

# The Foster Care Co-operative



## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2020/2021 (ENGLAND)

*The National Minimum Standards require every fostering agency to have a Statement of Purpose. This is a statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and of the facilities and services provided.*

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## **STATEMENT OF AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

- The Foster Care Co-operative is a not-for-distributed profit independent fostering agency based in England and Wales. Since its inauguration in 1999, the agency has committed itself to providing quality foster care to Children Looked After who are placed with FCC foster carers.
- We are currently the only co-operative organisation in foster care in England and Wales. Being a co-operative allows us to work in a way that includes staff and carers in the planning and performance of the agency and all profits are put back into the agency for the promotion of first-rate care for children and young people.
- The Foster Care Co-operative maintains the standard of care provided by its foster carers through high quality support from supervising social workers; clear lines of responsibility and accountability; positive management; and regular and robust monitoring.
- The Foster Care Co-operative (FCC) will provide a service to every child or young person placed with its carers where they will feel safe and protected; where their positive self view is promoted; and their wishes and feelings are taken into account in all aspects of their care.
- FCC is a co-operative designed to continually develop a reputation for delivering a quality service with integrity. Its co-operative status makes the agency unique amongst fostering providers and we are proud of the ethos that stems from this.
- FCC is committed to improving the life chances of all children and young people placed with its foster carers using the individual care plan as a benchmark but always striving to achieve more.
- FCC has been established in a way that encourages the foster carers and staff members to influence how the service conducts its business. This is an integral part of the co-operative ethos.
- FCC is committed to consulting with children and young people about how they are cared for and what they expect from FCC whilst they remain with us.
- FCC does not discriminate on grounds of gender, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, health, disability, race, colour or age.
- FCC has, as one of its objectives, to grow the number of foster carers available for children in Local Authority care requiring placement, through the recruitment of individuals and couples new to the fostering task. Qualified and skilled staff recruit, assess, train and support foster carers, building strong professional relationships that promote stability in placements.

- FCC 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 to exceed the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering, the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, the Children Act 1989 and associated legislation and guidance.

## **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY**

Diversity and inclusion really matters. We are wholly committed to understanding and recognising diversity and inclusion through all we achieve. Educating ourselves and others about diversity and inclusion, being brave enough to challenge each other, making positive changes within FCC, and inspiring other Fostering agencies to do the same.

Our agency aspires to change the lives of children across the country and at its very core, our purpose to represent everyone. We believe in equality of opportunity and chances for all our children, carers and staff. This is why as a Co-operative we embrace as many voices, views and abilities as possible, as well as giving opportunities to people from all backgrounds.

Our ultimate aim is to be able to say 'we have built an understanding of diversity and inclusion and are able to hear and celebrate diverse voices in everything we do'.

## **THE SERVICES PROVIDED**

The Foster Care Co-operative receives referrals of children and young people requiring a foster placement from Local Authorities throughout England. Referrals are dealt with by our Placement Co-ordinator who identifies potential matches and then liaises with our staff and carers and the Local Authority to progress the referral. This agency has a robust Matching procedure which ensures that every child referred is matched to the carer who can best meet their needs.

Every fostering household has provided a family profile, which includes photos and information about themselves and a message to the child or young person requiring a placement.

The Foster Care Co-operative offers a range of placement types, as follows:

### **Short term**

The Foster Care Co-operative provides short-term placements. For example, children and young people may require a short-term placement to aid a return

home or to assist them in moving to an adoptive or a permanent placement. A child may be placed in an emergency, pending decisions being made about their future. Foster carers will be working with the placing Authority on objectives within the child's Care Plan and ensuring that the child or young person reaches their individual potential, however long the placement lasts.

### **Long Term**

The Foster Care Co-operative offers permanent family placements for children and young people for whom the decision that they require a permanent placement has been made. The aim is to provide a home into adulthood.

We are an agency that will promote Special Guardianship and adoption for children placed with our foster carers, where this is in the child's best interests and with agreement of all parties.

Where appropriate, this agency supports, in principle, carers who wish to continue to offer a place for a young person after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. We believe that offering a young person a Staying Put arrangement, where FCC remains involved and supporting the former foster carer, is the most positive way of providing this.

### **Staying Put**

Staying Put is a governmental initiative to support young people, on reaching the age of 18, to stay with their former foster carers. Whilst not a fostering placement, FCC has a scheme which allows for the former carer to be supported whilst the Staying Put arrangement is in place. This scheme benefits both the young person and the carer.

