

AFFINITY FOSTERING SERVICES LTD



STATEMENT OF PURPOSE JANUARY 2021

“Enhancing and Empowering Young People’s Lives”



INTRODUCTION

This Statement of Purpose has been developed in accordance with appropriate statute law including:

- The Care Standards Act 2000
- The Fostering Service Regulations (England 2011)
- The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (England and Wales) 2011

The Statement of Purpose, produced in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations includes:

- A statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service, and; a statement as to the services and facilities provided by the fostering service.

A copy of the Statement of Purpose is provided to, and/or made available upon request, to:

- Ofsted
- Purchasers of the service
- Any person working for the purposes of the fostering service.
- Any child (subject to their age and understanding) placed with Affinity Fostering and the parent or guardian of any such child.

This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed and updated on regular basis, at least annually by the Senior Management Team, and modified if necessary. The annual review cycle is January each year.

MISSION STATEMENT

Mission Statement:

“To provide a quality driven service that focuses on safeguarding, positive outcomes for children, their foster families and staff”.

Value Statement:

” Enhancing and Empowering Young People’s lives”

Participation Statement:

“Participation is when people are given the opportunity to express their views effectively and for those views to be listened to and taken account of. It is about being involved in and influencing decision making on matters that affect them”.

Affinity have three Children and Young People’s Participation Leaders who assist and encourages young people to contribute to and influence the operation and development of Affinity Fostering.

Introduction to Affinity Fostering Services Ltd

This document sets out the Statement of Purpose for Affinity Fostering Services, an independent Fostering Provider whose office is based in Essex, operating in Essex, Kent, Surrey, London and the East Midlands, and fulfils the underpinning legislation as set out in NMS 2011 Standard 16 including Children's Guides.

Affinity Fostering Services Limited will provide foster placements for Local Authorities throughout the UK.

This Statement of Purpose has been developed in accordance with Fostering Service Regulations and appropriate legislation and guidance relevant to:

- The Children Act 1989
- The Children Act 2004
- The Care Standards Act 2000
- The Fostering Service National Minimum Standards 2011
- The Fostering Service Regulations England 2011
- The Care Planning Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010

The Statement of Purpose provides:

- A statement of the Aims and Objectives of the Fostering Service
- A statement as to the services and facilities provided by the Fostering Services.

Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of Affinity Fostering Services is to provide the highest quality of care to children and young people and to maximise their potential.

Affinity Fostering is dedicated to the following: -

Children and Young People:

- Continuous development of its services in order that children and young people can develop and grow within the five outcome areas of Every Child Matters
- To provide a secure base approach to enable children and young people to develop healthy attachments.
- High quality Foster Care resources that are matched to the needs of the individual child and provide safe, nurturing environments and experiences.
- That a child or young person's physical and emotional health care needs are met, and positive healthy lifestyles are encouraged. Enable all children and young people to benefit from educational opportunities.
- To actively encourage children and young people to inform us of their thoughts and views and ensure we actively listen, encouraged and facilitated by our Participation & Support Leaders
- To promote contact in line with the Care/Placement Plan, birth family and significant others during a placement and to encourage and facilitate this as appropriate.
- Monitoring that the Care Plan for every child placed is followed within the timescales set at each Statutory Review.

Foster Carers:

- We will continue to recruit Foster Carers from all backgrounds in order to meet the racial, cultural and religious needs of children and young people referred.
- A commitment to the ongoing learning and training of Foster Carers, including the TSD Standards; funding specific learning areas that Foster Carers have a particular interest in, in order to develop the individual and benefit the organisation.
- We will ensure the retention of Foster Carers by allowing Carers to be rewarded appropriately and recognise that they are valued and respected.
- To actively encourage Foster Carers to inform us of their thoughts and views and ensure we actively listen and action appropriately.

Affinity Fostering Staff:

- To provide consistent support, availability, and supervision to our Foster Carers.
- To provide the highest quality of care to children and young people.
- A Team of Managers, Social Workers, Participation & Support Leaders and Administrators who are appropriately qualified and experienced, registered with their professional regulatory bodies, and supported in continuous professional development.
- Research in areas of practice pertaining to our service to ensure continuous development.
- A focus on continuous improvement, quality assurance, and high-quality service provision.

Affinity Management Personnel and Directors:

- Strategic vision and direction
- Child centred values and principles.
- Quality assurance
- Annual review of Business Plan in line with children and service user's needs
- Developing the service in line with best practice
- Financial management to ensure best value to Local Authorities and Affinity Fostering
- Assimilation of new legislation and regulations into practice

Status and Constitution

Affinity Fostering is a private limited company registered under the Companies Act 1985 (Company Number 858158).

Affinity Fostering is registered as an Independent Fostering Provider under provision of Care Standards Act 2000 and regulated by OFSTED who consider Affinity Fostering as being an Outstanding provider.

OFSTED Registration number SC469688.

Equality and Diversity

In accordance with NMS 2011 Standard 2

Affinity Fostering recognises the diverse society and communities in which we all live and work. We embrace diversity and promote equality of opportunity. We aim to recruit people from all backgrounds to reflect the demographics of the regions we cover.

We are aware however, that discrimination, prejudice, unfairness, and oppression exist in every aspect of daily living, including:

- Ethnic minority groups
- Women
- People with disabilities
- Age
- Bisexuals
- Gay and Lesbians
- Transgender

We actively pursue an equal opportunities policy within the organisation not just for our employees but also for the children placed with our Foster Carers. Culture, age, gender, ethnic origin, religion, language, sexuality, and disability are all sensitively addressed during the matching procedure. Equal opportunities form an important part of our Foster Carer's training programme.

Management and Structure

In accordance with NMS Standard 25

Affinity Fostering commits to safer recruitment and selection of staff. All staff members that may have access to children are thoroughly vetted as required under The Protection of Children Act, 1999 and Care Standards Act 2000 and NMS 2011.

Standard 19

Detailed job descriptions, Person Specifications, Contracts and Conditions of Service are provided for all staff members by the Head of Business Services who holds the Specialist Paralegal in Employment Law Degree. All Social Workers are registered with the Social Work England (formerly HCPC) and memberships renewed as required. Regular Supervision and Annual Staff Appraisals are conducted and include identifying training needs and interests. The appropriate organisational structure and systems are in place to ensure that Affinity Fostering meets the needs of the service users.

