how to handle difficult situations. This is the first point of call when a child is missing. The number is 01228 526690

3.10 Reviews of Foster Carers

All foster carers must be subject to an annual review of their approval. The reviewing process is initiated by the supervising Social Worker – using the request for review papers to be sent out form and the process to be followed is detailed in the administrative procedure for this. The index of formats for reviews is helpful in organising the process. The review process considers the following areas:-

- Report on progress, any issues arising in the previous year, and skill level of the foster carer by the Social Worker -
- Feedback from the Foster Carer
- Feedback from the Social Worker for each child placed
- Feedback from any young person in placement of an age to give their views
- Feedback from the Unannounced visit and updated Health and safety checklist
- Feedback from the foster carer’s own children

Foster Carer reviews must be chaired by an experienced Manager and the result creates a recommendation to the Panel which includes:-

- Progress and skill level of the carer
- A review of training undertaken and the carer’s training needs analysis
- Any concerns in relation to the carer’s performance
- Recommended approval details – age, sex, number of children and type of

The first review of an approved foster carer and any change to the approval details needs to be discussed at the panel. Subsequent reviews where no significant change is recommended need to be available for panel members to peruse but do not need to be placed on the agenda for discussion except once every 3 years the review is discussed at panel.

Extraordinary reviews

Where there have been a number of concerns in respect of a foster carer’s practice, or they have been the subject of serious allegations it will be appropriate for an extraordinary review to be held and for this to be discussed at panel. In such circumstances the panel will consider whether the carer’s approval should be continued or revised. If the recommendation is that the approval should be terminated then the panel arrangements need to reflect the seriousness of such a
decision and provide appropriate support and advice for the foster carers as detailed in the panel procedures.

3.11 Unannounced Visits to Foster Homes

Such a visit must take place at least annually by a member of the team. The visit is designed to check out:-

- Sleeping arrangements
- Standards of care
- Safe Care arrangements
- Practices at different times of the day

Where there are concerns in respect of a foster carer’s practice more regular visits of this type may be indicated. Visits should be made without prior warning and at a time when we would expect to see the family in ‘full swing’ e.g. early mornings or in the evening or at a time when the area of concern is likely to be most exposed.

The visit must be written up on a Case Record Sheet and placed on the foster carer's file.

Children's bedrooms and personal space must be treated with respect. The purpose of the visit is to check standards of care and this does not normally require a tour of the child's bedroom. A look in from the doorway will usually be sufficient. If a reason for close examination is identified this needs to be negotiated with the young person when they are present.

3.12 Health and Safety Check

This is an integral part of the assessment process for new applicants and is designed to highlight any dangers in the home and agree steps to manage or overcome these. Any significant issues need to be discussed in the assessment report. The Prescribed form FOST 67.

A review of the Health and Safety check needs to be undertaken in preparation for the annual foster carer review.

At the time of writing it has become custom and practice to combine the Unannounced Visit with the Health and Safety check in preparation for the annual review. This allows the review procedure to ensure all Health and Safety issues have been addressed.
Health and Safety Checklist

Approved foster homes need to be safe for children and young people to live in. It is the responsibility of the local authority to ensure, as far as possible, that the foster home fulfils safety standards.

The Health & Safety Checklist below contains all of the checks that are needed. The first part of the form relates to the general living conditions in the home (e.g. Is there enough space for the numbers and ages of the children who will be living in the home? Will a child have his or her own hanging space for clothes?). The second part of the form related specifically to home safety (e.g. Are bleach and domestic cleaners kept out of reach? Are balcony doors secured to prevent children from opening them?) The entire form should be completed by the Social Worker during the assessment process. However, carers could be asked to complete a photocopy of the second part of the form as a way of gathering evidence of meeting competency 2.1. An ability to ensure that children are cared for in a home where they are safe from harm or abuse. You could then work through the form together and highlight any areas which need improvement or correction before the home can be approved as ‘safe’.

---

Part 1: General household conditions (for Social Worker only)
Improvement required and date to be carried out

- Is the accommodation suitable for the number of children/young people living or proposed to live, in it? (Note, disabled children may need more space)  
  YES/NO
- Is there sufficient space for children to pursue their homework, to engage in quiet activities on their own, as well as play boisterously?  
  YES/NO
- Do rooms have sufficient light to read and play by?  
  YES/NO
- Do all rooms have an opening window?  
  YES/NO
- Are all rooms maintained at a reasonable temperature?  
  YES/NO
- Will the child/young person have his or her own bed/cot (Note, bunk beds are not suitable for 14+, top bunks are not suitable for under 5’s)  
  YES/NO
- If children over eight years old will be sharing a bedroom, will it be with a child of the same sex?  
  YES/NO
- Can children eat in a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere?  
  YES/NO
- Is the accommodation hygienically clean and free from the odour of pets, cigarette smoke, urine and rubbish?  
  YES/NO
- Are there any obvious hazards? (if YES please specify)  
  YES/NO
- Do any pets pose a physical threat to children?  
  YES/NO
• Are sleeping and feeding arrangements for pets hygienic? YES/NO

• Do adults understand how infections are transmitted? YES/NO

Part 2: General safety factors (indoors)
Improvement required and date to be carried out

• Is electrical equipment in good repair? YES/NO

• Are accessible power points fitted with child resistant safety covers? YES/NO

• Are all heating appliances fixed to the wall? YES/NO

• Are fireguards used? YES/NO

• Is there an easily accessible (and working) fire extinguisher or fire blanket? YES/NO

• Are smoke detectors fitted and working (test batteries)? YES/NO

• Are sockets overloaded? YES/NO

• Has the wiring been checked by an electrician and a safety and a report issued? YES/NO

• Are gas fires and gas water heaters services yearly? YES/NO

• Are all large areas of glass fitted with safety glass? YES/NO

• Are there any loose or uneven floor coverings? YES/NO

• Do soft furnishings conform to the British Standards? YES/NO

• Are you committed to ensuring that any new furniture conforms to the British Standards? YES/NO

• Is furniture safe? YES/NO

• Do windows have locks/restrictors? YES/NO

• Are all window and door keys easily available in the event of a fire? YES/NO

• Is there adequate artificial/natural light to illuminate any steps. YES/NO

• Are the banisters filled in or have a maximum gap between rails of 4 inches? YES/NO

• Is stair gate fitted? YES/NO

• Do high chairs, buggies and child equipment conform to British Safety Standards? YES/NO

• Is there an accessible First Aid box? YES/NO
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kitchen</th>
<th>Improvement required and date to be carried out</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Are glassware, china and other fragile objects kept out of reach?</td>
<td>YES/NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are alcohol, cigarettes and lighters kept out of reach?</td>
<td>YES/NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are kettle flexes short and out of reach?</td>
<td>YES/NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are chest freezers kept locked?</td>
<td>YES/NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are knives and other utensils kept out of reach?</td>
<td>YES/NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is a cooker guard fitted?</td>
<td>YES/NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are kitchen work surfaces and flooring undamaged and kept clean?</td>
<td>YES/NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is food appropriately stored and the fridge kept at correct temperature?</td>
<td>YES/NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are bleach, poisonous substances, matches, etc, stored in their original containers out of the reach of small children?</td>
<td>YES/NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bathroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Are lights or electric fires controlled by a pull cord switch?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are medicines, shampoo’s, cosmetics and razors locked away out of reach?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is there a thermostat on the hot water control to prevent scalding?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is there a lock on the door (is it out of reach of small children)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bedroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Is the bed or cot safe?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part Three: General safety factors (outdoors)

Improvement required and date to be carried out

- Has a trip device been fitted in the electrical circuit to prevent fatal shocks? YES/NO
- Are garden/ DIY equipment/chemicals locked away, out of sight and reach? YES/NO
- Are garden fences and gates secure and in good condition? YES/NO
- Are swings, slides, etc, securely fixed and kept in good condition? YES/NO
- Are garage and sheds locked? YES/NO
- Are greenhouse, ponds, water tanks, etc, covered or fenced off? YES/NO
- Are sandpits hygienic and covered when not in use? YES/NO
- Are cars fitted with BSS approved restraints and carrycot restraints? YES/NO
- Is MOT and insurance on car up to date? YES/NO

Assessing Social Worker:

Print Name: _________________________________________
Signature: _________________________________________ Date:____

Applicants:

Print Name: _________________________________________
Signature: _________________________________________ Date:____

Print Name: _________________________________________
Signature: _________________________________________ Date:____

The member of staff undertaking the Health and Safety check should follow the guidance at the end of Section 3.10 in respect of the inspection of children's bedroom.
3.13 Progression on the Foster Care Career Structure

The Foster Care Career Structure is designed to create opportunities for Foster Carers to develop their skill level and thereby achieve a higher level of reward. Most foster carers enter the system on Level 1, with the opportunity to progress to Level 2 after completing appropriate training, gaining 2 years experience and a growth in skills. A further 2 years sees an opportunity for progression to Level 3. Details of the levels of payment are contained in the Table 13 document which is updated and issued to foster carers on an annual basis.

