



Fairer Fostering Partnership

Vision for Children in Foster Care

We need to build relationships in any system that we envision for children who cannot live with their birth parents. The current social care system does not support this and, in some cases, even discourages it. Clear examples of this are when foster carers are not given full delegated authority for the children and young people they are looking after, or they do not receive appropriate financial support to do so.

We believe that children need to be consulted and listened to and given the power to co-design, co-create, and co-produce the services they are entitled to.

We also believe that as a sector there is much expertise that is not being tapped or even considered by Government which could drive innovative change.

The following points outline some of our proposals for what needs to change in the care system based on what we hear from our foster carers, children, young people, and staff:

- 1. End the Postcode Lottery.** We believe that the care system's current legal framework provides the appropriate structure to support our children and young people with its correspondent guidance and regulations. However, how this is translated into practice varies enormously across the country, resulting in a large number of our children and young being at a disadvantage, unable to access services equally and treated differently based only on where they live, or the Local Authority who funds their care experience. The review should carefully consider the appropriate structure to deliver the care system, bearing in mind that the care system exists in the homes that children grow up in far more than it does in statutory offices.
- 2. Good Matching Practice.** Far too often information about children that Local Authorities share with foster carers is deficit-based and largely negative. It often fixates on negative experiences the child has gone through and the trauma-informed behavioural responses they create. Whilst it is important to be clear, open, and honest about the child's needs, it is vital that asset-based information is given equal

space, as prospective carers need to know what the child likes, what they enjoy and what they are good at. They need to know who, and what is important to the child. Children also need to be involved and consulted throughout the process. It is these “hooks” that lead carers to think about how the child will fit into their family and how they can offer the child a safe and stable home that will be positive for them¹. Also, most of the time-matches are made in a rush or crisis environment which has an impact upon assessment of the child’s needs, the decision-making process, and the availability of carers. Matching should be greater resourced and moved away from that crisis atmosphere to allow child-centred practice. Further research is needed on the impact and attribution of matching practices on children, young people and foster carers, in order to review practice guidance.

3. Relationships are crucial and **siblings should be placed together** unless it is absolutely not in their best interest to do so. The practice of younger siblings being adopted whilst their elder siblings remain in foster care must end. The state as the parent has the resources to fund extensions to foster carer’s and kinship carer’s houses to allow them to bring up siblings together. If the family lives in social housing, they should be considered as a priority by their local housing services in obtaining a property that meets their accommodation needs.
4. Children need to be supported and maintain **contact with the people that are important to them** (extended family, friends, previous foster carers, etc). Programmes such as Family Rights Group’s “Lifelong links” ([Lifelong Links - Family Rights Group \(frg.org.uk\)](http://lifelonglinks.org.uk)) must be available to all children in care. We would also advocate that Courts and Local Authorities do not seek to decide and enforce family time. The foster carers and the birth families must be enabled and supported to work together to promote these links and family time. In this way, family time can be more natural and respond to the weekly variations in commitments without needing permission from the Local Authority and/or the Court to respond to the day-to-day events of family life.
5. Children must be allowed to **settle in** when first starting to live with a new family and start forming relationships. Foster carers should be given up to 5 days of paid leave by their employer as a settling in period and children should not be expected to resume their previous routine straight away (meetings with family, activities or even school). The pandemic lockdowns taught us that concentrated family time improved relationships in the majority of foster homes.