### **Sibling Groups**

The agency does assess and approve foster carers who have the emotional strength and physical space to care for a sibling group. We recognise the additional support that looking after a sibling group requires so that each individual child achieves their maximum potential.

### **Parent and Child Placements**

This Agency provides a Parent and Child placement service. Foster carers are required to have training in this type of provision as well as evidencing their ability to take on this complex task. We have carers who can work with the placing Authority on a parenting assessment and provide evidence for the court report.

### **Short Term Placements Under Regulation 42**

Under Regulation 42 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, this agency has offered to Local Authorities, foster carers who can work alongside a parent or family member caring for a non disabled child and who will offer short breaks to

enable the child to continue to live at home. Relevant training and support will be offered to carers interested in this area of work.

## **SPECIALIST STAFF PROVISION**

Education Advisor This role is held by a qualified teacher who has had many years experience working in the public sector. They are notified when children and young people join the agency and monitors their educational progress throughout the period of FCC care. The advisor liaises with carers, placing authorities and individual social workers, promoting educational achievement and assisting where difficulties are present. There is no additional cost for this service. FCC employs two Education Advisors, who cover the North and South regions respectively.

Placement Co-ordinator. We employ a Placement Co-ordinator who has many years experience working in Local Authority Children's Services Departments. Our Matching Procedure is very robust as we see this is essential for placement stability. The Placement Co-ordinator is the point of contact for all referrals and placing issues. FCC offers a responsive and prompt service to all authorities requiring placements.

Marketing and Recruitment Officer. This post has been created to manage all enquiries from individuals interested in fostering for FCC. Assistance is given to FCC social workers running recruitment events and managing the application process. The role includes managing the agency website and the marketing of the agency through media and online resources.

Within the social work staff group, we have individuals with a range of expertise and skills, including mental health and the promotion of healthy lifestyles; All our social work staff are qualified and experienced.

Supervising Social Workers and Education Advisors work closely with carers, young people and partner agencies to support transitions into adulthood as part of their care planning.

The children and young people have access to the FCC 'Kidzrep' through a dedicated webpage and helpline facility. This role is held through our Marketing Officer. On placement, every child and young person receives a Children's Guide which gives information about aspects of fostering, how to complain and provides key phone numbers. The Kidzrep supports children and young people in the following ways;

- providing cover for the Kidzrep phone (for both England and Wales) i.e. management of any calls / web messages received;
- Undertaking a support role in respect of all children and young people placed in Wales (which would involve arranging events, often with a linked consultation element).

- Assisting in the review and management of the content of the children's section of the FCCs website.

**Activities and Events:** Examples of activities and events that we have regularly run in the past are poetry or story writing competitions for children, art workshops for children (and subsequent art exhibitions), summer events for carers and children (such as going to see an outdoor children's play and then a barbeque), seasonal meals for carers, winter events for carers and children such as ice skating, etc.

## **ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE**

### **Status and Constitution**

The Foster Care Co-operative is registered as a Co-operative under common ownership and this registration is listed with Co-operatives<sup>UK</sup>, 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.

It has been agreed that PAYE staff will be accepted as full members of the Co-operative and foster carers as associate members. It is not possible for foster carers to sit on the Board as Fostering Regulations do not allow this.

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 FCC being wound up, or being subject to dissolution, any of the assets of the company remaining to be disposed of, after its liabilities are satisfied, cannot be distributed among the Members, but will be transferred instead to some other common ownership enterprise(s), or to Co-operatives<sup>UK</sup> or to some other non-profit organisation(s) which promote and support co-operative and common ownership enterprise. This will 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.

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 held at Head Office.

The Foster Care Co-operative is currently registered as a Fostering Service under the Care Standards Act 2000. The Registration Body is OFSTED and the contact details are: Ofsted, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD. Telephone number 0300 123 1231 and email address [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

## **Senior Management Structure**

The Head office of the Foster Care Co-operative is based in Malvern, Worcestershire and effectively has oversight for all the company activities; our Business Support, Finance and Human Resources staff are based in Malvern and our Senior Leadership Team meetings and quarterly quality assurance meetings are also held at this office.

