

FosterTalk Comments, Compliments and Complaints Procedure

Introduction

FosterTalk is committed to providing the best possible services for its customers. Our comments, compliments and complaints process gives you the chance to tell us what you think of the services we provide and to have your views taken on board.

If you have a comment

All suggestions are important to us and all will be considered in line with our service improvement plans. We will always acknowledge your suggestions, and where possible we will respond with detail about how your suggestion has been used.

If you have a compliment

We always pass your feedback on to our service areas and specifically to the member of staff or team that it was about. We also use this information in staff appraisals as well as for developing best practice at FosterTalk.

If you have a complaint

Sometimes things go wrong. If this happens we will do everything possible to put it right. If we cannot give you the outcome you want we will explain the reasons for this. We will respond to your complaint fully, working together between departments to ensure that we have answered all of the issues raised. We will do this as quickly as possible, letting you know if it is likely to take more than 10 working days, and keeping you informed throughout the process.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome of your complaint then you can ask for it to be reviewed. You need to tell us why you believe we were wrong according to our policies and procedures. The central team will review this for you and contact you with the outcome. We will again work through this process as quickly as possible, letting you know if it's likely to take more than 25 working days, and keeping you informed throughout the process.

Some complaints we will not be able to respond to, for example, a complaint that has already been answered, and reviewed with no new issues raised, or a complaint which is not about a service delivered by FosterTalk. If this is the case we will inform you of the decision not to investigate it.

How to make a Comment, Compliment or Complaint

You can make a comment, compliment or complaint by telephone, by email to enquiries@fostertalk.org, or by using one of the feedback forms on our website at www.FosterTalk.org/contact-us

We welcome feedback that will help us improve our service to you. Whether we've got something right, or could have done something better, we would like to hear what you think of our services.

Terminology:

For the purposes of this procedure a complaint is defined as *“a written or verbal expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to services provided by FosterTalk or its employees and agents”*

FosterTalk's complaints procedure is based on the following principles:

- FosterTalk seeks to create an ethos in which a foster carer, fostering service representative or service user can confidently make a complaint in the knowledge that it will be dealt with promptly and fairly;
- A complaint will be resolved as near as possible to the point at which it arises;
- The level at which a complaint is dealt with will reflect the seriousness of the complaint
- All complaints will be acknowledged and responded to in writing
- A copy of the procedure will be made available upon request

Who Can Make A Complaint?

- A foster/kinship carer, member or other FosterTalk service user
- A Fostering Service Provider representative
- Anyone else for whom FosterTalk has agreed to provide a service

Designated Complaints Receiving Officer

The Designated Complaints Receiving Officer is the Head of FosterTalk.

The Head of FosterTalk has responsibility to:

- Monitor all representations & complaints dealt with locally at stage one; through responding to requests for advice from FosterTalk staff and quarterly monitoring returns.
- Oversee the investigation of complaints that cannot be resolved at stage 1.
- Advise on matters of FosterTalk policies and procedures and the law, requirements and good practice guidance which underwrite them.
- Ensure that the complainant is aware of other avenues of complaint open to them.
- Ensure that the relevant parties receive copies of the Independent Investigators' reports as appropriate and that outcomes are communicated to all concerned.
- Ensure the smooth running of the complaints review panel arrangements including the convening and servicing of the panel.

- Maintain records of all complaints and their outcomes and ensure that such information is incorporated in relevant reviews of FosterTalk's quality strategy and made available (in suitably anonymised format) in response to any reasonable written request.

Complaints Procedure-overview

FosterTalk has a three-stage procedure for dealing with complaints:

Stage One

Informal problem solving

- Complaint acknowledged in writing and/or verbally within 3 working days by designated manager.
- Complaint recorded on FosterTalk's database and allocated for investigation.
- Attempt to resolve informally – clarification, negotiation, mediation, practical action by allocated person in consultation with complainant.
- Response – determined within 10 days of complaint being made and outcome letter sent to complainant.
- Complainant satisfied with outcome?

YES → Resolved and recorded on database, submitted to the Head of FosterTalk.

NO → Complainant advised of option of proceeding to **Stage Two**.

Stage Two

Independent Investigation

- Complaint referred by designated manager to Independent Investigator who may be an appropriate member of staff from an organisation independent of FosterTalk.
- Independent Investigator contacts complainant to establish facts within 5 working days where possible
- Investigation undertaken and report completed within 25 days for simple complaints and 65 days for complex complaints. If, for any unavoidable reasons, the investigation surpasses these deadlines, FosterTalk will seek your agreement.
- Report shared with complainant and other parties, in whole or part, by Independent Investigator in conjunction with the Head of FosterTalk if appropriate.
- Complainant satisfied with outcome?

YES → **Resolved**

NO → **Stage Three**

Complaints Review Panel

Note: This may involve appropriately qualified external individuals contracted for this purpose, independent of FosterTalk.