Management and Support

In accordance with NMS 2011 Standard 21

It is recognised that placing 'looked after children' often makes large and varied demands on the Foster Carers. Through Affinity Fostering's continuous professional development programme, our Foster Carers are trained to meet the demands of children who have been exposed to high levels of neglect, deprivation, or abuse. Foster Carers for Affinity Fostering are selected for their tenacity, as the demands of fostering are rigorous, and it is expected that Foster Carers will work through difficult issues and concerns with the support of Affinity Fostering personnel.

It is the Supervising Social Worker's responsibility to manage and support the Foster Carer in the fostering task. Affinity's Supervising Social Workers and Foster Carers understand that the child's needs are paramount.

Supervising Social Workers visit the Foster Carers they support regularly both when children are in placement as well as when the Foster Carers are awaiting their next placement, this is in addition to ongoing telephone support.

Affinity Fostering subscribes all of our Foster Carers to FosterTalk which provides a range of independent supports including legal services and insurance.

A qualified named Social Worker is identified as the Supervising Worker and will complete newly approved Foster Carer's induction programme.

Support begins with the induction programme. During the matching process additional support will be given including consultation regarding the views of the Foster Carers. On-going support is bespoke, ensuring the right level is achieved, according to the needs of the child and the Carers.

Emergency Support (on call service), staffed by experienced Supervising Social Workers, is accessible to Foster Carers outside of office hours, 7 days per week, 52 weeks per year. A qualified Manager is also on back up duty to advise and support.

Support Groups are held on a regular basis and in venues convenient to Foster Carers or virtually depending on Government restrictions in place. These are groups where information can be shared and any issues can be raised with the agency and most importantly Foster Carers can socialise together, learn from and support each other. Support Groups are also supplemented by a specific training workshop to cover identified areas of case studies or practice reviews particularly around core training subjects.

Supervisory Visits - Regular supervision and support meetings are held between Supervising Social Worker and Foster Carers. Supervision meetings are an opportunity to discuss the needs of the child in placement and that the Foster Carer can progress the child's care plan. Any concerns or challenges are also identified and discussed with action plans identified. These meetings are formally recorded on a template that covers the secure base/ five outcomes and signed off by both parties and overseen by the Practice / Registered Manager.

Supervising Social Workers have primary responsibility for developing the skills of Foster Carers and identifying training needs with Foster Carers is a key part of the Supervising Social Worker's role. All Supervisions are fully recorded and signed off by the Foster Carer and the Supervising Social Worker before being seen by the Line Manager.

Unannounced visits/inspections will take place at all Affinity Foster Carers' homes including any holiday homes/caravans. These inspections will also include an audit of the Foster Carer's practical steps to ensure that they are fully compliant with the GDPR Regulations 2018 and cyber security. They will receive at least two unannounced visits each year exceeding the Regulations.

Affinity's Senior Management Team hold regular 'Keeping in Touch' Days (KIT) that follow on from the monthly Management meetings in local areas, or virtually dependent upon Government restrictions. The KIT days provide the opportunity for Foster Carers to meet with the Management Team to share their views, concerns and developmental ideas for the Agency. Management also use these meetings to obtain feedback from Foster Carers about the level of support they receive and / or require.

Affinity Fostering Staff Team

In accordance with NMS 2011 Standards 17/19

Team Meetings are held monthly attended by all staff and Management. Social Work Practice Meetings are also held monthly where current and topical research information is disseminated along with discussion as to situations with Foster Carer's and our young people. The Team also attend regular Team Days, training events, social events and the Foster Carers' Conference which provides quality external training for all and a social evening and overnight for Foster Carers and staff alike.

The Directors are responsible for the strategic direction of the organisation. The Directors have considerable experience in managing Fostering Agencies.

All Social Workers are required to hold a recognised Social Work Qualification and be registered with the Social Work England.

The Head of Business Services is suitably qualified in Human Resources and Administration Management and has much experience of working within Independent Fostering Agencies.

All staff will receive regular supervision and Annual appraisals and have access to regular training, ensuring they are aware of new developments, key changes in legislation, processes and best practice.

Affinity believe in constantly developing staff in their capabilities and professional standards. From 2018 Affinity implemented a staff wide Skills Audit, which culminates in an annual training programme developed to further the learning of all Social Work staff, with Admin staff developing more individually and supported through support sessions.

In addition to permanent staff there is a pool of individuals who will work for Affinity Fostering on an independent, self-employed basis across a variety of roles including Panel Members, Specialist Consultants, Independent Trainers, Form F Assessors and Support Workers.

Panel Members will be overseen by the Panel Chairperson, Form F Assessments will be supervised by the Registered /Practice Manager, Support Workers by the Registered Manager and Participation & Support Supervisor.

All Independent staff are required to hold appropriate qualifications and can evidence previous experience related to the work they are undertaking. Affinity Fostering carries out a range of pre-employment checks on all staff including references and telephone follow up calls, enhanced Disclosure and Barring checks where appropriate to ensure the welfare of children and young people are safeguarded and fulfils our Safer Recruitment Policy.

STATUS, EMPLOYEES & STRUCTURE

Staffing

Proprietor/Responsible Individual/ADM:

- Diploma in Social Work,
- PQ Foundation Programme in SW, Certificate in management
- Exec Dip Management Level 7
- Advanced Safeguarding

Supervisory Responsibilities:

- Director
- Independent Panel Chair

Director:

- BA Degree in Business Administration
- Executive Masters in Business (MBA) Surrey University

Supervisory Responsibilities:

- Head of Business Services
- Finance Manager
- Children's Participation & Support Supervisor (L&D Needs)

Registered Manager:

- CMI Level 5 Executive Diploma Management
- Diploma In Social Work
- BSC Hons Economics
- Advanced Safeguarding for the Designated Safeguarding Officer
- Practice Teaching Award
- Child Care Award

Supervisory Responsibilities:

- Practice Manager – South
- Lead Recruit/Senior Supervising Social Worker
- Senior Supervising Social Worker
- Senior Children’s Participation & Support Team (Practice)

Head of Business Services:

- Specialist Paralegal in Employment Law
- NVQ5 – Operations Management Introduction to Company Law, 2008
- Introduction to Contract Law, 2009
- NVQ4 Higher Diploma in Business Administration
- Advanced Safeguarding