The Chief Executive Officer of FCC is the Responsible Individual and this post is based in Malvern. The current post holder is **Sam Ram**. Sam is an experienced senior leader with a track record of strategic and operational leadership at CEO and Director levels. With over 25 years' leadership experience, Sam has established a reputation in the sector for delivering outstanding sustained results through her systems leadership approach to co-production work, collaborations/partnerships, and is known for her transformational leadership style. Sam's career has been driven by her commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people. Sam holds an MA in Leadership & Innovation.

Our Senior Leadership Team comprises of: -

- Steve Field – Director of Child Care
- Barbara Bull – DCEO and Head of Human Resources
- Samantha Williams - Head of Business Support Services and IT

The Director of Child Care for England is the Registered Manager and ADM for the agency. The post holder is **Steve Field** (BSc (Hons) Social Work). He has 14 years' experience within a variety of different Local Authority settings including Looked After Children, Care Leavers and Safeguarding. Holds the PQ award in Social Work.

Supervising social work staff and foster carers are managed by two Operational Managers who cover the Northern and Southern regions of England respectively

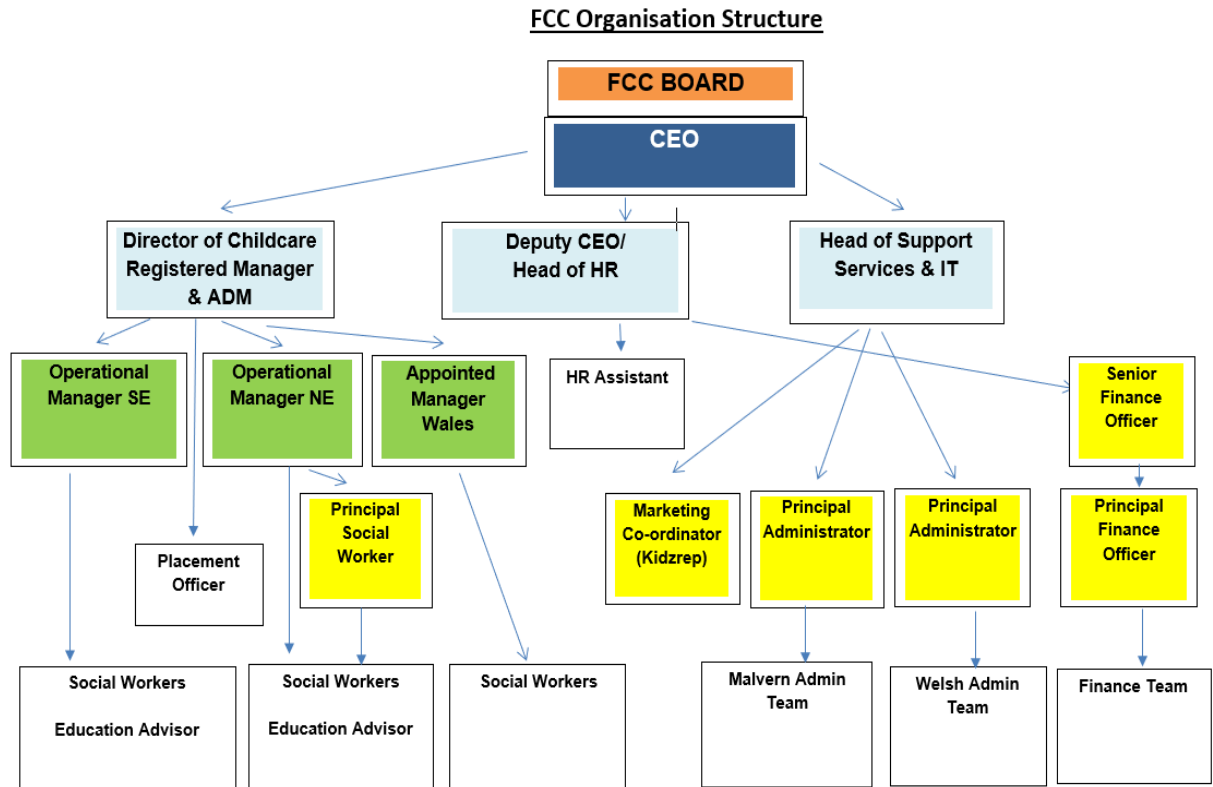
## **Current Operational management team**

The Regional Operational Manager (South) is **Helen Underwood** (CQSW, BSc (Hons) in Social Work. Experience in working with Disabled Children, Children and Families and Fostering. Holds the PQ Award in Social Work

The Regional Operational Manager (North) is **Julie Hough** (DipSW). Experience in working with children and fostering. Holds the PQ award in Social Work.