¹ Appendix A

- 6. Delegated Authority.** We heard from children and young people that relationships are crucial for them, especially with the people that take care of them. We not only need to promote these relationships but also to trust that these people are doing what is best for the children and young people in their care. Foster carers need to be respected and trusted. They are experts regarding the children they look after. To this end, the family courts should hear from foster carers as a matter of routine whilst deliberating about lifelong decisions for the children. This routinely happens in the Scottish system. Delegated authority should be used more generously and expansively, especially in the context of a 'permanence' fostering arrangement. Decisions regarding the child must be made, in almost all cases, in the home where they live so that they can have input and involvement in these decisions as children in general population families do. There must be no meetings about the child without the foster carers being present. We suggest that delegated authority is automatically implied and given when a child moves in with a foster family. If not, a clear reason should be declared in writing by the Local Authority at the point of placement. This opt-out approach rather than the present opt-in approach would improve the situation markedly.
- 7. Visibility of the system –** Our children, young people and care experienced adults repeatedly tell us that the system intrudes into their lives and reminds them they are in care as well as exposes that to their peers. We must seek to end professionals' meetings taking place in our childrens' family homes or children being taken out of lessons to attend meetings in schools. The significant increase in virtual meetings has led to the system intruding far less into family life for foster carers and this should be built-in.
- 8. Pupil Premium.** Due to the increasing complexity, bureaucracy and different interests involved in the management of the funding between Local Authorities, virtual schools and schools, we believe that the funding should be delegated to the foster carers. They can then work with their child's school, their Supervising Social Worker and the Local Authority Social Worker to ensure that the children get the appropriate intervention to meet their individual academic needs.
- 9. Allegations.** In TACT's report "*Compassionate Parenting: What Foster Carers Think*" we found that 16% of foster carers have experienced at least one allegation throughout their fostering careers. Half of them also stated that they did not feel adequately supported during the process. Foster carers give accounts of children being taken away without warning (highlighting the limited parental rights of foster carers), confusion as to what is going on, and therefore more support and legal protection are required. Foster carers see allegations as lengthy battles where

sometimes the only option available is to resign unless they feel very supported by their fostering agency. Nonetheless, the process is still very stressful as it takes an extremely long time to resolve. Foster carers feel that they are not kept in the loop and do not feel involved in the process, and most of the time the worst-case scenario is highlighted rather than them being reassured of the best possible outcome to expect. Allegations should always be investigated but there is plenty of evidence that the current process of doing so is not working. Instead, it is depleting the number of foster carers at a time when they are needed more than ever due to the increasing number of children in care, and this is having an impact on the children's stability. The LADO system does not operate in the same way in all Local Authorities and the timescales for resolution of the allegations process is sometimes far too long. Supervising Social workers have told us that when Police get involved, sometimes delays can become excessive because if it does not qualify as a criminal offence, it is not seen as a priority. **There is a need for a strengthened LADO system with dedicated police officers and strict timescales as to when the process is expected to conclude.** The same timescales as apply to s.47 enquiries should apply to investigations into allegations regarding foster carers.

10. Careful **attention is also needed when it is decided that it is in the child's best interest to move them from their foster home** when an allegation is made. Those in authority need to ensure that children not only return when allegations are unproven but that they and their carers are supported, and there should be an understanding of what they have been going through in order to guarantee the stability of the child's situation within the foster home. The time many allegations take to resolve actively mitigates against children returning to their foster home so causes disruption in their childhoods.
11. **Leaving Care or the 'Cliff Edge of Care'**. There should be no cliff-edge as, although children may move out of their childhood family home, they should not leave "care". The cliff edge will never be addressed until the state accepts the responsibility that once it removes children from their birth parents then they are a parent for life. Parents' support for their children does not stop at age 18 or 25 and the support provided by our care system should be the same. Children and young people who have been in care should be entitled to support for the rest of their lives. Being care experienced should be a protected characteristic which grants automatic right to support for life.
12. Young people should also have a say when it comes to who should be their **Personal Advisor**; this could be a mentor from a charity, who could provide objective support or their foster carers, as this would be a natural continuation of the

foster carers' role. There should always be financial support to enable them to do this. Introducing a new professional into young people's lives at age 18 is not young person-centred and is rarely consistent.

- 13. University fees should be waived or paid** for care experienced young people no matter what age they decide to enrol. For those that choose not to, other **educational and professional careers opportunities, such as apprenticeships, should be fully funded and guaranteed.** In addition, the family home the child grew up in must be available to them to return to in university vacations. The state is the parent for our children and should give its children every advantage as they move into adulthood.
- 14. Staying Put allowances** should be equal to foster carer allowances and funding for those should be continued and guaranteed. Looking after an 18 or a 21-year-old is no cheaper than looking after a 17-year-old. Foster carers should not be expected to lose their status as foster carers or their support from their agency. Housing benefit applications should play no part in Staying Put arrangements. If DfE and DWP want to utilise Housing Benefit to fund this, then that should be by way of a central government write back between these two departments and should not involve young people making benefit claims. Foster carers should not be put at a financial disadvantage when moving from a fostering placement to a Staying Put arrangement and statutory guidance should be drawn up to guarantee this.
- 15. Therapeutic and Educational Support.** Children should have direct access to therapeutic and educational support not only when they enter care but at any point during their journey in care. Therapy support should be provided promptly and should not depend on where the child or young person lives or on the Local Authority responsible for them. As proposed in point 2, good matching practice is crucial to the success of any fostering arrangement. Consideration should be given to making it mandatory for Local Authorities to provide chronologies and timelines when a child is referred. With the additional information this is likely to provide, it is then possible to work in an open trauma-informed way. Fostering providers who can offer therapeutic services through trauma-informed therapists should be able to work alongside CAMHS in a system that is embedded within Children's social care services.
- 16. All professionals working with children and young people should be trauma-informed.** It is imperative that they have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the impact of development and relational trauma, foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, attachment styles and neurological diversity that are significant issues amongst care experienced children, young people, and adults. It is especially important that all

