



Managing Allegations against Foster Parents and Adopters Procedure

This procedure sets out the actions to be taken when any allegation is made against foster parents and adopters. This procedure applies to all those that complete work on behalf of Polaris in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. **Scotland Fostering Agencies have their own procedure.**

The term '*Adopters*' is used throughout procedures but depending on the context, it may refer to potential adopters, prospective adopters, or those adopters for whom an adoption order has already been granted.

This procedure forms part of the Polaris Community Quality Management System in line with ISO-9001:2015 standards and applies to all companies within the Community unless stated otherwise. All group companies are detailed in the current legal structure.

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Associated Policy and supporting documents:	DBS Policy
	Whistle Blowing Policy
	Safeguarding Policy and Procedures

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Purpose/Objectives

The purpose of this procedure is to ensure that any allegations that a Foster Parent or a Adopter has behaved in a way that has harmed a child or adult at risk, may have committed an offence against a child or adult at risk or may pose a risk of harm, or behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children is referred to statutory agencies and is fully investigated. (The term 'Adult' will be used in the context of adult at risk).

This procedure provides guidance to appropriately manage any concerns or allegations of alleged abuse, neglect, or harm and to ensure that all allegations of abuse made against foster parents and adopters working with children, young people and adults are dealt with in a fair, consistent and timely manner.

An allegation is distinct and different from a complaint, which should be dealt with using the

specific company's complaints procedure. It is extremely important that the nature of the issue is quickly established so that correct procedures can be followed. If there is a suggestion of harm or abuse towards a child or adult, then the matter must be treated as an allegation, and this procedure must be followed.

The main factor to consider when applying these procedures is whether the individual subject to the allegation or concern, occupies a Position of Trust; this is where an individual is in a position of power or influence over a child or adult at risk, by virtue of the work or nature of activity being undertaken, therefore foster parents and adopters are in a Position of Trust.

The objective is to ensure that investigations are conducted fairly whilst ensuring that safeguarding children and adults is our priority. It applies whether the allegation has arisen in relation to their work as a foster parent/adopter or in any other sphere of their lives. The allegation that they have harmed a child could refer to any child; not specifically a foster child or child placed for adoption in their care. This is also the case for adults at risk.

Definition

In England, Working Together to Safeguard Children defines an allegation against a professional as:

- having behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child; or
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child or
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates s/he may pose a risk of harm to children or
- behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children.

The Care Act 2014 states that the safeguarding duties apply to an adult who:

- has needs for care and support (whether or not the local authority is meeting any of those needs).
- is experiencing, or at risk of abuse or neglect, as a result of those care and support needs are unable to protect themselves from either the risk of or the experience of abuse and neglect.

An adult at risk is any person who is aged 18 years or over and at risk of abuse or neglect because of their needs for care and/or support. Where someone is over 18 but still receiving children's services and a safeguarding issue is raised, the matter should be dealt with as a matter of course by the adult safeguarding team, in conjunction with Children's Services.

In Wales and Northern Ireland, procedures about allegations against a professional simply refer to

allegations of 'abuse.'

In Wales, managing cases under these procedures applies to a wider range of allegations than those in which there is reasonable cause to believe a child or adult at risk is suffering, or is likely to suffer harm. It also applies to concerns that might indicate that a person is unsuitable to continue to work with children or adults at risk in their present position or in any capacity.

It should be used in all cases in which it is alleged that a person who works with children or adults at risk has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed or may have harmed a child or adult at risk
- May have committed a criminal offence against a child or adult at risk or that has a direct impact on the child or adult at risk
- Behaved towards a child, children or adults at risk in a way that indicates they are unsuitable to work with both children and adults

In Northern Ireland, there is legislation in place to help avoid harm, or risk of harm, by preventing people who are deemed unsuitable to work with children and vulnerable adults from gaining access to them through their work.

Registered Managers/Head of Service

The Registered Manager/Head of Service of the region is the Designated Safeguarding Lead and is responsible for:

- Managing referrals to the Designated Officer in the respective Local Authority / Trust
- Attending and contributing appropriately to Strategy Meetings, Position of Trust Meetings
- Notifying the Inspectorate e.g., Ofsted, Care Inspectorate Wales, other regulatory body of incidents or events when required
- Managing referrals to the Disclosure and Barring Service or equivalent. Advice or support can be provided by Central QA if required.