The process for progression is:

THE FOSTER CARE CAREER STRUCTURE

The Foster Care Career Structure allows foster carers who have shown a commitment to training, gained experience and developed their skill level to progress through a structure which links skills to payments. The terms for progression are laid out below:

**Progression from Level 1 to 2**

**Requirements**

Two years experience at Level 1.

Completion of all preparation and induction training.

Evidence of:

- Quality work to help a child overcome feelings of separation and loss.
- Understanding of child protection issues.
- Sensitive handling of natural parents.
- Planned and child centred endings of placements.
- Ability to work as part of a professional team to meet a child’s needs.
- Quality standards of care – food, hygiene and clothing, health and safety, stimulation and activities, personal space.
- Ability to keep useful recording.
Process

1. Carer writes letter to Team Manager - Fostering, requesting consideration.

2. Social Worker - Fostering writes report, with recommendation, containing details of previous placements and evidence of (a) to (f) above and views of previous and current social workers.

3. Team Manager - Fostering, conducts a review of foster carers and makes own recommendation.

4. Discussion at Fostering Panel.

Appeal Process

In writing to the Service Manager - Fostering.

Progression of Level 2 to 3

Requirements

Three years experience at Level 2.

Completion of the following Training Courses:

Child Protection Level 2.
Caring for a Sexually Abused Child.
TCI.

Evidence of:

(a) Ability to prepare and develop other foster carers.

(b) Understanding of Child Care Legislation.

(c) Ability to prepare adequate reports on children and make useful contributions to case conferences and core groups and the potential to give evidence in Court.

(d) Eagerness to take advantage of ongoing training.

(e) Understanding of the need to maintain and develop a child’s identity.

(f) Ability to remain child focussed when under stress.

(g) Ability to observe and assess parent/child interactions and relationships.
Understanding of the need to promote good health and educational achievement for the children in their care.

**Process**

1. Carer writes letter to Team Manager - Fostering, requesting consideration, with report addressing (a) to (h) above.

2. Social Worker – Fostering writes report containing details of placements and evidence of (a) to (h) above and views of previous and current social workers.

3. Team Manager - Fostering, conducts a review of carers and prepares a recommendation.

4. Service Manager – Fostering sees carers to discuss application and make recommendation.

5. Discussion at Fostering Panel.

**Appeal Process**

In writing to Coordinating Manager – Looked After Children

### 3.14 Members of Staff applying to become Foster Carers

The Services Regulations 2002 have specific requirements in relation to members of staff in foster care provider agencies and need to be consulted before any application is progressed – the regulations at section 20 (6) and (7) are the most relevant. It is important that a number of issues are explored at the time of an initial enquiry from a member of staff. These are:

- Potential conflicts of interest
- Confidentiality relating to their assessment
- Clarity of boundaries between work and fostering children.

### 3.15 Friends and Family Carers

The best interests of many children are best served by placement with friends or extended family members. This must always be the first consideration where children need to be provided with care away from their parent or parents. Such placements often have a number of benefits for the child:

- cultural stability
- continuity of attachments
- reduced feelings of rejection
positive contact arrangements

At the same time we must be sure that:

- the child's short and, where necessary, long term needs can be met.
- the carers can protect the child where this is necessary.
- the carers can provide positive standards of care
- the carers do not pose a danger to the child.

No child should be placed with family or friends without preliminary checks with Children’s Services records and other appropriate checks. In some instances children who are cared for by family or friends do not need to become looked after.

If the child does become ‘looked after’ and the placement is made in an emergency the procedure for immediate placement must be followed. Regulations require a full assessment of their suitability to care for the child within six weeks.

Many such carers will benefit from similar preparation and training to other foster carers and many will need and welcome ongoing support and assistance with meeting the needs of the children in their care.

3.16 Assessment of Changes in Foster Carer Relationships

On occasions foster carers experience problems in their relationships and in some cases marriages or partnerships come to an end. Single carers may find a new partner. These changes in family relationships may have profound affects on the foster home and the care provided within it and need to receive due care and attention. The following framework should be followed when relationship changes are taking place with a foster carer:-

1. If relationship disharmony is identified, the supervising social worker will undertake an assessment of how this is affecting the children in the home and prepare a brief report for discussion with the team manager. If the assessment suggests that the children’s welfare is being affected then a strategy discussion should be called with the social workers for the children concerned and decisions made about how the issue is to be dealt with.

2. If a carer and their partner or husband or wife separate the same must take place as in 1. above and the assessment and an extraordinary annual review of the foster carer must be held and the review report must be discussed at the panel.

3. If a carer meets a new partner and introduces this person to the foster children a CRB check must be undertaken as a matter of urgency before any overnight stays occur in the foster home.
4. If the new partner is spending a significant amount of time with the foster children then an assessment of the individual must be undertaken covering the usual issues in the Form F framework and taking up the normal references including previous partners. The completed assessment must be completed and discussed at panel before the couple live together on a full time basis.

5. If an assessment and panel discussion concludes that a potential partner is not suitable to care for children who are looked after this must be made clear to the original carer. If they insist in pursuing the relationship a strategy discussion must be held to discuss the future care of the children. Any proposal to remove a child from the care of the foster carer must be referred to the Head of Service.

6. In exceptional circumstances where a foster carer is found to have a new partner living in the home prior to any CRB check or assessment the following must occur:-

- Urgent CRB check
- Urgent preliminary assessment of the new partner
- Urgent strategy meeting to review the welfare of the children in placement
- If the decision is that the children should remain in the care of the foster carer – a risk management strategy must be implemented while an assessment of the new partner is completed and presented to the panel within 28 days of the strategy discussion.
Chapter 4

Contents:

Record Keeping, Use of Premises and Financial Arrangements

4.1  Register of Foster Carers
4.2  Register of Children
4.3  Staff records
4.4  Foster Carer’s files
4.5  Children’s records
4.6  Complaints and Allegations
4.7  Use of Premises
4.8  Payments to Carers
4.9  Budgetary Control
Chapter 4.

Record Keeping, Use of Premises and Financial Arrangements

4.1 Register of Foster Carers

This document is required by regulation and needs to include:-

The name, address, date of birth and sex of each foster carer
The date of his approval
The current terms of his approval (number, age and sex of children to be placed)
Date of last review

This document also needs to include:-

All placements made in an emergency with unapproved carers who are Family or Friends of the placed child - where regulation allows placement up to six weeks after appropriate checks and after the signing of an appropriate agreement.

All Shared Care Carers – where children have short term stays to provide respite for them and their families

To allow this to be a useful working document in the monitoring and allocation of placements and the delivery of the foster carer service it is important to also have included:-

The names and dates of birth of children currently placed, the date their placement started and to have readily available a list of children previously placed and also any brief details in respect of future planned placements or current restrictions.

At the time of writing a countywide spreadsheet which is generated by the electronic database Carefirst is being refined and its title is ‘CLA Placement Register’ and is delivered weekly as part of the Allocations and Assignments listings from the Data Assurance system.

A regular audit of the information on Carefirst relating to foster carers and children placed must be used by Social Workers – Fostering and Team Managers to ensure that the information is accurate.

Availability of Placements with Foster Carers

The CLA Placement Register gives the number of children for whom a foster carer is approved to care and it also gives the number of children currently placed with the carer and the remaining places. However, this does not necessarily mean that the number of remaining places equates to usable vacancies for new children requiring placement. This may fluctuate at any time for a variety of reasons e.g.

Illness in the family
Placements under stress
Carer under investigation
Holidays
and so on

Social Workers – must use the start of the notes field in the carer Approval screen on Carefirst to indicate the carer’s current Availability - the text here will be reproduced in the CLA Placement Register

To ensure consistency – the following codes must be used:-

**AV** = Currently Available
**TU** = Temporarily Unavailable – this should be followed by the end date or the date on which this should be reviewed (e.g. Saturday’s date if the carer is on holiday and about to return, if the carer has a broken arm you must put in a review date perhaps 6 weeks hence)
**LA** = Limited Availability – this means there are complex issues at the moment and any placements will need to be the subject of discussion with the Social Worker – or the Team Manager –
**WC** = Waiting to be closed – this is where a carer is in the process of resigning or their approval is to be terminated by some other means and this is in progress

When inserting a **review date** or end date after **TU** or **LA** the following format for the date must be followed:-

```
DD/MM/YY e.g. 14/09/06
```

4.2 The Register of Children

The register of children placed with Cumbria approved foster carers is a document required by regulation.

