



ACORN HOUSE (Fostering Services) Ltd

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND FUNCTION

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ACORN HOUSE (FOSTERING SERVICES) LTD

Referred to throughout the document as Acorn House

1. Introduction

This statement of purpose has been written in accordance with Standard 16 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, Regulation (3 & 4) of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011 and Sections 4.1 and 4.2 of the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Vol 4 (2011). It sets out the Statement of Purpose for Acorn House (Fostering Services) Ltd and relates to the agency's operations as an independent fostering provider. The Acorn House Statement of Purpose is designed for a wide readership including:

- Children and young people who are placed with our Foster Carers
- The agency staff
- Foster carers and prospective Foster Carers
- Local Authorities who place, or are considering placing with Acorn House
- Ofsted
- Colleagues from other social care agencies
- Health and educational establishments
- The general public

The Acorn House Statement of Purpose aims to meet, and where possible, exceed the requirements arising from:

- The Care Standards Act 2000
- The Children Act 1989
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Vol 4 (2011)
- The Children Act 2004
- The Fostering Service Regulations (England 2011)
- The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (England) 2011
- UK National Standards for Foster Care (1999)
- TSD Standards for Foster Carers

This statement of purpose is reviewed and updated annually by the Board of Directors and more frequently as necessary by the Board of Directors, Responsible Individual and Registered Manager.

Acorn House was established to provide high quality well matched placements for children and young people who cannot live at home in the hope that this will lead to fewer placement breakdowns and greater placement stability for the children and young people.

We aim to work closely with families, Foster Carers and all other partner professionals involved in the care of children and young people to ensure that the highest quality of service is being offered.

2. Status and Constitution

Acorn House is an independent fostering provider (IFP) and is a private limited company registered under the Companies Act 1985 (company number 6437368). In accordance with the Companies Act 1985 and 1989, Acorn House Ltd has produced a Memorandum of Association and Articles of Association. Acorn House has a Board of Directors. The Board of Directors meets regularly and is responsible for the corporate governance of the company, as well as determining and reviewing the company's:

- Strategic vision and direction
- Culture, values and principles
- Annual Business Plan
- Development issues
- Performance targets
- Policies and Procedures
- Financial Management
- Legal Compliance
- Quality Assurance

In doing so, the board meet the statutory duties and responsibilities as Directors of a registered company and ensures that all matters are reviewed regularly and in a planned way.

Acorn House has organisational membership with:

- Fostering Network
- CoramBAAF (formerly BAAF)
- Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers

3. Structure

Acorn House is managed by the Responsible Individual and Registered Manager. The Social Work Manager (The Registered Manager) is responsible for the day to day operation of the agency and for the development of services to children and young people.

The Responsible Individual is: Gail Hopkins (CQSW / APCM (level 7))

The Registered Manager is: Jonathan Richard Glover (BSc Behavioural Science / CQSW / Post Graduate Diploma in Social Work / NVQ 5 Management).

In addition to the above, Acorn House employs a qualified Deputy Manager and Supervising Social Workers. They are responsible for providing support and supervision to Foster Carers and stability to children and young people.

Acorn House employs Supervising Social Workers who have an appropriate social work qualification e.g. DipSW / CSS / CQSW and are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

As Foster Carers vary in the number of children they are approved to look after, we prefer to measure support needs as a reflection of this. Supervising Social Workers are therefore allocated to families based on the potential number of children placed. This is intended to indicate that the welfare of the child in placement is of paramount importance.

The staff team of Social Workers carries mobile phones and e-mail devices in order that they can be contacted, in an emergency, during the evening and at weekends via a duty system.

The Social Work staff and Foster Carers are fully supported by administrators. Key financial services, including invoices and payments are also undertaken by appropriately qualified personnel.

