

## Introduction

Atrium Foster believes that foster parents and children have a fundamental right to have their views heard and listened to and for these to be considered in the ongoing development of the service. These views may be in the form of a concern or complaint about the service, constructive ideas for how to improve the service, or in the form of a compliment about how a service was delivered.

All concerns, complaints, compliments and comments provide vital information to inform future policy, planning and development of the service as well as identifying areas which are successful and valued. They help to highlight any gaps in provision and should lead to the development of better services.

Being subjected to complaints can feel hurtful, and at times stressful for all those involved. The seriousness of complaints may range from very minor concerns, which require informal discussion and/or action, to more serious complaints, which need a more formal procedure and action.

It is in no-one's interest to cover-up when concerns or complaints are raised as a satisfactory outcome can emphasise the agency's dedication to improving their future services. Where formal complaints are concerned, Atrium Foster Care is committed to a policy of openness and honesty as long as this does not breach confidentiality and our paramount responsibility, which is to protect children and promote their welfare.

The specific standards and regulations that inform this policy are:

### **Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011**

- Regulation 18 - Independent Fostering Agencies – Representations and Complaints

### **Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011**

- Standard 1 – The child's wishes and feelings and the views of those significant to them
- Standard 4 – Safeguarding children
- Standard 25 - Managing effectively and efficiently and monitoring the service

### **Outcome:**

Children know that their views, wishes and feelings are taken into account in all aspects of their care; are helped to understand why it may not be possible to act upon their wishes in all cases; and know how to obtain support and make a complaint. (*Fostering Services NMS. Standard 1*)

**Please note:** The terms "child" and "children" used within this policy refers to anyone aged 0-18 years.

## Policy aims

The aim of this policy is to offer a clear procedure on how Atrium Foster Care responds to any concerns, complaints, compliments and comments. When something goes particularly well,

or badly, we encourage feedback so that we can repeat successes and correct errors. The complaints, compliments and comments received are an essential part of the development process.

## Underpinning principles

Atrium Foster Care acknowledges that it can be difficult for foster parents, employees and children to raise a concern or make a complaint about the workplace or service they currently receive. Previous experiences may impact on how they see the service responding. It may be that their concerns have not previously been responded to appropriately or that the outcome of a complaint did not meet their own expectations.

Our intention is to acknowledge all views about the service provided and follow the procedure within this policy. Complaints, compliments and comments are an important part of developing Atrium Foster Care. Our aim is to provide a service that foster parents, employees and children are proud to be a part of.

## Definitions

**Concern** – Something that one or more people consider as worrying but not to the extent that they wish to make a complaint. This should initially be raised as a supervision issue or if it is a concern shared by team members then raised as an agenda item in a team meeting.

**Complaint** – A written and/or verbal expression of dissatisfaction with the service or aspects of the service provided by Atrium Foster Care, received by anyone who has contact with the service.

**Compliments and comments** - A written and/or verbal form of feedback to Atrium Foster Care from anyone who has had contact with the service.

Note: Complaints, compliments and comments might be in regard to an inappropriate service, a decision-making process, the standard or quality of the service, lack of service, an inadequate service, communication, staff behaviour or attitude.

## Procedural guidance

Any child, foster parent, employee, family member or any person who has or had any involvement with Atrium Foster Care is entitled to comment about the quality of any aspect of the service provided, whether positive or negative. A foster parent, relative or friend can also do so on a child's behalf.

The complainant will receive written acknowledgement of the complaint and details of the planned investigation. All complaints will be investigated in accordance with the stages set out below. No-one who makes a complaint in good faith will be subject to any form of negative consequence or reprisal.

1. As part of the fostering role parents are asked to advocate for the child in their care.

This can also mean that they share a child's complaint, compliment or comment with the necessary professionals and ensure that those involved follow the appropriate procedure. Children will also have the opportunity to tell us their views by writing, calling, emailing, texting or speaking to a member of staff. (Please see our guide to fostering for more information)

2. Atrium Foster Care has an online, electronic database that is password protected. Once received either in written form or electronically all complaints, compliments and comments will be recorded and stored securely within this system. Hard copies will only be produced for Ofsted purposes or as a requirement for part of the procedure outlined below at stages 1, 2 and 3.
3. Any looked after child may complain about an aspect of their care to their placing authority, whose own complaints procedure will be available to the child via the social worker. However, if the complaint relates to an aspect of the service provided by Atrium Foster Care, an agreement will be reached with the placing authority about which agency will investigate the complaint.
4. When a complaint is made directly to Atrium Foster Care by or on behalf of a child, the placing authority social worker will be informed immediately. Agreement will then be reached with the placing authority about which agency will investigate the complaint.
5. Complaints may be made by the child, foster parent, parent, social worker, friend, advocate, relative or Atrium Foster Care employee. The complaint may concern any aspect of the service provided by Atrium Foster Care.
6. Our children's guide contains written information on how to make complaints, including the availability of independent support and advice. Children will be assured that their complaints will be taken seriously and investigated thoroughly. They will receive written notification of the outcome. Children will be reassured that by making a complaint they will not be subjected to any form of negative consequence or reprisal.
7. Although we recognise that complaints can cause a level of anxiety for those involved, Atrium Foster Care appreciates that this can be a very useful form of feedback and the opportunity to reflect may help us to develop our service in a positive way. With this in mind, no person who makes a complaint will be subject to any form of discrimination or reprisal.
8. If we make a mistake we will openly acknowledge and reflect on how this could have been avoided. Atrium Foster Care aims to be open and honest with both foster parents and children, where appropriate, and may ask them to suggest how we can ensure the mistake is not repeated. We will also consider whether we could provide an explanation or information to the complainant, review a policy or procedure, review our literature or arrange additional training or guidance for employees to avoid repeating the mistake.

