Compliments, Suggestions and Complaints Procedures

The Fostering Network is a membership organisation and as such it is vitally important that we listen to what our members are saying to us. We are an organisation that promotes quality foster care and aims to achieve a high standard in all that we do. As a learning organisation, one of our basic principles is that we continuously seek to make improvements to our service. We also want you to tell us what we do well so that we can build on our strengths to maintain our high levels of standards.

You may wish to raise a complaint, give us a compliment or make suggestions about a service you have received from an individual providing that service or your perception of the organisation as a whole.

Complaints against members of the Board of Trustees

This policy also applies to compliments, suggestions and complaints relating to the Board of Trustees. In that instance, the complaint is dealt with by the Vice Chair of the Board although the same general processes would be followed as for staff. If your complaint is against the Vice Chair you should write to the Chair and an independent investigator will be appointed within 10 working days.

We positively welcome your views.

The principles of our Compliments, Suggestions and Complaints procedures

Our Compliments, Suggestions and Complaints procedures are based on the following principles in that we will:

- Ensure open access to all procedures
- Adhere to the Fostering Network equal opportunities policy
- Carry out an impartial review of all complaints
- Require positive action on the part of the Fostering Network's senior management team and Board of Trustees in response to justified complaints
- Aim to satisfactorily resolve all complaints where possible
- Keep an open mind with regard to all suggestions
• Regard compliments, suggestions and complaints as a way of continuously improving our services

This document outlines the procedures for how to give us compliments on things you think we have done well, how best to make a suggestion for improvement or change and how to make a complaint about the Fostering Network.

1  Procedure for giving us compliments

It is of enormous value for us to hear of any positive experiences whilst involved with the Fostering Network. It is important for us to know how well the organisation performs at both a strategic and local level. Our people thrive on ‘making a difference’ and therefore we learn and build our infrastructure on valuable and constructive feedback.

If you would like to pay us a compliment, it can be done in several ways:

- Write a letter to the person you wish to recognise, and copy it to their manager
- Send a card to that person, their manager, or the Chief Executive
- Send an e-mail to that person, and copy it to the Chief Executive
- Write a letter to Foster Care magazine to share your positive experience with the Fostering Network

2  Procedure for sharing your suggestions with us

Suggestions for how we might improve any aspect of our service are a welcome source of feedback. If there are any suggestions you want to share with us please contact the Country Director (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) or write to the Deputy Chief Executive (based in the London office), clearly stating your suggestion, which part of the service it relates to, and the benefits you believe the suggestion would offer its membership or the organisation. All suggestions will be acknowledged and seriously considered.

3  Complaints Procedure

A complaint is defined as ‘the expression of dissatisfaction concerning the service provided by the Fostering Network, or of the actions of an individual providing that service’.

The Complaints Procedure has four stages:

Stage 1 - preliminary stage
Stage 2 - intermediate stage
Stage 3 - formal stage
Stage 4 - Independent Review stage.
Whilst it is open to you to begin the complaints procedure at Stage 3, we hope that, unless you consider the situation to be of a very serious nature, every effort will be made to resolve your complaint at Stage 1 or Stage 2.

**Note on Anonymity and Confidentiality**

If the complainant wishes to remain anonymous then we will usually be unable to investigate the situation. If there is any indication that the complaint involves a child being at risk of harm then the Fostering Network will pass on the information to the statutory agencies.

Whilst the Fostering Network will accept complaints that are made in confidence, it should be recognised that dealing with a complaint made in confidence can make investigation difficult.

### 3.1 Stage 1: Preliminary Stage

Many complaints may be dealt with by simply talking to the person who you believe has treated you unfairly, rudely or been abusive. This could include someone who you feel has not answered your calls over a reasonable period of time. We recognise that it is not always easy for people to raise a complaint and therefore suggest that you write down your concerns and use this to guide the discussion with the person concerned.

