



Complaints and Compliments Policy

Introduction

Anglia Fostering Agency (“AFA”/“We/Our”) is committed to resolving complaints at an early stage wherever possible; working in partnership to reach a mutually satisfactory outcome. Where this is not possible, we will ensure that any complaint is investigated sensitively and fairly. We define a complaint as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction concerning the service provided by AFA, or the actions of an individual providing that service’, for example a Director or employee of AFA.

Complaints will be dealt with as speedily as possible, but the timescale will be such as to allow a thorough examination of any issues raised. The party raising the complaint will be kept up to date as to the progress of their complaint and regularly updated on the timescale for resolution. Please be aware that information relating to third parties, or where consent has not been given to share information, cannot be disclosed.

The AFA Complaints Policy and Procedure complies with the statutory requirements as outlined in the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, Regulation 18, which states that all independent fostering agencies must have ‘a written procedure for considering complaints made by or on behalf of children placed by the agency, and by foster parents approved by the agency’. All complaints, including those resolved informally, will be acknowledged in writing stating the nature of the complaint, the action taken, any decisions made, who is responsible for carrying these out and the anticipated timescale for the matter to be concluded.

Complaints relating to the AFA Fostering Panel

Foster Carers or Individuals who wish to make a complaint or appeal against AFA Fostering Panel (“Panel”) recommendations, or a qualified determination made by the Decision Maker, should set out the grounds for their complaint or appeal in writing within 28 days of the date of the decision. The options for appealing the decision will be outlined in a letter sent by the Decision Maker and are detailed in **Section 1 (10) Representations/Independent Review Procedures of the AFA Policy and Procedures Handbook**. Copies of the procedures can be accessed through the AFA website or requested from Placement Managers.

Complaints relating to the Local Authority

Under the Children Act 1989, Section 26(3) a Foster Carer has a right to complain to the case responsible Local Authority on behalf of the child or young person in their care. It can be difficult for children to make a complaint and if you, as a carer, feel a child is not receiving the service or resource they need, or that they are being disadvantaged by actions or decisions the Local Authority has made, you should initially speak with the child's Social Worker or their Line Manager. If the problem is not resolved, you should ask for details of the complaints procedures from the child's Local Authority. Prior to making a formal complaint you should discuss the options available with the Placement Manager. Children may have an independent visitor or a Children's Officer if there are current legal proceedings, and they can also make representations on the young person's behalf, as can an Independent Reviewing Officer. Children and young people can also be supported to contact the Office of the Children's Commissioner at:

Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3 BT
Tel. No. 020 7783 8330

Email: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

Website: www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

Further information on a local authority's complaints procedure will be available on their website. On request, AFA can help carers access this information.

Concerns relating to the safety or welfare of a Looked After Child should be discussed in the first instance with the child's Social Worker or their Line Manager and, if the child is felt to be at risk of significant harm, a referral should be made using the local Safeguarding Board's Inter-Agency Child Protection Procedures. **(See Section 2 (2.3) Referring Concerns to Children's Social Care and Others in the AFA Procedures Manual)**. You are advised to contact AFA prior to contacting any Local Authority.

Complaints from a child or young person, or a Foster Carer on their behalf, relating to the service provided by AFA should be made using the route outlined in the children's guide.

Protected Disclosure ("whistleblowing")

AFA aims to nurture an environment that is open and honest; where Employees, Foster Carers and other external parties feel able to raise concerns and draw attention to issues or deficiencies in service provision, practice or procedure, without fear of reprisal.

Foster Carers or external parties should follow AFA's Whistleblowing policy to raise concerns about any of the following:

- Failure to comply with legal obligations
- Criminal activity (for example theft, fraud)
- Safeguarding concerns
- Improper conduct

- Attempts to conceal any of the above

Employees should refer to the Whistle Blowing Policy in the staff handbook.

Alternatively, and where appropriate, you may wish to contact the Regulatory Authority

Ofsted: Tel. 0300123 3155.

Foster Carers Complaint Process

If a complaint has been made that doesn't fall into any of the above categories, and cannot be resolved, the following stages will apply:

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

Complaints should be raised in the first instance with the Placement Manager. If they are not available or you do not feel confident to discuss the complaint with them at this stage, contact should be made with their Line Manager. A meeting will be arranged to discuss the complaint unless it is not practicable to do so, for example due to geographical considerations, in which case a confidential telephone call will be arranged. The Placement Manager, or their Line Manager as appropriate, will provide a written record of the meeting or phone call within 7 working days, unless it is not practicable to do so, in which case you will be advised of the anticipated timescale.