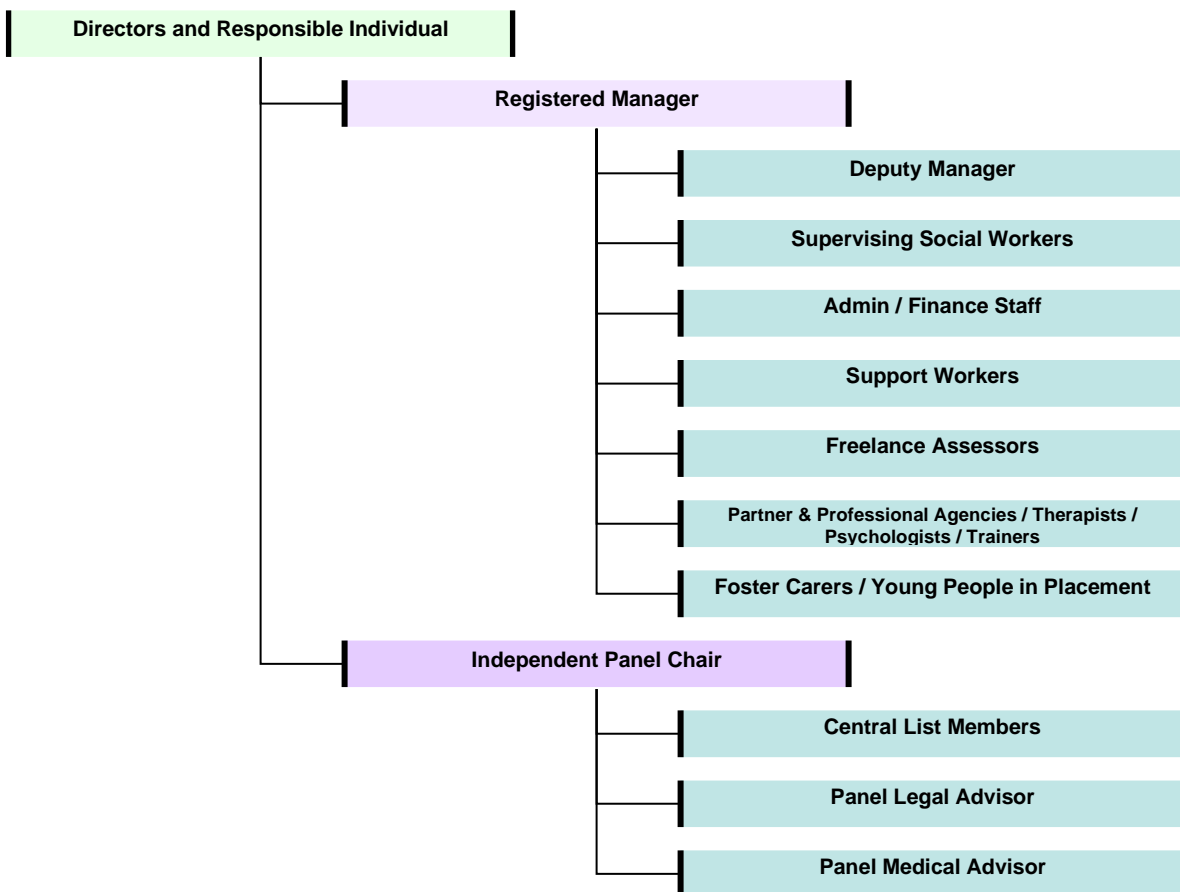
In addition to the above, Acorn House has contracted with several specialist services that provide:

1. Business support and advice and full accountancy and financial services, including the preparation of monthly management accounts and annual updating of the budget.
2. Design, marketing and printing.
3. Information Technology, database and systems development.
4. Educational support services for children and young people.
5. Freelance Assessors
6. Clinical Psychologists
7. Support Workers
8. Independent Training Organisations

All staff, whether employed on a service contract or providing services under a contract, are subject to the full range of enquiries including:

- Disclosure and Barring Service (formerly CRB)
- Verbal and written references from previous employers
- Copies of qualifications
- Health and identity checks

All staff who work for Acorn House, either permanent, casual or self employed are covered by appropriate professional indemnity insurance and all have job descriptions, contracts of employment and / or contractual project briefs.



Acorn House insurance liabilities cover is:

- Employers Liability - £10 million
- Public/Products Liability - £10 million
- Professional Indemnity - £5 million
- Abuse Liability - £10 million
- Medical Malpractice - £5 million

4. Aims and Objectives

The objectives of Acorn House are child focused and aim to provide services which complement those provided by Local Authorities through cooperation rather than competition.

Acorn House will provide an emergency, short, bridging, respite and long-term needs-led service for Looked After Children and young people where they can reflect and plan for the future with their families, social workers and other significant people. Where it is in the interests of the child and agreed by the appropriate professionals, family and panel, long-term placement would be considered but only after the option of rehabilitation to family or friends approved under the appropriate regulations had been explored. Acorn House also offer parent and child placements.

