

The Foster Care Co-operative

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE (WALES)

**CARE STANDARDS ACT 2000
FOSTERING SERVICES (WALES) REGULATIONS 2003**

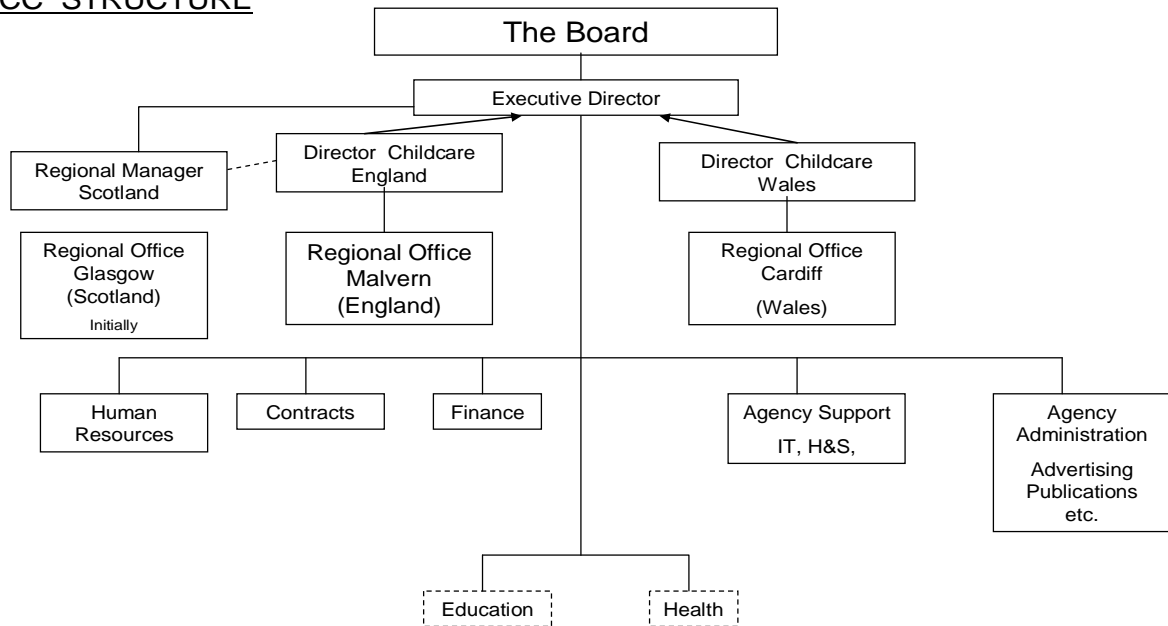
STATUS AND CONSTITUTION

1. The Foster Care Co-operative (FCC) is an independent fostering agency operating throughout England and Wales. Its co-operative status makes the Agency unique amongst fostering providers.
2. The Foster Care Co-operative is registered as a Co-operative under common ownership and this registration is listed with Co-operatives^{UK}, the National Clearing House and Representative Body for Co-operatives in the United Kingdom. In addition the Foster Care Co-operative is registered as a limited company in the UK.
3. It has been agreed that PAYE staff will be accepted as members of the Co-operative and Foster Carers as associate members. Limited consultation is achieved with carers through the support group mechanism (routinely attended by the Director or Deputy Director of Child Care, as well as the Executive Director on a less frequent basis), quarterly newsletters and an innovative and informative FCC website. In order that all views can be communicated to the Board of the Co-operative a formal written consultation process is initiated by the Executive Director well in advance of the Annual General Meeting. Issues raised are recorded and responded to with details being appended to the AGM minutes. It is not possible for Foster Carers to sit on the Board of the Co-operative because Foster Carers are expressly forbidden from controlling and/or managing the agency for which they foster in the United Kingdom.
4. The detailed rules governing the Foster Care Co-operative are contained within the Memorandum of Association and the Articles of Association, copies of which are available on request and will be placed on the FCC website in due course. In essence, the Co-operative is collectively owned and cannot be subject to a takeover or asset stripped by a minority interest, nor can the agency be sold. In the event of the business being wound up, or being subject to dissolution, any of the assets of the Co-operative remaining to be disposed of, after its liabilities are satisfied, shall not be distributed among the Members, but shall be transferred instead to some other common ownership enterprise(s), or to Co-operatives^{UK} or to some other non-profit organisation(s) promoting and supporting co-operative and common ownership enterprise, as may be decided by the Board at the time of or prior to the dissolution. In the event that for whatever reason any residual assets cannot be so transferred, they shall be given for charitable purposes.
5. The Foster Care Co-operative is registered as a Fostering Service under the Care Standards Act 2000. The registered body is the Care and Social Standards Inspectorate for Wales (CSSIW). The contact details are: CSSIW, Welsh Government, Rhydycar Business Park, Merthyr Tydfil, CF48 1UZ.
Tel: 0300 062 8800 Email: cssiw@wales.gsi.gov.uk Web: www.cssiw.org.uk

MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

6. The current structure of the Foster Care Cooperative is represented below.

FCC STRUCTURE



THE MALVERN HEADQUARTERS

7. The Headquarters of the Foster Care Co-operative is based in Malvern, Worcestershire and effectively has oversight for all the Company activities. The finance section is based in Malvern, and the management team meetings rotate between Malvern and Cardiff.

8. A Fostering panel has been established in Wales and became operational in November 2011. This panel considers new applications from potential carers as well as reviewing existing carers.

9. The Director of Child Care in Wales is the Registered Manager for the Fostering Service.

THE CARDIFF OFFICE

10. The Cardiff office moved, in late 2004, into the current premises. An additional modification and refurbishment of these premises was completed in Jul 2010.

11. The Cardiff office is the operational regional headquarters for Wales and provides support to existing Foster Carers, recruits potential carers and completes assessments and supervises all child care placements in Wales. The Director of Child Care for Wales is based at the Cardiff headquarters together with administrative staff and several social workers. The recent review of Agency operation has identified growth areas within specific geographical boundaries that can operate more autonomously from the Head office in order to expand within Wales, as well as increasing efficiency and maintaining Welsh regional identity and a sense of unity within FCC as a UK wide organisation.

BOARD MEMBERS

12. The Board currently comprises the following Directors:-

Laurie Gregory Chairman of the Board
Qualified Social Worker and Manager.
31 years in Local Government Social Services Departments with experience ranging from Social Worker to Deputy Director. Four years in international development work across a number of Central and Eastern European countries. Work with several independent fostering agencies before founding the Foster Care Co-operative in 1999. Previously fostered a child with disabilities for a total of 13 years. Also involved in a number of charities including Citizens Advice and Crossroads Care, and Housing Associations.

Ian Brazier Executive Director
Colonel (Retired) Fellow of Chartered Management Institute. Alumnus of the Manchester Business School. 34 years service as an Army Officer in the Infantry, serving in Northern Ireland, Germany Falklands, Arctic, Bosnia and Kosovo. Well versed in Public Private Partnerships, Public Finance Initiatives, project, change and Military of Defence (MoD) Budget Management. Former Member of the Northwood Development Project Joint Management Board. Wide ranging experience in both Military and Family welfare issues.

- Penny Gregory** Company Secretary
Qualified Social Worker and Registrar
Previously practiced Child Care as a social worker before retiring to foster and start/rear a family. Fostered a child with disabilities for a total of 13 years. Has now been the Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages for Ledbury (Herefordshire) for 23 years.
- Jerry Tudge** Company Director
Qualified Building Surveyor
Work experience in the private, NHS and Local Government sectors. Retired Principal Building Surveyor for Worcestershire County Council. Previously fostered for a total 14 years.
- Tony Poyner** Company Director
Specialist qualifications in the Paper Industry
Over 30+ years in the paper industry and is a successful Company Director of a private company. Involved in a range of community organisations and groups.

