

Foster Carers Complaints Policy



**Camden
Association
for Foster Care**



Introduction and principles of the complaints system

There are likely to be occasions where a foster carer is not happy either with the standard of service received from Camden Council or about a decision made by the Fostering Service. This policy aims to set out what action foster carers can take to raise issues and how Camden will work in partnership to resolve these issues.

- Camden welcomes feedback from all parties who receive council services as this helps to improve service delivery and staff working practices. It is important that foster carers feel that they are able to raise issues with the Council's Family Services and Social Work (FSSW) department and that those complaints will be dealt with fairly, effectively and efficiently.
- Camden aims to resolve any issues as amicably as possible by reaching agreement with the complainant in an informal manner, using mediation where appropriate. Complaints should only progress onto more formal stages when all attempts to resolve issues informally have failed.
- Complaints procedures will be applied in a non-discriminatory manner so that all complaints are dealt with consistently within the principles of the procedure regardless of the complainants' ethnicity, gender, religion, culture, language, age or sexual orientation.
- Any foster carer wishing to make a complaint may choose to be supported or represented by a friend.
- The outcome of any formal complaint will be passed to the relevant service for them to consider how to implement any lessons learnt from the issue and whether any changes need to be made to policy or practice.

Types of complaint

Foster carers may wish to raise the following issues with either the Fostering Service or FSSW:

Decisions on re-approval or re-registration

Foster carers who wish to complain about Panel recommendations regarding their continued suitability to foster or imposed changes to terms of approval may either make a formal appeal to the Agency Decision Maker or use the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

The Agency Decision Maker will provide foster carers with written reasons as to why they are no longer considered suitable to foster or why their terms of approval have been changed and this is known as the qualifying determination.

Appeals to the Agency Decision Maker on the qualifying determination (in Camden this is the Assistant Director of FSSW) should be made in writing within 28 days of the date of the letter. Submissions should set out why they feel the matter should be reconsidered, and the matter will be referred back to the Fostering Panel for further consideration.

Appeals to the IRM should also be made in writing within 28 days of the date of the letter requesting a review of the decision. The Fostering Service will ensure that all relevant documents are sent to the IRM and will take any decision on the IRM review into account when deciding whether or not to overturn the original qualifying determination.

If foster carers take no action within the 28 day period, the Agency Decision maker will go ahead with any decision regarding re-approval.

Complaints about services for looked after children

Standard 1 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering states that foster carers should support children to make their views and wishes known, including supporting them to take up issues around their care and service provision.

Camden has a separate complaints system in place for children, and foster carers should ensure they are familiar with the procedures. Where a looked after child wishes to make a complaint about any aspect of the service they receive, foster carers should support them to do so.

A complaint can be made by the child or an adult acting on behalf of the child (including a foster carer) through the Children, Schools and Families complaints procedure. Contact details are:

The Complaints Unit
FREEPOST RRAR-KKUL-RCEZ
London Borough of Camden
Children, Schools and Families
218 Eversholt Street
London NW1 1BD
Freephone: 0800 393 561

If children are unhappy with any aspect of their care planning, for example decisions made by social workers around contact or where the child will be living, foster carers should help children to get in contact with their Independent Reviewing Officer in order to resolve differences of opinion and ensure the child's views are taken into account.

Protected disclosure (“whistleblowing”)

Camden aims to nurture a working environment that is open and honest where staff and foster carers feel able to raise issues and draw attention to deficiencies in service provision or practice without fear of reprisals. However, Camden recognises that there may be circumstances where foster carers feel unable to raise concerns or incidents of because there is reasonable doubt that these would be dealt with adequately.

Foster carers may use Camden's protected disclosure or whistleblowing procedures to raise concerns about any of the following:

- criminal activity such as theft or fraud
- concerns about possible child abuse
- failure to comply with legal duties
- instances of improper conduct by council officers
- attempts to cover up any of the above.

To make a protected disclosure, foster carers can contact Camden Council's confidential and independent help-line on **0800 734199** or the Ofsted whistleblowing line on **0300 123 3155**.

Complaints by foster carers

Sometimes foster carers may feel that they are not receiving a good enough service from the Fostering Service and may wish to complain about issues such as:

- poor support
- lack of training opportunities
- failure to pay allowances or fees on time
- conduct of staff
- harassment.

Preventing disputes

The care of children will always generate differences of opinion, especially the care of vulnerable children such as looked after children. In many cases, there will be possible conflict between parents, foster carers and social workers about the best way to meet the child's needs.

Camden aims to operate within the spirit of the Children Act 1989 by making sure children's wishes are acted on and parents and foster carers are consulted and included with regard to the child's care where this is consistent with the child's welfare.

Care planning processes followed in Camden should ensure that a consensus is reached regarding the child's care and that foster carers are properly equipped to carry out the fostering task in terms of training, information and support.

If there are differences of opinion, these should be resolved as early as possible with the supervising social worker or Fostering manager so that matters do not have to progress to formal complaint. Where possible, mediation should be used to facilitate a resolution, with a mediator identified and agreed by the foster carer and the Fostering Service.

Stage 1 complaint

If matters cannot be resolved in an informal manner as described above, foster carers may raise a formal complaint with the Principal Officer for Children's Provision. All complaints must be in writing and foster carers may use a representative from the Camden Association for Foster Care to make the complaint should they wish.

All complaints will be acknowledged by the Principal Officer within three working days of receipt. The Principal Officer will investigate the matter and reply to the carer within 10 working days of receiving the complaint. Where appropriate, this task may be delegated to another member of the management team.

If the foster carer is not happy with the response from the Principal Officer, they may choose to progress the complaint to Stage 2. The foster carer should notify the Principal Officer of their wish to progress to Stage 2 within 3 working days.

Stage 2 complaint

Stage 2 complaints will be investigated by an Independent Reviewing Officer or Child Protection Officer who is independent of the case and a representative of Voice. Whilst carrying out the investigation, the officer will continue to look at possible issue resolution and use of mediation to achieve this.

The investigation will be carried out and a written report made available within 25 working days of the foster carer's request for a Stage 2 investigation. The report will be passed to the Assistant Director of FSSW to decide on the matter. The Assistant Director may request further investigation or information before making a decision.

The Assistant Director will write to the foster carer within 10 working days of receiving the report notifying them of their decision and the reasons for this. If the carer is not happy with the outcome, they may request a review hearing.

Requests should be sent to the Children, Schools and Families complaints unit within 14 days of receipt of the Assistant Director's letter and should detail the reasons why the carer is unhappy with the Stage 2 outcome and why a review hearing is needed.

Stage 3: Review hearing

Review hearings will be held within 28 days of receipt of the foster carer's request for a hearing. Reviews are heard by a panel that consists of 3 independent people, one of whom will be a foster carer or a person with knowledge of fostering.

The panel will look at the Stage 2 report and will consider evidence from the foster carer and the investigating officer and may take advice from the Agency Advisor on fostering regulations where this is relevant and necessary.

The panel will reach a conclusion on the matter within five working days of the hearing and will notify the Director of Children, Schools and Families of the outcome.

The Director will make the final decision on the matter and will notify the foster carer of this within 15 working days of receiving the panel's conclusions.

Contact details

Fostering Service
Children, Schools and Families
Camden Council
Crowndale Centre
218 Eversholt Street
London NW1 1BD.

Tel: 0800 0281 436

Fax: 020 7974 6799

Email: fosteringteam@camden.gov.uk