Children will only be placed with Foster Carers who have been approved by our own agency. The placing Authority should approve the placement and arrange for statutory visits by the child's social worker. Each child will have an Individual Placement Agreement.

In order to improve the outcomes for Looked After Children in placement we aim to ensure that each young person receives:

- A physically and emotionally nurturing, safe, supportive family environment, which protects and safeguards the welfare of each child.
- A placement plan, which reflects the child's needs as identified in his/her care plan. Support for agreed programmes to ensure that the key development areas of health, education, social, emotional and behavioural needs are met.
- Access to education appropriate to the child's age and ability accompanied by effective liaison and cooperation with the Education Authorities.
- Commitment to a review schedule, which will reflect general and specific outcome targets for each child.
- Clearly identified arrangements for delegated authority in relation to everyday decisions relating to the looked after child or children.
- Access to appropriate health care.
- An open, honest approach to achieve a shared understanding of the outcomes expected from placement with the child, carers, family and social workers.
- Accurate records which are kept in such a way as to facilitate the participation of the child in their progress and key life events while respecting the need for confidentiality and security of such information.
- Respect for the child's network of family and friends and to promote contact where it is in the child's interests.
- Stability and consistency in the child's attachments and networks.

- Increased self-esteem and confidence through support and encouragement in personal achievement and positive feedback.
- After-care planning and support.
- Access to other support services, such as Educational Assessment and time-out and respite activities to support placements.
- Respite placements, which may only be provided by persons checked by the Agency and approved by the Local Authority.
- Advocacy services for looked after children where necessary.
- Organised activities for children / young people including members of the Foster Carer family.

5. Philosophy and Care Principles

The values, which inform our approach to foster care, are:

- Children are children first and are entitled to a safe living environment in which they feel secure and their unique circumstances, rights and opinions are respected and listened to. While looked after, they should have a positive experience of family life, relationships and attachments, which validate the child's own family and recognise the loss and separation, which they have experienced.
- It is essential to give opportunity for the child to be involved in planning for the future, which, where possible, should involve active consideration of rehabilitation to members of the wider family network. In the absence of such a solution, to plan for stability and permanence in placements which continue to validate the child's own family, race, culture, language, religion, gender and sexual orientation.
- To achieve this, Foster Carers will work in partnership with the child, their family and social worker. To ensure positive outcomes in the child's physical, intellectual, social, emotional and behavioural development we will work together with those who have parental responsibility and professionals in order to access the opportunities, resources and support needed to secure a future which will fulfill the child's potential and encourage social inclusion.
- We do not believe that readiness for independence is achieved at a date determined by the young person's 18th birthday, so we will continue to work with all parties towards independence at the young person's pace.
- As an organisation we work within the Children Act 1989, Fostering Services Regulations (2011), National Minimum Standards (2011), The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4 (2010), The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2 (2010), Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018), Every Child Matters (Change for Children) and work with partner agencies to achieve the five outcomes identified in Every Child Matters.

We are therefore guided to target the following specific outcomes for the children and young people that we look after:

- Be Healthy
- Stay Safe
- Enjoy and Achieve
- Make a Positive Contribution
- Achieve Economic Wellbeing

6 Services and Facilities

Fostering Placements

Acorn House uses a 'Duty System' which is the first point of contact for local authorities making enquiries about placement choice. All placements are 'matched' to ensure that children's needs are complemented by the skills and experience of the Foster Carer's family in order to best meet those needs.

The agency aims to provide a wide range of placements for children and young people of all ages with Foster Carers, these include:

- Parent & Child placements
- Long term placements
- Short Term placements
- Sibling Groups
- Placements for children with disabilities
- Respite Placements
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Placements
- Assessment Placements
- Bridging Placements
- Emergency Placements
- Solo Placements

All placements made with Foster Carers are made and monitored in accordance with the Fostering Service Regulations (2011).

- Individual 'Placement Plans' are prepared either before or at the point of placement, which include essential information sharing and care plans.
- Wherever possible, pre-placement planning is undertaken, including introductions between Foster Carers and children. In the case of emergency placements, immediate care and planning is given timely attention with all paperwork provided within 5 days.