CONSULTATION

13. Co-operatives^{UK}, the main constitutional advisers, continue to provide advice and guidance on our unique co-operative development. The regional support groups provide a consultation forum and the introduction of a new and wide ranging web based information structure will be at the heart of increasing consultation and visibility for all members, throughout the UK. Dedicated support, information and consultation areas are provided for staff, carers and the foster children themselves. At present Support Groups within Wales operate in Cardiff and West Wales. National and regional events are also staged to support the carers and their families and provide open access to all the managers in an informal and extended manner. Minutes of meetings and forums will be published for all members of the co-operative and, in due course, access will be available on the FCC website.

THE SERVICES PROVIDED

14. The agency is designed to recruit, assess, train and support Foster Carers in a variety of locations throughout Wales.
15. FCC holds regular “Skills to Foster” courses. Attendance on this course is also offered to other Fostering Agencies.
16. The Foster Care Co-operative offers short-term placements and permanent family placements as follows:-

Short Term Placements

a. Short-term placements are offered with foster carers who are skilled and suited to this type of placement. These placements can vary in duration from a single night to a number of months. In all cases, monthly reports are provided for placing agencies along with other appropriate recording.

b. A proportion of short-term placements commence as emergency referrals from Local Authorities and, by the nature of this type of referral, no clear plans or 'end-date' are known at the point of placement. A Foster Care Co-operative Placement Agreement is completed prior to or at point of placement which confirms the Care Plan for every child placed.

Long Term Placements

c. Long term placements are offered with skilled carers. A permanent home into adulthood can be provided if this is an identified requirement of the Child Care Plan. Where appropriate, the opportunity is welcomed to offer permanent family placements to children who have had short-term placements with the agency. In all cases, monthly reports are provided for placing agencies on the progress of children in placement. A Foster Care Co-operative placement agreement is completed prior to or at point of placement which confirms the Care Plan for every child placed.

Short Term Placements under Regulation 37.

d. The Foster Care Co-operative also offers Local Authorities the opportunity to place children with carers on a shared care basis between them and their permanent families. This enables children to remain predominantly in the care of their birth family whilst simultaneously accessing any appropriate support services that will maximise and promote good outcomes and ultimately prevent entry to the Looked After system. This is a skilled task and this service is not yet available to all Authorities but is an area that is to be developed.

Parent and Child Placements (PACT)

e. This Agency offers trained and appropriately skilled carers who can offer placements of parents with their children. The parent does not necessarily have to be below the age of 18 and both male and female parents can be included if this is deemed appropriate to meet the needs of the child and family. Carers are selected who have the necessary skills to enhance their capacity to undertake this particularly complex type of work. All carers offering this type of placement are required to undergo specialist training prior to any PACT placement being made.

THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES, PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS OF CARE OF THE FOSTER CARE CO-OPERATIVE

17. It is the overall objective of the Foster Care Co-operative to provide an excellent child care service to Local Authorities. FCC is a Co-operative designed to continually develop a reputation for delivering a quality service with integrity.

18. The organisation has been established in a way that encourages the members to influence how the service conducts its business – this includes all Foster Carers, Social Workers and those staff involved in the administration and management of the Co-operative. FCC is characterised by a democratic style of management and Common Ownership and this is an integral part of the co operative ethos.

19. A consultative process has been established with a commitment that the Board of the Co-operative will consult with the Members, especially before major decisions are made. Through the regular support group meetings, a high level of consultation currently takes place. A formal annual written and electronic consultation process for all members and associate members is now in place.

20. The FCC does not discriminate on grounds of gender, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, health, age, disability, race or colour. However, persons with a criminal record may be excluded from appointment subject to the nature of the conviction against them and persons with a conviction for any sexual offence against children, no matter how old the conviction, are not considered. Smokers agree to abide by our no smoking policy at our offices, at all meetings, and when in the company of children in their own home. FCC does not have an upper age limit for foster carers. Additional interim medical examinations may be recommended at the Director's discretion.

21. The Foster Care Co-operative is committed to providing a service to Local Authorities which is considered to be excellent value for the fees charged, and to working with placing agencies and our carers within the remit of the Foster Care Co-operative Inter-Agency Placement Contract, our Service Agreements, The Children Act 1989, Care Standards Act 2000 and associated National Minimum Standards and Regulations.

