

Updating foster care standards and guidance consultation

The Fostering Network's response

Contents

- [Part 1: Why this matters](#)
- [Part 2: The Fostering Quality Standard](#)
 - [Standard 1: Recruitment and assessment](#)
 - [Standard 2: Kinship and family and friends foster carers](#)
 - [Standard 3: Identity, culture and family relationships](#)
 - [Standard 4: Knowledge and capability](#)
 - [Standard 5: Support and supervision](#)
 - [Standard 6: Delegated authority and everyday family life](#)
 - [Standard 7: Allegations, concerns and the fair treatment of carers](#)
- [Part 3: The Foster Carer Development Standards](#)
 - [Development Standard 1: Understanding the role of the foster carer](#)
 - [Development Standard 2: Building safe, stable and loving relationships](#)
 - [Development Standard 3: Therapeutic parenting](#)
 - [Development Standard 4: Identity, culture and the child's sense of self](#)
 - [Development Standard 5: Safeguarding and the child's safety](#)
 - [Development Standard 6: Health, education and everyday wellbeing](#)
 - [Development Standard 7: Working with others around the child](#)
- [Part 4: Guidance for fostering services](#)
- [General questions](#)
- [Implementation questions](#)
- [Consultation Proposal 1: Withdrawing notice](#)

About this response

The Fostering Network's response is based on four focus groups held with our members, attended by 90 services and 50 foster carers and a survey which was completed by 44 foster carers and 5 services, in addition to organisational expertise and research.

Part 1: Why this matters

9. To what extent do you agree with the principles used to write this document?

Strongly agree

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest.

We welcome this long overdue update to the fostering standards, guidance and development standards. In particular, we support the focus on putting the child's experience at the heart of the standards, as well as the focus on giving greater authority to foster carers as the person that often knows the child best which we hope will drive improved practice across the sector. We also support the focus on relational care, safeguarding and reflective practice and the focus on understanding what children's behaviour is communicating. This is at the heart of our new 'Protective Care' guidance which replaces our previous publication, 'Safer Caring'.¹

However, we are disappointed that the document continues to use outdated language and would question the justification for this. Language used in legislative documents does not have to be applied to new updated standards. Some language has been changed, for example current legislation, regulation and the previous standards refer to those who foster as *foster parents* however the new standards have changed this from parent to carer. We do not accept that language such as *placement* and *contact* cannot be changed to reflect the significant growth in our understanding of the impact of language.

It is stated on page 9:

'Statutory guidance should use the terms the law uses, and this document does.'

However, the document does not follow all of the terminology currently used in law and deviates from this in many instances. Children and young people have consistently expressed a preference for language that reflects family, home, relationships and belonging rather than systems and processes. Our understanding of trauma-informed and relationship-based practice has developed significantly since much of the existing legislative framework was written in 1989 and 2011. The standards provide an opportunity to model the language and culture we want to see in practice.

We would encourage the Department to review the terminology used throughout the standards and guidance to ensure it is consistently child-centred, reflects current understanding of language and identity, and promotes belonging, family life and enduring relationships. It should be reviewed for consistency and either follow all relevant language as currently stated in law or support all the changes to reflect child centred and currently accepted language.

Part 2: The Fostering Quality Standards

Standard 1: Recruitment and assessment

10. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

Agree

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest.

Results from our survey indicated that 24.4% of respondents strongly agree, 46.7% agree, 17.8% neither agree nor disagree, 0% disagree, 2.2% strongly disagree, 8.8% I don't know.

Overall, members were supportive of the standard, including the proposed six-month assessment timeframe, as it should help ensure prospective foster carers progress through

¹ [Protective Care \(2026\) The Fostering Network](#)

the assessment process in a timely manner and are not left waiting unnecessarily for approval decisions.

“Assessments can feel very long and overwhelming” – Foster carer

Causes of delays out of fostering service control

However, members consistently highlighted that delays are often outside the control of fostering services and are frequently caused by external agencies, particularly in relation to medical assessments and DBS checks. Members suggested that the standards should also set expectations and timescales for partner agencies to help avoid unnecessary delays in the assessment process.

“Some of the delays are outside of the hands of Fostering Services once that process has been initiated” – Fostering service

Members welcomed the greater flexibility proposed around medical assessments, recognising that more creative approaches could help address existing barriers. However, there does need to be expectations set for health services about supporting the completion of these and training about what is relevant to include to assist a fostering service in assessing and understanding an applicant's suitability to foster, particularly around mental health and trauma experiences. There were also concerns about the length of time DBS checks can take to be completed, with some members noting that these delays can create significant challenges for kinship care arrangements and, in some cases, risk leaving children in unlawful placements while assessments remain incomplete.

“The ability to access medicals, GP to undertake the medical report, to get DBS checks back... there can be delays or challenges.” – Fostering service

Members were also concerned that the 6-month timescale may cause assessments to be rushed in order to meet deadlines, this may lead to key issues and safeguards being missed especially where applicants have complex family circumstances or additional issues requiring careful consideration. Fostering services stressed that thorough but proportionate assessments should take precedence over meeting deadlines.

Approval terms

We support the principle that carers' skills, abilities and capacity should inform terms of approval and should not be unnecessarily restrictive but the guidance should make clear that the primary consideration should be needs of children who require foster carers, to fulfil the requirement to recruit a pool of people to meet these needs. We would encourage the guidance to place greater emphasis on the use of broad approval terms which provide opportunity for continuous development and ensure that as many restrictions as possible are removed. Matching should be the primary consideration, and restricted approval terms should not be used as a replacement for this.

Type

Short Term – this captures all forms of task centred, transitional foster care.

Long term – this should be used when foster carers have the capacity to provide permanence.

Age

Age approvals such as 0-18 years or 5-18 years provide the greatest flexibility to achieve the best possible matching between children and foster carers. Foster carers approved to undertake long term care must be approved to 18 to ensure permanence can be realised.

Broad approval terms allow services to respond more effectively to the needs of individual children while reducing unnecessary administrative processes, including avoidable referrals to Agency Decision Maker or fostering panels solely to amend approval terms. Foster carers' motivations, preferences, experience and specific strengths can be explored and reviewed through ongoing supervision, support and matching discussions with their supervising social worker and fostering service. These factors are often more appropriately considered as part of the matching process rather than being reflected through narrowly defined approval terms.

We are concerned that limiting carers to preferences expressed at the point of approval may unintentionally restrict opportunities for children to be placed with carers who could be an excellent match with the right support plan and preparation. It may also limit carers' ability to develop their skills, confidence and experience over time as they progress in their fostering journey.

Approval terms should therefore be sufficiently broad to enable flexibility, promote better matching outcomes for children, support children's placement stability, and allow carers to grow and develop their practice without requiring frequent changes to their approval status. Narrow approval terms should be used only where there is a clear safeguarding, capability or suitability rationale for doing so.

Transfers

Foster carers described transfer processes as overly lengthy and bureaucratic, sometimes taking longer than initial approval. Therefore, members were supportive of the focus on the transfer process being timely and proportionate.

There are many issues that prevent a smooth transfer for foster carers. Transfers should build on existing assessments and evidence of practice rather than duplicating work already completed. We would encourage stronger expectations around timescales and accountability for delays, as prolonged transfer processes can negatively affect children and discourage experienced carers from remaining in fostering. We also believe foster carers should not be required to submit their 28-day resignation notice until key elements of the transfer have been agreed, including approval by the receiving service, financial arrangements and a mutually agreed transfer date, ensuring continuity of approval and minimising risk and uncertainty for carers and children alike. We support the inclusion of The Fostering Network's Transfer Protocol into the standards to ensure consistency of practice that is underpinned by statutory guidance.

“We’re currently transferring to another local authority... and it seems to be taking me longer to do that than getting approved as a foster carer in the first place.” – Foster carer

Transparency

Foster carers welcomed the new standard stating that ‘Clear, honest information is provided about the role, including expectations, rewards, financial support and multi-disciplinary help.’ They raised that many new carers leave within the first 24 months of fostering often due to lack of transparency and awareness of what the role entails during the assessment process.

Support

Members were also pleased to see the standards include that assessments should continue after approval as this will allow services to support new foster carers, identify any support needed and therefore prevent them feeling overwhelmed with the role and resigning.

Lived experience

Members supported the inclusion of people with lived experience of care and foster carers on fostering panels, recognising the value this brings to decision-making. However, fostering services reported ongoing challenges in recruiting and retaining people with care-experience. Where direct participation is not possible, services highlighted the need for flexibility and suggested that alternative mechanisms should be recognised to ensure young people’s views and experiences continue to inform panel processes.

Recruitment and retention challenges

Members supported the aim of recruiting a diverse foster carer workforce that reflects the children and young people in care. However, concerns were raised about the ongoing challenges in attracting sufficient numbers of foster carers. Members felt that achieving greater diversity and sufficiency will require stronger national recruitment efforts and additional government support alongside the expectations placed on fostering services. Members also feel that there should be a stronger focus on retention of current skilled foster carers.

“There is a chronic shortage of foster carers working with my council, particularly those able to support a child long-term until adulthood. This may not go far enough to meet this shortage.” – Foster carer

The Fostering Network recommends

- Removing the requirement for foster carers to provide notice when transferring from one service to another and include the need for services to mutually agree a transfer date.
- The standards and guidance should recommend services use The Fostering Network Transfer Protocol.
- A targeted national foster carer recruitment campaign.
- Develop national retention standards to bring an improved level of standardised expectations and national commitment to support national promotion of the fostering role and what people can expect if they decide to apply.

- Government financial support to fostering services to skill them in recruiting, assessing and making reasonable adjustments for potential foster carers who have additional needs.
- Using broad approval terms during assessment and annual review, to create capacity for matching, skills development and reflect the needs of children and young people..
- Government departments and partner agencies should be subject to clear performance expectations for the completion of DBS checks and medical reports to prevent unnecessary delays to foster carer assessments.

Standard 2: Kinship and friends and family foster carers

11. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

Neither agree or disagree

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest.

The separation of kinship in the fostering standards is potentially confusing and could imply that the other standards do not apply to kinship. Standard 2.1 and 2.2 are already set out in the Children Act 1989 and in care planning regulations. Assessment of mainstream and kinship foster carers are set out the fostering regulations and the regs do not support a differential assessment as proposed in the standards.

Clarity is needed on what aspects of the new standards apply to kinship only, mainstream only or kinship and mainstream. This is not currently clear and there are many aspects outside of the specific standard 2.1 and 2.2 which should apply across the board, e.g. the guidance in standard 1, in relation to assessment, approval panel and transfer.