Support for Children and Young people

All children and young people in placement with Acorn House are visited regularly as part of the role of the Supervising Social Worker. In undertaking this, due consideration is given to the role and involvement of the local authority Social Worker, so that there is clarity between the roles and responsibilities of each agency and social worker.

The Supervising Social Worker will confirm that the best interests of the child and / or young person are being safeguarded and promoted, and may identify further services that are appropriate to promote their physical, social and emotional welfare.

Acorn House commissions qualified, accredited and experienced educational professionals on a contractual basis to provide support, assistance and information to children and young people in placement. This support also extends to Foster Carers and supervising social workers.

In addition, Acorn House has contracted with a specialist high-quality training provider who provides fostering training on-line. The syllabuses are structured and tailored towards Foster Carers specific needs.

Acorn House provides a small number of Parent and Child placements: Sometimes a parent, usually the mother, needs a lot of support in the early months to learn how to look after her baby and how to put the baby's needs before her own. Often the mother is young. Acorn House provides specialist training to Foster Carers to support and coach the mother to look after the baby herself. In some cases the Foster Carer will be working as part of a team, in preparing an assessment for court proceedings which will determine whether the child is to remain in the care of the mother, or perhaps be adopted. Where court reports are required the Foster Carer will have additional support from Acorn House social workers or consultants to help them in completing these.

Referral Criteria

It is anticipated that Local Authorities will be seeking placements for young people who have experienced any number of the following:

- A high level of attachment disruptions or difficulties
- Inconsistent or inappropriate care arrangements
- Neglect of basic needs
- Personal or family trauma, violence or abuse
- Loss, separation and rejection
- Levels of high criticism and low affection
- Involvement in offending behaviour
- Lack of continuity and consistency in education and health care
- Social exclusion and disrupted social and peer relationships
- Inappropriate levels of independence

As a consequence, young people will need to learn to trust, develop self-esteem and express feelings of anger, guilt and confusion about their lives.

The successful matching of placements involves the balancing of the needs of young people with the competences and circumstances of Foster Carers. Such a decision depends on an open and detailed sharing of the young person's history including their strengths and the requirements for monitoring any behavioural change to ensure that their welfare is compatible with individuals and the environment of the foster home.

7. Care Arrangements

Health Care

Young people will be supported in co-operating with routine and Looked After Children health checks and specific treatments, having regard to their wishes, legal status, those with parental responsibility, care plans and appropriate development towards independence.

Young people will be registered with the local G.P., orthoptic practice and dental surgery at the earliest opportunity.

Young people will be encouraged to maintain a healthy lifestyle, in relation to diet, personal hygiene, drugs and sexual relationships, consistent with their cultural, racial and religious beliefs.

Specialist health care will be provided locally through the relevant health authority. Issues regarding specialist health care will be discussed with the social worker at the time of referral and appropriate timescales agreed to ensure that resources are in place before the placement begins.

Contact Arrangements

Positive encouragement will be given to ensure that contact with significant people to the young person can continue or be established where it is in their best interests and consistent with the Care Plan. The need for supervision of such activities will be agreed on a case-by-case basis but it should not be assumed that the foster home is always an appropriate venue for all such arrangements. In general, positive encouragement will be given to achieve an active partnership with the young person's family and all-party involvement in planning and decision-making.

Education and Employment

Foster Carers will have good links with Education Services so that the young person can receive continuity in education either by traveling to their previous school or in gaining a local school or college place.

Where it is possible to maintain attendance at the same educational establishment, this will be supported through negotiation between the Agency, Foster Carers and the Placing Authority and those with parental responsibility.

Where this is not possible the choice of enrolment at a local school or college will be supported by Foster Carers.

Support to attend school, complete homework and take part in extra-curricular school activities, develop positive peer relationships and appropriate community

based activities will be provided in consultation with all parties. Similarly, support will be provided in enjoying positive work experiences, training schemes, dealing with agencies and authorities to achieve employment and independence.

Behaviour Management

Inappropriate or challenging behaviour will be dealt with by positive disciplinary means, agreed with the placing authority and people with parental responsibility. These means will only be used where positive validation and reward has not been effective in modifying behaviours. All foster carers are trained in Managing Actual and Potential Aggression (MAPA) which focuses on de-escalation skills and is accredited by the British Institute of Learning Disabilities (BILD).