Tasks may be delegated, as the Registered Manager/Head of Service considers appropriate, to other managers and staff, but the Registered Manager/Head of Service remains responsible for the process and oversight.

Procedure Details

What to do

If you receive an allegation or are concerned about the behaviour of a foster parent/adopter, you

should make an immediate note of the details and then report the allegation to your line manager and the Registered Manager/Head of Service. Outside office hours, report the allegation to the Out of Hours Service. The intention of this conversation is to consider the issue together and determine whether it is an allegation about harm to a child or adult. If it is agreed that the allegation should be reported, the Registered Manager/Head of Service will agree who will undertake the following;

- Reporting the issue to the responsible and area local authority / trust social worker(s) of all children in placement with the foster parent/adopter
- Sharing information in relation to other children or adults at risk in the household
- Reporting the issue to the Police
- Reporting the allegation to the Designated Officer (formerly LADO) in the area in which the foster Parent or adopter resides (or equivalent for your jurisdiction)
- Notifying the Inspectorate - For Fostering - see Recording and Reporting ME/NE's Guidance and Recording Matrix ME/NEs). For Adoption, all events are monitored and escalated as notifiable if appropriate.

If there is disagreement between the worker and manager as to whether or not to report a concern a discussion with the QA lead for the service should always take place.

The Designated Officer (or equivalent) must be informed immediately – and within 24 hours at a maximum. A written record must be made of the referral to the Designated Officer, which must note the time, detail, person making the report, person receiving the report, as well as any actions agreed. It is important to note that the relevant Designated Officer (or equivalent) is where the foster parent/adopter who is the subject of the allegation lives, even if the child is placed from another area.

If there is any doubt as to which is the relevant local authority / trust then all Designated Officer's (or equivalent) / local authorities/ trusts who may potentially be involved should be contacted and the responsibility will be agreed between them.

Local Authority /Trust Safeguarding Procedures should always be consulted to ensure the referral is made correctly, and to provide a guide as to the processes that will be followed.

Advice must be taken from Children's / Adult's Social Care, the Police, or the Designated Officer (or equivalent) about what, if anything should be said to the person who is the subject of the allegation.

Remember to appropriately record everything at every stage in writing, including management decisions, discussions with other agencies, conversations with foster parents/adopters and children, and correspondence.

If an annual foster parent review is scheduled to take place, it must not be postponed, as review timescales would then not be met. The review should proceed, acknowledging if possible that an allegation is currently under investigation and that a further review will take place at the conclusion of the investigation.

The Designated Officer (or equivalent) may decide that the allegation does not meet the threshold for a multi-agency investigation. They may instead request that the agency / service undertakes their own internal investigation into what has happened. In such circumstances, Fostering agencies should undertake an internal investigation, utilising the internal investigation reporting template or equivalent. The internal investigation should be completed by someone other than the allocated Supervising Social Worker to ensure impartiality and avoid any potential conflict of interest. The investigation will usually be managed by either the Fostering Service Manager or the Registered Manager. This process should not replace consultation with the Designated Officer (or equivalent) but should supplement it as agreed with all partner agencies and the Designated Officer (or equivalent).

If the Designated Officer (or equivalent) agrees that the allegation requires multi-agency consideration, they will convene a strategy meeting / Position of Trust meeting to agree actions and plans. Multi-agency consideration of allegations against people who work with children involve three separate but broadly simultaneous processes which must be coordinated by the area local authority/ health and social care trust and Designated Officer.

These are:

- the process of protecting child/ren /adult(s) at risk
- investigation of the allegation – possibly including a criminal inquiry by the police
- the approval and termination process of the alleged perpetrator's fostering/adoption agency.

The Local Authority / Trust Social Worker will decide who is best placed to keep the child (ren) / adult at risk informed of progress in the investigation.

Child Protection Process

The welfare of the child/ren concerned is an urgent priority. Looked after Children placed in foster care/adoption will have an allocated Social Worker from their responsible local authority / trust, who must be informed of the allegation immediately. If the allegation is received out of office hours, the authority's Out of Hours team must be informed. If the child is placed in a foster placement/adoptive placement outside the responsible local authority/ health and social care trust's area, two different local authorities / trusts will be involved.