Kinship arrangements do not have to end if they do not meet the fostering regulations and standards, nor should all kinship arrangements require assessment under fostering regulations to be supported and maintained.

Results from our survey indicate that 26.7% strongly agree, 42.2% agree, 17.8% neither agree nor disagree, 2.2% strongly disagree, 2.2% disagree and 8.9% I don't know.

Members welcomed the increased focus on kinship care within the standards and recognised the importance of acknowledging the distinct circumstances faced by many kinship carers. However, there were mixed views about the decision to separate kinship care into a standalone standard. Some members felt this risks creating uncertainty about which standards apply to kinship carers and which apply to mainstream foster carers, particularly where many aspects of assessment, support, approval and review should apply across all fostering arrangements.

Members were also conscious of the ongoing work of the Law Commission in relation to kinship care and noted that future recommendations may have significant implications for the regulation, assessment and support of kinship carers. Some therefore questioned whether it

is appropriate to make substantial distinctions between mainstream and kinship fostering through these standards before that wider review has concluded.

"So pleased to see there's a separate section around kinship care and certainly, you know, looking at assessment and how it might need to look differently." – Fostering service

A consistent theme was that current systems, assessments, training and support are largely designed around mainstream fostering and do not adequately reflect the distinct circumstances of kinship carers. Members highlighted that many kinship carers begin caring for children before formal assessments are completed and often balance complex family dynamics alongside their parenting responsibilities. Therefore, there was support for assessments being proportionate to the kinship carer role, however members thought the current draft was too high-level and open to interpretation. While members supported proportionate approaches to assessment, some questioned whether the standards should imply a fundamentally different assessment framework for kinship foster carers while fostering regulations continue to apply equally to both mainstream and kinship fostering.

"There was just so much of the assessment that didn't actually relate to us." – Kinship foster carer

Need for more tailored support

Members were pleased to see the standards outline that kinship carers should access early and ongoing support that is tailored to specific challenges facing kinship carers. Members repeatedly stressed that there is also a need for emotional support, trauma-informed services, peer support and practical guidance tailored to kinship carers.

"Greater support is needed for kinship carers as well. So more emotional support, more trauma informed services." - Fostering service

Greater support needed in the early stages of placements

Kinship foster carers described feeling overwhelmed when children first moved in, often receiving little support despite taking on care at very short notice. While the standards include early on support, members felt there should also be increased supervision, contact and practical support during the first few months of a placement, with more frequent check-ins and earlier access to support groups and networks.

Training and TSD requirements may be disproportionate

Members felt that existing training and TSD requirements can be burdensome for kinship carers, particularly older carers, grandparents and those who take on the care of a child at short notice during a family crisis. Members therefore welcomed the recognition within the proposed standards that learning and development should be proportionate to the needs of the child and the circumstances of the carer. However, fostering services would welcome greater guidance on how this principle should be applied in practice.

"Some of the training can be very difficult for them. It can be very confronting because it's their family member, often their child that's caused the harm." - Fostering service

There should be greater recognition that kinship carers often begin caring for children at a time of significant family upheaval and distress. Unlike mainstream foster carers, they are typically responding to an immediate need to keep a child within their family network while simultaneously managing changes to family relationships, legal processes and their own and the child's emotional needs. Training requirements should therefore be designed and delivered in ways that are accessible, flexible and responsive to these circumstances.

Flexible and accessible approaches to preparation and development, alongside a relational approach which emphasises the importance of peer support and reflective supervision, may be more effective than requiring kinship foster carers to attend structured classroom style training immediately following the placement of a child. Regular reflective discussions with supervising social workers can help carers apply learning directly to the child's circumstances and identify areas where additional support or development may be required.

We would welcome specific preparation and induction pathways for kinship carers which recognise their unique role and learning needs. While it is important that all carers develop a strong understanding of key areas such as safeguarding, trauma, identity, attachment and caring for children who have experienced adversity, this learning should not place unnecessary pressure on carers during the early stages of a placement.

Training for social workers and panel members

Members expressed that while the standards are a good starting point to prioritise kinship care, they felt supervising social workers as well as panel members need to have a stronger understanding of the complexities of kinship and connected care. Some suggested dedicated kinship teams or specialist workers were particularly valuable.

Lack of clarity on expectations and timescales

Members highlighted significant uncertainty about learning and development requirements for kinship carers, including when training expectations begin, which elements are mandatory, and how these interact with temporary approval arrangements. There were concerns that a lack of clarity could create unrealistic expectations, undermine carers' confidence, and reduce engagement with support and training opportunities.

<i>"It just says from approval the standards, but it doesn't say what approval is it. The Reg 24? Is it by panel? And it needs to be clarified." - Fostering service</i>

Financial support and housing

Members felt that the standard does not give sufficient attention to the financial challenges faced by kinship carers. Concerns were raised about lower levels of support for Special Guardianship Order carers, limited opportunities for progression through fee structures, and significant variation in financial support between local authorities. Members emphasised that kinship carers should receive equitable financial recognition that reflects their skills, experience and the responsibilities they undertake.

Housing was also identified as a significant challenge for many kinship families. Respondents highlighted difficulties accessing suitable larger accommodation when taking

on the care of additional children and felt the standard should place greater emphasis on recognising and addressing housing barriers that can affect the stability of kinship arrangements.

"Some of the biggest challenges aren't really recognised in the standards, such as the finances and housing challenges." – Fostering service

The Fostering Network's recommends

- Financial support for kinship carers is clearly outlined that it should be the same as foster carers.
- The Fostering Quality Standards should apply to all forms of fostering and not isolate kinship from the quality of support and expectations that should be delivered to all children being raised in foster care. As the standards sit under the fostering regulations they should align with these and await the outcome of the Law commission report to address wider systemic issues.
- Greater clarity is needed throughout the standards and guidance about which requirements apply specifically to kinship carers, which apply to mainstream foster carers, and which should apply equally to all fostering arrangements.

Standard 3: Identity, Culture and Family Relationships

12. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

Agree

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest.

Responses from our survey indicate that 31.8% strongly agree, 31.8% agree, 22.7% neither agree nor disagree, 2.3% disagree, 2.3% strongly disagree, 9.1% I don't know.

Feedback on this standard was overwhelmingly positive. Members welcomed the stronger emphasis on maintaining enduring relationships beyond immediate family members and recognised the importance of supporting children to maintain connections with significant people throughout their lives, including siblings. The focus on life story work and ensuring any records are written in non-stigmatising, respectful language with the child in mind was also welcomed.

Members main concern was clarification on where the responsibility, accountability and funding for maintaining these relationships lies.

Standard 3.4 and 3.5 could generate confusion as although a positive point of practice, it is not possible for a fostering service to deliver on these standards. Reviewing contact arrangements and assessing if respite care with relatives is in the best interest of a child is a care planning responsibility falling to the child's social worker and local authority.

"We need to support enduring relationships and keep connection; it is vital to psychological safety and self esteem." - Foster carer

Strong support for making identity a standalone standard

Participants felt identity is fundamental to children's wellbeing and development and agreed the sector needs to do more to support children in care to understand and maintain their

identity. Services also welcomed the child-centred focus of the standard and the wider structure of the new standards.

Greater emphasis on enduring relationships

One of the strongest themes was support for recognising the importance of children's enduring relationships beyond parents and siblings. Members welcomed the focus on maintaining connections with significant people throughout a child's life, including former foster carers, wider family members and community networks. Members felt this helps prevent children experiencing repeated loss and the severing of important relationships when placements end or circumstances change.

"I think there's a much bigger focus on actually how we work creatively to ensure that those relationships can continue really" – Fostering service

Recognition of wider family and community networks

Participants welcomed the emphasis on involving wider family members and community connections in children's lives. Feedback highlighted the value of these networks both in preserving children's identity and culture and in providing practical support around placements. Some noted that extended family relationships can contribute positively even when family members are unable to provide full-time care.

Concerns about maintaining relationships after placements end

An important area for foster carers was what happens when children move on from foster families. Members highlighted that relationships between children and former foster carers, foster siblings, birth children in fostering households and other significant individuals are often lost following placement moves. There were calls for greater recognition of the emotional impact of these endings and stronger expectations around maintaining positive ongoing relationships where appropriate. Although we recognise this is covered in the section on transitions in standard 5.

Our State of the Nations' (SoTN) Foster Care survey in 2024 of nearly 3,000 foster carers showed that sadly, 43% of foster carers were not supported at all to keep in touch with former foster children and 22% not very supported.² We asked foster carers why they haven't kept in touch with children they previously fostered, if applicable. The most common reasons for not keeping in touch were that local practice didn't allow it (22%); the child's birth family (22%) or adopters (21%) didn't want the child and their former foster carer to keep in touch; or the child themselves didn't want to keep in touch (20%). This is likely to be an area where local practice needs to be strongly encouraged and monitored.

As covered in our response to standard 7, the impact of allegations or standards of care concerns on placement break downs and maintaining relationships should be considered and addressed. There should be a stronger expectation that services take a therapeutic and relationship-based approach to preserving contact, supporting repair and maintaining enduring relationships wherever this is safe and in the child's best interests if these take place.

"She'd never had any contact with any carer she'd lived with after the point that it ended." – Foster carer

² [Ellis, S and Williams, N, State of the Nations' Foster Care \(2024\)](#)

Importance of embedding identity and culture in decision-making and matching

Members stressed that matching and decisions affecting children should consistently consider identity, culture and heritage. Some expressed concern that identity-related matters could be deprioritised compared with areas such as health and education, particularly where delegated authority arrangements are unclear. Foster carers emphasised the need for extra training if a cultural match is not possible and raised concerns where children and young people living in an area with no relation to their culture and how that could impact them.

"Knowledge of their history, identity and culture cannot be understated. It informs, equips and can define the child, gives roots and meanings, building resilience." – Foster carer

"You might end up with areas that are important to a child's identity that wasn't seen as higher priority as health education." – Fostering service

Need for clearer accountability and implementation guidance

Fostering services sought greater clarity on who is responsible for maintaining family relationships, understanding their identity and also family time arrangements. There was concern that responsibilities can be informally delegated to foster carers despite local authorities retaining statutory responsibility. Some foster carers also shared this concern and how this would work practically. Respondents felt the standards should explicitly set out oversight and accountability arrangements.