The agency currently employs 19 Support and Finance staff in full and part-time positions. A further 17 staff are employed as social workers on a full-time or part-time basis. The social workers are based in the regions where carers are located. All social work staff are qualified and registered with Social Work England and have considerable experience in social work.





**Board Members**

The Board currently comprises the following Directors:

**Laurie Gregory**

**Honorary President of the Board and Founder**

A qualified Social Worker and Manager with 31 years in Local Government Social Services Departments, Laurie has experience ranging from Social Worker to Deputy Director. He also spent four years in international development work across a number of Central and Eastern European countries.

Along with his wife, Laurie has been an approved Foster Carer himself (having previously fostered a child with disabilities for a total of 13 years) and has worked with several independent fostering agencies before founding the Foster Care Co-operative in 1999. Laurie is also involved in a number of charities including Citizens Advice, Crossroads Care and with Housing Associations.

After founding the FCC, Laurie was the Agency’s Executive Director for the first ten years it was operating

**Les Kinmond**

**Chairman of the Board**

A retired local businessman, previously Chief Executive of the Prym Newey

Group plc, the Independent Chair of Audit for West Mercia Probation Trust and the former Chief Executive of Worcestershire Citizen's Advice, Les is a highly experienced Chief Executive, Chair and Board Member.

In addition to the management of large organisations his particular areas of expertise are strategy and policy, financial management and partnership, working across sectors with funders and key stakeholders.

Les also has 7 years of experience of working in the charity sector and undertakes a number of voluntary activities within his local community.

### **Jerry Tudge**

#### **Company Director**

Jerry is a qualified Building Surveyor and ex-foster carer (with 14 years of experience of fostering) with work experience in the private, NHS and Local Government sectors.

Jerry also sits on both the Welsh and English Fostering Panels and is Vice Chair for both panels.

Although now retired, Jerry was previously the Principal Building Surveyor for Worcestershire County Council.

### **Brian O'Connell**

#### **Company Director**

Brian is a consulting solicitor for a large solicitor's firm based in Worcestershire. He has also sat as a Deputy District Judge for over 20 years.

He was also a founder member of the Worcester Duty Solicitor Scheme.

### **Elizabeth (Betty) Hutton**

#### **Company Director**

Betty has over twenty-two years of experience of working in the Third Sector as a Personal Assistant to a Chief Executive. In this role she worked closely with members of the Board of Trustees and Management Team on highly confidential matters, and covered all aspects of charity governance and adoption.

Since retiring, she has continued to volunteer with Faith in Families and for six years, also volunteered for SOVA (Supporting Others Through Voluntary Action) Currently she is assisting as volunteer with local Food Bank, is a volunteer patient with local hospital and is a long-standing participant in UK Biobank.

Betty also has past fostering experience as a single foster carer, having fostered thirteen teenagers (and has assisted local authorities with Information Days for prospective foster carers).

### **Consultation for foster carers**

The regional carer support groups provide a consultation forum for foster carers. The introduction of a new and wide-ranging web-based information structure is at the heart of increasing consultation and visibility for all full and associate members throughout the UK. At present Support Groups operate in Bristol, Yorkshire, East Anglia, Staffordshire, Merseyside and the West Midlands region.

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 are available to all members of the Co-operative. This includes a Carer Forum that meets with the Director of Child Care at stages through the year to help impact the strategic plans of the agency and provide feedback regarding the agency.

### **Consultation for children and young people**

FCC provides a range of opportunities for children and young people to comment about the quality of care they receive from individuals and from the agency as a whole.

These come in the form of questionnaires and feedback forms; social events; and consultation activities/website.

We are committed to listening to what fostered children and young people say. We are also committed to listening to what birth children and young people who foster say. We will act on suggestions and comments and respond quickly and promptly to complaints and concerns.

## **THE PROCEDURES AND PROCESSES FOR RECRUITING CARERS**

FCC does not discriminate against any individual wishing to be considered as a foster carer because of gender, ethnic origin, religion, culture, language, disability or sexuality.

FCC focuses upon welcoming applications from persons with life experience who are completely new to fostering.

Recruitment takes place in all English regions where we currently have foster carers. A variety of methods are used to recruit potential carers and this eclectic approach has proved to be successful. It is important to us to emphasise the 'not for profit' status of the Co-operative and our ethical approach to the delivery of a fostering service.