If your complaint is about, or relates to, your Placement Manager, you should submit the complaint to their Line Manager or go directly to Stage Two.

Stage 2 – Formal Investigation

If you are not happy with the outcome under Stage One as outlined above, you should write to a Director of AFA within 7 working days. Your letter should set out in detail the grounds of your complaint if it relates to your Placement Manager, and how you would like the matter to be resolved.

Your appeal will be dealt with by an AFA Director or Senior Manager who will acknowledge your letter within 7 working days. Stage 2 of the complaints procedure should be completed within 28 days, unless there is reason to believe that enquiries may take longer. In such cases you will be kept informed of progress and the proposed timescale for concluding the investigation.

As part of the investigation the Director or a Senior Manager will convene a meeting with you to discuss your complaint, enabling you to provide further details and answer any questions. If it is not possible to arrange a meeting, a confidential conference telephone call will be arranged. The Director or a Senior Manager will be accompanied during any meetings or conference calls by another person (usually an AFA staff member); their role will be to record the key issues raised and they will not take part in the discussion. AFA wishes to reassure carers that no person who is employed by us will be involved in the investigation of a complaint if they are the subject of the complaint.

The Director or a Senior Manager will set out his decision and findings in a report which will be sent to you within 14 working days of your meeting or call with him or her (unless it is not practicable to do so, in which case you will be advised of an alternative timeframe).

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome you may request that the complaint proceeds to Stage 3. AFA reserves the right to end the complaint at stage 2 if it is considered that the findings are conclusive.

Stage 3 – Independent Review

A request for an Independent Review should be made in writing to Human Resources. Your request will be acknowledged within 7 working days giving details of any review and the timescale, usually 28 days, for completion. Any extensions to this timescale will be conveyed to you in writing.

The Director will appoint a panel of up to three suitable people to review the complaint process. Typically, the panel will consist of individuals with fostering or social work experience who are not current employees of AFA. Furthermore, they will have knowledge and experience relevant to the area of your complaint. The panel will consider the documentation available in relation to your complaint and any additional written representations set out in your grounds for requesting a Stage 3 Independent Review.

The panel will produce a written report, which should detail outcomes and recommendations, and this will be considered by a Director and a Human Resources representative to decide whether the complaint is upheld or not and what (if any) action is required to improve AFA's service or performance. You will be notified of the decision within 28 days of the report being presented to AFA, unless it is not practicable to do so, in which case you will be advised of an alternative timeframe. The decision will be final and you have no further right of appeal. There are no further stages of the complaints procedure. Should you remain dissatisfied, you may take advice from the regulatory authority:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
Tel. 0300 123 1231

The Registered Manager of AFA will as a matter of course refer any serious notifiable complaints to Ofsted for information and advise them of the outcome of any investigation and the action points identified.

Although the AFA Fostering Panel ("Panel") has no designated role in the investigation of complaints. The Panel Adviser will inform Panel Members of any complaints made at Stage 1 or above, as well as the outcome and recommendations.

Complaints relating to the Agency from other Parties

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

Complaints should be raised in the first instance with the Area Manager, Registered Manager or Human Resources Manager.

A meeting will be arranged to discuss the complaint unless it is not practicable to do so, for example due to geographical considerations, in which case a confidential telephone conference call will be arranged. We will provide a written record of the meeting or phone call within 7 working days unless it is not practicable to do so, in which case you will be advised of the anticipated timescale.

If your complaint is about, or relates to, a Staff Member, you should submit the complaint to their Line Manager or alternatively go directly to Stage Two.

Stage 2 – Formal Investigation

If you are not happy with the outcome under Stage One as outlined above, you should write to a Director of AFA within 7 working days. Your letter should set out in detail the grounds of your appeal, or the grounds for a complaint if it relates to a Staff Member as detailed above, and how you would like the matter to be resolved.

Your appeal or complaint will be dealt with by an AFA Director or Senior Manager who will acknowledge your letter within 7 working days. Stage 2 of the complaints procedure should be completed within 28 days, unless there is reason to believe that any enquiries may take longer. In such cases you will be kept informed of progress and the proposed timescale for concluding the investigation.