Supervisory Responsibilities:

- Business Services Support
- Administration Team

Finance Manager:

- Pensions
- Sage
- Extensive fostering experience
- Advanced Safeguarding

Practice Manager – South:

- BA Hons Social Work Degree
- Diploma – Person Centred Counselling
- Higher Diploma – Child Psychology
- NVQ Level 3 – Health & Social Care (Children & Young People)
- Advanced Safeguarding

Supervisory Responsibilities:

- Senior Supervising Social Workers
- Social Worker
- Independent Social Workers

Senior Supervising Social Workers x 4:

- BA (Hons) Social Work Degree
- Higher Diploma Child Psychology
- Higher Education Diploma in Social Work
- Diploma – Person Centred Counselling
- Certificate in Social Care
- NVQ Level 4 in Management

- NNEB
- Advanced Safeguarding
- Supervisory Responsibilities:
- Supervising Social Workers

Supervising Social Workers x 5:

- BA (Hons) Social Work Degree
- BTECH Level 3 Childcare, Learning & Development
- AYSE
- Advanced Safeguarding
- Diploma in Supervision

Senior Children’s Participation & Support Supervisor:

- Advanced Safeguarding
- TSD Standards
- Attachment Styles
- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Preparing For Independence and Adulthood
- Life Story Work “Becoming a Therapeutic Care Giver”
- Seen and Heard – Signs of Abuse
- Mental Health: Overcoming Anxiety, Challenges and Building Confidence;
- Contact & Birth Families
- Participation – What Good Fostering Looks Like from a Care Leaver’s Perspective
- Radicalisation and PREVENT
- Education for Looked After Young People
- Diploma in Supervision

Supervisory Responsibilities:

- Children’s Participation & Support Leaders x 2

Children’s Participation & Support Leaders x 2:

- Advanced Safeguarding
- TSD Standards
- Attachment Styles
- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Preparing for Independence and Adulthood
- Life Story Work “Becoming a Therapeutic Care Giver”
- Seen and Heard – Signs of Abuse
- Mental Health: Overcoming Anxiety, Challenges and Building Confidence;
- Contact & Birth Families
- Participation – What Good Fostering Looks Like from a Care Leaver’s Perspective
- Radicalisation and PREVENT

Business Services Support:

- Advanced Safeguarding
- Fostering Regulations

Senior Administrator:

- Safeguarding
- Data Protection & Recording
- Fostering Regulations
- Advanced Safeguarding

Administration x 2:

- Advanced Safeguarding
- Fostering Regulations

Statistics and Outcomes**In accordance with NMS 2011 Standard 25**

Affinity Fostering complete Regulation 35/25 Reports annually are submitted to OFSTED and Local Authorities as part of their Contract monitoring process.

In conjunction with the Regulation 35 / NMS 25 Report is also completed by the Registered Manager and Head of Business Services, in addition to regular statistical reports which are sent to Local Authorities, as part of their Contract Reviewing/Monitoring processes.

Records and Confidentiality**In accordance with NMS Standard 26**

Affinity Fostering is registered with the ICO –Number A1015865

Files of both Looked after Children and Foster Carers are securely kept and password protected. We are governed by the same legislation as Local Authorities regarding access to files. Looked After Children, subject to their Social Worker's approval, can have access to their files on request. All records and third-party information is kept in the strictest confidence. Staff and Foster Carers have received training on GDPR Legislation and the Data Protection Act.

Affinity Fostering implemented a programme to ensure that it meets the requirements as directed by the new GDPR Legislation effected on the 25th May 2018. Affinity invested in the bespoke CHARMS Fostering Database in order to ensure all records/data is maintained in a secure and accessible manner. Appropriate training is provided to all new users and are reminded of their obligations under GDPR and Affinity's Confidentiality Policy.

Foster Carer Recruitment, Training, Support and Reviews**In accordance with NMS 2011 Standard 13****Recruitment Criteria:**

Applications to become Foster Carers are welcome regardless of gender, marital status, sexuality, race, disability, religion, or culture.

There is immediate exclusion of any applicant who has been convicted of an offence against a child, or any serious offence against an adult.

Anyone over the age of 21 may apply. There is no upper limit for Foster Carers. Obviously, all applicants must be healthy and active to enable them to care appropriately for a child and this must be confirmed by their GP on a Coram BAAF AH1 medical form and then every three years

on the Coram BAAF AH2 form. It is a requirement that all prospective Foster Carers have at least one spare bedroom for a Fostered child.

Safer Recruitment

In accordance with NMS 2011 Standard 19

Safer recruitment has been acknowledged as fitting within the wider context of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and the “Every Child Matters (ECM) Agenda”.

“Working Together to Safeguard Children” states all agencies and individuals should aim to proactively safeguard and promote the welfare of children that the need for action to protect children from harm is reduced.

To achieve the above, Affinity Fostering has undertaken the following:-

- Senior Management are committed to Children and Young people’s safety.
- Key Personnel have received Safer Recruitment Training.
- Safer Recruitment Statement on all Application Forms and Job Descriptions
- Ensure that Affinity Fostering have effective recruitment and human resources procedures, including checking of all new staff and volunteers, to ensure they are safe to work with children and young people.
- Follow procedures for dealing with allegations of abuse against members of staff, Foster Carers.
- Have procedures about how to safeguard and promote the welfare of young people.
- Will annually review our recruitment procedures, including the renewal of DBS checks and Social Work England (formerly HCPC) Registrations.

Recruitment

In accordance with NMS 2011 Standard 13

- Affinity Fostering has clear written, recruitment and selection procedures for appointing Foster Carers, which also involves young people in care placed with the Agency.
- A welcome speedy response is given to all Initial Enquiries irrespective of whether they are received by telephone or via the Agency’ Website.
- Initial contact will be made by the Business Services’ Team who will filter appropriate enquiries to the Senior Supervising Social Workers who are the leads for Affinity’s Foster Carer Recruitment and who will endeavor to make personal contact with the enquirer by telephone within 48 hours to arrange an initial visit. A detailed explanation of Fostering is given to the applicants and, if requested by the enquirer, an Initial Visit will be arranged as soon as possible and no longer than 7 days unless requested by the enquirer.
- A report following the initial visit will be submitted to Senior Management for the agreement to proceed at which point an information pack will be provided to the enquirer for completion. Alternatively, if the decision is not to proceed a letter will be sent to the enquirer, informing them of the reasons.