Some forms of sanctions are not acceptable

For example:

- Corporal punishment.
- Any deprivation of food or drink usually available, affection, sleep, shelter or clothing.
- Restriction on contact or agreed communication with parents, family and friends, people with parental responsibility, solicitor, independent visitor, social worker or other professionals identified in the Care Plan unless a specific requirement of the agreed Care Plan.
- Actions, which could lead to social exclusion or humiliation.
- Withholding of medical treatment.
- Being locked in a room.
- Discriminatory language or acts.
- Public criticism of the young persons' family or friends.

Some forms of sanctions are acceptable but should always be appropriate in relation to the transgression for example:

- The withholding of a proportion of pocket money to pay towards the cost of damaged or stolen items.
- Restriction on certain leisure activities, which are 'earned' by acceptable behaviours.
- Additional domestic chores or other duties.
- Grounding.
- Confiscation of illegal or dangerous items.
- Helping to mend things, which the young person has broken.
- Apologising to those who have been harmed or affected by the young person's behaviour.

Absences from the Foster Home

Foster carers should inform the Authority and Agency immediately if they become aware of an unplanned absence which suggests that the young person has run away or been removed from the household. A decision regarding who will inform the police must be made and acted upon at this point.

Foster carers are required to inform the Agency in advance of any planned overnight stay away from their household and of any period of time spent in the care of another adult no matter how temporary. The Agency will ensure with the placing Authority that such plans are in the interests of the child and acceptable to them.

Any arrangements for respite care must be discussed and agreed with the supervising social worker prior to commencement of any respite period. The supervising Social worker will in turn consult with the placing authority. Wherever possible a joint discussion will take place to agree any plans for respite placements and their frequency and duration. These placements would only ever be with approved/ back up carers known to the agency unless the placing authority identify an 'in house' or third party respite placement.

In the event of an emergency situation, approval for arrangements should be agreed with the Agency who would consult with the Authority at the earliest opportunity.

Acorn House will keep a detailed record of any such events.

The Protection of Children and Young People

Young people who have experienced abuse or neglect in the past can be especially vulnerable to further abuse; they have the right to be protected whilst being looked after.

Foster carers will follow and cooperate with the Placing Authorities' Child Protection Procedures and Protection Plans by adhering to the procedures described in the Foster Carers Handbook. These procedures apply equally to an allegation of abuse made against a member of the Foster Carer's family. All of our Foster Carers undergo training and complete a "safer caring" agreement before they are approved.

In any event of alleged or actual abuse, the Placing Authority will determine whether the placement can continue. The Agency will support and appraise the competence of the Foster Carers and their need for support and development.

Young people themselves will have age and ability appropriate information regarding how they can raise concerns or complaints about how they are being cared for.

Foster carers will receive guidance, training and support to assure that the young person's welfare is safeguarded and his/her environment is a safe place. However, it may become evident that welfare or safety is being or likely to be compromised.

Foster carers will communicate with the Supervising Social Worker and the young person's Social Worker routinely but should indicate at the earliest opportunity should the placement not be going well, thus avoiding arriving at a crisis without warning to the Agency or Authority.

Circumstances also change for the foster family household which impact on the viability of the placement. In circumstances which may lead to the breakdown or disruption of a placement, notice of 28 days is required of Foster Carers or the earliest possible communication of such concern, whichever is earlier.

Acorn House will undertake *at least* two unannounced visits annually to ensure that we continue to promote the welfare of Children and Young People we care for. If no Young Person is in placement, then one unannounced visit is necessary.

Health & Safety

Any living environment contains hazards. There are too many risks to list but generally, the household should be kept clean, warm and comfortable, providing personal and communal space appropriate to the needs of its members. It should also be kept safe from the risks of fire and accidental injuries, offering safety and security for the young person and their possessions without preventing their freedom of movement.

Activities within and outside the house, which would normally involve parental consent, should be referred to the Authority via the Agency. Foster carers will be trained in risk assessment and pediatric first aid and be aware of relevant Health and Safety Standards through the initial assessment checklist which is updated at annual reviews or earlier should events indicate the need. Health and Safety issues are also monitored during supervision visits to carers.

A detailed risk assessment will be undertaken for each Young Person placed with foster carers. This will be reviewed at the CYP Review and following any incidents.

8. Recruitment, Approval, Support and Training of Foster Carers

The recruitment, selection, support and monitoring of Foster Carers is the process which ensures that Children are looked after by carers who are competent in the skills needed, are accountable and supported.