schools take a trauma-informed approach and that their staff are trained and supported in this. Trauma-informed approaches should underpin how organisations and professionals work together within the system. Good outcomes for children can be significantly influenced by the effectiveness of the professional network. However significant and damaging trauma resonates through the system, leading to miscommunication, mistrust and poor ineffective working relationships.

- 17.** There is an **overrepresentation of black children in our care system**. At present, it is more likely for black children to come into care than any other children. To add to this, we do not count on a diverse enough workforce, in terms of foster carers or professionals. These are structural, institutional, and systemic issues with deep implications in terms of social justice and funding. Racial and cultural diversity and representation among the social care workforce and in matching processes needs to be assured. Research needs to be conducted to determine factors of overrepresentation and how these impact the child's journey. If we truly want to develop an ethos of anti-discriminatory and anti-racist practice, action plans and services need to be developed based on the findings.
- 18. Stigma and Language:** Language is a powerful tool for communication but sometimes the way that it is used in social care creates stigma and barriers to understanding. In the Language that Cares ([Language-that-cares-ENG.pdf](https://tactcare.org.uk) (tactcare.org.uk) Children and Young people told us that the care system needs to be more mindful and in sync with their views and feelings when we talk to and about them. Words such as 'placement', 'respite', 'contact' and 'LAC' can create a different sense to the actual point, and that can impact children's and young people's self-esteem and stigmatise them. Language needs to change to normalise their lives and it needs to move from the professional point of view to the child's one.
- 19. No more silos –** Foster carers can be a great resource to support children who return to their birth parents. Consideration should be given to utilising experienced foster carers to support kinship carers who have taken an SGO and birth parents whose children have returned to them. More widely the support and training foster carers receive would be of equal benefit to kinship carers, birth parents whose children return to them and adopters. The silos created by the current system are not in the best interests of children nor those who are caring for them. Joint training and support groups should be promoted in all localities and support given to help all families to be embedded in the fabric of the local community both to support all families and to begin to build social capital for their children.
- 20. Foster Carer Recruitment:** the nationwide shortage of foster carers needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency as the current forecast predicts a shortfall of

25,000 foster families over the next five years². A national campaign to recruit foster carers should be enacted focusing on encouraging more people to come forward and consider looking after young people and siblings' groups. Central Government should replicate models and funding from their other schemes, such as teacher recruitment if a transformative change wants to be achieved.

21. Regulations and the need for compliance: Currently sector-wide practice in addressing the regulations and standards, informed by serious case reviews or other reflections on practice, typically sees managers creating even more lengthy and bureaucratic processes. As managers seek to assure themselves and inspectors, the effectiveness and judgement of foster carers and social workers are undermined by the requirement to fulfil compliance with lengthy forms. If we want to truly focus on children and free up resources in the system, we should ask those at the coal face to review key processes, defining key principles to be attended to. This would better enable those workers to be empowered to judge, when for example detailed instructions need to be written down and when due to knowledge of the circumstances a lighter touch is suitable. An obvious example of this is the extent to which foster carers need to record or the need to undertake detailed risk assessments. Fundamentally, we need to enable our foster carers (as detailed above) and our social workers to be decision-makers, rather than escalating matters away from the child.

22. Central fund for children's savings: all eligible children and young people's savings should be placed in a central fund for protection and guarantee of its availability and access in the future. Concerns are that too often children and their savings become detached, misplaced or disputed due to changes of social worker and/or placement moves.