22. Foster Care Co-operative in Wales is committed to improving the life chances of all children and young people placed with its carers using the "Working Together under the Children Act, 2004 " agenda.

23. An extensive level of support is offered to FCC Foster Carers in the knowledge that support has a bearing on successful outcomes. Particular value is placed on the Carer members of the Co-operative, and this is reflected in part by offering competitive fostering fees in the acknowledgement that caring for children in care demands a tremendous commitment and should be properly rewarded. Support of Carers is delivered by experienced and qualified supervising social workers who visit on a

fortnightly basis. This high level of support is a key factor in largely avoiding the need for intervention in crisis.

24. Placements are monitored and information is made available to the placing Local Authority. Relevant data is also collated, reported on and included in the Annual Quality of Care Report and informs Agency strategic decision making in relation to service delivery.

25. FCC Wales employs an Education Advisor who offers a service in respect of all matters of an educational nature.

26. The Agency also employs a Health Liaison Officer who monitors the health of Looked After Children and acts in an advisory capacity for staff and carers.

27. A Transitions Advisor is employed in an advisory capacity and works with young people and carers who are approaching independence - this role also incorporates the role of the FCC's "Kidz Rep" or "Children's Champion".

28. A Placements Co-ordinator is employed in Wales and this provides a single point of contact for all referrals and enables a prompt and accessible response for placement throughout Wales. This post has been increased to include responsibility for recruitment and retention of foster carers and is now a full time post.

NUMBERS, RELEVANT QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF STAFF

29. The agency currently employs two administrative and management staff in full and part-time positions based in Cardiff and 14 similar staff in Malvern, Worcestershire. A further 16 staff are employed as social workers on a full-time, part-time and sessional basis, eight in Wales and 11 in England. In Wales the service is managed by a full time Director of Child Care. A Deputy Manager has operational responsibility for supervising social workers. All those employed are expected to have considerable experience and evidence work of a high calibre in their particular field as well as possessing qualifications relevant to the post held. Social Workers are expected to demonstrate a good working knowledge of the processes involved in all aspects of the provision of foster care.

STAFF CURRENTLY WORKING AND BASED IN WALES

30. The staff currently working and based in Wales can be summarised, with their qualifications, as follows

Sian Hopkins – Director of Child Care Wales

BA (Hons) Social Policy & Admin
CQSW
Certificate of Management Studies

Sian qualified as a Social Worker in 1983 and was employed by Cardiff Council until 1989 as an Approved Social Worker under the Mental Health Act (1983). In 1989, she commenced employment within a Children's & Families team in Cardiff - initially as a Senior Social Worker, and latterly as Manager of a Family Centre responsible for the delivery of a range of Child Care Services. In 2000 she was employed as a Child Protection Co-ordinator by Cardiff County Council.

In 2006 she was appointed as Director for Child Care (Wales) for The Foster Care Co-operative.

Derek Clode – Regional Manager Wales

DipSW
Certificate in Education English/PE

After teaching in a secondary school (English/PE) in Hertfordshire in the late 70s, Derek became a Residential Social Worker in 1982. He retrained as a social worker and qualified in 1988. Child & Family/Child Protection Social Worker 1989-1995. Fostering & Adoption Social Worker in Cardiff 1995-2000. Senior Practitioner in Caerphilly 2000- 2002. Senior Practitioner and later Deputy Project Manager Taith Newydd Fostering Project, Action for Children (formerly NCH) 2002-August 2010.

Derek became Regional Manager (Wales) for FCC in August 2010.

Lorraine Bailey - Social Worker

Diploma in Business and Finance
Bachelor of Economic & Social Studies in Education and Sociology
Diploma in Social Work.

Qualified as a social worker for nine years having worked in various areas within the voluntary and statutory sector, including NSPCC, NCH (Wales) and various Local Authorities. Lorraine has also worked within child protection, Looked After Children system and Children In Need. She has also undertaken specialist assessment work with children and families within the voluntary sector.