"Ultimately the local authority holds that responsibility to make sure and to review that those relationships are maintained." – Fostering service

"I think that should be set out. It's not the foster carer's full responsibility. There should be oversight there." – Fostering service

Funding and resource concerns

Alongside questions about responsibility, participants wanted greater clarity on the practical and financial support available to sustain relationships. Members questioned what "practical and financial help" would mean in practice and what obligations this would place on local authorities. Funding for sibling contact, family relationships and ongoing connections emerged as a key area of uncertainty.

The Fostering Network recommends:

- Greater clarity on the oversight and accountability arrangements for maintaining family relationships, understanding their identity and family time arrangements between the service and foster carer.
- Ensure that the importance of identity is embedded in the standard on delegated authority.
- Greater cultural change around support for foster carers to keep in touch with former foster children and that this is the norm, not the exception with stronger monitoring to ensure it happens.

Standard 4: Knowledge and Capability

13. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

Agree

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest.

Responses from our survey indicate that 31.8% strongly agree, 43.2% agree, 18.2% neither agree nor disagree, 0% disagree, 0% strongly disagree, 6.8% I don't know.

Members generally welcomed the updated standard, feeling it better reflects the skills, knowledge and expertise required of foster carers today. Members particularly welcomed the stronger emphasis on supporting foster carers' learning and development throughout their fostering journey, as well as the clearer responsibility placed on fostering services to provide this support and evidence it. Overall, members viewed this as a positive shift away from a compliance-based approach towards one focused on professional development, continuous learning and ongoing support.

"Even as experienced carers, (you need to) become both confident and competent in new issues and new challenges." - Foster carer

Removal of the TSDS workbook

Members welcomed the move away from the current workbook, which was widely seen as burdensome, overly academic and focused on compliance rather than meaningful development. Many described the workbook as a tick-box exercise that does not accurately reflect foster carers' learning or capabilities. However, members emphasised the need for reassurance that removing the workbook would not weaken expectations around learning, professional development and the ongoing development of carers' skills and knowledge.

Members highlighted the importance of ensuring foster carers continue to develop their understanding of key areas such as attachment, child development and trauma-informed practice, enabling them to meet the complex needs of children and young people in their care.

"Capturing that learning in that first year is still going to be really important." – Fostering service

Strong preference for reflective learning and supervision

Members supported replacing the workbook with reflective supervision. They felt that reflective discussions with supervising social workers provide a more meaningful way to demonstrate learning, apply knowledge in practice and identify development needs. This approach was viewed as more accessible for foster carers and better focused on improving outcomes for children.

Workforce and capacity implications

Both fostering services and foster carers raised concerns about the increased expectations being placed on supervising social workers. While the shift towards more reflective supervision, assessment and developmental support was welcomed in principle, members felt it could create additional workload pressures and questioned whether fostering services have sufficient capacity and resources to deliver these expectations consistently.

"I'm just not sure how much social workers have the capacity to do anything other than tick off the basics." – Foster carer

"Training given, is shorter, is given by social workers who are already overstretched." – Foster carer

Resource and funding pressures

Fostering services questioned how they would fund and deliver the requirements set out in the standard. While supportive of the aims of enhanced training, supervision and support, members felt the standard may require additional investment at a time of significant budget pressures. Concerns were raised about whether fostering services have the capacity and resources needed to implement the standard effectively and consistently.

Need for greater clarity on training expectations

Members consistently highlighted a lack of clarity around mandatory learning and development requirements. They felt the standards should be more explicit about the training all foster carers are expected to complete and maintain, with clear and consistent expectations across fostering households.

"Not specific enough in definition, such as the expectation for Foster Carers to continually engage in training. 'Learning should be ongoing beyond year 1...' can be interpreted as 'Training engagement expected in first 2 years.' Continual engagement in training throughout the fostering career should be explicit." – Foster carer

The Fostering Network recommends:

- Prospective foster carers should complete a structured, accredited, pre-approval course as part of their assessment such as The Fostering Network's 'Skills to Foster.'
- Foster carers should have access and be supported to participate in a structured learning and development pathway throughout their fostering career, recognising that skills and knowledge need to develop as children's needs change and foster carers gain experience.
- The standards should explicitly recognise the value of peer learning and support from experienced foster carers.

Standard 5: Support and supervision

14. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

Agree

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest.

Responses from our survey indicate that 32.6% strongly agree, 46.5% agree, 9.3% neither agree nor disagree, 0% disagree, 7% strongly disagree and 4.7% I don't know.

Members strongly supported the principles underpinning the standard and generally viewed the proposals as reflective of good practice. There was support for a more relationship-based and developmental approach to supervision rather than a purely administrative one.

Out of hours support

Foster carers were particularly pleased to see the standards requiring fostering services to provide out of hours support and 'from someone who has the knowledge and authority to be genuinely helpful'. This is an important step to ensure foster carers always have access to support whenever an issue arises, limiting the need for unnecessary escalation such as to the police.

In SoTN, only 36% had access to out of hours support, they deemed to be excellent or good. Most fostering services said they have an emergency duty team made up of central local authority staff (59%), or a fostering specific support line operated by fostering service staff (58%). A fifth (19%) said support is provided by the foster carer's own SSW, and 6% said it is provided through a fostering specific support line operated by foster carers. Therefore, resourcing for out of hours support to meet this standard will need to be considered.

"Sometimes issues arise in the evenings or weekends or with contact." – Foster carer

Positive support for planned breaks

Foster carers also strongly welcomed the recognition of planned breaks as they are viewed as an important mechanism for supporting wellbeing, preventing burnout and sustaining fostering households. Members felt this recognition helped reinforce the view of fostering as a demanding role that requires appropriate support.

In SoTN, almost half of foster carers (49%) said they have access to an approved support network or person who can provide overnight care for the children they foster. The link with this and their wellbeing and likelihood was clear. Foster carers with access to an approved support network or person who can provide overnight care were over three times more likely to recommend fostering than those without it and less likely to experience burn out and poor wellbeing.

Mockingbird foster carers (who all have regular access to short breaks) were less likely to have experienced burnout or poor wellbeing (54%) than other foster carers (58%), and significantly more likely to feel able to ask for support (64%) than other foster carers (47%).

"It's really positive that the need and the role of planned breaks is being recognised." – Fostering service

Concerns about mandatory monthly supervision requirements

The Fostering Network supports the introduction of a clear minimum expectation for supervision. We believe regular, high-quality supervision is an essential safeguard for children and an important source of support, challenge, reflection and professional development for foster carers. Children should be able to expect that their foster carers receive consistent oversight and support regardless of where they live.

Members strongly supported the principle that foster carers should receive regular supervision and recognised its importance in safeguarding children, providing support to foster carers, promoting reflective practice and strengthening placement stability. Many welcomed the introduction of a clear minimum expectation, recognising that children and foster carers should be able to expect a consistent level of oversight, support and professional involvement regardless of where they live.

Members highlighted that good supervision is about much more than compliance or monitoring. Effective supervision should provide opportunities for reflection, discussion about children's needs, trauma-informed conversations, professional development, identification of emerging risks and challenges, and emotional support for fostering households. Members felt that high-quality supervision is one of the most important ways fostering services can support carers to provide stable and nurturing care for children.

However, some fostering services raised concerns about how the monthly requirement would be implemented in practice. Members noted that support is often delivered through a combination of formal supervision sessions, visits, telephone contact and responsive support

tailored to the needs of the child and fostering household. They were keen to ensure that minimum standards do not inadvertently discourage professional judgement or flexibility in how support is delivered, particularly where carers require more intensive support or where different approaches may be more appropriate.

Members also stressed that the success of this proposal will depend on sufficient workforce capacity and investment. There were concerns about social worker workloads and whether services will have the resources needed to consistently provide the level of reflective and relationship-based supervision envisaged within the standards.

"There needs to be resources and investment because otherwise this is a wish list." – Fostering services

Greater focus on understanding and learning from endings

Members strongly supported the emphasis on reviewing and learning from placement endings. They felt that fostering services should have opportunities to understand why placements end, identify lessons learned and strengthen support to help prevent future breakdowns. However, members noted that current workload pressures within local authorities and the urgent need to find another foster family for the child within a limited pool of foster carers can severely limit the ability to undertake meaningful reflective practice. Members also emphasised the importance of ensuring children are helped to understand the reasons for placement endings and are appropriately supported through these transitions.

"We would love to be able to go, actually, let's understand why this ended." – Fostering service

"We don't have the time to do the work to understand why it ended." – Fostering service

Ongoing support following endings

Members highlighted the importance of support continuing after a child moves on from a foster family. They noted that placement endings can have a significant impact on both foster carers and other children within fostering households, and that appropriate emotional and practical support should be available during these transitions. They emphasised that many foster carers feel guilt, blame and sadness. Members felt that the impact of placement endings has historically received insufficient attention and welcomed the greater focus on support.

Members also welcomed the focus on ensuring active steps are taken to maintain relationships with former carers where the child wants this and it is safe to do so and support for carers to sustain relationships where the young person moves on. As mentioned in our response to standard 3, this currently does not happen enough so we welcome the focus on this in this standard.

"It's important that children and young people know why that placement ended." – Fostering service

"There is a lot of blame and a lot of shame around when placements end." – Fostering service

Demand for more individualised and therapeutic support

Members highlighted increasing levels of foster carer stress and burnout and emphasised the need for more personalised support. Members welcomed the inclusion of emotional support in the standards, they would like them to go further and acknowledge the need for greater access to therapeutic services, counselling and wellbeing support as well as legal

advice and advocacy services during allegations (see response to standard 7). Where appropriate, these services should be available through independent providers to ensure foster carers can access timely, impartial and specialised support. While members recognised that providing this support may require additional investment, they felt it could improve foster carer retention, strengthen placement stability and ultimately lead to better outcomes for children.

"When you weigh that up against the cost of losing foster carers." – Fostering service

Importance of rapid and responsive support

Members emphasised that effective support is often less about the type of intervention and more about how quickly help is provided. Foster carers highlighted the value of responsive services that can mobilise support quickly when placements are under pressure. Therefore, including a requirement for support to include early intervention would be welcomed to prevent escalation and placement breakdown.

"What makes a difference... is the responsiveness and the rapidity of the responsiveness." – Fostering service

Importance of children's feedback

Members felt children's views and experiences should play a much greater role in shaping support and supervision arrangements. They argued that children's feedback is often overlooked and should routinely inform supervision discussions, support planning and service improvement activities.

Clarification of responsibilities across agencies

Members questioned whether fostering services alone can realistically deliver all aspects of support described within the standard. A recurring theme was that many support needs, particularly around family relationships (as mentioned in our response to standard 3), contact and therapeutic support, require effective multi-agency involvement. Respondents called for greater clarity about the responsibilities of local authorities and partner agencies alongside fostering services.