The name and date of birth of the child.
The date of his placement.
The name and address of the foster carer.
His legal status.

The CLA placement register described above also contains detailed information in relation to children who are looked after in Cumbria

The child’s address prior to placement and his/her placement history can be obtained from their Carefirst record.

4.3 Staff records

There are a variety of types of documentation which are required:-

**Register of Staff in the Service**

This forms part of the annual inspection material and details all staff members, their qualifications, the date of the last CRB check and the post they hold in the service. It is held by the Service Manager -
Personnel File

Individual personnel files of Staff are held in the Personnel section of Capita Carlisle and will have details relating to the person's employment, date of birth, home address, health check and CRB checks and any significant issues relating to their employment e.g. disciplinary matters, occupational health issues.

Supervision file

Each line manager should hold a file in respect of each supervisee in which a copy of each supervision note is kept and any memos or other documentation relating to their performance or welfare at work.

All these documents are confidential and must be held appropriately

Supervision notes which relate to a particular carer must be signed and dated and placed on the carer’s file.

4.4 Foster Carer Files

Each foster carer must have a file relating to them which is kept in accordance with the guidance detailed in Section 3.6 above.

Foster Carer files are held in local offices. Foster Carers can request access to their files using the Access to Records policy and procedure. There should be no information on a carer’s file that they have not been made aware of – other than confidential references given as part of their assessment for approval.

Supervision notes which relate to a particular carer must be signed and dated and placed on the carer’s file.

Guidance on the format of such files and recording is given in Chapter 3

4.5 Children’s Records

The child’s file is held by the Social Worker in the appropriate fieldwork team and should be available to Staff.

Each child should have his/her own file and all papers relating to them should be filed in accordance with an agreed format.

Each child placed in a foster placement will have a purple file in the team with essential documentation relating to the child’s care plan and progress in foster care. This folder must include:

- Care Plan
- Placement Plan (Part 1 and 2)
- Placement Information Record
- Essential Information Record (Part 1 and 2)
- Copy of contact sheets regarding the child’s placement
4.6 Complaints and Allegations

The Service is subject to the same Complaints and Representations procedure as the rest of the Children's Services and seeks to learn any lessons arising in the investigation of complaints. The Procedure Allegations against foster carers are similarly subject to procedures as detailed in chapter 2.4 above.

It is necessary to clarify which issues need to be dealt with under which procedures:

- **Complaints against members of staff** – the Complaints procedure
- **Allegations of abuse against staff** - the procedures relating to Allegations of Child Abuse involving professionals
- **Allegations against foster carers** – the procedures detailed in chapter 2.4 above
- **Concerns about foster carer practice** – the procedures detailed in chapter 2.4 above

The person raising the issue should be informed of which procedure the issue is being investigated under and the outcome.

In some circumstances it may be necessary to investigate the concerns under one set of procedures but also deal with it under the Complaints procedure particularly where the complainant requests this.

Informal complaints should be investigated by the Team Manager – . Stage 2 complaints need to be dealt with by Service Manager – .
It is important for all staff and managers to represent a culture where we recognise we will not always be able to provide a perfect service and where we are interested to hear the views of those in receipt of our services in order that we can learn and develop positively the impact we have on both children and adults.

Complaints by children in respect of carers must be taken seriously and the children made to feel that they have been listened to and that appropriate actions have been taken.

Similarly, foster carer’s making a complaint on their own behalf or that of a child must be treated with appropriate respect and action.

4.7 Use of Premises

Staff are generally accommodated in Children’s Services offices with the required space and equipment and Health and Safety measures. Where this is not the case it is important for the local service manager to bring this to the attention of the office manager and their Service Manager -

In the recruitment, assessment, training and support of foster carers Staff regularly need to use other premises which range from Social Services provided Family Centres to church halls in small villages to rooms in the back of public houses.

It is important that premises used are identified with the following issues in mind:

- Health and Safety for participants and staff
- The image of the Service
- Appeal to service users
- Cost effectiveness
- Level of confidentiality required
- Facilities for the disabled

Premises used should be the subject of a well considered risk assessment and any appropriate safety measures implemented.

4.8 Payments to Foster Carers

Foster Carers are paid according to the Cumbria County Council scheme of Allowances and Charges and is updated annually can be accessed. This is revised on annual basis and circulated to all staff and carers.

Foster Carers receive an allowance which is designed to cover the costs of caring for the child in respect of food, clothing, school equipment, toys, presents, holidays, transport, personal items, additional household expenditure and so on. Each carer also receives a fee for the work they do. This fee varies according to their level on the Foster Carer Career Structure and how many children they are caring for.

The fees and allowances are paid on a fortnightly basis – one week in arrears and one week in advance. The amounts payable are paid directly into carer’s bank accounts via the BACCS system. The amounts are calculated by the
Child and Family Care Administrators on the basis of information on the Form C supplied by the social worker for the child and information about the carer from Family Placement. Any miscalculations are rectified in the next payment.

Foster Carer’s request for additional payments to meet the needs of a particular child are considered and authorised by the Social Work manager.

4.9 Budgetary Control

The Service is responsible for a number of budgets:

1. **The Staffing Budget** – this covers the cost of salaries and mileage and subsistence of all staff plus all employer costs such as National Insurance, superannuation etc.

   This budget is subject to an annual rise to cover annual increments and the annual pay rise and inflation but within this all staffing resources must be funded.

   The budget is split between the 3 divisions and requires careful monitoring by the Team Manager - Fostering for the area and any difficulties reported to the Service Manager – Fostering.

   Slippage on this budget due to vacant posts can be used to provide worker time in other ways e.g. the use of independent or sessional workers. This budget must not be used for other shortfalls without the permission of the Service Manager - Fostering.

**The Foster Care Recruitment, Training, Support and Equipment budget**

- this limited budget needs to cover a wide range of costs and expenditure needs to be carefully planned and monitored throughout the year.

   The Team Manager - Fostering is authorised to use this budget as imaginatively and productively as possible within their division of responsibility reporting any projected overspend to the Service Manager - Fostering as soon as this is identified.

   Some recruitment activities each year will need to be planned and funded on a countywide basis and it is important that the call on the local budgets is agreed at an early stage in order to facilitate the management of the remaining funds.

3. **Shared Care** – the payments to carers for this service to children with disabilities is managed within the service and is monitored on a countywide basis by the Service Manager – Fostering.

4. **Specialist** – the budget covering all the fees and recruitment, training and support needs of this group of carers is managed on a countywide basis by the Service Manager – Fostering.
5. **Support to Foster Carers** – the budget for the sessional workers who provide support to foster carers is monitored by the Coordinator for Sessional Support to Foster Carers and is managed by the Team Manager - Fostering in the division. Expenditure needs careful month by month analysis as the level of expenditure will dictate whether the level of support being requested is affordable or not. The salary and employer expenses for the Coordinators also come out of the divisional budgets for this scheme.

6. **Payments to Foster Carers** – the budget for weekly allowances in respect of children and family support is held within the child care teams with overall responsibility resting with the General Manager. Requests for additional costs in respect of a specific child are addressed to the Team Manager in the social work teams via the child’s social worker.

7. **Fees to Foster Carers** – the responsibility for the management of this budget rests with the managers of the service who allocate fees according to the Assessment and Allowances table and the Foster Care Career structure. Retainers are also paid to carers for a period when they are without a child in placement. The overall responsibility for the Foster carer fee budget rests with the Service Manager – Fostering.

All Staff and managers have a responsibility to ensure that funding is used constructively and cost effectively, while maintaining a high level of service with appropriate concern for children and foster carers. All are expected to maintain an eye on the situation of payments and arrears etc and ensure that any difficulties are rectified as soon as is practicable.
Chapter 5  Approval, Review and Termination of Approval of Foster Carers

5.1 The role of the Family Placement panels
5.2 Panel processes
5.3 Officers in Attendance at Panel
5.4 Applicants attending Panel
5.5 Agency Decision-maker
5.6 Observers at the Adoption and Panel
5.7 The Panel Procedure
5.8 Recommendations
5.9 Matters where the panel does not make a recommendation - advice and notification
5.10 Matters normally not to be referred to panel
5.11 After the recommendation has been made
5.12 Panel Recommendations not accepted
5.13 Emergency panel meetings for urgent placements
5.14 Adoption and Panel Business Meetings
5.15 Induction and Training for Panel Members
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ADOPTION AND PANEL PROTOCOL

1 Confidentiality
2 Checks
3 Anti-discrimination
4 Declaration of interest in cases known to panel members
5 Procedure
6 Case papers/papers for discussion
7 Meetings/dates/time/venue
8 Practical arrangements
9 Training Days
10 Information/Induction Package
11 Concerns about behaviour of a panel member
Chapter 5. Approval, Review and Termination of Approval of Foster Carers

5.1  The Role of the Fostering Panel

5.1.1 Constitution, membership and terms of reference

In January 2007 the Fostering Panels were established following the Regulations 2002. There will be 2 panels per month one held in Workington and the other held in Kendal.