Lorraine joined FCC in January 2007 as Supervising Social Worker.

Katrina Couper – Social Worker

BA Hons Sociology and Social Policy
Diploma in Social Work
Diploma in Industrial Studies

Before completing her Diploma in Social Work Katrina gained experience in the mental health sector with adults as well as working for many years with children with disabilities and special needs. She qualified as a social worker in 2001. Since then she has worked in both the voluntary and statutory sectors with Women's Aid in The Vale of Glamorgan and with Caerphilly Local Authority Children's division in the Assessment Team. Katrina joined FCC in August 2010 as Supervising Social Worker.

Kayley Delmonte – Social Worker

Certificate in Health & Social Care

Kayley worked for 10 years for the Legal Services Commission and joined the Foster Care Co-operative in August 2004 as an Administrator / Placement Co-ordinator in order to pursue a career in the Social Care field.

Kayley qualified as a Social Worker and joined FCC as a Supervising Social Worker in December 2009.

Shirley Harris – Social Worker

BA Soc Anthropology & Religion

From 1976-1990 Shirley worked as a Residential Social Worker (full time) in a variety of children's homes. From 1986-1989, she gained the Certificate in Social Service (day release). From 1990-1998 Shirley worked as a SW with Cheshire County Council supporting children in long term care. Specialities include direct work with children, plus Sec 51 counselling - adults who have been in care. 1991-1992 Shirley gained her Applied Social Work Certificate and 1998-2001 her BA Social Anthropology and Religion, plus Adoption and Child Protection Worker with Ceredigion County Council. 2002-2005, Link Social Worker with Ceredigion County Council

Shirley joined FCC as Supervising Social Worker in 2005.

Amy Hurst - Social Worker

BSc (Econ) (Hons) Economics and Social Studies
BA (Hons) Social Work

Began social work in 2003, working as an unqualified social worker within the Adoption and Permanence field. Amy was then seconded to undertake Social Work degree, moving into Child Protection (where she qualified) for one and a half years.

Amy joined FCC in September 2008 as Supervising Social Worker.

Margaret Stevens - Social Worker /Development Officer

CQSW

Prior to qualifying as a SW Mags worked as a Foster Carer for Calderdale Social Services for eight years. Between 1988-1990 she was employed by Calderdale Social Services as an unqualified Social Worker. Since qualifying, Mags worked as a SW with Bridgend County Borough Council Children & Families Team followed by two and a half years with Family Placement Team including adoption work.

Mags joined FCC as Supervising Social Worker in June 2003.

Penny Wigg – Social Worker

BA Social Studies

Diploma of Higher Education in Social Work

Penny originally worked as a civil servant. Between Jan 2000-Sept 2003 she worked as a Childcare Support Worker for Caerphilly Borough Council. From Sept 2003-Oct 2005 Penny was a Supervising Social Worker for Family Placement, Rhondda Cynon Taff.

Oct 2005- Jan 2007- Senior Social Worker at Barnardo's Cymru Adoption and Fostering Service

Penny joined FCC as Supervising Social Worker in January 2007.

Phil Young – Social Worker

DipSW

PG Diploma SW

BA English Literature

Experience in fostering and residential child care fields. Applied SW Qualification CSS. Prelim. Resid Care Cert.

Phil joined FCC in 2001 as Supervising Social Worker.

All Social Workers will be expected to be registered with the General Social Care Council in England and/or the Care Council for Wales.

Helen Shardlow – Education Advisor

Certificate in Education with Maths & Science

B Ed Maths

Qualified Specialist Behaviour teacher

Helen has 20 years' teaching experience including tutoring in Maths, ICT and PSE.

Jessica Jones - Recruitment and Placement Co-ordinator

HND Business Administration

A Levels and GCSEs

Jessica has extensive experience in administration both in the private education sector and children services within the Local Authority.

Susan Gwilliam – Administrator

A levels and O levels including Maths and English.

Rebecca Fuse – Administrator

BA (Hons) Creative Arts

A Levels and GCSEs including Maths and English.