The Agency will ensure that all Foster Carers and any other members of their household are assessed as to their suitability before the Agency's Panel gives recommendation to approve. This includes enhanced DBS, Previous Agency, Local Authority, School checks for all members of the household under the age of 16, comprehensive referencing accompanied by interviews of referees, medicals, other statutory checks and employment history.

It also involves pre-approval preparation in terms of advice, training (Skills to Foster – Fostering Network), development group attendance and induction in relation to the Agency's philosophy and values.

Following approval, Foster Carers are informed of their approval terms in writing and required to enter into a Foster Care Agreement with the Agency before any child / young person is placed with them.

Foster Carers receive their copy of the Foster Care Agreement the Foster Carer Handbook, which includes: -

Policies and Procedures

Policy documents in relation to assessment and checks, safeguarding (child protection) procedures, placements, methods of care and control, record keeping and access, incident reporting, confidentiality, financial procedures, health and safety, dealing with disclosure of abuse, arrangements for visiting and contact, reviews, working in partnership with family, working together, disciplinary and grievance procedures, appeals procedure, delegated parental and other responsibilities, changes in household composition, welfare principles, discrimination, medical consent etc are available on the website.

Other documents and guidance in relation to pro-formas, Agency philosophy, care standards and competences, Fostering Panels, legislation and guidance, terms and conditions and support arrangements will be provided to Foster Carers.

Before a specific placement, Foster Carers will receive a copy of the Placement Plan and information provided by the Authority relating to the Care Plan and history of the child and his/her family and placements as well as details of the placing authorities' child protection procedures.

The Assessment / Approval Process

Acorn House follows the requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations (2011 and amendments):

A qualified and experienced worker visits the applicants to explain the process and to gain information and history of the family and to examine the premises. The assessment process is split into two stages; the first stage is about fact checking (e.g. references, health status, suitability of accommodation, details of household members, criminal records, previous applications to foster/adopt, details of current/previous relationships etc and the second stage of the assessment is a more detailed assessment of a person's suitability to provide foster care for children that Acorn House provides placements for.

The overall assessment includes:

- Obtaining the views of the Local Authority in which the family reside.
- Obtaining 6 written personal references and visits to referees.
- Viewing Birth, Marriage and Nationalisation certificates.
- Obtaining permission to carry out DBS checks on all adults in the household.
- Obtaining Child Protection checks from current and past Local Authorities of residence.
- Obtaining a medical form from the G.P. on CoramBAAF form AH1.
- Interviewing all relevant parties including significant extended family members and ex-partners, in order to complete the assessment form.
- Observing and assessing the knowledge, experience etc of applicants during group meetings with other applicants and experienced Foster Carers.
- Submitting the applicant's assessment to one of the Agency's Fostering Panels for consideration. Foster carers are encouraged to attend panel meetings.

All documents will be kept on the Foster Carer's personal file held at Acorn House Head Office. This file, with the exception of information received under confidential arrangements, can be seen by Foster Carers on request and within 15 working days.

A register of approved Foster Carers will be kept at the company's registered offices and the Local Authority advised of Foster Carers in their area. Records will be kept for at least 10 years from the termination or rejection of approval.

The process, from application to Fostering Panel, can take up to eight months. It will be conducted in the spirit of openness, honesty and participation of the applicants but the final decision on approval lies with the Agency Decision Maker informed by the recommendation of the relevant Fostering Panel.

Approval Conditions

Following the Agency Decision Maker's agreement with the recommendation of the Fostering Panel, Acorn House will confirm the approval as a Foster Carer in writing detailing the specific terms of approval.

Review of Approval

Under Regulation 28, Foster Care Approval is subject to routine annual review. The first review after approval is considered by our Fostering Panel and Foster Carers are required to attend. Subsequent reviews are also notified to a Panel and Foster Carers are required to attend at five yearly intervals unless recommended otherwise.

However, should there be a complaint, allegation or other matters of concern or at the carer's request, a review should follow at a time consistent with the level of concern. At all reviews, all of the parties involved are informed and invited to contribute. As soon as possible after an investigation into a Foster Carer is concluded, their approval as suitable to foster is reviewed and will be referred to the Fostering Panel for consideration. There is a clear policy framework which outlines the circumstances in which a Foster Carer should be removed as one of Acorn House's approved foster carers, in the interests of the safety or welfare of children. This is available to Foster Carers on the website or a paper copy will be provided on request.