A discussion should take place with the child's responsible authority / trust on whether or not the child remains in the foster/adopter's home while the allegation is investigated. Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 place a duty on local authorities not to remove children from placement without a LAC review unless there is 'immediate risk of significant harm'.

If the decision has been made for the child/ren not to be removed from the home, a risk assessment must be completed.

In addition to details of the allegation/s it must detail who has taken the decision that the child should remain in placement and for what key reasons. It will include a risk management plan and strategies to minimise risk. A summary of the evaluation of risk and agreed strategies in place to manage those risks should be included in the Risk Assessment. The risk assessment should be approved by the Fostering Service Manager/Registered Manager / Head of Service and placed on the child's record.

Where a child is removed, the Registered Manager along with the placing LA should decide whether this precludes the foster parents looking after any other children who may remain in placement pending further investigation. The agency will inform the foster parent(s) in writing of any such decision.

For Adoption Services, any decisions made by the LA Social Worker around the child/ren not to be removed from the adoptive home must be clearly recorded on Charms and confirmed via email with the LA Social Worker. It is important to be clear that it is the responsibility of the Designated Officer (or equivalent) to direct the course of the investigation of the allegation, involving the Police where necessary, while the child's local authority / health and social care trust is responsible for the safety and wellbeing of the child.

Sometimes, another local authority / health and social care trust will also be involved, for example, if the alleged behaviour took place when the child was on holiday in a third local authority / trust's area. In such cases, all relevant local authorities / trusts must be informed, and will agree between themselves the conduct of the investigation.

Consideration may need to be given to the safety of any other children/adults with whom the person who is the subject of the allegation may have contact with, including their own children or grandchildren, in which case, safeguarding referrals must be made in relation to these children/adults as appropriate.

Similarly, the course of an investigation by the local authority / health and social care trust can vary greatly, but in general, the child should be spoken to alone and, if possible, in a setting away from the alleged perpetrator.

The Designated Officer and any S.47 investigation should determine how and when the child(ren) will be spoken with in order to investigate the concerns and allegations.

If the Supervising Social Worker or equivalent is asked to investigate the allegation, care must be taken to ensure that this is appropriate, before agreeing to this course of action. Advice should be sought from the Registered Manager / Quality Assurance Lead if there is any doubt about this.

Adults Safeguarding Process

All adult safeguarding concerns should be reported to the local authority where the abuse or neglect is allegedly taking place or is at risk of doing so. Where a local authority believes an adult at risk is experiencing or is at risk of experiencing abuse or neglect, it must make enquiries (this is not necessarily an investigation), or cause others to do so. This is a duty under S.42 of The Care Act 2014. An enquiry should establish whether any action needs to be taken to prevent or stop abuse or neglect, and if so, by whom. The objectives of an adult safeguarding enquiry are to:

- establish facts, ascertain the adult's views and wishes, assess and address their need for protection and support, in accordance with the wishes of the adult, make decisions as to what follow-up action should be taken, enable the adult to achieve resolution and recovery.

All staff have a duty to report suspected, alleged, or actual harm or abuse involving an adult at risk. Where there are issues of mental capacity, whether the person has the capacity to make specific decisions regarding their own protection and to understand the safeguarding process. In the event that people lack the capacity to provide consent, action should be taken in line with The Mental Capacity Act 2005 by the responsible authorities.

Investigation of the Allegation

The investigation of the allegation may be conducted as a single agency investigation by either the Police or Children's/Adults Social Care, or as a joint investigation.

The nature of the investigation will be determined through a Position of Trust Meeting but could change as further information becomes available in the course of the investigation. Also, if there are concerns in relation to significant harm or multiple concerns in relation to the Foster Parents/adoptive parents then a strategy meeting may be convened in addition to a Position of Trust meeting and / or the processes run concurrently.

Appendix 1 provides an insight into the areas that will be discussed at a Strategy Meeting or Position of Trust meeting.

Criminal Enquiry by the Police

The Police will investigate the possibility that a criminal offence may have been committed against or related to a child/adult. Sometimes the Police are involved at the outset because there is a need for emergency action to prevent immediate risk, or because the concern may have been reported to the police in the first place as a possible criminal offence.