Head Office staff supporting the Welsh office:

Pete Johnson – Leaving Care Advisor / Childrens' Champion

Pete is a qualified social worker and has worked in Children's Services for over 20 years, the majority of time with Young People leaving Care. He has contributed on a national basis to the development of packages for Preparation for Adulthood. Pete also has wide experience in working with Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

Sue Farr – Health Liaison Worker

Registered and District Nurse Certificates, Managing Health Services, BT Medical Law, AEB Certificates in Supervision and Counselling Skills.

Sarah Barton – Administrator and Marketing Co-ordinator

BA (Hons) with editorial experience.

Bob Blackburn – Administrator and IT Co-ordinator

BSc (Hons), PGCE and ECDL Certificate.

Yvonne Clayton – HR

O-levels and Certificate in Institute of Leadership and Management.

Penny Marriott – Senior Finance Officer

O-levels and extensive experience in Finance Departments.

Justin Willis – Training Co-ordinator

HND in Spatial Design and Diploma in Art & Design (experience in local government planning services), GCSEs including Maths and English.

Andrea Poyner – Panel Administrator

BA (Hons).

NUMBERS OF FOSTER CARERS (AS OF JANUARY 2012)

31. Foster Care Co-operative Wales currently has 67 sets of Welsh based foster carers who are registered by the FCC Fostering Panel and 11 sets of carers under assessment. A total of 6 sets of foster carers have no placements and between them are registered to take up to 16 placements whilst, at the point of writing this statement, 41 further sets of foster carers have one or more vacancies. ie placements that require matching with children already in placement. 18 of the 67 sets of carers identified above are registered as respite carers ,under Schedule 3.

32. The agency has recruited a wide range of foster carers including people who are single, married and partnered, and has begun to attract a growing number of foster carers representing the minority ethnic communities, different religions, and those who are gay or lesbian.

NUMBERS OF CHILDREN PLACED (AS OF JANUARY 2012)

33. A total of 61 children/young people are looked after by Welsh carers at the time of issuing this Statement.

34. Some placements have been offered to children and young people with disabilities, different ethnicities and religions, the agency would like to accelerate the capacity for meeting the needs of more children with special requirements.

COMPLAINTS

35. Complaints made against the Agency are investigated in accordance with a procedure that is published in the carer manual on the FCC website.

36. Initially, complaints are investigated within the Agency through arrangements outlined in the complaints policy. The internal process is structured into a maximum of three possible stages. Where the complainant remains dissatisfied by the results of the internal process, then an Independent Person can be appointed to undertake an investigation, and this is known as Stage 4 (the last stage) of the process.

37. The numbers of complaints are held centrally within the Agency, and the process of investigating each complaint is recorded. The Directors of the Agency and, from time to time, the Board of the Agency, are obliged to examine the complaints that

have been made, and seek to make any changes that the complaints suggest are warranted.

38. A serious complaint about any approved foster carer, and any child protection enquiry involving a child placed with foster carers, will be reported to the Care Standards Inspectorate for Wales, as required under Schedule 8 of the Fostering Services Regulations.

39. The Foster Care Co-operative has a whistleblowing policy

40. **Number of complaints and their outcomes (Wales, Jan 2011 – Jan 2012)**

	Number	Outcome
By Foster Carer	0	
Against Foster Carer	1	Investigated, no further action
Child Protection investigation	0	
Allegation of Professional Abuse	1	Investigated, not substantiated

THE PROCEDURES AND PROCESSES FOR RECRUITING, APPROVING, TRAINING, SUPPORTING AND REVIEWING CARERS

RECRUITMENT

41. The Welsh Regional Office has had considerable success in respect of recruiting new carers. Campaigns have been targeted on areas where referrals have been greatest. Key geographical areas for development remain Cardiff, Gwent, Swansea & West Wales and recruitment campaigns have been planned in order to address the need for larger numbers of carers within this area.