"The standard says 'Support is provided to navigate complex family dynamics in a way which enables contact with children, child's family and which protects them when needed, helps repair those relationships - that's a multi-agency responsibility.'" – Fostering service

Staying Put

Staying Put provides young people leaving care with a stable environment with continued support from a trusted adult whom they've built a relationship with, helping them transition into adulthood. Recent Ofsted data has found that in 2024/25, 62% of 18 year old care leavers continued living with their former foster carers, but this figure drops to only 33% for those aged 19-20. This illustrates that Staying Put is potentially not being provided for as many young people as it could. Our SoTN 2024 also found that 78% of foster carers in England are financially worse off in a Staying Put arrangement. This means many foster carers who want to offer it young people in their care, are unable to.

We are pleased to see Staying Put included within the standard, recognising its important role. However, we believe the standard should place greater emphasis on Staying Put and include stronger expectations on fostering services to actively support and prioritise these arrangements. This should ensure transitions are well planned and delivered smoothly for both young people and foster carers promoting enduring relationships.

Therefore, The Fostering Network believes the standard should require fostering services to provide adequate allowances and fees for Staying Put carers, ensuring that financial considerations do not become a barrier to young people remaining with their foster families beyond the age of 18. This would help ensure that all foster carers are able to continue providing the support and stability that young people need as they move into adulthood.

We understand that the DfE are undertaking work to review Staying Put guidance from 2014 which we welcome and any changes will need to reflect that.

Current wording:

“Continuing care and support are offered to young people who wish to stay with their carers beyond the age of 18 through Staying Put.”

Proposed wording:

“Continuing care and support are offered to young people who wish to stay with their carers beyond the age of 18 through Staying Put. Foster carers are provided with appropriate financial and practical support to facilitate these arrangements ensuring a swift transition.”

Payments

Paying in line with the government's National Minimum Allowance (NMA) is not statutory, nor is it monitored nationally. This results in inequality for children across England due to the variation in financial support available. Many foster carers have to dip into their own pockets to cover the costs of caring and this is not acceptable. This has been an issue for foster carers for many years, well before the current cost-of-living crisis.

Therefore, The Fostering Network would like to see the standards ensure that payments “must” be set at least the national minimum allowance.

We also think this is a missed opportunity to set out a national minimum requirement for a fee framework in the standards as there is for allowances. Our research has shown that fee payments vary widely across the country. Some foster carers receive £732 less per week than foster carers in a different local authority, a difference of £38,000 per year. Some local authorities provided as little as £18 a week for their lowest paid mainstream foster carers and as much as £750 a week for others.³ Over three quarters of foster carers and fostering services in SoTN said they would like the Government to introduce a national fee framework.

The Fostering Network recommends

- Adding the financial and practical support foster carers are entitled to while providing Staying Put arrangements.
- Outlining that foster carers ‘must’ receive at least the national minimum allowance.
- Introducing and including a national fee framework for foster carers.
- Ensure that the additional support available to foster carers is clearly defined and consistently communicated, including access to therapeutic support, counselling, legal advice and advocacy services.
- Ensuring the additional expectations for out of hours support, supervision, support with endings and other additional duties for services are appropriately resourced through greater investment into local authorities.
- Every foster carer should have access to structured peer support, either through models such as Mockingbird or other locally designed peer support arrangements

³ [*Out of Pocket: A fairer fee framework for foster carers \(2024\) The Fostering Network*](#)

Standard 6: Delegated authority and everyday family life

15. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

Strongly agree

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest.

From our survey, 46.3% strongly agree, 39% agree, 7.3% neither agree nor disagree, 0% disagree, 4.9% strongly disagree, 2.4% I don't know.

Strong support for delegated authority

Members were overwhelmingly positive about the principle of extending delegated authority and welcomed its prominence within the standards. There was a strong view that foster carers should be trusted and empowered to make day-to-day decisions and having a dedicated standard will help to reinforce its importance across the system. It will reduce delay and bureaucracy in decision-making, such as dental checks and holidays, which is an important step to improve family life and outcomes for children. It will also ensure that children are not treated any differently to their peers.

"I've sat in the dentist at 8:30 in the morning on the phone trying to convince a duty supervising social worker to allow them to take a child in." - Foster carer

"We can't give Calpol, we can't give antihistamines." – Foster carer

"We've not left the country together as a family as a whole for three years because we don't want to leave a child behind." – Foster carer

Foster carers treated as equal partners

Both fostering service and foster carer members were particularly pleased to see the standard explicitly state that foster carers are treated as equal members of the team around the child and should attend all meetings 'which involve decisions about them and the foster family, or carers have the opportunity to meaningfully feed into decisions with their views considered and acted upon'. Members raised that currently there are ongoing power imbalances and a lack of respect for foster carers' expertise even though they are often the people who know children best. Members raised that the culture change this will involve will take time and that it also needs to extend to other key services that work with children such as health and education.

Our SoTN survey found that inclusion of foster carers in key meetings had worsened since 2021. However, inclusion of foster carers in key meetings about children is not stated in the fostering guidance which may lead to it not being implemented. Furthermore, it is unclear how services will be monitored in their application of this.

"The power lies with the child social worker and they often feel powerless." – Fostering service

"I was a bit stunned sometimes when I wasn't involved in meetings at school." – Foster carer

Reviewing delegated authority

Fostering services welcomed the standard's requirement for delegated authority to be reviewed at every placement review. However, they felt this could be strengthened to recognise that children and young people's circumstances and needs, particularly those with

undiagnosed or diagnosed SEND can change quickly, therefore arrangements should be reviewed regularly and adapted accordingly.

"It's important for delegated authority to be a live document." – Fostering service

"A child's needs can change enormously in a two-month period." – Fostering service

Lack of recognition of shorter term placements

Some members felt the standard is focused on longer-term foster care and did not adequately address emergency, short-term or bridging placements, which would evolve as a foster carer got to know the child and anticipate and understand their needs. They felt there would need to be clearer guidance that covers a wider range of placement types and how delegated authority is considered in each of them.

Clarity, confidence and accountability in decision-making

Members strongly supported the principle of increased delegated authority but expressed uncertainty about how it would operate in practice. They wanted clearer guidance on what decisions foster carers can make independently, which decisions should involve others with parental responsibility, and how disagreements between foster carers, parents, local authorities and other professionals should be resolved. Members felt that concepts such as "restrictions as the justified exception" would benefit from further explanation and practical examples to support consistent implementation.

In particular, members highlighted the guidance which states:

"Where a decision has not been delegated to a foster carer and it is not reasonably practicable to seek prior approval from the local authority, the foster carer may do what is reasonable for the purpose of safeguarding or promoting the child's welfare."

While members welcomed the intention behind this provision, they felt further guidance is needed on what would constitute a "reasonable" decision in practice and the types of situations where foster carers would be expected to exercise this discretion. Foster carers also highlighted the need for confidence and protection when exercising delegated authority appropriately. While members welcomed the standard's emphasis on supporting carers to take on delegated authority, they felt clear organisational backing and guidance would be needed, particularly for newer carers or those caring for children with complex needs.

Concerns were also raised about higher-impact health and education decisions, where carers felt some decisions should continue to involve wider discussion and appropriate safeguards while maintaining the principle that children should be able to experience everyday family life without unnecessary delay. There is more information in the guidance on these areas but this should be included in the standards too so foster carers are clear on the expectations.

"It does then leave foster carers quite vulnerable around those day-to-day decisions." – Fostering service

"What protection do carers have around that?" – Fostering service

"I wouldn't have dreamt of doing that on my own. I would want some backup." – Foster carer

Inconsistent understanding across agencies creates barriers

Members highlighted that delegated authority is often interpreted inconsistently across schools, health services, social workers and fostering services and in turn is enacted with differing degrees of priority and urgency. They stressed that any strengthening of delegated authority must be accompanied by greater awareness, training and a more joined-up approach to ensure foster carers' authority is understood, recognised and applied consistently across agencies and local authorities and extends to other partners such as health and education. Whilst we support for example the standard stating, 'carers are given access to passports', a timeframe in which social work teams are expected to ensure this happens would support foster carers in making plans and children feeling part of their family knowing that those plans are being made with them and will not be changed last minute as passports have not been prioritised.

"Although the authority was there, a foster carer was having to prove repeatedly that they are the person who can make that decision." – Foster carer

"The delegated authority didn't have any meaning to the hospital at all." – Foster carer

Voice of children and young people

Members felt the standard does not place enough emphasis on children's views and experiences and how this might evolve in line with the age and maturity. They stressed the importance of ensuring children understand delegated authority arrangements and are meaningfully involved in decisions that affect them. There was also a strong view that children in care should be able to experience the same freedoms and opportunities as their peers wherever possible so the aim of the standard to do this was welcomed.

We believe that delegated authority is most effective when supported by clear Protective Care planning as set out in our recent publication 'Protective Care'.⁴ This enables foster carers, children and professionals to agree in advance how risks will be managed, giving carers confidence to make day-to-day decisions whilst promoting children's safety, independence and participation in ordinary family life.

The Fostering Network recommends

- Clearer guidance on how delegated authority will work alongside parental responsibility and how disputes between parents, carers and local authorities should be handled.
- Improved guidance on how delegated authority related to different length of placements, including short-breaks, for newer carers or those caring for children with SEND.
- Stronger protections for foster carers when making decisions through delegated authority.
- Clearer guidance on what should be considered in exemptions to ensure consistent interpretation.
- Clearer guidance in the standards around how delegated authority will work in relation to other agencies, in particular in health emergencies and what decisions are permitted around education.
- Add a section into the guidance on ensuring foster carers should be invited to all meetings which involve decisions about the child and should be treated as equal members of the team around the child and how this will be monitored.

⁴ [Protective Care \(2026\) The Fostering Network](#)

Standard 7: Allegations, Concerns and the Fair Treatment of Carers

16. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

Agree

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest.

From our survey, 32.6% strongly agree, 32.6% agree, 16.3% neither agree nor disagree, disagree 2.3%, 9.3% strongly agree, 7% I don't know.

The Fostering Network would welcome greater reference to Protective Care approaches when concerns arise about a foster carer's practice. Our Protective Care publication supports proportionate decision-making, helps identify how children can remain safe whilst preserving important relationships, and can reduce the likelihood of unnecessarily restrictive responses or avoidable moves during investigations.