5.1.2 Functions and Duties of the Panels

Fostering Services Regulations 2002

Matters the Panel is required to do by statute

To recommend

1. On each application for approval whether or a not a person is suitable to act as a foster parent (FSR 26(1)(a)). This indicates “stronger” foster carers and “family and friends” foster carers.

2. Where approval of a foster parent is recommended, the terms on which the approval is to be given (FSR 26(1)(b)).

3. On the foster carer’s first review, whether or not a person remains suitable to act as a foster parent and whether the terms of approval remain appropriate (FSR 26(1)(c)(i)).

4. Where the foster service provider chooses to refer to the Panel its report on a second or subsequent review, to recommend whether or not a person remains suitable to act as a foster parent and whether or not the terms of the approval remain appropriate (FSR 26(1)(c)(ii)).

5. On such other matters or cases as the service provider may refer to it (FSR 26(2)(c)).

To advise

1. On the procedures under which reviews in accordance with regulation 29 are carried out by the service provider (FSR 26(2)(a)).

2. On such other matters or cases as the service provider may refer to it (FSR 29(2)(c)).

To monitor periodically

The effectiveness of the procedures under which reviews are carried out (FSR 26(2)(a)).

To oversee
The conduct of assessments carried out by the service provider (FSR 26(2)(b)).

To consider

1. Written representations where the service provider considers that a person is not suitable to act as a foster parent, with a power to make fresh recommendations (FSR 26(1)(b), 28(6) and (8).

2. Where the service provider is no longer satisfied that the foster parent and his household continue to be suitable or that the terms of the approval are appropriate where the Panel may make a recommendation (FSR 26(1)(d), 29(7) and (9).

Importance of Panel recommendations

The service provider i.e. the County Council cannot approve a person as a foster parent unless the Panel has considered the application (FSR 28(2)).

Matters Cumbria County Council has chosen to refer to the Fostering Panel (FSR 26(2)).

1. To note the resignation of a foster parent (FSR 29(11)) and to send a letter of thanks for services provided.

2. To consider a disruption report on the breakdown of all permanent placement.

3. To consider every situation where it is proposed to exceed the usual limit by providing foster care for more than three children where those three children are not all siblings with respect to each other and the Local Authority proposes to grant an exemption certificate to ensure that the criteria of schedule 7 of Children Act 1989 are met.

4. To receive a report on each occasion that a child is placed with a foster carer outside the terms of the foster carers approval to monitor whether the terms of approval should be varied and whether the interests of the children in the placement are being met.

5. To review any case where there is an allegation of concern that a foster carer may have harmed a child including any incident which has led to an investigation, for example a foster carer striking a child.

6. To recommend whether a prospective foster carer is a suitable permanent foster carer for a particular child and whether the foster carers are able to meet the needs to the child into adulthood and understand the difference between short-term and permanent commitment.

7. To consider each case where the terms of approval of a foster carer after changing from short term to permanent care.

8. To advise on any aspect of the child’s plan as requested by the Local Authority e.g. contact proposals.

9. To receive reports about the change of foster carers households (e.g. new partner, elderly relative moving in, birth child leaving home) and to consider
the implications for the terms of approval of the carer.

10. To give preliminary consideration to any case where foster carers are wishing to either adopt or become permanent carers for a child.

5.1.3 Timescales

Standards set time scales for various aspects of the Panel’s work.

The panel should hear applications no later than six weeks after completion of an assessment.

Decisions by the Agency Decision Maker must be made within seven working days of the panel recommendation.

Decisions should be conveyed orally to applicants, birth parents and the child within 24 hours and confirmed in writing within seven working days.

Foster carers who make an application to adopt a child in their care will be entitled to the same information and preparation as other applicants and be assessed within four months of giving written notice of their application.

Cumbria Social Services is required to have a system in place to monitor performance against the timescales set out in the Standards. As part of this the panel has a role in this monitoring by noting in their minutes when the timescales are not being kept to and the reasons for this.

5.2 Panel Process

5.2.1 Membership of and Appointment to the Panels

There are two separate panels, one covering the south and one the north of the county of Cumbria.

There can be up to 10 members in each panel, comprising the following:-
The panel should have a mix of gender. Single carers, disabled people, lesbian and gay people should all be represented, if possible, so that there can be a reflection of their views. Similarly black and minority ethnic people need to be represented. There is a job description setting out the key responsibilities and roles of panel members.

Legal Advice
Each panel must have access to legal advice

5.2.2. A Quorum

A quorum for a meeting of the panel 5 members, who must include the Chair or Vice-Chair, a social worker, and two independent members. The panel cannot make a recommendation if it is not quorate.

5.2.3 Chair

The Chair is an independent person appointed by the Corporate Director of Social Services in consultation with the Cabinet member for Children and Young People, and has to be seen as independent from the day-to-day management of staff undertaking assessments of foster carers.

The Chair has the responsibility for:

- ensuring that the panel is clear about the reasons for its recommendations and that these have been accurately recorded.
- deciding who will attend the panel, in addition to panel members.
- ensuring that all panel members participate fully and that, if possible, a consensus is reached.
- performance management of panel members, and taking any action when panel members are unable to meet the standards required.
- managing the situation when a panel member declares an interest in a case.
- deciding when a matter is urgent and when either an additional panel be called or the case transferred to a panel in another division.

The Chair, with the professional adviser of each panel, should feed back issues to the Service Manager – . Regular meetings should take place to monitor the work and membership of the panel and address any concerns about the panel and practice issues. The Chair should also be involved in the recruitment and induction of new panel members.

The Chair is responsible for liaising with the decision-maker after panel meetings and ensuring that the timescales for decisions are met and conveyed appropriately.

There is a job description setting out the key responsibilities and tasks of the Chair.
5.2.4 Vice-Chair

A Vice-Chair is appointed from the rest of the panel membership for each panel by the Corporate Director of Social Services. His or her role is to deputise for the Chair when the latter is not available. Guidance says that it may be preferable for the Vice-Chair to be a qualified social worker with supervisory or management experience.

5.2.5 Social work representatives

Three social workers employed in Children’s Services by Cumbria County Council are panel members. The aim is to have a representative and balanced range of skills and experience on each panel with one having experience of adoption and assessments, one with placing children and one with the management of child care services. The Corporate Director of Social Services appoints them.

The meetings will not be quorate unless one social worker representative is present.

5.2.6 Medical adviser

The medical adviser is a full member of the panel and he or she is not limited to providing advice and comment on medical issues. They are appointed by the Corporate Director of Social Services and nominated by the local Primary Care Trust. The Panel Adviser has the responsibility for verifying the medical adviser’s qualifications and registration with their professional body. The tenure of office of the medical adviser is not fixed. There is a job description setting out the key responsibilities and task of medical advisers.

If the medical adviser is unable to be present at the meeting, written advice must be available to the panel.

5.2.7 Elected Members

Elected members are drawn from the Executive or Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee and nominated by the Cabinet. There is one elected member on each panel. They operate on a full and equal basis as other panel members.

5.2.8 Independent Members

There are five independent members on each panel. The Corporate Director of Social Services appoints them. The meetings are not quorate without two independent members being present.

A person cannot be appointed as an independent member of a panel if he or she is a foster parent approved by Cumbria, employed by the Cumbria Children’s Services or an elected member (or a member of an employee’s family).

Regulations require the recruitment of a current foster carer or someone who has fostered within the last two years as a panel
member. This carer must be from a service provider other than the one on whose panel they sit. Other groups to be included if possible are a fostered person who must be at least 18 years old, and birth parents whose children have been fostered. In the Guidance it suggest other appropriate independent members as being members of black and minority ethnic groups, a person with disabilities, a lawyer, a doctor with a special interest in child health, a teacher, a health visitor or a probation officer. When a vacancy occurs, the Chair and panel adviser need to consider the overall range of areas and interest groups represented on the panel before seeking a suitable replacement.

5.2.9 Tenure of office

Panel members may hold office for a term not exceeding three years and may not hold office for more than two consecutive terms without an intervening break of at least three years. The medical adviser may remain a panel member indefinitely. The tenure of office is arranged so that, as far as possible, the term of office of at least one third of the members ends each year. The terms for the panels start from January 2007.

A panel member can resign by giving one month’s notice in writing.