- Request to advance to Stage 3 must be received within 28 days of the outcome letter for Stage 2.
- The Independent Investigator's report, along with the written reasons for the continuing dissatisfaction by the complainant, is presented to the panel members.
- The complainant attends to provide representations to the panel.
- The panel issues an initial response to the complainant within 24 hours.
- A comprehensive written response is provided to the complainant within 5 working days.

Additionally, if a Stage 3 Review Panel is requested, it should convene within 30 days of the request. Subsequently, the Panel is required to provide the complainant with its report within five working days. Following this, FosterTalk has 15 working days to respond to the Panel's findings.

Stage One - Informal Problem Solving

FosterTalk staff and partner fostering service providers seek wherever possible to resolve matters as part of their normal daily routines and duties, but where they are unable to do so, FosterTalk staff are instructed to make the complainant aware of this procedure and advise them about who they should contact to make their dissatisfaction known. In the first instance this will be the Head or other designated local manager who will acknowledge the complaint within 3 working days, and specify which member of staff will address it and seek to resolve matters with the complainant.

The person appointed at Stage 1 will contact the complainant and attempt to resolve the complaint informally through discussion, negotiation and/or mediation, offering practical action where this will resolve the complaint. A formal written response will be made within 10 working days.

In the event of it not being possible to resolve a complaint informally at local level then the complainant will be informed in writing (stage one outcome letter) of their right to pursue the matter further through an Independent Investigator.

In those situations where no attempt has been made by the complainant to resolve the complaint informally at a local level, the Independent Investigator will encourage complainants to follow this route. However where a complainant does not agree to pursue this option then a formal complaint can be lodged at Stage Two of this Procedure.

In this case, the appointed Independent Investigator will respond to the complainant within 5 working days to establish the specific detail of the complaint and to inform the

complainant about how the matter will be investigated. This will include advising the complainant of their right, in some circumstances, to have their complaint investigated under local authority representations and complaints procedures.

In matters of a serious nature, particularly those concerning child protection issues, the appointed Independent Investigator will advise that the complaint must be investigated under the relevant local authority procedures.

Stage Two - Independent Investigation

Under the FosterTalk procedure, the investigation will be carried out by an Independent Investigator who has had no previous involvement with the matter concerned. This may be a member of staff from an organisation independent of FosterTalk or an externally contracted individual with relevant qualifications and experience. Any such appointment will be made known to and discussed with all parties prior to the commencement of the investigation. In appropriate circumstances, local authority social workers may be informed of the complaint and of the progress of the investigation and outcome subject to data protection requirements.

No one who is the subject of, or who has been involved in seeking to resolve, the complaint informally (stage 1) will be responsible for any investigation conducted under stage 2.

In some circumstances the task of an Independent Investigator may be one of ensuring that the complainant is aware of their right to complain under alternative procedures. Where appropriate this could include making the complainant aware of their right to seek advice from their solicitor, Member of Parliament, local councillor or local government ombudsman.

The independent investigator will have the right (subject to any necessary permissions) to examine any relevant documents held by FosterTalk and, as appropriate, to interview foster carers, their family members, Fostering Service Provider staff and others whose involvement has been significant. The method and conduct of the investigation will be in accordance with guidelines for Independent Investigators. The target timescale for completing an investigation at Stage 2 is 25 days for a simple complaint, and no more than 65 days if the complaint is more complex. If the issues are complex or more time is required, the independent investigator will inform the complainant of revised timescales for the completion of their investigation.

The Independent Investigator will submit a written report within these timescales. Within this report the Independent Investigator will reach a view about the findings and whether the complaint is upheld. The guidelines for Independent Investigators indicate that they should prepare their written reports on the assumption that the content will be shared with the complainant and other parties.

The outcome of the investigation and the response on behalf of FosterTalk will be communicated in writing to the complainant and other relevant parties, which may include making all or some of the Independent Investigator's report available. The decision about making all or some of the Independent Investigator's report available will take full account of issues of individual's confidentiality and data protection legislation.

Stage Three – Complaints Review Panel

Where a complainant remains dissatisfied with the response at stage 2, they may request that a complaints review panel be set up to consider the complaint investigation and its findings. The request must be received within 28 days of receiving the outcome in writing of the stage 2 independent investigation.

The panel will consist of an executive director from the FosterTalk Board of Directors, another senior FosterTalk manager who has no connection with the complaint and someone who is independent of FosterTalk i.e. an individual with a relevant background and expertise who is not an employee of FosterTalk.

A complaints review panel meeting will be convened within 30 days of the request to move to Stage 3, and the venue and date/time for this will be agreed with the complainant and the procedure and background documentation will be circulated to all parties.

The complainant will be invited to make their representation to the panel who will then make an initial response to the complainant and FosterTalk. A full written response will be provided within 5 working days. FosterTalk then have 15 days to respond to the panel's findings.

NB The outcome of the Complaints Review Panel is the final stage of the Procedure.

END

Next review due May 2028