Overall, members welcomed the standards focus on ensuring that allegations are dealt with proportionately and are looked at impartially. They were pleased that a fostering services response should reflect the nature and seriousness of the concern as well as basing their decision on an understanding of the foster carer, child and those who know child the best. There was also strong support for resolving concerns through supervision, support and risk management where appropriate and the focus on preserving the child's relationship with the carer where it is safe to do so.

The Fostering Network supports this view and our recent toolkit *Allegations in Foster Care: The 5Ps Model, Best Practice guidance*⁵ sets out the importance of ensuring allegations are dealt with proportionately. One of the 5Ps which make up the core practices in the toolkit is 'Proportionate' which advises proportionate, well-informed decision making and risk assessment for all. We are also supportive of the meeting that is set out in the standards which mirrors the context and insight meeting we recommend holding in our *Allegations* toolkit to explore if threshold is met for an allegation.

However, as we stated in our response to the Working Together consultation, we support statement in the standard that there should be a strategy discussion and enquiries should be made under Section 47 if there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm and that the matter is also dealt with through the multi-agency child protection process. But more clarity is needed in either the standards or Working Together regarding the specific roles of the MACPT, the LADO and the child's social worker to avoid duplication and to ensure it is relevant to the role of a foster carer as a person in a position of trust.

"Being proportionate is so important. The safety and well being of a young person is paramount but also we need to have a level of confidence that as carers we will be fairly heard and considered in the right context and decisions not made without context and an evidence base." – Foster carer

"What is excellent is your recognition of the fairness and the foster parents' journey in that, when an allegation is made." – Fostering service

⁵ [Allegations in Foster Care Toolkit: The 5 Ps Model, Best Practice Guidance \(2026\) The Fostering Network](#)

"The young person still in my life, she's now an adult and she's still in my life." – Foster carer

Concerns regarding language

The standards state 'A concern or allegation may be raised for many reasons. It is approached with an open mind and no assumption that it is either true or untrue, and it is looked at thoroughly and impartially'. We would strongly advise the removal of this paragraph. It goes directly against safeguarding guidance which sets out the expectation that children are listened to and believed. It could be re-worded to state:

'A concern or allegation may be raised for many reasons. It should be explored with an open mind, and if it meets threshold for safeguarding investigation this should be undertaken thoroughly and impartially.'

Clear difference between allegations and standards of care concerns

Members also supported attempts to differentiate allegations and standards of care concerns and how each should be handled. Fostering services highlighted that the terminology continues to be used interchangeably in practice which often leads to confusion and can cause inappropriate escalation. They wanted to see clearer definitions and thresholds for different types of concerns which will contribute to consistency in practice.

The Fostering Network strongly supports this differentiation and this is a core purpose in the allegations toolkit. We would also recommend that the difference is set out in the Working Together guidance as well so that all guidance is the same and services and Ofsted are all working to and reporting on the same definitions and thresholds. This has been some of the reason behind the current confusion.

"People used words like concerns, complaints, allegations almost interchangeably." – Fostering service

Independent support and advocacy

Members strongly supported the introduction of independent support and advocacy for foster carers. Both foster carers and fostering services highlighted the emotional impact allegations can have on not only foster carers but the rest of the household and everyone involved. Access to therapeutic, wellbeing and legal support is therefore necessary throughout the entire investigations process and should continue after the investigation closes.

"Having been subject to allegations in the past there was virtually no support and no explanation of the process. Everyone within the service withdrew I was left very much alone and with no income. I came very close to leaving fostering" – Foster carer

However, members did question whether sufficient advocacy services exist, whether they could meet demand and how services will ensure foster carers know about them and are able to access them. Our State of the Nations survey in 2024 found that only 38% of foster carers received independent support in relation to their most recent allegation.

If all foster carers are to be able to access independent support, we would urge the government to ensure there is sufficient funding provided for this so all services can offer this and it does not become a postcode lottery.

We would also recommend that the standards and guidance specify that foster carers and their family should receive counselling and wider support for their family as this is not mentioned. In SotN only 9% of foster carers in England were offered counselling support and 6% wider support for their family. Allegations against foster carers can be extremely

distressing for them and affect their whole family, so this support is vital for their wellbeing and to enable them to continue fostering when it is right to do so.

Foster carers also often report feeling isolated during allegations and standards of care processes through services applying a blanket approach stopping them from accessing peer support through support groups and other foster carer groups they may attend. This sometimes extends to children then not being able to access activities that are run by services. We would recommend that the guidance addresses this issue suggesting that this is considered on an individual basis for foster carers taking a proportionate rather than a blanket approach that considers the individual needs of foster carers and children alongside any risk of being present.

We did not ask about access to legal advice in SotN and all Fostering Network members receive this but we would recommend that access to this is also stated explicitly in the standard. This is hugely important to protect foster carers if an allegation is investigated by the police.

Vague language

There were also strong concerns that the wording within the standard remains too vague and open to interpretation. Members consistently highlighted that terms such as "fair", "swift" and "independent support" were seen as subjective and could be interpreted differently by services and Ofsted. Foster carers would like there to be clearer safeguards defined within the standards to ensure they are treated fairly, along with the type of support and advocacy they are entitled to clearly outlined.

There is a need for further clarity about when foster carers should receive independent advocacy as there is potential confusion between the wording in Standard 7 on page 32, 'if a child protection investigation is required or the carer's ongoing registration is in question the carer is provided with access to individual advocacy and can choose the provider' and page 54 where the guidance states, 'Foster carers going through an allegations or standards of concern [sic] process are entitled to access independent advocacy and should be able to choose the provider of said advocacy.' In the standard this could suggest that foster carers only receive this if subject to an allegation or serious standards of care whereas the latter point suggests any issue related to allegations or standards of care should be supported. We would support foster carers receiving support across the breadth of need to ensure relationships with children and fostering services are preserved and early intervention supports ongoing retention.

"What is fair?" - Fostering service

Fostering services also felt that the principles of the standard were broadly right, however wanted much clearer expectations and processes showing exactly what should happen when concerns are raised. Clear workflows, process map or flowcharts to support them, was suggested. Several members noted that without greater prescription and clarity, the standards may continue to allow significant variation between services.

The Fostering Network supports this and a flow chart is included in our Allegations Toolkit which we would support the Government using or referring to.

Police and external parties causing delays

The strongest concern raised by fostering services was the impact of police investigations. Members consistently stated that fostering services often have little or no control over the timescale of an investigation once the police become involved.

"I am concerned about how this will work in practice e.g. outside agencies such as police investigations can be very lengthy so may make it difficult to deal with these in a timely manner." – Foster carer

Some members reported that investigations can take months, even years to conclude due to police involvement and fostering services are often unable to progress their own investigations while waiting for police action. One in six respondents (17%) in SotN said their latest investigation took six months to one year, and one in ten said the investigation took over a year. Issues with delays from the police was the top issue reported by services. This is an issue we also see regularly through our Independent Support service.

These delays can cause significant stress and increased trauma for the foster carers and children involved especially when children are interviewed by police. This can cause significant damage to the relationship between a fostering service and a foster carer that may cause a foster carer to resign. It also often impacts enduring relationships for children who have been removed from their foster home resulting in damaged relationships and often not being able to return at the end of an investigation due to the length of time that has passed when it may have been safe and appropriate to do so.

"A lot of carers stop fostering because of the hurt caused" – Foster carer

"The bit that we can't do, which is the most difficult bit for foster carers is what are the police doing? Why is it taking so long?" Fostering service

Fostering services were concerned that expectations stated in the standard around "swift" investigations may be unrealistic and out of their control when external agencies such as the police are involved.

Members felt that the standard places significant expectations on fostering services without sufficiently recognising the role of police, LADOs, other areas of local authorities and the Crown Prosecution Services. The standard promotes escalation to the local Safeguarding Partnership but members do not feel that this goes far enough.

Therefore, fostering services would like to see strong requirements for police forces to act in a given timeframe, and stronger recognition of shared responsibility and accountability across agencies with clear roles and accountability outlined.

Financial impact

We highly welcome the standard clearly stating that financial support for foster carers should continue during a formal investigation, we have consistently heard from our members the financial impact allegation investigations can have on them. However, we are concerned that the wording of the standard lacks clarity and doesn't not completely align with the wording in the following guidance.

The standard states on page 32:

'Payment of allowances and fees continue during a formal investigation. Whether payment continues is kept under regular review, taking account of how long the investigation is taking and the seriousness of the matter. Where there is an ongoing police investigation, continuation may need to be reconsidered.'

This section mentions that allowances and fees should continue but the following sections in the guidance, only mention fees. On page 74 it says:

'Fees continue during the investigation, subject to regular review against the length and seriousness of the matter, with continuation reconsidered where there is an ongoing police investigation.'

Then in the section on payments in the guidance on page 67, it says:

'If a carer normally receives a fee, and is subject to an allegation, the fee should continue for the duration of the investigation.'

We believe that the allowance should continue as long as the foster carer is caring for a child as the allowance is for the child but the fee should continue for 52 weeks a year.

This is likely to cause confusion for both fostering services and foster carers around what payments should be received during the investigations, whether that is all payments including skill payments or just fees or the basic allowance. The wording of the standard "taking in account how long the investigation is taking" gives little clarity to fostering services around how long payments should be maintained.

We do not believe that this should change, as stated above, many of the delays are out of both the foster service and foster carer's control. Therefore, taking away a fee from foster carers for delays out of their control is not fair and foster carers should receive a fee for 52 weeks of the year.

Fostering services were particularly concerned over the funding for fee payments. Members from IFAs raised concerns that when a child or young person is removed they may no longer receive payment from the local authority. Members were particularly concerned about the financial implications for smaller independent fostering agencies and charitable providers. With fears that smaller organisations may struggle to absorb long-term costs, especially when investigations are delayed for over a year.

There were also concerns that agencies might become more cautious about accepting referrals for children with a history of making allegations if they perceive a future financial risk.

Therefore, fostering services would like to see additional funding to accompany these requirements.

Avoiding unnecessary moves

Members were in support of the focus on children avoiding unnecessary moves but wanted a stronger focus on maintaining children to stay with their foster carers wherever this can be done safely through risk assessment and support. This would include strengthening the voice of the child in the decision and welcomed the inclusion of a child's right to advocacy if there is a child protection investigation or the carer's registration is in question. There was recognition that placement disruption can be harmful for children and concerns that children can be moved too quickly during investigations.

We are also very supportive of this and this is a key aim behind the allegations toolkit. In SotN, a third of foster carers said a child they fostered was removed from their home during their most recent allegation investigation, up from a quarter (25%) in 2021. This time we also asked if the child was returned; around a fifth of foster carers said yes.