If the decision is to proceed the applicant(s) will be invited to a 2-day Basic Skills to Fostering Training which will be presented locally, or virtually if required by a Senior Social Worker, Head of Business Services, an experienced Foster Carer and a Looked After Child.

An additional third day is provided to discuss Post Panel / Approval processes and what to expect on the arrival of the newly approved Foster Carer’s first placement.

A one-to-one workshop will be held with each new applicant to discuss and fully inform them of the type of information received for referrals for Looked After Children and to establish a more extensive understanding of appropriate matching with the applicant(s) and their immediate family. Additionally, Affinity will provide a full explanation of its Matching Policy and criteria. This workshop will be led by an identified Senior Supervising Social Worker and the Affinity Business Support Team who respond to all Local Authority Referrals and liaise with Foster Carers regarding potential placements.

The format of the training is derived from a programme produced by Fostering Network and is tailor made to fit the ethos of Affinity Fostering covering the principles of 'From a Secure Base' Dr Gillian Schofield.

On-going process:-

References and checks are undertaken from the age of 18 years.

- Disclosure and Barring checks
- Local Authority checks (upon application and every three years thereafter)
- Current or previous fostering organisation references/Protocol Meeting
- School/Health visitor reports (on own child if appropriate)
- Medical reports
- Birth children interviews
- Current employment references
- References from all previous employment involving children and vulnerable adults
- Verbal telephone reference to ensure authentication of written reference
- Personal references (at least 2) who will also be visited by a Social Worker.
- Overseas checks where applicable
- Two health and safety inspections will be carried out including on any holiday homes /caravans, upon initial application and when nearing the completion of the assessment.
- Dog Questionnaire / Pet Questionnaire (For other types of animals)
- Financial – Landlord/Mortgage where applicable
- Ex-partners & children of an appropriate age from previous relationships will also need to be interviewed.
- GDPR Safety / Security Audit undertaken

Throughout this process support is given to the applicants by the Administration Team who are experienced and qualified to ensure that this is a smooth and thorough assessment.

Assessment

A qualified Social Worker will carry out a Form F assessment, using the competency format, as published by British Association for Adoption and Fostering (Coram BAAF) 2017. An additional Assessment report is completed for those Foster Carers who seek approval to be approved for Parent and Child placements. She/he visits the applicant's home generally on 6 - 8 occasions, to meet and collect information about all members of the household and their support networks. Any children within the household will also be interviewed separately.

The assessment can take up to 6 months but must be concluded within 8 months of date of acceptance of application and every effort is made to ensure that there is no unavoidable delay. All information obtained about prospective Foster Carers is held on file. Upon request this can be viewed under the Freedom of Information Act. References from external agencies (DBS, Local Authorities, Medical and professional references) are sought. The referees are made aware that

the reference could be shared with the Applicant if they so request, under the Freedom of Information Act.

The assessment is supervised by the Practice Manager and is signed off by the Registered Manager. The completed assessment is shared with the prospective Foster Carers.

The document is sent to the Panel Members at least 10 working days in advance of the Panel Meeting to enable full and proper consideration.

Annual Reviews

The procedure for reviews is detailed and reflects the Statute law, Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2011.

Foster Carer Reviews are held annually unless the Panel have advised for it to be held sooner, or there is a complaint or allegation that necessitates an earlier review. First Reviews will be presented to the Independent Foster Panel with the option to present Fourth and Seventh Annual Reviews for quality assurance reasons.

The review procedure is based on the core competencies as set out in the Coram BAAF Form F Assessment.

The Review is conducted by an Independent Reviewing Manager. The First Annual Household Review Report format is completed on the Five Outcomes with subsequent Review Reports based the Secure Base methodology.

Guidance on the Purpose and Conduct of Reviews

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (Regulation 29), the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011) require that the suitability of Foster Carers is reviewed within one year of approval and at intervals of not more than one year thereafter.

The primary purpose of any Foster Carer Review is for a fostering service provider to satisfy itself that the Foster Carer(s) continue(s) to be suitable to carry out the responsibilities of fostering children/young people and to determine if the Foster Carer household remains an environment in which the welfare of any child/young person placed will be safeguarded and promoted and meets the expectations of Affinity Fostering.

Annual Reviews are also an invaluable opportunity for Affinity Foster Carers to give feedback on the level and quality of support received from the agency, including an appraisal of how their training and development needs have been addressed. Future training and development needs should also be identified as well as future support needs. Completion of a Foster Carer's Review is also the main vehicle within Affinity for routine updating of statutory checks/enquiries in relation to Foster Carers and for ensuring that the foster home can comfortably accommodate all who live there and is a safe environment. Affinity seek feedback from young people, which is age appropriate, as well as placing Local Authority Social Workers. Foster Carer's own birth children are also invited to share their comments, if applicable.

Enhanced Disclosure and Barring checks will be carried out upon initial application. All Foster Carers will be subscribed to the DBS Update Service and annual checks of the register undertaken to ensure that no additional information has been included since their initial Enhanced DBS check was undertaken. All Enhanced DBS checks are undertaken on adult members of the household, Support network and will be renewed every 3 years (NMS, Standard 19).

In completing assessments of prospective Foster Carers, Affinity Fostering undertakes enhanced Disclosure and Barring checks in relation to other household members who are aged 18 years plus.

Medical Updates will be undertaken every three years with a Medical Questionnaire Update completed as part of the Annual Household Review process on alternate years.

Issues emerging from the updating or completion of statutory checks/enquiries will be fully explored with the individual.

A Coram BAAF Form F will have been completed for all Foster Carers. Coram BAAF Form AH1 is completed by the applicant's GP to ensure the applicant is fit to Foster. This document is also confirmed by Affinity Fostering's Medical Adviser who will add any necessary comments and their recommendation as to whether they believe the Applicant is fit to foster based on the information provided. Any issues arising from medical reports will be discussed with the Foster Carer.

Affinity Fostering is committed to Foster Carers having the maximum opportunity to participate in and contribute to Annual Reviews and will support and assist Foster Carers to achieve this objective. As well as making their own written and oral contributions Foster Carers will receive a copy of the completed Reviewing Officer's Report for comment regarding the accuracy and fairness.