Otherwise, the Designated Officer (or equivalent) may refer the matter to the police and the need for police involvement will be agreed. The police should take part in a Designated Officer (or equivalent) convened strategy meeting or Position of Trust meeting, and decisions about any police investigation will be communicated in that forum.

The course of any police investigation can vary immensely in both length and complexity, depending on the nature of the allegation. The foster parent/adopter subject of the allegation may be invited to attend the police station for interview, or may be arrested and interviewed.

Interviews take place under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, and the foster parent/adopter **must** be advised to obtain legal representation at the interview, which for foster parents is provided through their membership of an Independent Support Service.

Outcome of the Investigation

The following definitions should be used by the Designated Officer (or equivalent) when determining the outcome of allegation investigations. Remember to appropriately record everything at every stage in writing, including management decisions, discussions with other agencies, conversations with parents and children, a record of any Position of Trust/ Strategy Meeting held (in particular any actions and recommendations) should be recorded as usually minutes are not immediately available. This information must be recorded on Charms.

Summary of outcomes England

- Substantiated: there is sufficient identifiable evidence to prove the allegation.
- Unsubstantiated: this is not the same as a false allegation. It means that there is insufficient evidence to either prove or disprove the allegation: the term therefore does not imply guilt or innocence.
- False: there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation.
- Malicious: there is sufficient evidence to disprove the allegation and there has been a deliberate act to deceive.

Summary of outcomes Cymru

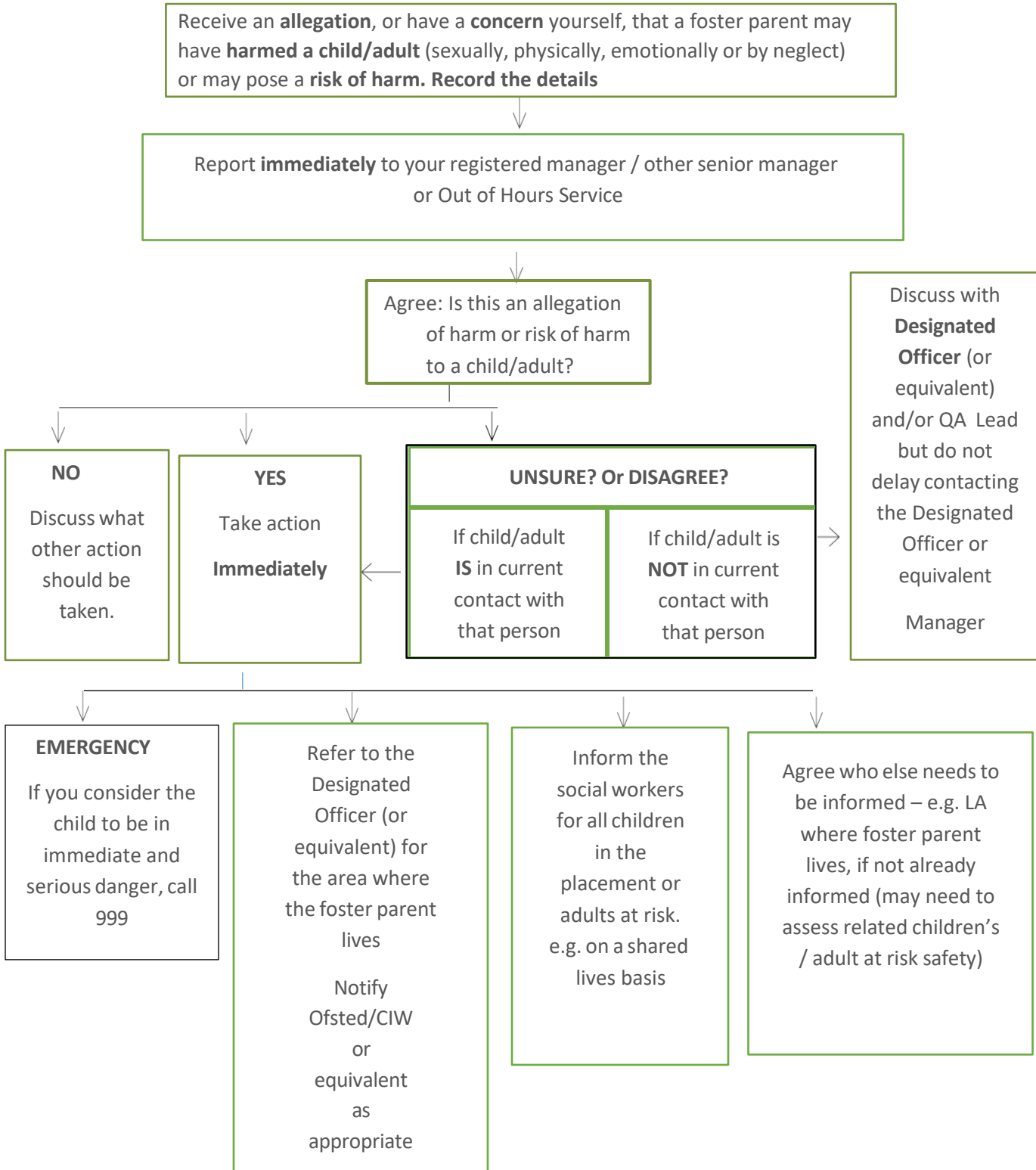
- Substantiated - Continuing Risk or Substantiated - No Continuing Risk
- Unsubstantiated