As part of the investigation, the Director or a Senior Manager will convene a meeting with you to discuss your complaint, enabling you to provide further details and answer any questions. If it is not possible to arrange a meeting a confidential conference telephone call will be arranged. The Director or Senior Manager will be accompanied during any meetings or conference calls by another person (usually an AFA staff member). Their role will be to record the key issues raised and they will not take part in the discussion. AFA would like to reassure you that no person who is employed by us will be involved in an investigation of a complaint if they are the subject of that complaint.

The Director or Senior Manager will set out their decision and findings in a report which will be sent to you within 14 working days of your meeting or call with him or her, unless it is not practicable to do so, in which case you will be advised of an alternative timeframe.

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome you may request that the complaint proceeds to Stage 3. AFA reserves the right to end the complaint at stage 2 if it is considered that the findings are conclusive.

Stage 3 – Independent Review

A request for an Independent Review should be made in writing to Human Resources. Your

request will be acknowledged within 7 working days giving details of any review and the timescale, usually 28 days, for completion. Any extension to this timescale will be conveyed to you in writing.

The Director will appoint a panel of up to three suitable people to review the complaint process. Typically, the panel will consist of individuals with fostering or social work experience who are not current employees of AFA. Furthermore, they will have knowledge and experience relevant to the area of your complaint. The panel will consider the documentation available in relation to your complaint, and any further written representations set out in your grounds for requesting a Stage 3 Independent Review.

The panel will produce a written report, which should detail outcomes and recommendations, and this will be considered by a Director and a Human Resources representative to decide whether the complaint is upheld or not and what (if any) action is required to improve AFA's service or performance. You will be notified of the decision within 28 days of the presentation of the report to AFA, unless it is not practicable to do so, in which case you will be advised of an alternative timeframe. The decision will be final, and you have no further right of appeal. There are no further stages of the complaints procedure. Should you remain dissatisfied, you may take advice from the regulatory authority:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
Tel. 0300 123 1231

The Registered Manager of AFA will as a matter of course refer any serious notifiable complaints to Ofsted for information and advise them of the outcome of any investigation and the action points identified. Although the AFA Fostering Panel ("Panel") has no designated role in the investigation of complaints, the Panel Adviser will inform Panel members of any complaints made at Stage 1 or above, as well as the outcome and recommendations.

Complaints relating to a Director or Registered Manager

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

Complaints should be raised in the first instance with the Human Resources Manager. An acknowledgment of the complaint will be sent via email or post. We will confirm who will be dealing with this complaint within 7 days.

Dependent on the nature of the complaint, if it is deemed appropriate to handle it under Stage 1, a meeting will be arranged to discuss the complaint unless it is not practicable to do so, for example due to geographical considerations, in which case a confidential telephone conference call will be arranged. We will provide a written record of the meeting or phone call within 7 working days if it is practicable to do so. You will be advised of the anticipated timescale.

Stage 2 – Formal Investigation

If you are not happy with the outcome under Stage One as outlined above, Stage 2 of our

process is that you should write to a Director or Registered Manager of AFA within 7 working days. Your letter should set out in detail the grounds of your appeal or complaint if it relates to a Staff Member as detailed above, and how you would like the matter to be resolved. However if the complaint relates to a Director or Registered Manager it may be decided that it is appropriate for the complaint to be independently investigated or referred directly to the registered body as due to the seniority of the staff member an internal investigation may not be appropriate or viable.

Stage 3 – Direct referral to the Registered Body – Ofsted

Dependent on the nature of the complaint you may choose to take advice from the regulatory authority:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
Tel. 0300 123 1231

Managing Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour

In a minority of cases people pursue their complaints in a way that is unreasonable. They may behave unacceptably or be unreasonably persistent in their contact and submission of information. In this scenario we will refer to our Managing Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour Policy.

Compliments

AFA's vision is 'Quality, Integrity and Respect' and we strive to offer the best service we can to our staff, Foster Carers and their families and, most importantly, the children and young people for whom we have responsibility. If you are a carer who has been pleased with the service provided by AFA, or a staff member impressed with the work undertaken by a carer, then please let us know so that we can celebrate and share your success.

Please contact the Registered Manager, Toni Adriano on tonia@afafostering.com

Connected Policies or guidance

Name of policy / Guidance	Relevant for
Staff Handbook	All staff
Whistleblowing Policy	All staff and Foster Carers
Foster Carer Handbook	Foster Carers and Placement Managers
Managing Unreasonable Complainant behaviour policy	All Stakeholders

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