42. The agency welcomes applications from persons with life experience who are completely new to fostering.

43. Advertisements are targeted geographically on local radio introducing an open event in such places as shopping centres, in a variety of newspapers, magazines etc. National advertisements have been placed specifically targeted at minority ethnic people and gay and lesbian people. In addition, the FCC has a website that does attract a significant number of enquiries. 'Word of mouth' has also been effective in leading applicants to apply to The Co-operative, usually when friends, relatives etc

display success and reward in their work as Foster Carers. Financial remuneration is paid to existing carers who actively recruit on behalf of the Agency.

44. The agency does seek to recruit persons who have a proven commitment to children and who will through the quality of their child care skills promote FCC as an agency that offers placements with carers of the highest calibre.

45. Having expressed an interest in joining the Co-operative, the applicant will have an initial visit from a social worker, explaining the implications of being a foster carer for all members of the family, what types of children are referred to the Agency and the assessment process. This process is under constant review and new recruiting literature is being supported with a DVD showing carer views and experiences with FCC. This is complementary to the complete restructuring of the FCC Website.

APPROVAL PROCESS

46. Each applicant must also undertake induction training and a full assessment prior to registration as an approved Foster Carer.

47. The assessment process usually takes up to six months and involves home visits to applicants: visits to personal referees; Criminal Records Bureau checks; medicals; and rigorous interviewing by the social worker so that the applicants and Agency are satisfied that there is proper understanding of the task that is to be undertaken. The assessment uses the competency based format and approach outlined within the BAAF Form F.

FOSTERING PANEL

48. The Fostering Panel maintains a crucial role in the provision and monitoring of foster care delivered by The Foster Care Co-operative. Since January 2003, the Agency has had its own Fostering Panel and its role and function is set out in the Fostering Services (Wales) Regulations 2003. The Fostering Services Regulations National Minimum Standards highlight the standards expected of Panels so that the following outcome is met:-

'Fostering Panels are organised efficiently and effectively so as to ensure that good quality decisions are made about the approval of foster carers, in line with the overriding objective to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in foster care'.

Therefore, one critical task concerns the making of decisions about the approval and terms of approval, and assessing the continuing ability of foster families to meet the complex needs of children.

49. The second critical task concerns the quality assurance function:-

Standard 30.5

Fostering Panels provide a quality assurance function in relation to the assessment process - in particular to monitor and review the work of the assessors; to provide feedback; to identify problems; and to ensure that there is a consistency of approach in assessment across the service, that it is fair to all applicants and that it has been completed in a thorough and vigorous way.

50. The Foster Care Co-operative, as an independent fostering agency, ensures a fair and transparent process that enables a balance of skills and abilities of its foster carers whilst ensuring that the child's welfare in placement is paramount.

51. There is an expectation that applicants will attend part of the discussion when their Form F is to be presented. It is therefore important that all Panel members discharge their role in a way that will put applicants at ease and allow for positive and constructive dialogue to take place. In this way, strengths and weaknesses can be identified and, whatever the final recommendation, the applicants feel they have had a 'fair hearing'. No Panel member should use language or an action that is in any way oppressive.

52. The Panel is made up of Foster Care Co-operative staff and independent members with a range of experience in the social care fields. The panel meets on a monthly basis and every Panel member is required to sign a confidentiality statement. Details of identity and experience of panel members is available separately.

53. The independence of the Panel is intended to ensure that the commercial necessities of running the agency do not compromise the standards set and efforts to improve the service.

THE PROCEDURE FOR REVIEWING CARERS

54. Foster Carers are subject to an annual review involving the written views of Supervising Social Workers and the Social Worker for the child/ young person on placement as well as the Looked After Child. The first annual review following Approval will be presented to Fostering Panel and thereafter every three years, with intervening reviews conducted by the relevant Director of Child Care and an overview report presented to Panel. Where there are exceptional issues, carers are presented to Panel outside these timescales. Suitability of placements is included in the statutory children reviews which by implication represent a review of the performance of the Foster Carer involved.