However, we think all children in care should have a right to independent advocacy, however sadly, this is often not the case. At the minimum, the standards should state that advocacy should be offered to any child going through an allegation investigation to seek their views,

regardless of whether there is a child protection investigation or the carer's registration is in question.

Evidence from our advocacy and mediation work highlights that investigations and children's placement changes can sometimes result in the abrupt loss of important relationships for children. We would welcome a stronger expectation that services take a therapeutic and relationship-based approach to preserving contact, supporting repair and maintaining enduring relationships wherever this is safe and in the child's best interests.

"We've worked successfully through allegations and concerns where children have remained as well." - Fostering service

Ability to complain

Many foster carers felt that they do not have the ability to challenge fostering services during an allegation or standards of care concern processes. There was a perception that those who speak up to advocate for children and young people or themselves may be labelled as difficult, leading to fears of negative consequences such as fewer placement opportunities. This can discourage constructive challenge and undermine carers' ability to hold services accountable in the best interests of children.

"They want us to be tenacious. They want us to challenge and advocate for our young people... but they don't want you to actually hold them accountable." – Foster carer

The Fostering Network recommends

- Requirements for greater accountability and set timescales, particularly from the police and other external parties to ensure allegation timescales are met.
- Clearly define what is meant by terms such as fair and swiftly.
- Clear definitions for standards of care concerns and allegations along with thresholds.
- Consistent wording in the standards and guidance to include both allowances and fees.
- Clear guidance on funding arrangements setting out that fee payments continue for 52 weeks of the year and the allowance continues whilst the child is with the foster carer.
- Clearly outline the types of independent support and advocacy foster carers are entitled to and state that this should be high quality independent, restorative advocacy and mediation during the allegation process.
- Include reference to counselling, access to legal advice and protection and wider support for the family.
- Create a step by step flow chart of how allegations and standard of care concerns should be managed.
- Foster carers access to support groups and activities should be assessed on a case by case basis rather than imposing a blanket ban during an allegation investigation.
- Advocacy should be offered to any child going through an allegation investigation to seek their views, regardless of whether there is a child protection investigation or the carer's registration is in question.
- A stronger expectation that services take a therapeutic and relationship-based approach to preserving contact, supporting repair and maintaining enduring relationships wherever this is safe and in the child's best interests.

- Recognition of the Protective Care publication as a key framework for balancing safeguarding, children's participation in ordinary family life and the preservation of enduring relationships during allegations and standards of care concerns.

17. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the same processes should apply to allegations against foster carers as apply to allegations against other adults who work with children, whether in a paid or voluntary capacity?

Strongly agree

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest

We agree that the same processes should apply to foster carers as they are classed as persons in a position of trust and care for children in their homes unsupervised so there are potentially high levels of risk. We think the new allegations process and thresholds set out in Working Together for persons in a position of trust which includes foster carers should apply. However, as we stated in this consultation, there needs to be greater understanding from LADOs about the unique role of foster carers in comparison to others working with children. This should include a focus on understanding the context before moving to a decision to ensure a proportionate response that considers safeguarding alongside children's attachments and enduring relationships.

Part 3: The Training and Development Standards

Introduction

18. To what extent do you agree with the principles used to write the Development Standards?

Agree

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest.

Both fostering services and foster carers were pleased to see the removal of the work book, which was widely seen as burdensome, overly academic and focused on compliance rather than meaningful development. Many described the workbook as a tick-box exercise that does not accurately reflect foster carers' learning or capabilities.

Foster carers were also pleased to see that the emphasis is on a fostering services duty to enable foster carers to meet each development standard rather than it being down to the foster carer themselves.

"I particularly like the sentiment 'The carer meets the standard; the service's duty is to enable them to.'" – Foster carer

The Fostering Network supports the principles behind the new standards of continuous learning and the focus on supporting foster carers to act as the primary decision-makers for children in their day-to-day lives. We also support the focus on more therapeutic trauma informed approaches to caring for children and the updated learning we have around this since the TSDS were published. This is a key element of our newly relaunched Skills To Foster pre approval training.

Development Standard 1: Understanding the role of the foster carer

19. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

Agree

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest.

Results from our survey indicate that 33.3% strongly agree, 42.9% agree, 14.3% neither agree nor disagree, 0% disagree, 4.8% strongly disagree and 4.8% I don't know

We welcome the focus within this standard on supporting foster carers to act as the primary decision-makers for children in their day-to-day lives. Strengthening delegated authority in this way will help ensure that children in foster care are able to participate in everyday activities and experiences without unnecessary delay, reducing the disadvantage they can face compared to their peers.

However, members expressed concerns about the lack of clarity within the standard. They felt that, without clearly defined and measurable expectations, there is a risk of inconsistent interpretation and implementation across fostering services. This could weaken accountability and lead to differing expectations regarding the training, support and decision-making responsibilities of foster carers, potentially creating tension between carers and fostering services.

<i>"A foster carer's role can be interpreted differently by different managers."</i> – Foster carer
--

The Fostering Network believes that Standard 1 should go further in setting out the breadth and complexity of the foster carer role. While the proposed standard appropriately emphasises delegated authority and day-to-day decision making, foster carers need to demonstrate a broad foundation of knowledge and skills to provide effective care for children. Gaining these skills begins pre-approval and can be evidenced during the assessment process through completion of preparation training, and reflective discussions of previous experience of caring for children. This foundational knowledge should then be developed throughout the foster carer's fostering journey.

Foster carers play a central role in understanding, advocating for, and meeting children's needs, working effectively as part of the team around the child, helping children to build and maintain important relationships, providing a safe and loving home and care that is therapeutic and helps children recover from trauma, supporting children's identity and sense of belonging, and supporting them through change and transition. These responsibilities form a core part of preparation training and should be reflected more explicitly within Standard 1 to ensure a shared understanding of the role across fostering services.

Supporting children's relationships is a particularly important aspect of fostering and should be more clearly recognised within this standard. Although Development Standard 4 refers to family time, Standard 1 should establish from the outset that supporting and nurturing

children's relationships with parents, siblings, extended family members and other significant people is a key responsibility of foster carers. Foster carers are often required to balance the provision of stable, nurturing care with supporting complex family relationships, and this can be one of the most challenging aspects of the role, particularly where the role and remit of the foster carer is not made explicit within the child's care plan.

Foster carers also need an understanding of the complex personal, social and systemic factors that may have contributed to a child entering care. They must be equipped to provide care that is trauma-informed, relationship-based and child-centred, while working respectfully and empathetically with children's birth families wherever appropriate. The ability to develop and sustain positive relationships with parents should be recognised as a core fostering skill, and foster carers should receive appropriate preparation and ongoing support to undertake this aspect of their role effectively.

Making these expectations explicit within Standard 1 would help create a more comprehensive and consistent understanding of the foster carer role, strengthen professional recognition of foster carers, and provide a clearer foundation for subsequent development standards.

The Fostering Network recommends

- Development Standard 1 should more explicitly reflect the full breadth of the foster carer role, including supporting children's relationships, working in partnership with birth families, advocating for children and contributing to the wider team around the child.
- Preparation training should provide a consistent and continuously updated national foundation and curriculum for all prospective foster carers. It should cover key areas including safeguarding, child development, trauma-informed care, identity, relationships and partnership working. National adoption of The Fostering Network's The Skills to Foster would support meeting this need.
- Foster carers should be supported to develop the knowledge and skills needed to build and maintain positive relationships with parents, siblings and other people who are important to the child.
- The standards should more clearly recognise the role of foster carers as advocates for children and equal partners within the team around the child.
- Learning and development should be viewed as a continuous journey that begins during assessment and preparation and continues throughout a foster carer's career through supervision, reflection and ongoing professional development.
- The standards should place greater emphasis on helping foster carers understand the experiences and circumstances that may have contributed to a child entering care, enabling them to provide relationship-based, trauma-informed and child-centred care.

Development Standard 2: Building safe, stable and loving relationships with children

20. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

Strongly agree

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest.

Results from our survey indicate that 46.5% strongly agree, 39.5% agree, 7% neither agree nor disagree, 0% disagree, 4.7% strongly disagree, 2.3% I don't know.

Members strongly supported the focus on building safe, stable and loving relationships, recognising that these are central to positive outcomes for children and young people in foster care. They welcomed the standard's recognition of the important role foster carers play in providing nurturing and child-centred care.

However, members emphasised that strong and loving relationships cannot be created through aspiration alone and require time, trust and ongoing support to develop. They felt that the experiences of both foster carers and children should inform a realistic understanding of what these relationships look like in practice.

Members also welcomed the acknowledgement of the close bonds that can develop between foster carers and children, noting that carers can sometimes feel criticised for caring too much. In addition, members highlighted the need for greater support to repair relationships following allegations, recognising the significant impact these can have on both carers and children.

"I think most Foster Carers already do this, but often Carer is a criticise for caring too much so this is a really positive move" – Foster carer

Development Standard 3: Therapeutic parenting

21. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

Strongly agree

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest.

Results from our survey indicate that 41.9% strongly agree, 25.6% agree, 18.6% neither agree nor disagree, 2.3% disagree, 2.3% strongly disagree, 9.3% I don't know.

Members were supportive of the inclusion of therapeutic parenting within Standard 3 and viewed it as a fundamental component of high-quality fostering. Many felt that therapeutic parenting reflects what foster carers already do in their everyday practice by providing consistent care, support, encouragement and understanding to children who have experienced trauma. Members welcomed the recognition of these skills within the standards and felt this could help other professionals better understand the importance of the relationships foster carers build with children and young people.

"I believe most Carers already offer therapeutic support and love and encourage the young people within our care but if it's written within the standard perhaps all the other agencies will understand the importance of these relationships we build with our Young people" – Foster carer

While members generally supported therapeutic parenting approaches and recognised them as best practice for many children, some cautioned against viewing them as a one size fits all solution. They emphasised that children and young people also need structure, boundaries and clear guidance.

"Of course therapeutic parenting is the best for the majority of children but there are times and situations where YP can't cope with a choice or may not have the understanding, in these cases a more structured approach is necessary" – Foster carer

The Fostering Network believes this reflects a common misunderstanding about therapeutic parenting. Therapeutic parenting is not the absence of boundaries or expectations. Rather, it

combines nurturing relationships with clear, consistent and appropriate boundaries, helping children feel safe while understanding and responding to the impact of trauma. We strongly welcome this standard which aligns with the therapeutic approach we have taken in our newly revised Skills to Foster training.