Conclusion

Any **Vision for Children in foster care** will also have to harness at its core the changing nature of care, not only in terms of the children's chronological age and changing needs but also the different forms of care and how these mix and overlap during the child's care journey if we want to start thinking in real permanency terms. This hierarchy of care between adoption, kinship, fostering, residential, etc., not only constrains and suffocates carers and

² Oakley, M., 2021. *Fostering the Future*. [pdf] Available at: <<https://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Fostering-the-future-Paper-1-June-21.pdf>> [Accessed 30 November 2021].

children, but also professionals when trying to achieve the best outcomes for the children they are responsible for. We need an end to the silo mentality.

Care and parenting are about relationships and providing a secure base for children, not the different labels we use, and foster carers continue to demonstrate how crucial their role is on a daily basis, not only in supporting children when they are in their care but also when they move on from them. Therefore, it is also hoped that in the next stage of the process of this Care Review we can progress to a more defined Vision for Fostering as ultimately this will be the Vision for our Children in foster care.

Appendix A.: STRENGTH BASE PROFILE

Insert current picture of the child
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Profile

Name of Child	Date of Birth	Gender	Ethnicity	Language Spoken	Religion
		Select			

Type of placement	What is the care plan for the Child	Current Legal Status	Date Required	Preferred Location	Liquid logic No.
Select	Select	Select	Click here to enter a date.		

Current School/Nursery and Year	Timetable	Detail of timetable	EHCP	Any additional support in place	Will a change of school be considered
	Select		Select		

<p>Child's Personality</p>	<p>It's so important to let the child shine off the page, please include activities they like, favourite school subjects, likes, personality traits (such as sense humour, music, great conversationalist), foods they enjoy/dislike. Do they have any hobbies, attend any clubs, or have shown interest in trying any? This is your opportunity to let potential carers know about the child and let agencies match the child to prospective families. Please include any photos that show off the child's personality so families can get a real feel for the child. If they are new into Care, in addition to speaking to the child and parent, ask their teachers, carers or any professional involved with the child to gain a real understanding of them.</p>
<p>Cultural Needs</p>	<p>Avoid narrow specification of ethnicity, cultural, religious or linguistic considerations but always specify the way in which the child's ethnic and cultural needs should be met in their new family. Please detail if the child is an unaccompanied asylum seeker.</p>
<p>Key background information on the child and why they've come into care.</p>	<p>Describe the child's relevant history (<u>do not cut and paste from the system</u>). This section is to explain why a young person has come into care, or explain any placement moves/breakdowns and how long they were placed. Any information on family members for example must be anonymised. Information on past placement history must also include reasons why they've broken down and put into context. Ensure you give a balanced account.</p>
<p>Child's wishes and feelings</p>	<p>Where possible, it's important to gain the views of the child and their wishes and feelings. For example, how do they feel about coming into Care? Are they uncertain about the future? Even if they are considered too young note what you/others feel they would want.</p>
<p>Describe any Learning or Disability Needs</p>	<p>This section is to include any additional such as ASD, ADHD, FASD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Cognitive Delays, Physical impairments. This must highlight what their needs look like and how this is managed on a day-to-day basis ie routines, equipment, medication etc. Please also include any assessments that are current or planned. Be sure to highlight their strengths as well as areas where support is needed.</p>

Medical Information	This section is for: allergies, dietary requirements, health appointment, medication taken. Please include any frequency and routine that relate to medical needs.
Areas where child requires extra support to manage specific behaviours that can be difficult and any tried and tested strategies	Please detail what these behaviours look like and how carers can manage them. It must be proportionate, giving clear detail on triggers and context why the child may display them (such as history of neglect, witness to DV etc).
Any known relevant risks – It must be put in context and clear	This section will detail any risk they pose to animals, being placed with other children, CSE, Missing, Substance misuse for example. You must detail the context of these behaviours and not list chronology of missing episodes for example.
Contact arrangements	This must detail frequency, where it's held, if it's supervised, is there any expectation of carers to support this. Any family members mentioned must be anonymised. Please also detail if there is a high level of contact if this will change if proceedings are still ongoing.
Current involvement with other agencies e.g. YOS/CAMHS/Prince's Trust/Charity	Give details of why the young person is involved with agencies (for example if it's YOS, give the details of offences, orders and engagement and context to the offences).
Other Important Information	

Social Worker	
Telephone number:	
Team Manager	
Date Completed	