TRAINING

55. The Foster Care Co-operative makes a major investment in training. New applicants must undertake induction training which is geared to the Fostering Network "Skills to Foster" model. Advanced training is provided in Wales in Attachment and Loss and is provided by the GECKO Training Consultancy. In addition, carers are

expected to undertake training in core elements of Safeguarding, Safe Intervention and De-escalation; Equality, Diversity and Equal Opportunities; Recording; Paediatric First Aid and Food Hygiene.

56. BAAF has also provided training to the FCC Fostering Panel members and will continue this practice on a periodic basis. Panel members attend training on an annual basis.

57. A range of additional training can be provided to carers and funded on an 'as and when required' basis.

58. The agency is committed to setting and adhering to recognised established standards of good practice. Consequently, all Foster Carers are supported with their subscriptions to the Fostering Network.

59. Foster Carers are encouraged to ensure that they are abreast of and operate to the Code of Practice for Foster Carers and the National Minimum Standards.

SUPPORT SERVICES PROVIDED

60. Particular emphasis is placed on providing good quality and regular support to Foster Carers. Each set of Foster Carers has a Supervising Social Worker and it is expected that monthly visits will be made to the home of each Foster Carer with additional visits provided where a need is indicated.

61. The agency also maintains a number of support groups for Foster Carers and these are usually geared to a six-weekly frequency. The support groups are generally very popular with Foster Carers.

62. Each set of Foster Carers has a full list of staff contact names and telephone numbers in order that contact can be made outside office hours. This approach appears to work well without the need for a more formal roster but this is something that is kept under constant review.

63. Foster Carers are encouraged to attend all child care reviews and conferences and would be supported in their attendance by their supervising social worker.

64. The agency can make provision for paid respite care of up to two weeks per annum subject to this being agreeable to all concerned. Whilst respite care does provide Foster Carers with a break from the direct caring task, it must be recognised that this is not always appropriate for the child/children and some Foster Carers do not wish for this provision to be made available to them or the children placed with them. Respite presupposes the availability of a suitable respite placement which can minimise the disruption for the child/children concerned. Additionally, all Respite Carers are subject to an assessment (a lighter touch than a full Form F) under

Schedule 3 of the Fostering Regulations, and approval by the relevant Fostering Panel must have been obtained. All arrangements must be subject to the prior approval of the Agency and the Placing Local Authority.

65. Where appropriate, the Agency can make available additional personalised and confidential support to Foster Carers through access to a qualified psychologist, a counsellor or equivalent. This provision is not always required but the facility can be harnessed where Foster Carers, usually together with their Supervising Social Worker, agree the need for this intervention. This would be formalised as part of the child's Care Plan with the Local Authority

66. The Foster Care Co-operative currently produces a series of age appropriate guides for every child placed, which is available on line via the FCC web site. These guides explain the service offered by the agency and what to do should a Child or Young Person have a complaint or concern about their care. Telephone numbers of the National Help-Line and the telephone number of the local CSSIW office are included. The website also links to a wide variety of children's support agencies, charities and regulating authorities

67. Every Foster Carer, once approved, is given password access to the web based Carer Manual which includes policies, guidance, forms and procedures of the Agency. The current Statement of Purpose of the FCC is also available on our website and is reviewed quarterly.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

68. A range of financial support is provided to foster carers providing placements, and this can be summarised as follows:-

(a) Foster care payments are made in advance and, usually, by BACS payment. This advance payment is currently under review.

(b) Respite Care, as mentioned above, is provided, by agreement, for up to two weeks per year per carer. This means that, where appropriate, and where suitable, respite carers can be identified and booked, paid respite will be made available. The mileage associated with the respite care provision is also met by the Agency.

(c) Mileage is paid on officially approved journeys beyond the first 20 miles, and reclaimed from the relevant Local Authority at 40p per mile. These journeys are normally focused on the needs of the child, and could include contact arrangements, visits to specialist medical advisers, the courts, etc.

(d) Those journeys that are of mutual benefit (to both foster carers and the Agency) are charged in total, but at a lower rate. Examples of this type include attendance at support group meetings, training events, etc.

(e) The full costs of support group meetings and training events are normally covered by the Agency.