If a panel member becomes unfit, unwilling or unable to continue their membership, this may be terminated by giving him/her notice in writing, and setting out the grounds for the intention to do so.

When a member of the panel leaves before their period of tenure has expired, the next person takes over the unexpired portion of time. This is to ensure that the order of retirements is not disrupted. The Panel Adviser monitors the length of service of panel members, ensuring one third retire each year.

5.2.10 Checks on Panel Members

A Criminal Records Bureau check is made on all panel members before they commence being panel members. This is renewed every three years. It is the responsibility of the Panel Adviser to see that these checks are kept up to date.

At the time of writing the Criminal Records Bureau are only providing checks for people who will have unsupervised access to children – this issue is receiving ongoing attention

5.2.11 Confidentiality

All panel members and those attending panel meetings are expected to observe strict confidentiality. All panel members have signed a declaration on confidentiality before joining the panel and this has been retained on their files. This is also covered in the Panel Protocol of which all panel members have had copies. Matters discussed at panel should not be divulged elsewhere, and the substance of the discussion should not be shared with birth parents, child, prospective foster carers or others. In certain situations the
Chair of the panel will give guidance on which information, other than the panel’s recommendation may be shared with the parties mentioned.

Panel members must hand in all panel papers at the end of the panel meeting and where panel members receive papers for a meeting they subsequently cannot attend, they must remember to return the papers to the Panel Administrator.

5.2.12 Declarations of interest

Full advice is given to panel members and officers regarding the circumstances in which they should declare a personal interest in or previous knowledge of any matter being considered by the panel, in the Panel Protocol. This varies according to their role and type of membership of the panel. If in any doubt, they should consult the Chair whose decision on such matters is final.

Where a panel member has knowledge outside the panel of children or applicants being discussed at panel, they must declare the status of their knowledge. In some circumstances it will be appropriate for the panel member to withdraw from the discussion. It is accepted that members of the panel employed in a professional capacity may have knowledge of cases being discussed gained in the course of their work. This knowledge should be declared but would not normally require withdrawal.

Declarations of interest should be an item on the agenda for every panel meeting.

5.3 Officers in attendance at Panel

5.3.1 Panel adviser

Each of the panels has a panel adviser. If the professional adviser cannot be present arrangements must be made for a deputy to take on this role.

The panel adviser has a co-ordinating role with regard to agreeing the agenda with the Chair at a pre-agenda meeting, monitoring the quality of reports and ensuring that complete paperwork for the panel members is sent out in good time.

The panel advisers are experienced managers who understand the need for self evaluation in good child care practice and, where they recognise a conflict of interest, should bring this to the attention of their manager and the panel chair. In some exceptional circumstances it may be appropriate for the professional advice to the panel to come from an alternative member of the panel in respect of a particular item.

The panel adviser is present at the meetings to advise the panel on the regulations, and to give such advice to panel as the panel may request in relation to any case or generally, and also to take feed back from the panel to the Service about practice issues.
The panel adviser is not a voting member and should not participate in making recommendations.

The Chair and panel adviser are jointly responsible for the performance management of panel members against agreed objectives. Issues which should be considered for performance assessments are poor panel attendance, holding fixed views which discriminate against people from certain backgrounds and which are not altered in response to advice or training, and adequacy of contributions to panel discussions. The panel adviser assists in the appointment of panel members, induction and training.

5.3.2 Legal adviser

It is essential that the panels have access to legal advice on matters, where necessary, such as when the panel is considering termination of approval of a foster carer.

Currently the senior solicitors provide this from the Legal Services Child Care Team. The Panel Adviser has responsibility for verifying the legal advisers’ qualifications and registration with their professional body.

A legal adviser is normally present at all panel meetings and is sent the panel papers before the meeting. If that officer is prevented from attending, advice must be available to the meeting in writing.

5.3.3 Education adviser

The education adviser advises the panel on all matters and is appointed by the Corporate Director of Children’s Services. He/she should have expertise in the educational needs of looked after children, and this advice must be available to panel when they consider the best interests or matching. If the adviser is not able to be present, written advice must be available to panel.

The Panel Adviser has the responsibility of verifying the education adviser’s qualifications and registration with their professional body.

5.3.4 Minute taker

The minutes are taken by the panel administrator.

5.3.5 Social Workers and Social Workers -

All social workers and social workers - who have completed reports to panel must attend to present these reports to panel. If they are unavoidably unavailable their manager can represent them.

5.4 Applicants attending panel
5.4.1 In June 2004, a process whereby applicants or those being assessed as permanent carers are encouraged to attend the panel came into place. Foster carers are also encouraged to attend the panel where there is no agreement in respect of their future approval details following an annual review - this includes where the agency is recommending termination of approval.

5.4.2 The arrangements for applicants attending panels are set out in a protocol, "Applicants and Carers Attending Panels" and, more briefly, in a leaflet given to all applicants.

5.4.3 Applicants are given a choice as to whether they attend panel and should not be disadvantaged if they do not attend. They should be informed about this opportunity during their assessment and receive a letter from the Chair inviting them and a leaflet about the process.

5.4.4 Single applicants may wish to bring a support person. When the panel is considering a matter where there is a significant conflict of views between the applicants and the local authority, such as in terminations of approval, all applicants should be given the opportunity to bring a support person, whose role is to provide moral support, not to speak or act as an advocate.

5.4.5 Applicants with a physical, sensory or learning impairment, or whose first language is not English, may bring a helper or interpreter.

5.4.6 There are certain statutory constraints on the information available to the applicants; medicals, personal references and third party information need to be available to the panel but not to the applicants. Applicants do not attend that part of the discussion in which panel members consider the above information, nor that where they come to their conclusions.

5.5 **Agency Decision-maker**

5.5.1 The panel does not make decisions: It makes recommendations. The decisions are made by a senior officer of Children’s Services known as the agency decision-maker, on behalf of the Corporate Director of Children’s Services(being the head of the Service), taking into account the recommendations of the panel. Both the Regulations require that no member of the panel may take part in any decision made by the decision-maker on the panel’s recommendation. The decision-maker cannot be a panel member. Decisions must be taken within seven working days of the panel recommendation. The Chair of the panel, however, has the responsibility to liaise with the decision-maker reporting on the reasons for a panel’s recommendations.

5.5.2 If the decision-maker is unavailable, the Corporate Director of Children’s Services or an officer that he/she nominates takes the decisions.

5.6 **Observers at the Adoption and Panel**
5.6.1 Members of staff, prospective new panel members and any other person with a legitimate interest in the functioning of the panel, such as inspectors, may attend a meeting of the panel. Permission should be sought in advance, in the first instance, from the Professional Adviser and the Chair. Numbers of observers are limited to a maximum of two per panel meeting. Observers must sign a confidentiality agreement, sent to them by the panel administrator, before attending and agree not to retain or copy any panel papers.

5.7 The Panel Process

5.7.1 Panel protocol

The panel operates according to an agreed Panel Protocol. (see appendix 1).

5.7.2 Assessments and Information coming to the Panel

The subsequent pages give details of which areas of business are appropriate for each panel – either the Panel or the Adoption and Permanence Panel. Also covered is the documentation required and the presenting professionals.
THE ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS BETWEEN THE ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE PANEL AND THE PANEL

The tables below make clear the split of business between the two new panels.

It helps to remember that the Adoption and Permanence Panel deals with business relating to children who are leaving the Looked After System.

The Panel deals with business relating to children who are remaining Looked After.
## ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE PANEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Which Panel</th>
<th>Documentation Required</th>
<th>Prepared and Presented by who</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Assessment of Adopters where the agency is minded not to complete the assessment.</td>
<td>Adoption and Permanence Panel.</td>
<td>Brief but comprehensive report following legal advice – detailing the issues of concern</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue</td>
<td>Which Panel</td>
<td>Documentation Required</td>
<td>Prepared and Presented by who</td>
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<td>7. Plan for Residence Order or Special Guardianship where carer’s have previously been approved as permanent carers for the child at the Fostering Panel.</td>
<td>Adoption and Permanence Panel.</td>
<td>Support Plan.</td>
<td>Child’s Social Worker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue</td>
<td>Which Panel</td>
<td>Documentation Required</td>
<td>Prepared and Presented by who</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Assessment of Foster Carers for short term care, permanent care, respite care, specialist fostering (teenage), not for a specific child.</td>
<td>Fostering Panel.</td>
<td>BAAF Form F1.</td>
<td>Assessing Social Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue</td>
<td>Which Panel</td>
<td>Documentation Required</td>
<td>Prepared and Presented by who</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Matching of a child requiring a permanent placement with foster carers who have previously been approved to provide permanent care.</td>
<td>Fostering Panel.</td>
<td>Original Form F with appropriate update where necessary. Child Permanence Report. Matching Report</td>
<td>Assessing or supervising social worker for the carers and Social worker for the child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Reviews of Foster Carers at:</td>
<td>Fostering Panel.</td>
<td>Review Papers and accompanying report where more information is required, e.g. following investigations.</td>
<td>Supervising Social Worker (and Team Manager where serious allegations/complaints/concerns about practice).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) 1st Annual Review after approval.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>b) Following any significant change in the household.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>c) Following serious complaint/child protection investigations/serious concerns around practice.</td>
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<tr>
<td>d) Recommendation for significant change in type of fostering.</td>
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<tr>
<td>e) Following review every three years.</td>
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<tr>
<td>f) Following disruption of a permanent placement.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
|   | Foster Carer meets the criteria.  
|   | Report by Team Manager in case of progression to Level 3.  
|   | Report by Service Manager, Fostering  
| 8. In principle discussions for Panel, to address an issue which has arisen in assessment of Foster Carers. | Fostering Panel.  
|   | Report detailing the issue.  
|   | Assessing Social Worker.  
| 9. Exemption Certificates where more than three children are placed with Foster Carers or children placed are placed outside the Foster Carer’s approval details. | Fostering Panel.  
|   | Report addressing issues as detailed in the Foster Care Procedures.  
|   | Dispensation of Limit of Placements Form signed by General Manager.  
|   | Letter sent to the Foster Carers.  
|   | Supervising Social Worker.  