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All complaints will be investigated in accordance with the stages set out below.

## Stage 1 – Informal route

- We hope that most concerns or complaints can be settled by the complainant speaking to the person they normally communicate with, or by discussion with that person's immediate line manager. This is the informal route we would like people to try first.
- We will always encourage foster parents to initially talk with their supervising social

worker (SSW) or the registered manager about any concern or complaint they have and to try to resolve the matter with them. Unless matters are urgent, we expect informal routes of resolution to be explored first.

## Stage 2 – Formal investigation

- If a complainant is not satisfied with the informal response they receive, or if they wish to complain formally to Atrium Foster Care, they can do so at any time by putting their complaint in writing or calling the registered manager. In the event that the registered manager has been involved in the informal stage this complaint would then be given to another member of the senior management team at Atrium Foster Care. Should the complaint involve the responsible individual it should be directed to the registered manager.
- To contact either the registered manager, responsible individual or another member of the senior management team, use the contact details below, addressing it to the appropriate person and ensuring the communication is clearly identified as "strictly confidential":

### You can write to us at:

Jeanette Towning Director/Registered Manager

Farzana Asghar Director/Agency Decision Maker

Emma Ballo Responsible Individual/Strategic & Commercial Lead

Complaints and Compliments

Atrium Foster Care Ltd

Gill House

140 Holyhead Road

West Bromwich

Birmingham

B21 0AF

Or email us at: [hello@atriumfostercare.co.uk](mailto:hello@atriumfostercare.co.uk) Or speak to us by ringing: 07545 871 622

- Receipt of the complaint will be acknowledged within seven working days, including an indication of whether there are plans to try and resolve the complaint via internal investigation or, in the case of a potentially serious complaint, to move straight to the independent investigation stage.
- The recipient of the complaint will ensure that it is properly investigated. This stage of the process will normally be completed within 28 days of the commencement of the investigation unless, because of the complexity of the matter, it is agreed with the complainant that this timescale may be extended. On conclusion of the investigation the agency will ensure that a written report is produced. This report will include findings and recommendations for a resolution to the complaint. The report will be made available to the complainant.
- If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome they may request, within 28 days of

the date of dispatch of the report, that the matter be referred to stage 3.

## Stage 3 – Independent investigation

- Any request for an independent investigation should be made in writing to the responsible individual or a director not currently involved.
- The request will be acknowledged in writing within seven working days, including details of the proposed investigation.
- An independent person will be appointed to investigate the complaint. This person will hold a professional social work qualification and have relevant experience in foster care.
- The independent person will determine the most appropriate investigation process. This will include interviewing persons involved in the complaint, having access to all policies and procedures and, with relevant permission, access to the foster parent's and to the child's files and records. The independent person will prepare a report of their investigation, including conclusions and recommendations for the resolution of the complaint. This report should be completed within 42 days of the acknowledgement letter, unless it is agreed with the complainant that this period may be extended. The complaint report will be shared with the fostering panel where concerns about professional practice were identified as part of the investigation.
- Details of the investigation/proposed resolution will be made available to the next scheduled fostering panel for ratification. This marks the end of the complaints process. The responsible individual or director will consider the independent person's report and the panel comments. The responsible individual or director will write within ten days to the complainant setting out their proposals for resolving the complaint, and any other actions deemed necessary.
- If the complainant is not happy with the final outcome, or indeed at any stage of the process, they may contact the regulator, Ofsted outlining their concerns.
- All foster parents or any child receiving a service from the fostering agency may choose to contact Ofsted directly about any complaint/allegation concerning the standard of service being provided.
- Where foster parents have concerns about the service they receive from Atrium Foster Care, or the management of the agency, they may inform Ofsted. Atrium Foster Care will co-operate fully with any investigation conducted by Ofsted.

The contact details for the regulator are: Tel: 0300 123 1231  
Ofsted National Business Unit Royal Exchange Buildings Piccadilly Gate, Store Street,  
Manchester, M1 2WD

The Registered Manager is required by regulation to refer any serious complaints about foster parents to Ofsted. This will include the outcome of any formal investigation.

## **Monitoring**

All complaints, representations and allegations against foster parents are monitored by the registered manager and reported to the management group. All outcomes are evaluated annually to inform future service provision and development. All comments and compliments are collated, analysed and included in management reports. Information from these processes will be shared with agency staff and the fostering panel.

Atrium Foster Care has created separate policies that relate to whistleblowing and allegations and these can be referred to if the concern is that someone is in danger of significant harm, their safety is jeopardised or the rights and welfare of a child are at risk.

We encourage both children and our foster parents to seek advice from outside agencies if they are not satisfied with the response to any serious complaint.