Summary of outcomes Northern Ireland

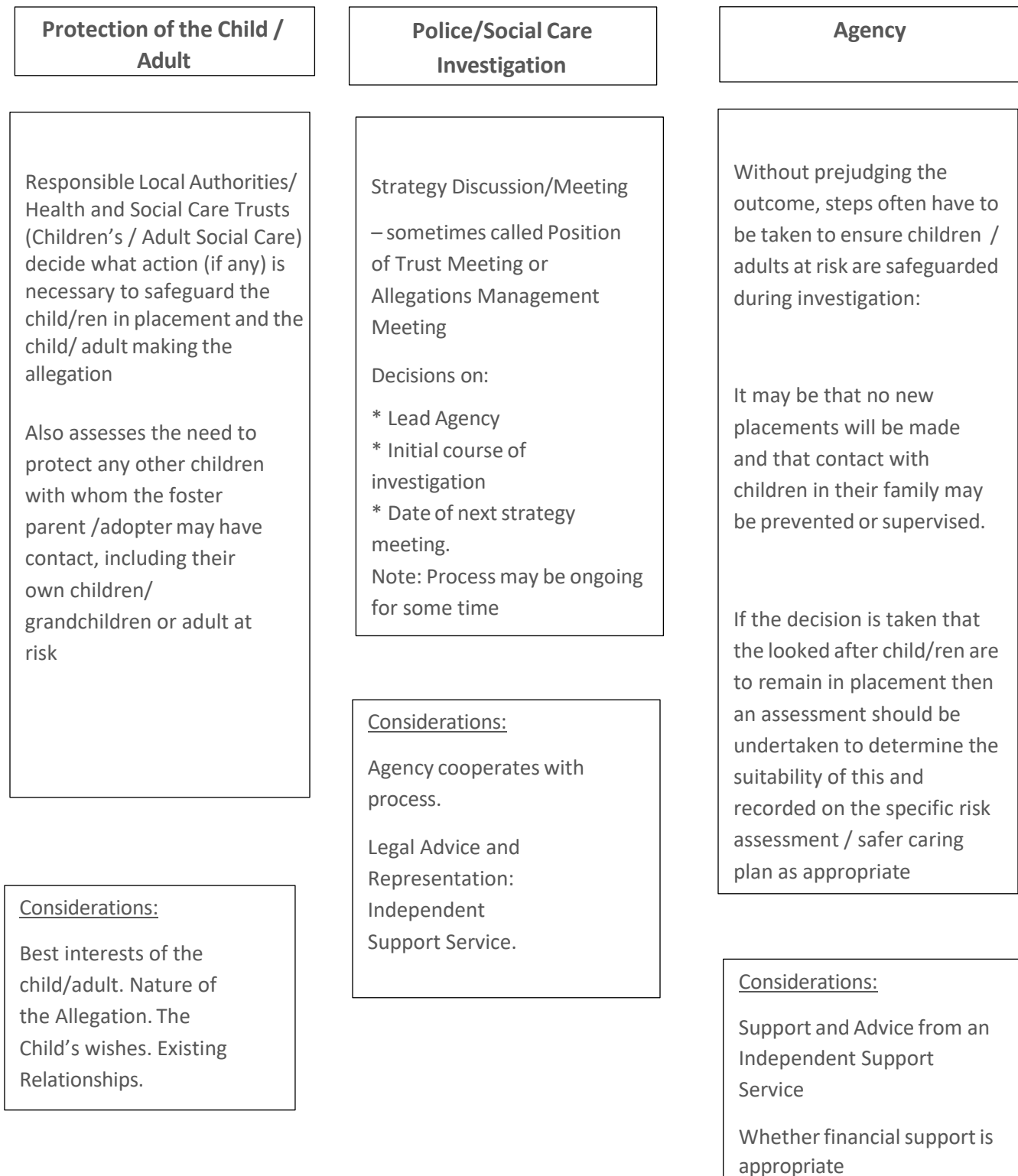
- Substantiated - Continuing Risk or Substantiated - No Continuing Risk
- Unsubstantiated