FCC seeks to recruit persons who have a 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.

FCC holds regular Fostering Network 'Skills to Foster' courses which are residential and held over a weekend. The course is mandatory for all applicants. It is enhanced by being co-led by experienced social workers and foster carers.

All applicants must complete a full assessment which is undertaken within an eight-month period and involves a home study with rigorous interviewing by the social worker. This is to ensure that the applicants are clear about the fostering task and the assessing social worker has obtained evidence that they have the competencies to foster. Social workers undertake visits to personal referees, and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and medicals are undertaken. The assessment uses the competency based approach and the BAAF Form F.

All applications are presented to the FCC Fostering Panel whose members are drawn from a Central List and who include a health professional, Educationalist, independent foster carers and a Care Leaver.

The Fostering Panel holds a crucial role in the provision and monitoring of foster care delivered by The Foster Care Co-operative. This agency has its own Fostering Panel and its role and function are set out in the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, Regulation 25:-

- a. Consider applications for approval and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to act as a foster carer, and if so, the terms on which they should be approved;
- b. Consider the first review of newly approved foster carers, and any subsequent reviews referred to it by the fostering service, and recommend whether or not the foster carers remain suitable to act as such, and if the terms of their approval remain appropriate;
- c. Oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering service;
- d. Advise on, and monitor the effectiveness of the procedures for:
  - i. Undertaking reviews of foster carers.
  - ii. Give advice and make recommendations on any other matters or cases referred to the panel by the fostering service.

The Foster Care Co-operative, as an independent fostering agency, has fair and transparent processes that enable it to balance the skills and abilities of its foster carers whilst ensuring that the child's welfare in placement is paramount. This core value is supported through the Fostering Panel being constituted in a way that equips it to make competent recommendations to the agency, taking into

account the nature of the children requiring placement and the carers undertaking the fostering task.

Once a foster carer has been approved, s/he is reviewed on an annual basis to allow The Foster Care Co-operative to properly satisfy itself about their ongoing suitability to foster.

## **THE FCC SERVICE TO FOSTER CARERS**

The Foster Care Co-operative has signed up to the Foster Carer's Charter and a copy of this can be found on the FCC website.

FCC makes a major investment in training staff and foster carers and delivers training events both centrally and locally throughout England. We seek to secure deliverers of training who are experts in their fields.

Our foster carers are required to attend mandatory courses in Safeguarding, Safer Caring, Disrupted Attachment, Diversity, CSE, Management of Challenging Behaviour, Allegations, e-safety and Paediatric First Aid. We also provide training for experienced carers who require an advanced level in fostering practice.

In addition to our face to face training, FCC offers an online training programme which covers all of the mandatory training modules, as well as specific subjects relating to the fostering task. This online provision is available to all staff and carers.

We are working with a therapeutic social worker who offers specialist advice and training to our carers.

The Foster Care Co-operative is committed to the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care and a full programme of training has been established to ensure carers complete the Workbooks within the set timescale. Work starts on this during the assessment and pre-approval phase.

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.

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.

Particular emphasis is placed on providing good quality and regular support to foster carers. When an individual applies to become a foster carer, they are allocated to a qualified FCC social worker who undertakes the assessment and presents the applicant to the Fostering Panel. This same social worker (wherever possible) continues to supervise the foster carer throughout their fostering career. We feel that the relationship built up between the carer and social worker during

the assessment phase promotes a positive working relationship when children and young people are placed. **This promotes placement stability.**

The agency also maintains a number of support groups for foster carers on a four to six weekly frequency. These are formal meetings with an agenda and are minuted. Very often the groups are used as training opportunities and carers will benefit from access to local training providers who are specialists in their fields.

Each set of foster carers has access to our Out of Hours support service which means a social worker is on hand to support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Foster Carers expect to be invited, and to attend, all Child Looked After reviews and conferences. They are supported by their supervising social worker or a member of FCC staff.

The agency makes provision for paid respite care of up to 14 nights per annum subject to this being agreeable to all concerned. All respite (or Back Up) carers are assessed and all arrangements must be subject to the prior approval of the Agency and the Placing Local Authority.

Every Foster carer, once approved, is given password access to the web-based Carer Information Section which includes the policies, guidance, forms and procedures of the Agency. The current Statement of Purpose of the Foster Care Co-operative is available on our website and is reviewed on an annual basis.