If a child or applicants have been considered at panel on a previous occasion, the minutes relating to the discussion need to be provided as part of the documentation.

The BAAF medical forms are to be used for applicants. There will occasionally be additional information available, often in the form of reports from the psychological and psychiatric services, medical consultants and specialists. The medical reports are sent only to the medical adviser who gives advice either orally or in writing to the panel.

From time to time developments in practice may lead to a change of documentation – any such changes would need to be approved by the Panel Management Group. Panel members must receive guidance in the use of any new documentation before it is presented to panel.

Where foster carers are being reassessed for a particular reason or the terms of their application have changed, the guidance contained in
the document "Reassessment of Carers" held on the Children's Services E-Library needs to be followed.

5.7.3 Written or oral observations of applicants

Applicants can make observations to the panel on their assessment, if they wish. The Assessing social worker has the responsibility of informing the applicants of their right to make any written or oral observations on the assessment. For those wanting to make oral observations these can be given to a member of staff not involved in the line management of the case. A note will be made in writing of the main issues and the accuracy agreed by the applicants. The final written report on the applicants to be considered by the panel should include the written record of any observations made by the applicants or the written notes of any oral observations.

5.7.4 Pre-agenda meeting

The reports and papers, which have been submitted for consideration by a panel, are sent to the professional adviser and the Chair as well as the Service Manager – Fostering immediately after the closing date for papers of that panel. This is three weeks before the panel date. The professional adviser and Chair meet to consider the items to go on the agenda, compile an agenda, decide if any additional information is needed or amendments before papers go to panel. The Service Manager may express views prior to this meeting.

5.7.5 Panel Meetings

The panel’s role at the meeting is to examine the assessment and other reports before it, to seek clarification or additional information from the social worker presenting the reports or the applicants if they are present, and then consider whether there is evidence to make a recommendation.

During the meetings the Chair has the responsibility to ensure that each panel member has an opportunity to raise questions or offer comments on each matter to be decided.

The first part of the meeting is used to prepare a mini-agenda for the cases where applicants are attending, whenever this is timed on the agenda. A list of strengths of the application and agreed questions is prepared and left available for the applicants and their Social Worker – Fostering to read before they come into the meeting.

For items on the agenda where the applicants are not attending, the item starts with the Chair establishing a mini-agenda for that item, with the social worker and or Social Worker - Fostering present.

The applicants and presenting social worker and /or assessing social worker are present for the open discussion stage which, when the applicants are present, consists of asking them prepared questions and recording their responses, when applicants are not present this is in the form of questions from the mini agenda.
At the closed discussion stage the applicants leave, whilst the social worker and or assessing social worker remain to hear the panel’s discussion and to address any further points. The Chair summarises the discussions and, at this point, each panel member should be asked whether or not he/she supports a formal recommendation. A consensus is usually arrived at without the need for formal voting but it is not always possible for panel members to come to a unanimous decision on a recommendation. If the panel is evenly divided it cannot make a recommendation. The Chair does not have a casting vote. Where there is a serious difference of opinion among members, or the opinion is evenly divided, the Chair should consider asking for more information to be made available to the panel before a recommendation is made. Serious reservations expressed by individual panel members about a particular recommendation should be recorded in the minutes for the decision-maker. The panel discussion is fully recorded giving the reasons for its recommendation.

Once a recommendation has been agreed, the Chair leaves the room and joins the applicants and informs them of the recommendation which will be made to the Agency Decision Maker.

5.7.6 Minutes

The Regulations require the keeping of a written record of the recommendations made by the panel and the reasons for them. Minutes are taken of all panel meetings in an agreed format, with a separate page for each item. Each minute is numbered. Panel members’ contributions are not attributed to individual members unless they are expressing a reservation or objection to the recommendation when this is noted by name with their reasons.

After the meeting, the draft minutes are sent to the Chair who amends them as necessary. They are also sent to the decision-maker as soon as they are available. The amended minutes are sent to the social workers and assessing social workers who presented cases giving them an opportunity to suggest corrections, to be forwarded to the professional adviser. The amended minutes are circulated to panel members with the papers prior to the next meeting. At the next panel meeting the amended minutes are an item on the agenda, when they are further amended if necessary and approved as an accurate record. Copies of the minutes should not be retained by panel members but returned with other panel papers.

The agreed minutes are kept on the Panel Drive. Agreed minutes are circulated to workers who have presented individual cases to be included on the case files. All such minutes are confidential and should be placed in the "Confidential" section of the file.

5.7.7 Panel administration

Each panel will have a panel administrator

Tasks
Before panel meetings

Production of an annual schedule of meetings countywide
Maintenance of a panel booking system – south and north
Notification to social workers of panel schedule and deadlines – countywide
Prepare papers for pre-agenda meeting
Arrangement of accommodation and refreshments
Preparation of agenda and panel papers and dispatching them to panel members and all those on distribution list
Advising presenting workers of their time slot on the agenda and sending out their papers
Sending out confidentiality agreements to any observers
Maintenance of records on panel members
Ensuring that the meetings will be quorate
Liaison with chair on requests for observers
Ensuring that meeting and waiting rooms are prepared on the day of panel, name plates available, spare reports available, attendance book etc
Preparing the papers for the decision maker

At the meeting

Taking minutes
Giving out and collecting expenses forms
Collection of papers at the meeting after discussions
Circulate attendance book

After the meeting

Completing the decision forms
Drafting minutes and submitting the draft minutes to the chair
Ensuring that amended minutes are circulated for the next meeting
Ensuring that the decision maker's decisions are passed to social workers and applicants
Ensuring that applicants, and social workers are notified in writing of decisions
Providing presenting workers with a copy of the minutes approved at the last meeting
Update Carefirst with any approved foster carers
Maintaining full records of panel business, agendas, reports and minutes
Maintaining statistical records for performance monitoring, government returns and the annual report

5.8 Recommendations

The panel may make recommendations on the following questions:

5.8.1 Whether a prospective foster carer is suitable to be a foster carer and the terms on which approval is given

5.8.2 Whether a permanent placement is in the best interests of the child
5.8.3 Whether a Foster Carer is a Suitable Match for a Particular Child needing a Permanent Foster Placement

5.8.4 Friends and family placements – kinship care

Looked After Children may be placed with friends or family members on an emergency/immediate basis following an initial assessment by the child's social worker. This approval is given by the Service Manager for the division in which the child resides and this report will be brought to the next panel for noting and for a discussion about timescales for full assessment.

The completed assessment of the carers will be brought to panel on an F2 report for a specific child or children which will make clear whether approval is recommended on a short term or permanent basis. Where the placement is being considered as a permanent arrangement, then whether permanent placement is in the child's best interests will be considered and a matching report is also required.

5.8.5 Foster care reviews

The panel must consider

- all first annual reviews after approval
- all reviews where there are significant changes in the approval details proposed
- reviews following child protection concerns or allegations about standards of care, where the outcome of the investigation recommended an extra-ordinary review.
- all proposals to terminate approval
- all requests for progression on the Foster Care Career Structure
- all reviews following the disruption of a permanent placement previously considered at panel

Panel will not normally consider

- Resignations by foster carers, unless their termination of approval is also being considered by the agency
- Minor changes to approval details e.g. age, sex and number of children to be placed.

Reviews which require consideration at panel (as detailed above) need to be on a panel agenda within two months of the date the review meeting was held.