### 3.2 Stage 2: Intermediate Stage

1. If step 1 does not lead to a positive outcome, or you do not wish to raise the matter with the staff member concerned, you should contact their line manager in writing. If you are unable to write down your complaint, you will be given appropriate support in order to document your complaint. An organisational chart is available on request and on our web site.

2. The manager will either meet with you in person, or if this is not possible e.g because of geographical considerations, s/he will have a telephone conversation with you in a confidential setting.

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1 The Fostering Network’s Child Protection Policy states: The Fostering Network is committed to ensuring that all children and young people are looked after in a safe way. The need to ensure the protection of children from significant harm or the risk of significant harm takes precedence over other organisational principles, including that of a general requirement to offer a confidential service.
3 Written records of the actions and decisions will be kept and you will see a copy of these within 10 working days.

Timescale: You will receive an acknowledgement of the complaint within 5 working days. A mutually satisfied resolution should be completed within 15 working days of the complaint being received unless otherwise mutually agreed.

3.3 Stage 3: Formal Stage

If you are not satisfied that a suitable resolution has been reached through Stages 1 or 2, or you wish your complaint to be formally investigated, you should put the reason for your dissatisfaction with the outcome of Stage 2 in writing, within 7 working days to the Deputy Chief Executive at the Fostering Network, or to the Country Director if your complaint relates to a country office. If you are unable to write down your complaint, you will be given appropriate support in order to document your complaint.

Timescale: The Deputy Chief Executive/Country Director will acknowledge your complaint within five working days and send you a copy of the Complaints Procedure if required.

A senior member of the organisation will aim to investigate the complaint and prepare a written report within 20 working days of receiving the letter of dissatisfaction at Stage 2.

The investigation will include the opportunity for you to explain the circumstances of your complaint. This may be done in person, or over the phone. You will be able to have someone with you if you do not feel happy about doing this alone, and we can arrange a conference call via the phone if you wish someone else to be with you but you cannot attend the meeting in person.

After careful consideration of the facts of the case, the Deputy Chief Executive/Country Director will write to you with the proposed course of action the organisation will take in response to the complaint. If appropriate, the report will be shared with the Fostering Network’s Chief Executive.

3.4 Stage 4: Independent Review

If you remain dissatisfied with the outcome and wish to take the matter further then you must formally raise this, in writing, within 10 working days of receiving the Deputy Chief Executive’s/Country Director’s response. This complaint letter should be sent to the Chief Executive who will arrange for the
Vice Chair\(^2\) of the Fostering Network’s Board of Trustees to take responsibility for further investigation.

The complaint will be investigated further by a person independent of the Fostering Network appointed by the Vice Chair\(^3\) of the Fostering Network’s Board of Trustees. The independent investigator will contact you in the process of investigating the complaint. Again, you may wish to have someone with you when any meetings or telephone conversations take place. The investigator will aim to report back to the Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees within 20 working days of receiving the complaint.

The Vice Chair’s role is to consider the report from the third party and decide on the way forward and whether the complaint is upheld and what action is required to improve the service or performance of the staff member.

The Vice Chair’s decision will be reached within a further 15 working days. If necessary the Vice Chair may consult with the Board’s Honorary Officers but the Vice Chair’s decision will be final.

**Our promise**

If for any reason you believe that the complaints procedure disadvantages you in any way the Deputy Chief Executive will make every effort to make appropriate arrangements. The Fostering Network is an Equal Opportunities organisation and the Complaints Procedure should serve in a way that challenges any sort of discrimination.

The timescales above will be adhered to wherever possible. However, if there are good reasons, eg the need for further investigation or the lack of availability of witnesses or companions, each party can request that the other agrees to an extension of the permitted timescale.

**Reporting to the Board**

A report of all complaints received to the Fostering Network will go to the Board of Trustees on an annual basis.

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\(^2\) The Vice Chair has lead responsibility on the Board for dealing with complaints.

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