Affinity Fostering ensure that all Foster Carers complete a new Foster Care Agreement (Care Standards Regulations 28(5)(6) and Fostering Service Regulations 2011 Schedule 5) following their First, Fourth, Seventh Annual Reviews and three yearly thereafter to remind them of their duties and responsibilities. At Affinity Fostering, Foster Carer Reviews are completed:

- Not less than yearly as specified by the Regulations and Standards and where there has been a serious or significant incident or event in the life of a Foster Family which raises questions about suitability to foster and/or their capacity to provide appropriate care for fostered children/young people.
- Following a serious complaint and/or allegation of abuse in relation to a Foster Family

Detailed financial information and guidance is supplied to Foster Carers within their Foster Carer Handbook and Finance for Foster Carers Policy and are also provided with a detailed annual statement. In accordance with economies of scale and the good working relationship we have with Local Authorities the fees paid to Foster Carers shall vary with sibling groups. This will usually mean a reduction per child per sibling groups of 2 or over.

If Foster Carers choose to take their young people on holiday and not take their respite entitlement this will be calculated and paid to them at the end of the year.

Local Authorities may contact Affinity Fostering for details pertaining to charges (in addition charging information will be sent prior to agreement of any placement). Any additional support identified can facilitate as required additional rates.

Affinity Fostering hold contracts with the following Authorities:

- London Care Services
- Essex County Council
- Lincolnshire County Council
- West London Alliance
- Kent County Council/Medway

- South Central Consortium
- London Borough of Sutton
- D2N2

Fee structures are agreed within those contracts.

Affinity Fostering also provide spot purchase services and are confident that we offer best value competitive fees whilst providing an outstanding service.

Panel

In accordance with NMS 2011 Standard 14

All initial Foster Carer Assessments and First Annual Household Reviews will be presented to an Independent professional multi-disciplinary Foster Panel with the option to present Fourth, Seventh Annual Reviews and three yearly thereafter for quality assurance purposes. It is our expectation that the Foster Carers will attend Panel on their First Annual Household Review. Whilst the Panel's main function is to evaluate Foster Carer applications, Annual Reviews including changes to Approval Terms, it also acts as a steering group for the organisation maintaining and improving quality standards and practice as well as to offer advice and guidance on other matters.

All prospective Foster Carers attend the Panel with their Assessing Social Worker.

The Foster Panel will make their recommendation about the suitability of the applicants and the range of their approval status.

A Panel Advisor will be available to advise Panel on any legislative and Care Standard issues. The Panel Advisor(s) have vast experience as Panel Advisors and Management within Fostering Services.

Agency Decision Maker

Legislation requires that no member of a fostering Panel should take part in any decision made by a fostering service provider and effectively creates a distinction between a fostering Panel's recommendations and the separate decision-making responsibilities of the Agency Decision Maker. The Decision Maker will not participate in Panel meetings.

The Decision Maker will receive copies of all papers (agendas, minutes and reports) circulated to Panel members for Panel meetings. In making the decision, the Decision Maker will take account of Panel's recommendation and will see the Panel's final minutes. In complex cases the Decision Maker may need to clarify points with the Panel Advisor or the Chair. However, the Chair is not allowed to take part in the decision-making process and will need to be mindful of this.

Affinity Fostering Services Decision Maker, Denise Robins, an experienced Director who is also the Responsible Individual for the organisation, will consider the recommendation and Panel Minutes within two working days of the Panel's Recommendation and final set of approved Panel Minutes being confirmed. The prospective Foster Carer will be informed orally within two working days and written confirmation will be sent within five working days.

Training

In accordance with NMS 2011 Standard 20

Affinity Fostering recognises that the needs of Looked After Children and Young People will change over time. To this end we actively support the continuous professional development of our staff

and Carers through training. Training is a crucial element of Affinity Fostering's support to Foster Carers and staff team.

New Foster Carers undertake an Induction Workshop, including TSD information, within two weeks of their approval which is facilitated by appropriate Supervising Social Workers. Foster Carer's Continuous Professional Development Plan (PDP) is considered within every Annual Review.

A full programme of training is provided annually comprising of E-Learning / Virtual and Face to Face training courses (when permitted) which are held in easily accessible local venues. The Foster Carer Agreement which the Foster Carers sign to agree to attend regular training which is a requirement and expectation of being a Foster Carer for Affinity Fostering. Foster Carers who have not attended training and have not submitted acceptable reasons will be taken back to Foster Panel to seek advice and guidance on way forward.

The core elements of the training programme are:-

- Safe Caring
- Child Protection
- Safeguarding in addition CSE/CCE/Gangs/FGM/Radicalisation and PREVENT
- Effective Recording
- Working with children who have been abused
- Managing emotions and angry behaviour
- Understanding Attachment issues
- Providing a Secure Base
- Managing and promoting contact
- Valuing diversity and promoting equality.
- Identity and self-esteem
- Pediatric First Aid
- Health and Safety
- Health Care and administering medication for Looked After Children
- Education of fostered children/young people
- Effective and meaningful participation
- Advocating for, and empowering, children and young people
- Preparing young people for independence

Specific courses are arranged with external trainers for Foster Carers who have Looked After Children with an identified need.

Affinity provide additional quality training from external trainers at the two-day carer conference, which is held at a four-star hotel, where three training sessions are held over the two days and lunch, dinner and accommodation is provided. Foster carers are at liberty to use the hotels swimming and leisure facilities, all funded by Affinity.

Affinity have engaged with multiple E-Learning training providers whose course library covers a wide range of relevant fostering core subjects, as well as other more courses that meet Foster Carer's individual needs which meet OFSTED requirements.

Foster Carers receive regular mail outs from the Government and professional bodies, i.e NSPCC, RoSPA, Kidscape informing them of any legislative changes or amendments and useful guidance on relative matters. The usage is recorded on the Foster Carer's Professional Development Record and how the learning is transferred into practice is considered and recorded at the next Foster Carer Supervision.

Enhanced Training

In addition, Affinity Fostering identifies Foster Carer's particular skills and interests and will source local education resources to provide Foster Carers the opportunity to gain recognition of new skills.