Representations Procedure

Should the applicant be dissatisfied with any aspect of the assessment process, subsequent review reports or panel recommendations (qualifying determination) to:

- a) Revise terms of approval;
- b) Not to approve;
- c) Terminate approval

the Foster Carer / Applicant, within 28 calendar days of the date on the letter, can submit any written representations to Acorn House. Alternatively the Foster Carer / Applicant may apply to the Secretary of State for a review by an independent review panel (IRM) of the qualifying determination. Acorn House will provide a leaflet about the IRM. The fostering regulations do not allow Foster Carers / Applicants to apply for an independent review as well as to make representations to the fostering service.

Any written representations will be considered by the Agency Decision Maker and referred back to our Fostering Panel for further consideration.

All Foster Carers / Applicants will receive a copy of the recommendation/s made by our Fostering Panel.

Termination of Approval

If on review, Acorn House Ltd is not satisfied with the suitability of the Foster Carer they can be presented to a Fostering Panel. The Agency will write under the fostering regulations to advise Foster Carers of the 'qualifying determination'. The reasons for the proposal to terminate approval will be outlined in the letter together with a copy of the recommendation/s made by the Fostering Panel.

Foster Carers can submit any written representations as outlined above.

Transferring to Another Agency

All Foster Carers have the right to freedom of movement between fostering services although they cannot be approved by more than one Agency at any one time.

The Fostering Network has produced a 'Transfer Protocol' which will inform Foster Carers as to how they must proceed. It recommends good practice guidelines to be followed when a Foster Carer wishes to transfer from one fostering service to another.

The protocol recognises the principles of child care legislation and seeks to ensure that safeguarding the welfare of children is at the core of fostering policy and practice. It recognises that the welfare of any child in placement is paramount.

When there is no child in placement, the Foster Carer should inform Acorn House in writing that they are considering a move to another fostering service. The recruiting fostering service may begin an assessment once this has been received by Acorn House. Once the assessment has been completed and the recruiting service informs the Foster Carer that they intend to approve them, the Foster Carer should give written notice of resignation to Acorn House. The fostering regulations state that an approval will be terminated 28 days from a written notice of resignation being received from a Foster Carer. The Foster Carer must be approved by the fostering service to which they are transferring with effect from the date that their previous approval ends.

Where there is a child / children in placement, Foster Carers must give written notice of their intention to consider moving to another agency both to Acorn House and to the placing authority / authorities (where different).

Upon receipt of the written notice, the placing authority must inform the child's Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) of the intended change in placement provision and shall, within 28 days, convene a meeting of the placing authority / authorities, the current service, the recruiting service and the Foster Carers.

The arrangements for approval by the recruiting service and termination of the Foster Carer's approval by the current service should be co-ordinated to ensure

continuity of approval, and that transfer is made on a mutually agreed date. Once the recruiting fostering service is ready to approve them, the Foster Carer's resignation can be submitted and their approval granted to coincide with the end of the 28-day notice period. It must be remembered that Fostering Panel only makes a recommendation and the decision about approval may be made several days later by the Agency Decision Maker. Parallel arrangements for timing a transfer of responsibility for the payment of fees and allowances to the Foster Carer will also be made.

In the interest of safeguarding the welfare of children in placement Acorn House will prepare a comprehensive, accurate reference on the existing Foster Carers and the recruiting service will undertake a comprehensive re-assessment.

9. Development, Training and Support Policy

Foster Carers

This process begins at the point of contact between Acorn House and the Foster Care applicant. While it cannot be assumed that each applicant will be approved, the relationship, at this early stage is one of potential colleagues, who need to develop a trusting, open and honest relationship to establish whether the applicants and Agency will be able to work together to meet the needs of children placed with us. The opportunities for learning, supervision and peer support should continue until the termination of Foster Carer's approval. Each Foster Carer has a personal development and training profile agreed with their supervising social worker.

The Assessment Process

Prospective Foster Carers are expected to attend preparation courses, which are designed to provide information about the Agency and expectations about the role of Foster Carer. The agency presently runs the Fostering Network, "Skills to Foster" course over several sessions. Experienced carers are invited to be part of this process and share their experience with new carers. Preparation courses also provide the opportunity to inform the assessment process and elicit early development needs.