Following discussion at panel foster carers will receive standard confirmation of their approval status and details.

5.8.6 Termination of approval of foster carers

Such a matter requires very careful documentation and planning to ensure that the foster carer is fully aware of the process and has every opportunity to have their views represented and considered. A full
report is presented by the Social Worker - to panel which must detail the concerns, the investigative process and the outcome. This report should also contain details of the carer’s history, any previous concerns, as well as any evidence of good practice and the successful care of children. A copy of the review document should also be presented to panel.

The foster carer needs to have seen a copy of the reports going to panel and to have the opportunity to respond and have their response presented to panel. A letter needs to be sent to the foster carer by the Team Manager - giving formal notice that there is a recommendation for Termination of Approval to panel offering independent support to help them prepare for and attend panel. The foster carer must also be offered the opportunity to attend an alternative panel outside their local area if this is their wish.

If the recommendation from panel to the Agency Decision Maker is that the foster carer's approval is terminated, the panel adviser will inform the foster carer in writing of this and give 28 days for the opportunity for the foster carer to address an alternative panel.

If the recommendation from panel to the Agency Decision Maker is that an applicant not be approved as a foster carer, or that their approval is terminated, the panel adviser will inform the applicant or the foster carers in writing of this. They will allow 28 days for the applicant or foster carer to prepare to address an alternative panel.

The panel discussion in these circumstances will take the following form:

1. Papers detailing the reasons for the recommendation for termination of approval from officers of the Children’s Services plus Papers detailing the foster carer’s submission to the panel are distributed to all panel members prior to the meeting.

2. The foster carer(s) is/are invited to attend and to be accompanied by someone to provide support but not an advocate. This could be:
   - a friend
   - a relative
   - independent support worker from another agency

3. Prior to the admission of the foster carers or the staff who have prepared the documentation outlining the reason for the recommendation for termination. The Chair of the Panel will prepare, with panel members, a list of issues to be explored and a list of questions to ask both parties.

4. The foster carers and officers are welcomed into the panel and made comfortable.
5. The officers give an overview of the case they have presented in their reports.

6. The foster carers are invited to give a verbal submission to the panel as to why they feel termination of approval is unjustified.

7. Panel members address issues/questions to the officers and the foster carers with opportunity for responses.

8. Foster carers and presenting officers depart the panel.

9. Discussion and recommendation making by panel under the direction of the Chair.

10. Chair informs the foster carers of the recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker.

5.8.7 Resignations of Foster Carers

Carers who are no longer available to offer care to children should be encouraged to send a letter of resignation to the agency. Such resignations do not normally need to be discussed at panel unless termination of approval was also being considered.

Where foster carers have not been in a position to receive placements of children for more than 6 months and where they are not able to indicate a timescale for becoming available and decline to send a letter of resignation, a letter should be sent by the Team Manager - assuming their resignation by a certain date.

Resignations result in removal from the register of foster carers 28 days after the date of the letter of resignation from the foster carers or 28 days after the date indicated on the letter to the foster carer from the Team Manager -

5.8.8 Exemption Certificates

It is sometimes appropriate to place children with foster carers above the normal limit of three or outside the approval of the foster carers, e.g. more than the number approved, different sex or outside the age range. This should only occur when it is clearly in the best interests of the children concerned and where all the risks have been considered and appropriate measures put in place to manage these risks.

In such circumstances the Co–Ordinating Manager - Looked After Children is empowered to grant a certificate of exemption to the foster carers according to the rules laid out in the Foster Care Procedures, Chapter 2.
Such an exemption certificate, if it extends beyond the date of the next Panel in the division must be brought to panel for discussion and agreement for it to continue for an agreed period of time.

The report prepared by the Social Worker - Fostering, the letter sent to the foster carers by the Team Manager – Fostering and a copy of the issues to be considered must be presented to panel - along with any other relevant material.

Panel will consider the whole situation in the foster home and form a view as to the acceptability of the exemption and agree a timescale for review. The Team Manager - Fostering, will ensure that the panel expectations are adhered to.

5.9. Matters where the panel does not make a recommendation – advice and notification

5.9.1 Early Advice

Panel may be asked to provide early advice or consultation on issues that have arisen in the assessment process. This often involves a discussion as to whether or not to proceed with an assessment. Panel will need a report on the issue which will contain the views of the applicants.

Advice given by the panel is not forwarded in the form of a recommendation to the decision maker. Any representations or complaints about this advice, which could lead to a decision not to proceed with an assessment, should be dealt with by the complaints procedure rather than through appealing to another panel. However the applicants need to be given information in writing by the Service if the panel’s advice leads to a decision by them not to proceed with the assessment.

5.10 Matters normally not to be referred to the panel

5.10.1 Private

The assessment of private foster carers is carried out by the Children and Families teams. It is not necessary to complete a Form F, rather address the issues listed in Children (Private Arrangements for) Regulations following the county procedures for private. These assessments do not come to panel for a recommendation.

5.10.2 Residence Order Applications

In the majority of Residence Order applications the local authority has no involvement and does not complete an assessment of the applicants unless one is requested by the Court.

Where foster carers who have been previously approved as permanent carers for a specific child and they are applying for a residence order in respect of that child a report will be need to be prepared for court by the social worker. The Support Plan will need to be considered by the Adoption and Permanence panel.
Where a child is "Looked After" by the Local Authority and where carers who have not been approved as permanent carers for the child are applying for a Residence Order in respect of the child, an assessment of the applicants needs to be brought to the Adoption and Permanence panel.

5.10.3 Special guardianship applications

These will follow the same processes as for Residence Orders as above.

5.10.4 Placement with parents’ assessments.

These assessments are carried out by the Children and Families Teams and do not go to the Panels.

5.10.5 Approval of supported lodgings.

These assessments are not dealt with in panels.

5.11 After the recommendation has been made

5.11.1 The panel administrators send the decision-maker copies of all the panel papers when they are circulated to panel members and send the completed decision forms to him/her on the first working day after the panel meeting, and draft minutes are sent by the minute taker as soon as they are available. The Chair telephones the decision-maker to clarify any points, having a pre-arranged schedule of when the decision-maker will be available to get feedback from the panel meeting. When the decision-maker has made the decisions he/she then signs the decision forms, which are returned with the panel papers to the panel administrator. Information on decisions is then passed to the divisional team administrators, and social workers. The child’s social worker and Social Worker - are responsible for the notification of the decision to foster carers, birth parents and children orally and in writing.

5.11.2 Applications and other decisions.

If the decision-maker decides that, following the panel’s recommendation a prospective foster carer or other permanent carer is suitable, the social worker must give the decision orally to the applicants within 24 hours and confirm this in writing within seven days, specifying the terms of approval and entering into a foster care agreement as outlined in Schedule 5 of the regulations. This process applies to all other decisions of the decision-maker.

Birth parents and children should be told in a similar way if there is a decision involving them or their child.

If the decision-maker, following the panel’s recommendation, is inclined not to approve the prospective foster carers as suitable, the reasons must be fully recorded and the foster carers notified orally.
within 24 hours and in writing within seven days. The prospective foster carers must be given, with this letter, a copy of the decision-maker's reasons for not approving them plus a copy of the panel's recommendations and invited to make written representations in the next 28 days. Similarly this process applies to the other decisions taken by the decision maker, such as terminating approval of foster parents,

If no representations are made on any of these decisions within 28 days, the decision-maker may proceed to make a formal decision and has to give written confirmation of the reasons to the applicant or foster carer.

If there are representations within 28 days the decision-maker shall refer the case to a panel in a different division to make a fresh recommendation. The procedure for this panel is outlined in 5.8.9 above.

The new panel then makes a recommendation and the decision-maker must take this into account before making a final decision. The applicants or foster carers must be notified orally and in writing of this final decision, either notifying them of the terms of their approval and entering into a foster care agreement or explaining the reasons for the decision not to approve them.

5.12 Panel Recommendations Not Accepted

5.12.1 Where the panel recommendations are contrary to the local authority's original proposals, the decision-maker will consult with relevant staff and managers before making a decision. These discussions need to take place within the seven working days after the panel makes its recommendation. The applicants and other parties can be informed within the timescales. Where after this process the Agency intends not to accept the panel's recommendation, the matter will be referred to the Corporate Director as Head of Agency.

5.12.2 Where the Corporate Director on further consideration intends not to accept the recommendation of the Panel, the matter will be referred to the Special Cases Appeal Sub-Committee of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee. The applicants need to be informed, given details of the reasons, the panel's recommendations and given the opportunity of making representations.