Experienced Foster Carers are trained to contribute to the Skills to Foster Courses for prospective Foster Carers, alongside a qualified experienced Social Worker, as deemed best practice by Fostering Network. A group of Affinity Foster Carers have compiled a short video sharing their personal views on what it is like to be a Foster Carer and in particular, a Foster Carer for Affinity. This is shared with new applicants during the Skills to Foster training.

Parent and Child Assessment Training

Affinity Fostering provide a bespoke training course for Foster Carers who choose to develop their skills in the area of Parent and Child Assessment. The course enables development of assessment skills, detailed recording and report writing. The framework of PAMS (Parent Assessment Manual Software) specifically designed by Dr. Sue McGraw. Additional OFSTED approved E-Learning Parent & Child training will be completed by newly approved Foster Carers wishing to offer Parent & Child placements.

Affinity have an identified Lead for Parent and Child Fostering and provide regular Parent & Child Forums for Foster Carers and support groups for their Parent & Child placements.

Placements

In accordance with NMS Standard 15

Affinity Fostering offer a range of placements to Local Authorities for children and 0-18 years.

Placements available:-

- Long term
- Short term
- Bridging (minimum of one month)
- Respite
- Parent and child assessments
- Solo placements (with no other children in the household)
- Permanency
- Disability

In-depth information will be requested from the Local Authority to assess the needs of the child, prior to placement. Matching is of primary importance and the needs of the Looked After Child will be assessed carefully to assist this process.

A Matching Pro forma will be completed to ensure the best possible match for young people and will involve the Referrals Team, Foster Carer, Supervising Social Worker and Practice / Registered Manager. The views of other children both birth and Looked After will be sought if appropriate prior to placement as will the views of their placing local authorities. This pro forma is incorporated into the Placement Planning Meeting to ensure that the view of the Local Authority Social Worker is also included in any consideration of potential risks posed should another young person be placed alongside.

All placements must be negotiated through the child or young person's Local Authority either through an individual placement contract or as part of a wider contract of service provision commissioned by the Local Authority.

Placements are made and monitored in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations and by using an individual Foster Placement Agreement which is prepared either before or at the point of placement. Individual Care Plans will be contributed to and promoted by Affinity Fostering.

Where a child is already in placement, the EXISTING Child's Social Worker's views will be sought for additional placements that may be placed alongside the young person placed by their Local Authority.

Placement Services

All children and young people placed with Affinity Foster Carers should have their own Social Worker from the relevant Local Authority or Social Care trust who will maintain contact with them throughout the placement, conduct statutory visits and make Care Planning Decisions with and for the child.

In addition to the child's Social Worker, a Supervising Social Worker is allocated to support and supervise each Affinity Foster Carer with the placements they provide. In addition, Affinity provide support from their Independent Children's Participation and Support Leaders.

Affinity Fostering Supervising Social Workers will:

- Maintain frequent contact with the Foster Carer and children in placement through placement visits and telephone calls;
- Undertake monthly supervision of Foster Carers which is recorded and signed off;
- Support and provide necessary reports for LAC Reviews, PEPs. Social Workers will attend all meetings where possible.
- Undertake at least two unannounced visits to the foster home per year;
- Provide advice guidance and support to the Foster Carer on the Safe Care of the children in placement;
- Participate in out-of-hours support to Foster Carers;
- Co-ordinate other support services as appropriate e.g. support work, respite care provision;
- Liaise with other professional service providers, who may be involved and contribute to formal meetings about Care Plans;
- Identify and respond to Foster Carer's training needs;
- Maintain up to date records on the progress of placements.

Education

In accordance with NMS Standard 8.

Education is an important part of children's lives. Affinity Fostering is committed to maintaining children within the community and to this end whenever possible we ensure that the children are entered into mainstream and local special needs schools.

Affinity have a nominated Education Champion who actively communicates between Foster Carers, Local Authorities, Schools and Virtual Heads to ensure that all young people have an appropriate educational placement or their education needs met in alternative methods. The Lead is notified of all new placements and will become involved as a liaison point at the commencement of placements should it be required.

Affinity also ensure that all achievements are closely tracked and recorded. Affinity Foster Carers will support and encourage all children to enjoy and achieve.

Affinity Fostering have access to an Independent Educational Consultant to advise and support on educational complexities.

Where appropriate Affinity Fostering will liaise with Virtual Schools in order to secure appropriate school resources for our looked after young people which will be initiated by the Education Lead.

Respite

Affinity Fostering provides 2 weeks paid respite to Foster Carers with placements. This entitlement will be calculated by Affinity Fostering Finance Manager at the end of each year. Foster Carers are encouraged to use all or part of their respite entitlement to provide a family holiday for them and their looked after child/ren. If this is not possible it is hoped that they can identify possible respite Carers within their own family network, or utilise an identified Back Up Carer to enable the child to have continuity of care by people known to them. Affinity Fostering consider Foster Carer's support networks within the Form F Assessment.

Where ongoing support is necessary from the regular Carer's network, a Back Up Carer support assessment is completed.

Affinity Fostering also provide an Activity Holiday for young people, this takes place during the summer holidays which also provides respite to their Carers. This is in addition to regular activity days out which are normally organised.

Children and Young People's Rights

Affinity Fostering believes that all Children and Young People placed with our Foster Carers have a right to:

- Protection from bullying, ridicule and emotional abuse in all areas of their lives.
- Protection from all forms of violence, including physical abuse and corporal punishment, in all areas of their lives.
- Protection from all forms of sexual exploitation, including prostitution and sexual abuse, in all areas of their lives
- A caring and warm environment that acknowledges their right to privacy and confidentiality within reasonable limits.
- An environment that positively acknowledges their ethnicity, culture, religion, sexuality and any disability.
- The opportunity to develop their own sense of identity and family history, including encouragement in valuing their own language, food, clothing and social presentation.
- Consultation about their wishes and feelings regarding their placement and care plan, including information about their rights and access to the agency's and independent complaints procedures.
- An environment that actively encourages appropriate Social Behaviour by providing appropriate role models to encourage good citizenship.
- An environment that is educationally stimulating, encourages reading books and using a computer together with support when making all educational and career choices.
- An environment that actively meets their health and safety needs including the right of consent to, or refuse, medical examinations (dependent on age and understanding) and access and encouragement to a healthy diet and physical exercise.
- Accurate and appropriate information, advice and counselling regarding, drugs, alcohol, smoking, relationships and sex education.
- An Independent Visitor if they do not have regular contact with their family.