Members highlighted the need for greater investment in ongoing learning and development to support carers to apply these approaches confidently in practice. While preparation training introduces therapeutic and trauma-informed approaches, foster carers require continued opportunities to reflect on their practice, develop their skills and access specialist support as children's needs evolve. Carers stressed that challenges should be met with practical support, reflective supervision and access to expertise, helping them build confidence, sustain placements and provide stable, nurturing care.

Development Standard 4: Identity, culture and the child's sense of self

22. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

Agree

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest.

Results from our survey indicate that 34.1% strongly agree, 31.8% agree, 20.5% neither agree nor disagree, 2.3% disagree, 2.3% strongly disagree, 9.1% I don't know.

Members strongly the focus on identity, culture and a child's sense of self, recognising the importance of helping children develop a strong sense of belonging and understand their background. They emphasised that children's views, wishes and preferences should be listened to and supported as they grow and develop.

Members welcome the standard highlighting the need for greater training and support for foster carers where there are cultural differences and stronger support in helping children explore and maintain their cultural and identity needs. Some felt the standard would benefit from greater clarity on how these needs should be supported in practice.

We strongly support the inclusion of reflection on carers' own identity, assumptions, values and potential biases within this standard. Supporting a child's identity development requires foster carers not only to understand the child's experiences and background, but also to consider how their own identity, culture and lived experiences shape their perspectives and responses. This reflective practice is essential in helping carers provide genuinely child centred care and challenge conscious and unconscious bias.

The standard would be strengthened by encouraging foster carers to reflect on the multiple aspects of identity, power, privilege and lived experience that shape both their own perspectives and those of the children they care for.

A further theme was the importance of ensuring that children's individual needs and voices remain central to decision-making, particularly where there may be differing views between children and their birth families.

"It changes as the child grows, they should be allowed their own voices heard." – Foster carer

Development Standard 5: Safeguarding and the child's safety

23. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

Strongly agree

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest.

Results from our survey indicate that 42.9% strongly agree, 35.7% agree, 11.9% neither agree nor disagree, 0% disagree, 2.4% strongly disagree, 7.1% I don't know.

Members strongly supported the inclusion of safeguarding within the standards and agree that protecting children is one of the most important responsibilities of a foster carer. They particularly welcomed the emphasis on recognising abuse, responding appropriately to disclosures, understanding extra-familial harms and online risks, and working as part of the wider team to safeguard children.

Members emphasised that safeguarding knowledge should be developed from the beginning of a foster carer's journey and strengthened throughout their fostering career. Foster carers need to be prepared to respond confidently and appropriately when children disclose abuse and to understand how safeguarding responsibilities apply in day-to-day care. Ongoing learning, reflective supervision and discussion of emerging safeguarding issues are therefore as important as formal training.

We would welcome a greater focus on Protective Care planning and preparing foster carers for the possibility of allegations and standards of care concerns as set out in our recent publication 'Protective Care'.⁶ Foster carers should understand how to safeguard children while also protecting important relationships and reducing unnecessary risk within the fostering household. Protective Care supports foster carers and services to think proactively about balancing risk, safeguarding and children's day-to-day experiences, rather than relying solely on reactive responses when concerns arise. It provides a framework for considering how children can be kept safe whilst maintaining relationships, promoting normal family life and supporting their development and independence.

Foster carers also highlighted the need for timely support from professionals when safeguarding concerns arise. Effective safeguarding relies on carers being able to access advice, guidance and decision-making support quickly when concerns emerge.

"An addition to 'Carers need to learn how to:' should be akin to 'Prepare themselves and their family for the possible eventuality of an Allegation of harm or Standards of Care concern' as this is a distinct possibility." – Foster carer.

We are pleased to see recognition that there is a distinction between an allegation and a standards of care concern. However, as stated in our response to standard 7 above, we believe this development standard would be strengthened by including clearer definitions, thresholds and examples to support consistent understanding and application across fostering services. This would help reduce unnecessary escalations, promote proportionate responses and ensure both children and foster carers receive an appropriate and fair response when concerns are raised.

Development Standard 6: Health, education and everyday wellbeing

24. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

⁶ [Protective Care \(2026\) The Fostering Network](#)

Agree

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest.

Results from our survey indicate that 48.8% strongly agree, 34.9% agree, 7% neither agree nor disagree, 2.3% disagree, 2.3% strongly disagree, 4.7% I don't know.

Members welcomed the focus on health, education and everyday wellbeing and recognised the important role foster carers play in supporting children to achieve positive outcomes. However, they felt the standard should place greater emphasis on shared responsibility across the wider professional network, including social workers, schools and health services.

A recurring theme was concern that other agencies are not always held accountable for the decisions and support they provide to children in care. Members stressed the importance of all professionals working together and making decisions that prioritise children's long-term wellbeing, stability and outcomes.

Members also felt that foster carers' knowledge and experience of a child's day-to-day needs should be given greater recognition and weight in decision-making relating to health, education and wellbeing.

"Carers already do this and understand it. Other agencies involved in education and health areas, e.g Supervising Social Workers need to get to grips with what it is that the young people need." - Foster carer

Development Standard 7: Working with others around the child

25. To what extent do you agree with the proposed standard?

Agree

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest.

Results from our survey indicate that 38.1% strongly agree, 40.5% agree, 14.3% neither agree nor disagree, 0% disagree, 2.4% strongly disagree and 4.8% I don't know.

Members strongly supported the principle of partnership working and agreed that positive outcomes for children depend on everyone working together effectively. However, many felt that foster carers are not always treated as equal partners, despite often having the greatest day-to-day understanding of a child's needs.

A recurring theme was the importance of ensuring foster carers have an equal voice in decision-making and that their views are listened to and respected by social workers and other professionals. Members felt that greater recognition of the foster carer role is needed across the wider workforce.

While members welcomed the expectations set out in the standard, some noted that many of these principles already exist in practice. They stressed that the effectiveness of the standard will depend on consistent implementation, accountability and all professionals working together in the best interests of the child.

"Working together is paramount but still foster carers are not always esteemed as equals but just as the young people's carer. Does this education need to happen at source in social

worker training , as well as constant reminders in training for LA and agencies.” – Foster carer

Part 4: Guidance for Fostering Services

26. To what extent do you agree with the proposed content of this guidance?

Agree

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with and any changes you would suggest.

Delegated Authority

The guidance outlines the ability for foster carers to be able to make day-to-day health decisions under the new delegated authority standard. However, the concept of "day-to-day" decision-making can be subjective and may be interpreted differently by foster carers, social workers, health professionals and fostering services and will vary based on parental responsibility.

As mentioned above, providing clear examples of the types of health decisions that fall within delegated authority, including how foster carers should respond in situations such as accidents, injuries or medical emergencies, would help build confidence and reduce uncertainty. Where guidance states that foster carers should be supported to access mental health support for children (3.6, p.65), guidance will be required to health services to be enacted in practice as generally services require referrals from professionals whose definition does not currently include foster carers.

We also believe the guidance should provide greater clarity on delegated authority in relation to education. While the draft guidance references education, it does not clearly set out which educational decisions foster carers can make on behalf of the child. This can lead to inconsistent practice and interpretation.

To support a consistent understanding across the sector, we recommend including a dedicated section on delegated authority within the guidance. This should clearly outline the scope of delegated authority, provide practical examples relating to health and education, so foster carers, fostering services and partner agencies all have the same guidance and expectations and there is no confusion. This would help ensure foster carers are empowered to make appropriate decisions in the best interests of children while maintaining clarity around professional and parental responsibilities.

Staying Put

We welcome the guidance's focus on Staying Put and outlining its importance. However, we have heard from many foster carers that practice across local authorities varies significantly. For some young people, Staying Put is introduced as early as 15 which has led to in-depth transition planning, however some young people and their foster carers only hear about it a couple of weeks before they turn 18 and for some not at all. Although the guidance states that the option of Staying Put should be introduced early, we believe having a dedicated time frame would help local authorities be held accountable for ensuring young people are able to make the decision early. We would recommend ages 15/16, however before GCSEs to avoid additional stress during important exam periods. As mentioned above, we are aware the DfE are updating the Staying Put guidance from 2014 and hope this will be addressed through this but we would like to see it included in here too.

Finances

We are pleased to see the guidance state that fostering services “should review the financial support they offer annually, including allowances, expenses and wider incentives (such as council tax discounts or exemptions)”. We strongly support the inclusion of council tax discounts or exemptions as an example of wider financial support, as this recognises the significant contribution foster carers make and can help alleviate some of the financial pressures associated with fostering.

As highlighted previously in our response, there appears to be inconsistency between the standards and guidance regarding financial arrangements during allegations. We believe greater clarity is needed to ensure a consistent approach across fostering services. In particular, the guidance should clearly set out the allowance and fee payments foster carers are entitled to where a child remains in the foster home compared to when a child is removed. This would help provide foster carers with reassurance and financial stability during what can be an extremely stressful period, while also promoting consistency and fairness in practice.

Fostering panels

We welcome the guidance clearly outlining the purpose and function of fostering panels, as well as the principles of expertise, independence, fairness and continuous improvement that should underpin their work. As we highlighted in our response to the consultation ‘Fostering reform: proposed changes to assessment and handling allegations of abuse’, fostering panels play a vital role in providing independent oversight and safeguarding within the fostering system.

We therefore support efforts to strengthen and clarify the guidance on fostering panels. Clearer expectations and greater consistency in how panels operate will help improve the process and help retain the robust scrutiny and safeguards panels provide that are essential to protecting children and maintaining confidence in the fostering system.

However, we believe that the wording in the guidance on the panel chairs experience needs clarity.

It currently states on page 58:

‘Regulation 24 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 sets the quorum. It must include the chair or a vice-chair, a social worker with 3 years’ relevant experience, and at least 3 other members, or 4 for a joint panel, with an independent member present where the chair is not.’

Member found this confusing as it can read that the panel must include a panel chair and social worker with 3 years relevant experience, rather than reading that the panel chair or a vice chair must be a social worker with 3 years relevant experience.

To clarify, we believe the wording should change to:

‘Regulation 24 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 sets the quorum. It must include the chair or a vice-chair, who is a social worker with 3 years’ relevant experience, and at least 3 other members, or 4 for a joint panel, with an independent member present where the chair is not.’

However, some members felt that the role of chair or vice-chair should not be restricted to social workers. They considered that individuals with relevant experience, skills and a strong understanding of fostering and children's services could perform these roles effectively, regardless of their professional background. Members therefore supported a more flexible

approach that prioritises expertise, independence and leadership capability over a specific professional qualification.