5.13 Emergency panel meetings for urgent matters

A panel will be taking place in one part of Cumbria every two weeks. If there is an urgent matter and the panel dates have been missed in the division where the case would normally be considered, it is possible, after discussion with the Chair and the professional adviser in the other division, to reschedule them as urgent cases. The Chair can, as an alternative, call an emergency panel meeting. This should only happen if there is an exceptional reason for not using a panel in another division, such as conflicts of interest.
5.14 **Panel business meetings**

Separate meetings of the panel are arranged throughout the year, to enable consideration to be given to matters of panel business. These can be just for the panel within one area or for the two panels together. Such meetings may include consultation by the Service of its arrangements for. Such meetings provide an opportunity for the panels to review the manner of their operation, promote good practice, consistency of approach and fairness by panel members, and progress reports on individual cases.

5.15 **Induction and training for panel members**

5.15.1 New panel members will receive an induction file and, wherever possible, will be asked to attend a meeting of the panel as observers prior to them taking up their appointment as panel members and given the opportunity to attend a course for new panel members.

5.15.2 Continuing training will be provided for panel members. This may include separate training days, presentations on new legislation and/or seminars on specific topics and the opportunity to attend other training events.

5.16 **Appraisal of Panel Members**

Panel members will be subject to an annual appraisal process.

5.17 **Annual Reports**

Each panel will be the subject of an annual report, prepared by the Chair and professional advisers.
1. CONFIDENTIALITY

1.1 Strict confidentiality is required by statute.

1.2 All members of the panels, advisers and secretarial support undertake to maintain the strict confidentiality of all matters discussed and are asked to sign a Confidentiality Agreement. Panel members plus advisers sign a book at each meeting of the panel they attend. Observers at panel meetings are also asked to sign the Confidentiality Agreement, Form CAA32.

1.3 Papers for consideration at meetings of the panel will be sent out to panel members by recorded delivery one week prior to a panel date. Members and advisers are asked to ensure that their papers are kept secure at home/office, in order to maintain confidentiality, and returned at the end of any panel meeting.

2. CHECKS

2.1 All panel members will have an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check before joining the panel, which will be renewed every three years.

2.2 Panel members should inform the Chair if they are convicted, or cautioned, for any criminal offence or if any criminal proceedings are pending.

3. ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

3.1 The panel conducts all its business on the basis that all people are of equal value, and that they should not be subject to discrimination. Discrimination should not occur in action, language, or social structures. It should not occur on the ground of race, ethnic origin, culture, disability, language, gender, sexual orientation or any other grounds.

3.2 As far as possible panel members should become aware of discriminatory, 'racist' and sexist factors to which people and especially children may be subject in matters and should seek to challenge them. Panel members are responsible individually and collectively for promoting anti-discriminatory practice.

3.3 In considering the placement of black children, panel members should make a particular effort to understand the world view of a black child (growing into a black adult), be able to make explicit the white perspective that affects the world view of all white people, and to be aware of the implications of both for.
4. DECLARATION OF INTEREST IN CASES KNOWN TO PANEL MEMBERS

4.1 This covers those circumstances in which any member of the panel should declare a personal interest in or previous knowledge of the people involved in any matter to be considered by the panel.

4.2 Independent members

Where the Independent member has previous knowledge of a person or family whose case is under discussion, whether in respect of another employment or positional role or in a personal and private capacity, an interest should be declared.

Elected Members

4.3 To some extent the practice for independent members of panel will apply to elected members also.

4.4 However, the nature of the role of elected members means that they have responsibilities to all members of their constituencies, and that they have a public profile and special interests, which make them known to an even wider community. Yet this recognition cannot debar them from taking part in most case discussions.

4.5 An interest should be declared only where a constituent has approached them, or a member of the public not a constituent has approached them in their other roles in the authority, e.g. as chair or vice-chair of a committee, about any aspect of the case under discussion.

4.6 An interest may be declared by an elected member where a case is already known to be of a high-profile nature by the time it comes to panel, even if none of the circumstances above apply. This would have regard to the possibility of the elected member's later involvement in their other roles within the authority.

4.7 Local authority employees

The roles of the social work panel members mean that they will not infrequently and quite properly have prior knowledge of the case under discussion.

4.8 A declaration of interest should only be made where the staff member has previous knowledge arising in respect of another employment or positional role or in a personal and private capacity outside the responsibilities of their current work.

4.9 Medical Adviser

The role of the medical adviser in this respect is unique. The medical adviser is required, with regard to many cases, and especially those of children, to have an intimate and detailed knowledge of the case prior to panel. This may also have involved previous judgements and decisions based on medical and related assessments.
4.10 A declaration of interest would normally only be made where the medical adviser has previous knowledge of a personal or private nature, which the medical adviser considers could be seen to prejudice her or his involvement in a case discussion.

4.11 Officers in attendance at the panel meeting

Officers in attendance should declare an interest when they have knowledge of the case in a private or personal capacity outside the responsibilities of the current work. This is particularly important when applicants known to them are attending the meeting. They should withdraw for that item, having made arrangements either for someone else to represent their role, or in the case of the legal adviser, advice to be given in writing.

5. PROCEDURE

5.1 The procedure set out below should be followed, bearing in mind that the level of knowledge or interest which should be regarded as significant may not always be obvious.

5.2 As soon as a member becomes aware that they may be seen to have an interest in or previous knowledge of a case, e.g. from first seeing case papers or the content of a panel discussion, they should refrain from further involvement with that particular case and inform the chair accordingly. Where any doubt remains after discussion, the view of the chair will be final.

5.3 At meetings of the panel, where the situation falls under one of the categories described above, the expectation will be for that member to withdraw for that item of discussion.

5.4 When a member has decided to withdraw from any agenda item they should inform the panel administrator, as soon as possible, because their absence may affect the quoracy for that agenda item.

5.5 As far as possible that member should not subsequently receive minutes relating to that case, nor participate in discussion of it at subsequent panel meetings.

6. CASE PAPERS/PAPERS FOR DISCUSSION

6.1 It is expected that panel members will have read their papers thoroughly prior to the panel meeting and come prepared to contribute to the discussion.

6.2 Members are asked not to write on the papers as these can be used again if kept in a 'clean' condition. Blank sheets are provided for the convenience of members' notes.

6.3 Members and advisers must return their case papers at the conclusion of the panel meeting. Panel papers should not be retained.
7. MEETINGS/DATES/TIME/VENUE

7.1 Panel meetings are held on a fortnightly cycle countywide – one in the south of the county and one in the north at a place and time notified in the agenda papers.

7.2 Tea/coffee is available prior to the meeting, if panel members wish to arrive early in order to partake of refreshments.

7.3 Panel meetings commence promptly at the time stipulated on the agenda. If meetings are expected to go on into the afternoon, a light lunch is provided.

7.4 Panel members are expected to attend 75% of all panel meetings apart from when on holiday, ill or in exceptional circumstances, and extra cases panels where necessary. If a panel member cannot attend a meeting, he/she must contact the panel administrator and inform them as soon as possible (non-attendance of members can lead to the panel not being quorate)

8. PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

8.1 The expenses of independent members of the panel shall be the equivalent of the attendance allowances and expenses paid to the elected members of the panel. Currently this is calculated as £35 per session and mileage is paid at the rate of 37p per mile. Claim forms are usually available at meetings. Reasonable child care expenses are paid and parking costs. Claim forms can be obtained from the panel administrator.

8.2 Time involvement - for panel meetings, this is estimated to be approximately 4 hours per meeting plus travel time. An estimated time period of between 2 - 4 hours may be required in addition to panel time for the reading of case papers and minutes. Business meetings are usually held twice per year and are generally a full day in duration.

9. TRAINING DAYS

9.1 Training is arranged to keep panel members up to date with changes in legislation, guidance and practice. Some of these will be just for panel members and on other occasions they will be invited to join social workers and other staff members on departmental courses. Panel members will be consulted on the content and format of the training. An annual training day with staff will be arranged. There is an expectation that panel members will make every effort to attend training days.

9.2 New panel members will be invited to observe a panel before joining and to go on an induction course for new panel members within ten weeks of joining a panel.
9.4 Responsibility for co-ordinating the training lies with the Chair, professional advisers and Service Manager – Fostering.

10. INFORMATION/INDUCTION PACKAGE

10.1 An information package will be provided for new panel members consisting of the BAAF publication, Effective Panels and Panels, a complete set of E and F forms, and the Service Statement of Purpose and a copy of the Foster Care Procedures which include the panel procedures.

11. CONCERNS ABOUT THE BEHAVIOUR OF A PANEL MEMBER

11.1 If there are concerns about a panel member’s behaviour, attendance or conduct in or outside the panel, these will be raised in private by the panel Chair.

11.2 If these concerns cannot be resolved informally the Chair will put in writing the reasons why the panel member’s appointment should be ended.