## **THE FCC SERVICE TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

FCC is committed to placing children and young people in fostering placements that will ensure their needs are met and they are safe.

We view placement stability as a key element of the fostering service we provide. We strive to ensure placement stability through the support and training we provide to our foster carers.

Every child or young person placed with FCC foster carers has been a part of a robust matching process where we would hope that the child has had some input into the decision to join an FCC foster family.

Every child or young person will, on placement, be given tools to capture the events and experiences whilst living with an FCC foster carer.

The Foster Care Co-operative produces two age-appropriate Information Guides for children and young people placed with FCC. These guides explain the service offered by the Agency and what to do should a child or young person have a complaint or a concern about their care. The telephone number of Ofsted, Childline and Become (formerly The Who Cares Trust) are included. The guide

also includes a section for inserting the names of the Independent Reviewing Officer responsible for the child and the child's Social Worker. These guides are web-based and every child also has a hard copy. The guides are available to children and young people through suitable alternative methods should this be required.

Upon placement, every child and young person is given a Welcome Box from the agency in which they will find a photo album, a Children's Guide and a Memory Stick, as well as some personal items. This encourages the child and carer to start keeping photos, important documents and certificates of achievement that can be taken with the child whenever they move on. We believe in promoting and enhancing the life stories of children in foster care.

Any child or young person placed within FCC, and any child whose family is fostering for FCC, has access to the 'Kidzrep', our marketing officer who can be contacted regarding anything that is of concern to them. The 'Kidzrep' can be contacted through the website or by phone and the contact details can be found in the Children's Guides.

All children have access to the FCC Children's Website (Kidz Zone), where information, competitions and events are assessable.

We consult with fostered children and young people on a regular basis and ask them to help us with ways of improving our service. The Kidzrep will use a variety of means in which to engage children and young people in matters that concern them within the agency.

We also support the children of fostering families by encouraging consultation and participation through activities and discussion. They too have access to our 'Kidzrep'.

## **REPRESENTATIONS AND COMPLAINTS**

Complaints made against the Agency are investigated in accordance with the FCC Complaints Procedure which is available on the FCC website and in hard copy if requested.

Initially, complaints are investigated within the Agency through arrangements outlined in the Complaints Policy. The internal process is in three possible stages. Where the complainant remains dissatisfied after the internal process, then an Independent Person can be appointed to investigate.

The numbers of complaints are held centrally within the Agency, and the process of investigating each complaint is recorded. All complaints and compliments are automatically reviewed through the quarterly Quality Assurance report that is completed in line with Fostering Regulations. The Senior Management Team may feel a complaint should lead to a change in procedure and the Board of



Directors of FCC may also examine the complaints that have been made and require the agency to take action.

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 Inspecting body, Ofsted, as required under Schedule 7 of the Fostering Services Regulations.

The Foster Care Co-operative has a Whistleblowing policy.

## **RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

In March 2020, the country went into lockdown as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. As a result of this, the agency updated the organisation's Business Continuity Plan to evidence how we would respond to the changes needed to keep staff safe and continue to support our carers and children.

Supervisions with carers and staff were completed remotely through video conferencing, as was any meetings, unannounced visits and other regulatory responsibilities. SSW kept in contact with carers on a weekly basis (sometimes more often) and our education advisor provided support through telephone, video conferencing and website contact.

Foster Care Co-operative remained dedicated to developing the skills of staff and carers through the use of our online training resource.

The agency continued to hold regular fostering panels for new applicants and reviews of existing carers by using video conferencing tools. We also continued our skills to foster training using the same medium.

This was a significant challenge for everyone across the UK and it was clear that the agency was able to respond to these challenges to ensure that the same level of support and responsibility was maintained throughout lockdown.

For any face to face visits with carers needed, we have a COVID-19 risk assessment to ensure that best and safe practice is maintained at all times. Likewise, we have increased our communication with LAs as part of our joint working to protect and support children.

The agency has organised a 'Post Lockdown Reflective Group'. The group will be represented across all departments of the agency and will look at the working arrangements during lockdown, the positives and challenges of working remotely and areas that we can take forward in the future as part of our working practices.

As lockdown begins to ease, the agency will continue to work under government guidelines ensuring that our staff, carers and children are supported and protected.



We hope that you have found our Statement of Purpose useful. However, if you would like to know more about our Agency, we would recommend that you have a look at our website:-

<http://www.fostercarecooperative.co.uk>