Looked After Children

Affinity Fostering will work in Partnership with Local Authorities across London and the South East/Midlands including Lincolnshire/Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire/Hull to provide fostering placements for children and young people.

All children/young people placed with Affinity Foster Carers receive a welcome letter and are informed of the Complaints Procedure on commencement of placement. These can be translated into languages to accommodate the cultural needs of the Looked After Child.

Additionally, Young People are provided with an age appropriate Young Person's Handbook which provide information about resources and information specific to a young person that is looked after, and services and social opportunities that are available to them locally.

This contains further information about what to do if they are not feeling happy and also includes information about bullying and a 'Have Your Say' feedback form, which can be completed and returned to their Fostering Social Worker with regards to the quality of care they are receiving.

'Have your say' forms are available within the process of completing our Foster Carers Annual Review and will be monitored by our Team to ensure we are providing the best service possible. Along with the standard issues covered in the Placement Agreement- Affinity Fostering's Social Worker will ensure that Children are aware of their rights whilst placed with our Foster Carers with all the information that they will need with regard to pocket money, clothing allowance, savings travel and lunch money Birthday and Festival allowances.

Affinity Fostering's Supervising Social Worker will ensure that they meet and get to know young people that are placed with their Foster Carers to ensure that their views are heard and recorded. These recordings will be carefully monitored as used to improve quality in Affinity Fostering providing the best service possible.

Affinity Fostering ensure that regular updates of Children and Young People's progress and outcomes are recorded on the CHARMS database which allows for monitoring, review and sharing with the appropriate placing Local Authority.

Safeguarding Children

In accordance with NMS 2011 Standard 4.

Affinity Fostering has a clear policy that is in line with Fostering Services National Minimum Standards and Regulations 2011, Standard 4, Safeguarding children and as outlined in the Children Act (1989). Any child protection/safeguarding issue or allegation against Foster Carers or any employee will be reported immediately to both the Placing Authority and area Local Authority. In all cases the needs of the children are a priority and our staff would work in line with the host Safeguarding Team and OFSTED where necessary.

The Registered Manager is the Designated Safeguarding Officer and will liaise with both the LADO and OFSTED where there are concerns around safeguarding.

The Registered Manager updates their 'Designated Officers Safeguarding Training' at least bi-annually.

Participation

Affinity Fostering have one Children's Participation & Support Supervisor and two Participation & Support Leaders whose main aims and responsibilities are not only to provide support to Foster Carers but also to engage and encourage all young people placed to have their views heard and to assist Affinity Fostering in reviewing and developing their policies and procedures to ensure that best outcomes for Affinity's young people are achieved.

Parent & Child Placements attend their own support group, these are facilitated by the Participation/Support Leaders and relevant topics are discussed and assimilated.

The feedback from this particular group has been extremely positive and has allowed the parent less isolated and more included. Minutes are retained and shared with group.

VOICES

Affinity's Voices Group is a young person's group comprised of young people currently in the care of Affinity Fostering Services. This group, facilitated by Affinity's Participation and Support Leaders, meet regularly to discuss, assist and advise Affinity on pertinent issues and ongoing working practices, enhancing the service Affinity provides to their young people, and empowering them in their lives with Affinity and beyond. An example of this is our Voice's campaign around Child In Care reviews in school, which received support from Nadhim Zahawi MP and both NAIRO and NIROMP. This culminated in an online and dissemination campaign with NIROMP, and Voices members attending and delivering to NAIRO's annual conference and NIRMOP's nationally represented meetings. Crucially, this has brought about national awareness to IRO influencers to change their ongoing practice.

The Voices group provide suggestions and feedback to experiences and proposed organised events. This includes Affinity's annual holiday for our young people, which due to COVID 19 had to be postponed in 2020.

Affinity have a value-adding project called the Independent Living Project. This one-on-one project with young people over the age of 15, over a 12 week period, covers core areas such as nutrition, budgeting and health, and includes individual tasks the young people complete with the support of Affinity's Participation and Support Leaders, to enhance their skills and empower them with knowledge and confidence in preparation for leaving care and going on to independent living.

Complaints Procedures

Affinity Fostering's Complaints Procedure has been developed to always respond speedily & equitably with any Complaint made by Children/ Young People, Parents, Foster Carers or Social Workers.

Affinity Fostering has a comprehensive complaints procedure and have access to an Independent Complaints Officer if the need arises.

The Complaints procedure is included:

- Within the age appropriate Welcome Packs for children and young people;
- Induction Pack for Foster Carers and in addition within the Foster Carer Handbook
- Employee induction pack upon commencement of employment;

and

- Employee Handbook

Complaints and Allegations Against Staff and Foster Carers

Background

To ensure that Foster Carers are managed in an appropriate and proper manner, The Placement (of Children) Regulations and Vol. 3 of the Children Act Guidance requires that a complaint procedure to respond to complaints from Foster Carers in a manner that can be demonstrated to be open and fair is in place.

Affinity Fostering aims to deal with complaints quickly and effectively. Complaints can be made by, or on behalf of children and young people, by Foster Carers and by Affinity Fostering staff and also other Professional bodies and individuals. Complaints may range from minor concerns which require informal discussion, through to serious concerns requiring formal consideration in relations to standards of care and/or child protection matters. The outcome of complaints can range from discussion and advice, through to clear directions of essential actions to deregistration and possible prosecution.

Certain complaints indicate that a company, rather than an individual response is critical. The purpose of the Complaints Policy and Procedure is to clarify the process that must be followed when a complaint is made. The following documents should also be referred to:

- Allegations against Foster Carers and Staff Policy
- Child Protection Policy and Procedure
- Staff Disciplinary and Grievance Policies and Procedures
- Whistle Blowing Policy
- Customer Care Policy
- Children's Guide

Complaints and Representations

Affinity Fostering have established written procedure for considering complaints. A written record is made of any complaint or representation, the action taken in response to it and the outcome of the investigation. In addition to this The Registered Manager shall on request supply to Ofsted a statement containing a summary of any complaints made during the preceding twelve months and the action taken in response.

Notifications will be made to Ofsted by the Registered Manager who is kept fully informed so that they keep Ofsted fully aware of any investigation and its outcome.