There needs to be clarification on the role of the panel chair where foster carers are raising service concerns, so the remit is clear and the scope of the role is understood to ensure independence is sustained.

Record keeping

While we support record-keeping practices that contribute to a child's life story and recognise the importance of maintaining records that children may access in the future, we are concerned that reducing recording requirements to weekly entries could create challenges where allegations arise. Members highlighted that detailed and contemporaneous records can provide important evidence to support foster carers and establish an accurate account of events. We therefore believe the guidance should strike a balance between reducing administrative burden and ensuring sufficient records are maintained to safeguard both children and foster carers.

Transfers

As mentioned above, we are supportive of the focus on the transfer process being timely and proportionate. However, we believe that foster carers should not give their 28 day notice before transferring and the two fostering services should mutually agree on a transfer date. We consider that to promote equitable and consistent practice across England, The Fostering Network's Transfer Protocol should be written into statutory guidance.

Fostering limits

We support children experiencing sleepovers with foster carers and their friends and removing restrictive practice to support this is welcomed. However, we feel it is important that some detail is included into the guidance to ensure arrangements are agreed with some oversight that recognises carer capacity and the needs and views of children living in the home.

Short breaks

We believe all foster carers should have access to an approved support network or designated support person who can provide short break care to children they foster. This would help strengthen placement stability, reduce carer stress and burnout, and ensure foster carers can access necessary breaks and emergency support when needed. We would recommend having clear expectations and consistent access to such support outlined in the short breaks section of the guidance.

We believe that all foster carers should have access to an approved support network or person who can provide overnight care for the children they foster.

General Questions

The following questions relate to your views on the document as a whole.

27. Do you have any overall comments on the proposed standards and guidance that you have not yet had the opportunity to share? For example, you may wish to comment on the overall impact of the proposed changes or identify any areas where additional detail or attention may be needed to support meaningful improvement.

Members highlighted the need for stronger partnership working between foster carers, supervising social workers and children's social workers. A recurring theme was that foster carers do not always feel recognised as equal and respected members of the team around the child, despite their significant day-to-day knowledge and experience of caring for children.

Members raised concerns about ongoing power imbalances within the system and called for greater cultural change to ensure foster carers' views and expertise are valued in decision-making. They emphasised that positive and collaborative relationships between professionals are essential to achieving the best outcomes for children.

Particular concerns were raised about children's social workers lack of understanding of the fostering role and their interaction with foster carers and the cultural change that will be needed around this. The guidance and standards need to be seen by children's social work teams as central to their practice which is not currently the position of most children's social care teams so work will be needed to educate them too as such a key partner in the team around the child.

Members also expressed concerns that increased supervision and administrative requirements could add to social worker workloads, potentially reducing the time available to build and maintain effective relationships with foster carers. They stressed that the successful implementation of the standard will depend on fostering a culture of mutual respect, trust and genuine partnership working.

We believe the standards should go further in their aspirations for both children and the professional development of foster carers. The current guidance refers to development "across the first year and beyond" (p.50) and highlights the need to support foster carers after their first year to meet the needs of the children in their care. While this is important, foster carers frequently report that post-approval training and development opportunities often duplicate foundation-level learning rather than building their expertise and contribution to the wider care system.

We would welcome clearer guidance for fostering services on how to support foster carers' progression beyond their first year. This should extend beyond developing skills to meet individual children's needs and instead promote a more strategic and systemic approach to professional development. Foster carers play a critical role within the wider professional network around children and should be supported to strengthen their influence and contribution within that system.

This could include opportunities for advanced practice development, mentoring and peer support roles, participation in service development, stronger involvement in multi-agency planning and decision-making, and pathways for foster carers to contribute their lived experience and expertise to organisational learning. Such an approach would recognise foster caring as a continually developing role, improve carer retention and satisfaction, and ultimately strengthen outcomes for children through more confident, skilled, and professionally integrated foster carers.

28. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed standards are suitable for kinship carers and meet their specific needs?

Neither agree nor disagree

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any aspects you agree with for kinship carers and any changes you would suggest.

Results from our survey indicates that 23.3% strongly agree, 27.9% agree, 27.9% neither agree nor disagree, 2.3% disagree, 2.3% strongly disagree, 16.3% I don't know.

Members generally welcomed the inclusion of a dedicated focus on kinship care and felt the standards recognise some of the distinct circumstances faced by kinship carers. In particular, members noted the importance of acknowledging existing family relationships and the need for flexibility in assessment, support and practice.

While the standards recognise many of the distinctive circumstances experienced by kinship carers, respondents were not always clear how the dedicated kinship standard interacts with the wider fostering standards and regulations. Greater clarity will be needed to ensure consistent interpretation and implementation.

Feedback highlighted the need for stronger joint working across services and greater recognition of the specific financial, housing and practical challenges faced by kinship families. Some members also felt that including kinship and mainstream fostering within the same set of standards could create confusion without clear guidance on how different expectations should be applied.

Members were also conscious of the ongoing review of kinship care by the Law Commission and noted that future recommendations may have significant implications for how kinship foster care is regulated, assessed and supported. As a result, some respondents felt it may be difficult to determine whether the proposed standards fully meet the needs of kinship carers until that work has concluded.

Implementation Questions

The following questions relate to your views on the implementation of the revised standards and guidance.

29. To what extent do you agree or disagree that these standards and guidance can be implemented in day-to-day practice?

Neither agree nor disagree

If desired, please explain your response.

Responses from our survey indicated that 28.6% strongly agree, 35.7% agree, 21.4% neither agree nor disagree, 0% disagree, 2.4% strongly disagree, 11.9% I don't know.

While members were broadly supportive of the proposed standards and guidance, many expressed concerns about the practical challenges of implementation. A consistent theme was that successful delivery will depend on sufficient investment in training, workforce capacity and support for both foster carers and fostering services.

Members highlighted concerns about existing workloads, particularly for supervising social workers, and felt that some of the expectations within the standards could be difficult to achieve without additional staffing and resources. There were also concerns about the financial implications of implementing the standards, including the costs associated with enhanced training, support and supervision requirements.

Overall, members agreed with the principles and ambitions underpinning the standards but stressed that effective implementation will require adequate funding, clear guidance and investment in the workforce to ensure expectations can be met consistently across services.

The Fostering Network supports these points and are also concerned that some of the standards and guidance lack detail and that this may lead to poor and varying inconsistent practice within services which could have implications for foster carers.

30. In your view, what are the challenges to implementing these standards and guidance? [Free text]

Members identified culture change, inconsistent practice and limited resources as the main challenges to implementation. Many felt that long-standing practices within children's services, resistance to change, and a lack of recognition of foster carers as equal partners could make implementation difficult.

"People don't like change and everyone would have to be on board" – Foster carer

Members also highlighted concerns about workforce capacity, high caseloads and funding pressures, which could limit the ability of services to implement the standards effectively.

Finally, members stressed the importance of greater transparency, accountability and partnership working, particularly in decision-making and allegations processes, to ensure the standards lead to meaningful improvements in practice rather than becoming a compliance exercise.

"It would take considerable change for local authorities and the children's social work team to treat foster carers as equals" – Foster carer

31. In your view, what additional support, if any, would be required to enable effective implementation of these standards and guidance?

Members identified the need for consistent training, clear communication and stronger partnership working to support effective implementation of the standards. Feedback highlighted the importance of ensuring that supervising social workers, children's social workers, team managers, LADO services and other professionals receive training on the standards and understand their implications for fostering and kinship households. Members also called for accessible guidance and resources for carers, including training, written materials and opportunities to ask questions.

"I would think each fostering service offers a 'team workshop' involving multiple teams around the child and conversations on how we can ALL make the impact and what it would look like for us to ensure all standards are met." – Foster carer

Many felt that successful implementation would require greater recognition of foster carers as equal member of the team around the child, alongside national and local investment in training, workforce development and support services.

"Mandatory training for everybody involved in looked after children and kinship. I think Supervising Social Workers will take this on board and be very supportive. I think for area Social Workers and Team Manager's it's vital that they do training to understand what the standards mean for a fostering household." – Foster carer

Consultation Proposal 1: Withdrawing notice

32. To what extent do you support a regulatory clarification being made to allow a foster carer to withdraw their resignation within 28 days? Where a foster carer does not withdraw a resignation within 28 days then they will be deregistered.

Agree

If desired, please explain your response. You may wish to include any benefits and any challenges of the proposal

Members were generally supportive of the proposed regulatory clarification allowing foster carers to withdraw their resignation within 28 days. Many felt this is a sensible and proportionate change that recognises that resignations can sometimes be made during periods of stress, frustration or crisis and may not reflect a foster carer's long-term intentions.

The Fostering Network supports this proposal. In our experience, resignations are sometimes submitted in response to a specific event, disagreement or period of difficulty and may not reflect a foster carer's long-term commitment to fostering. Allowing foster carers a period in which to reconsider their decision could help retain experienced carers, reduce unnecessary reassessments and support children's placement sufficiency, while still providing clarity through the 28 day timeframe.

A key perceived benefit is that the proposal could help retain experienced foster carers and avoid the need for unnecessary reassessments where carers subsequently wish to continue fostering. Members highlighted examples of long-standing foster carers having to undergo a full reassessment process after resigning in the heat of the moment, which was viewed as burdensome for both carers and fostering services.

However, members identified several areas where further clarity would be beneficial. In particular, there were questions about how the proposal would operate in cases where foster carers are transferring between fostering services, and whether the ability to withdraw a resignation could unintentionally create delays or uncertainty within transfer processes. Members also felt guidance should clarify how the provision would apply where there are ongoing allegations, investigations or concerns regarding suitability.

Some fostering services suggested that fostering services should retain discretion to refuse a request to withdraw a resignation in exceptional circumstances, particularly where there are concerns about a carer's suitability to continue fostering. Fostering services also raised concerns that if foster carers can withdraw their resignation, this may be used against fostering services when there are disagreements which are then later withdrawn once there has been a resolution.

Overall, members welcomed the proposal and viewed it as a positive step that could improve foster carer retention and reduce unnecessary administrative processes, provided there is clear guidance on implementation and the management of exceptional cases.

We believe the default position should be that a resignation can be withdrawn within the 28 day period.

"We have lost many members through resignation - usually an emotional, ill-judged response - as they often resign before contacting us and are unaware of the 'no withdrawal'"

clause. The ability to retract their resignation would have seen the retention of many Foster Carers in our Local Authority.”– FCA Foster carer