



Complaints and Compliments Policy

Introduction

Anglia Fostering Agency (AFA Fostering) is committed to resolving complaints at an early stage wherever possible by 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 an 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.

AFA's Complaints and Compliments Policy and related procedures comply 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 carers 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 Parents or Individuals who wish to make a complaint or appeal against AFA Fostering Panel's 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 the relevant AFA Policy and Foster Parents Handbook. Copies can be accessed through the AFA website, from the CHARMS documents store or requested from Fostering Social Workers.

Complaints relating to the Local Authority

Under the Children Act 1989, Section 26(3) a Foster Parent has a right to complain to the Local Authority responsible for the child or young person they are caring for. It can be difficult for children to make a complaint and if a Foster Parent feels 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, they should initially speak with the child's Social Worker or their Line Manager. If the problem is not resolved, they should ask for details of the Local Authority complaint's procedures. Prior to making a formal complaint they should discuss the options available with their Fostering Social Worker. Children may have an Independent Visitor or a Children's Guardian if there are current legal proceedings, and they can also make representations on the young person's behalf, as can an Independent Reviewing Officer. All children are also entitled to the support of an independent advocate. Children and young people can also be supported to contact the Office of the Children's Commissioner at:

Tel. No. 020 7783 8330

Email: cco.communications@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

Website: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/> or enquire via the online form: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/about-us/contact/>

Further information on a Local Authority's complaints procedure will be available on their website. On request, AFA can help Foster Parents access this information.

Concerns relating to the safety or welfare of a child who is looked after should be discussed in the first instance with their 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. Foster Parents are advised to contact AFA prior to contacting any Local Authority.

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

Protected Disclosure ("whistleblowing")

AFA aims to nurture an environment that is open and honest; where Employees, Foster Parents 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 Parents 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 and additional guidance in the staff handbook. Alternatively, and where appropriate, you may wish to contact the Regulatory Authority Ofsted: Tel. 0300 123 4666.

Complaint From Foster Parents

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 One – Informal Resolution

Complaints should be raised in the first instance with the Fostering Social Worker. 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 or Teams meeting will be arranged. The Fostering Social Worker, 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 the Foster Parent or complainant will be advised of the anticipated timescale.

If the complaint is about, or relates to, your Fostering Social Worker, it should be submitted to their Line Manager or go directly to Stage Two.

Stage Two – Formal Investigation

If the Foster Parent is not happy with the outcome under Stage One as outlined above, they should write to a Registered Manager of AFA within 7 working days. The letter should set out in detail the grounds of the complaint if it relates to the Fostering Social Worker, and how they would like the matter to be resolved.

The appeal will be dealt with by Senior Management who will acknowledge your letter within 7 working days. Stage Two 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 a Senior Manager will convene a meeting with the Foster Parent to discuss the complaint, enabling them to provide further details and to answer any questions. If it is not possible to arrange a meeting, a confidential conference telephone call or Teams meeting will be arranged. The 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 Foster Parents that no person who is employed by us will be involved in the investigation of a complaint if they are the subject of such.

A Senior Manager will set out their decision and findings in a report which will be sent to the Foster Parent within 14 working days of the meeting or call with them (unless it is not practicable to do so, in which case they will be advised of an alternative timeframe).

If they are dissatisfied with the outcome, they may request that the complaint proceeds to Stage Three. AFA reserves the right to end the complaint at Stage Two if it is considered that the findings are conclusive.

Stage Three – Independent Review

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

The Registered Manager 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 the complaint and any additional written representations set out in the grounds for requesting a Stage Three Independent Review.

The panel will produce a written report, which should detail outcomes and recommendations, and this will be considered by the Registered Manager 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. The Foster Parent 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 they will be advised of an alternative timeframe. The decision will be final and they have no further right of appeal. There are no further stages of the complaints procedure. Should the Foster Parent remain dissatisfied, they may take advice from the regulatory authority:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
Tel. 0300 123 4666

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 has no designated role in the investigation of complaints, the Panel Adviser will inform Panel Members of any complaints made at Stage One or above, as well as the outcome and recommendations.

Complaints from other Parties

Stage One – Informal Resolution

Complaints should be raised in the first instance with a Senior Manager or Human Resources representative.

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 or a Teams meeting will be arranged. AFA 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 they will be advised of the anticipated timescale.

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

Stage 2 – Formal Investigation

If the complainant is not happy with the outcome under Stage One as outlined above, they should write to the Registered Manager within 7 working days. The letter should set out in detail the grounds of the appeal, or the grounds for a complaint if it relates to a Staff Member as detailed above, and how they would like the matter to be resolved.

The appeal or complaint will be dealt with by the Registered Manager who will acknowledge the 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 the complainant will be kept informed of progress and the proposed timescale for concluding the investigation.

As part of the investigation, the Registered Manager or another Senior Manager will convene a meeting with the complainant to discuss the complaint, enabling them 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 Registered Manager 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 any complainant that no person who is employed by them will be involved in an investigation of a complaint if they are the subject of that complaint.

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

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome they may request that the complaint proceeds to Stage Three. AFA reserves the right to end the complaint at Stage Two if it is considered that the findings are conclusive.

Stage Three – Independent Review

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

The Registered Manager 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 the complaint. The panel will consider the documentation available in relation to the complaint, and any further written representations set out in the grounds for requesting a Stage Three Independent Review.

The panel will produce a written report, which should detail outcomes and recommendations, and this will be considered by the Registered Manager and/or 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. The complainant 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 they will be advised of an alternative timeframe. The decision will be final, and they have no further right of appeal. There are no further stages of the complaints procedure. Should you remain dissatisfied, they may take advice from the regulatory authority:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
Tel. 0300 123 4666

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 has no designated role in the investigation of complaints, the Panel Adviser will inform Panel members of any complaints made at Stage One or above, as well as the outcome and recommendations.

Complaints relating to the Registered Manager

Stage One – Informal Resolution

Complaints should be raised in the first instance with Human Resources. An acknowledgment of the complaint will be sent via email or post. AFA 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 One, 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 or Teams meeting will be arranged. AFA will provide a written record of the meeting or phone call within 7 working days if it is practicable to do so. The complainant will be advised of the anticipated timescale.

Stage Two – Formal Investigation

If the complainant is not happy with the outcome under Stage One as outlined above, Stage two of the process is that you should write to Responsible Individual within 7 working days. The letter should set out in detail the grounds of the appeal or complaint if it relates to the Registered Manager as detailed above, and how they would like the matter to be resolved. It may be decided that it is appropriate for the complaint to be independently investigated or referred directly to the registered body (as per Stage Three below) as due to the seniority of the staff member an internal investigation may not be appropriate or viable.

Stage Three – 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 4666

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.

Contact point for complaints:

Registered Manager: tonia@afafostering.com

Human Resources: hr@afafostering.com or feedback@afafostering.com

Compliments

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

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

Connected Policies or guidance

Name of policy / Guidance	Relevant for
Staff Handbook	All staff
Whistleblowing Policy	All staff and Foster Parents
Foster Parent Handbook	Foster Parents and Fostering Social Worker
Managing Unreasonable Complainant Behaviour policy	All Stakeholders

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