There is a register to track all Ofsted Notifications to ensure that all are concluded as appropriate.

Complaints by Foster Carers

The Foster Carer's Handbook which provided during the induction process gives clear guidelines on making complaints. Foster Carer's training covers making complaints. Specific training is also delivered on safe caring, managing complaints and allegations. Affinity Fostering offers 24 hour support service so complaints and allegations can be reported and dealt with 24/7, 365 days per year.

Affinity Fostering recommends that any complaint made by a Foster Carer could first be discussed with their Supervising Social Worker. This may resolve the complaint, if not a meeting will be arranged between the Foster Carer and the Practice Manager to resolve any concerns.

There are two stages within the Procedure to be followed should any issues or concerns raised by the Foster Carer not be alleviated through discussion with their Supervising Social Worker.

Part of this discussion may cover whether it would be more appropriate for the complaint to be directed to the local authority with responsibility for the child's placement under the local authority's complaints procedure. Consideration will also be given to the allocation of independent support to the Foster Carers during the investigation which will be funded by Affinity Fostering if appropriate. All Foster Carers have membership to FosterTalk who also provide independent advice and guidance to Foster Carers.

Informal Resolution – First Stage:

Following receipt of a written complaint the matter will be investigated by the Complaints Officer. The Foster Carer's letter will be acknowledged within seven days. The investigation into the complaint will be completed within 28 days. The person carrying out the investigation will meet with the Foster Carer who can have a representative present at this meeting.

A letter of resolution or outcome will be issued in response to informal complaints by the Foster Carers by the Practice Manager, including details of how the matter was investigated, by whom and with the relevant facts to support the outcome.

This stage of informal resolution will be completed **within 6-weeks** from the official complaint.

Formal Resolution - Second Stage: (if cannot be resolved informally in the first instance)

Affinity Fostering is committed to resolving conflicts and concerns at an early stage – **Stage One** - wherever possible, but in the interests of transparency and a commitment to individual interests/rights, individuals are able to complain at **Stage Two** in the first instance if they so wish. Affinity Fostering will ensure that complainants are kept informed regarding the progress of their complaint. In the event that any complainant is not satisfied at any stage, they may and should avail themselves of the right to make a complaint to the Regulatory Authority.

Representation in Respect of Terminations

Termination of approval is usually considered in line with the Foster Carer's Annual Review following complaints or serious standards of care issue. If the Independent Fostering Panel recommends de-registration of the Foster Carer and Affinity Fostering supports this recommendation, this is confirmed in writing with the reasons allowing a 28 day period for the Foster Carer to make representations. Foster Carers will be made aware of their right to lodge an appeal with the Independent Review Mechanism.

Complaints Made by Children, Parents or Local Authority Social Workers

It is important that children and young people who are being looked after by Affinity Fostering are satisfied with the service they receive.

Apart from what may be considered good practice, the Children Act 1989 provides in legislation for children to have this right.

Upon the commencement of their placement, children and young people are provided with an Affinity Children's Guide which sets out the process of how to complain.

In order that Affinity Fostering can investigate the complaint fully, the complaint has to be about services provided by Affinity Fostering Services to children and their families. It can be made by either:

- Children and young people looked after by Affinity Fostering.
- Or it can be made on behalf of the child or young person by:-
- A parent;
- Any person who is not a parent of his/hers but who has parental responsibility

An independent organisation called Voice are very experienced in working with young people and any difficulties they are currently experiencing:

VOICE

320 City Road

London

EC1 2NZ

Free phone 0808 800 5792

email: info@voiceyp.org

Website: www.voiceyp.org

[The VOICE advocate for children and young people. Here is a piece from their website.](#)

OFSTED

Children and young people and Foster Carers have a Statutory Right to an Independent Complaints Procedure through OFSTED.

Complaints Manager

NBU

Piccadilly

Gate

Store Street

Manchester

M1 2WD

Tel: 0300 12 231

Complaints Raised by Affinity Fostering Employees

It is essential that grievances from employees are treated fairly and consistently.

The grievance procedure is a legal requirement and both parties, Affinity Fostering and the employee, are required to follow the procedures.

A grievance is defined as a complaint by an employee about an action which their employer has taken or is contemplating taking in relation to them, and this can include actions of other employees. It does not apply to dismissals and normally does not apply to complaints about other disciplinary action, as an employee must use the appeals procedure in these circumstances.

It is important that employees feel comfortable to communicate openly within the company. Therefore, if any individual has a grievance Affinity Fostering will make every effort to address this to find an equitable solution via the grievance policy.

Employees should be encouraged to raise these issues informally in a confidential meeting prior to implementing the grievance policy. This may solve the problem quickly and protect good working

relations. All information will remain confidential unless a criminal offence has occurred or there is a risk of personal danger.

Quality Assurance

In accordance with NMS 2011 Standard 25.

Affinity Fostering ensures maintenance of a rigorous QA monitoring system of all Policies and Procedures. Additionally, individual files and recordings are considered monthly to ensure current information is available to all staff.

QA is a standard item on the Monthly Management Meetings and Independent Panel Meetings.

Panel Members assess and evaluate all Form F Assessments and Annual Household Review Reports as well as the performance of the Panel meeting itself and members residing on that Panel.

In addition, Panel Chair will also confirm that Assessments presented to the Independent Panel will evidence that applicants and / or Foster Carers have met or continue to meet the Fostering Competencies as required under the Fostering Standards and will provide a summary of all Panel's recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker. Additionally, the Panel Advisor will also submit a feedback form to the Agency to ensure that any actions or recommendations are acted upon appropriately.

Affinity invites feedback, suggestions and ideas for improvement/development from Foster Carers, young people in placement and other relevant third parties.

Foster Carer/Management Keeping in Touch Days are conducted in venues, or virtually if necessary, whereby open invitation is given to local Carers to join for lunch to share ideas and thoughts as to what could be improved within the service or to confirm what is good and working for them.

Affinity's Administration Team use appropriate QA Checklists when auditing all tasks undertaken and data collation required for but not exhaustive of:

- Form F Assessments
- Foster Carers' Supervisions / Annual Household Reviews
- Unannounced Visits
- DBS/Medical/Household Document Renewals
- New placements including receipt of all essential documentation
- Appropriate Risk Assessments
- Foster Carers' Recordings