Post Approval Training and Development

Induction

The Supervising Social Worker will appraise with Foster Carers their short, medium and long-term development needs in relation to the competences and knowledge needed to fulfill their responsibilities. This will result in a Personal Development Plan (PDP) for each carer and will be reviewed regularly in light of experience and performance. The details will also be included in the review of the Foster Carer.

During the initial induction period, this programme will ensure that the Foster Carer:

- Knows key personnel and resources in the organisation.
- Has access to and understands key policy and procedural guidance, such as health and safety requirements, child care policy and legislation, child protection procedures and support arrangements.
- Is able to understand and meet the needs of young people placed with the Foster Carers.
- Can apply anti-discriminatory policy to practice.
- Can work together with agencies and professionals and in partnership with the families of children placed with them.
- Has a copy of the Acorn House Foster Carer Handbook.

- The induction process will also inform ongoing development needs in key themes such as, caring for children, safeguarding (child protection), providing a safe environment, the foster care task, anti-oppressive practice, moving young people on and the issues relating to the Foster Carers' own family.

Support

Foster Carers will receive regular supervision visits from their Supervising Social Worker. These will be greater frequency if the carers are new to fostering or have taken a new placement and less frequent when placements are long-standing and stable.

Foster carers have access to 24 hour telephone support with qualified and experienced staff.

Foster carers have access to regular Foster Carer support meetings which will incorporate a training element as well as peer support.

Foster Carers have membership of Fostering Network once they are approved by Acorn House.

Foster Carers have limited insurance through the membership with Fostering Network. Details will be provided following approval.

Foster Carers have access to regular training, some of which is mandatory and some which is personal choice / interest / identified by the Supervising Social Worker for the development of the Foster Carer

Post Induction Training

The Government expects that Foster Carers can evidence TSD Standards within 12 months of approval. Foster Carers will be encouraged to undertake National Vocational Qualifications / Diploma in Child Care and will be supported by Acorn House in this process.

Development opportunities need to be tailored to the individual circumstances and learning preferences of individual Foster Carers and a range of methods is used. Support groups, workshops, supervision, conferences, adult education classes, individual study and formal courses are some of the many forms.

10. Complaints Procedure

Complaints are a form of consultation. At their most extreme, complaints raise safeguarding concerns that require immediate statutory investigation. At a lower level, they provide valuable feedback about how services to children and young people can be improved. All complaints are treated seriously and proportionately. They should be reported and recorded clearly and quickly and passed on to the Registered Manager for urgent consideration at the first opportunity.

Acorn House is committed to the following principles to respond to and investigate complaints:

- Issues raised about the quality of care provided will be regarded as complaints, even if the complainant does not explicitly state that they wish to make a complaint. This is to ensure our investigation is timely and robust;
- All complaints will be taken seriously and investigated thoroughly, regardless of the initial indication. We know from many Serious Case Reviews into significant harm, that an apparently trivial piece of information can ultimately lead to significant harm being uncovered;
- All children and young people making complaints will be offered access to advocacy to support them raising and progressing the complaint;
- All complaints will be investigated in a timely way, with appropriate feedback about the progress of the investigation provided to the complainant in a format of their choosing.

Acorn House will accept complaints from:

- Any child or young person who is, or has been, a foster child;
- The parent of a child or young person who is, or has been, a foster child;
- Any Acorn House Foster Carer – there is a Complaint Form in the Foster Carer area of the Acorn House website;
- Any placing authority, school or external agency involved with a looked after child or young person;
- Any independent worker commissioned by Acorn House.

When a complaint is received from a person not listed above, the Registered Manager will decide whether it should be accepted. An anonymous complaint may be accepted if the Registered Manager feels that it is appropriate to do so.

Each child or young person receives a handbook at the start of their placement, which includes advice about how to get help if they are worried about their welfare. The Agency ensures that the child receives the appropriate information and documentation provided by the placing authority with regard to complaints.

Young people also have access to the Kids Zone section on the Acorn House website. This area includes feedback forms, complaint forms and an interactive area, 'Tell Us What You Think'.

The full Complaints Policy and Procedure can be downloaded from our website – www.acornhouse.co.uk. This contains full details of who to contact and the timescales we work to.

We are regulated by Ofsted, they can be contacted at

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

08456 40 40 40