If the outcome is expressed as NFA (No Further Action), seek urgent clarification from the Designated Officer and/or the police of the basis for this decision, in the terms outlined above, as this is vital for furtherance of disciplinary processes. It is likely that an internal investigation will still be required if the allegation is deemed to be unsubstantiated or substantiated, rather than false or malicious.

Flowchart – Reporting an Allegation



Flow chart – Investigation – Three Possible Strands



These three strands in the flowchart must all be considered at the outset.

Usually the Police and/or Children's Social Care investigation must then be completed before further action can continue. The agency should have due regard to the Working Together Guidance and ensure that every effort is made to ensure that timescales are adhered to avoid any unnecessary delay.

Communication

Good Support is vital at this time. The agency must maintain contact with foster parents/adopters and the household. Foster parents/Adopters should be encouraged to participate and maintain their usual support through attendance at support groups, training, and supervision.

However, if there are allegations relating to harm to a child/adult, it may be advised that they do not attend support groups until the investigation is complete. This should be discussed as part of the Position of Trust meeting with the Designated Officer.

No information can be given about the content of the allegation without the agreement of those conducting the investigation, but the support offered should provide:

- Understanding and emotional support
- Information about the process and progress of the investigation
- A response to questions as far as possible

A guide for foster parents about allegations is available in the foster parent's handbook. An independent support service is available which ensures a joined-up approach between the fostering service, Foster Parent, and the support that is required during allegations and serious complaints.

For Adoption services, support for adopters can be made available by the AfA team in conjunction with the Local Authority.

Post Investigation

An update to the original notification to partner agencies and the Inspectorate must be provided upon the conclusion of any investigation and subsequent review. Consider including a restorative review and wellbeing check for foster parents or adopters who are returning to service following an unsubstantiated or false allegation. Support services should include trauma-informed support and reintegration planning.

**Protection of
Child/Adult**

If substantiated:

Placement usually ceases

Otherwise:

Children who had been moved may return to placement – depending on the child's Care Plan

Decisions are made about reviewing Placement Plan, Safer Caring Plan, Risk Assessments, etc., as appropriate

**Police/Social Care
Investigation**

If substantiated:

May be charged with an offence, and taken to court or cautioned

Otherwise:

No further action by police or Social Care, but recommendations may be made about the actions that should be taken by the agency

The Designated Officer (or equivalent) may decide that the allegation does not meet the threshold for a multi-agency investigation. They may instead request that the fostering agency /adoption agency undertakes their own internal investigation. In such circumstances, the Internal Investigation Report template should be used

Agency

If substantiated: A foster parent's/ adopter's suitability to continue fostering/adoption is reviewed and is presented to panel, for ADM decision

Otherwise:

If the allegation is false/unfounded/malicious no further action will be taken. Internal Investigation of the event may still be required for unsubstantiated allegations, followed by foster parent review and presentation to panel. Clear rationale for the decision must be added on the incident record as management oversight by the RM. In any case the allegation must always be included for consideration at the next foster parent annual review.

Internal Investigation Report template should be used if applicable.

Legal Duty to refer to Disclosure and Barring Service if Foster Parent approval is terminated or is likely to have been terminated had the foster parent not resigned. Notify Inspectorate conclusion /outcome

Review and Return to Panel

For Adoption

If the adopter does not withdraw following a substantiated allegation, a review will be carried out. Were the information gathered in the review suggests to the agency that the prospective adopter may no longer be suitable to adopt, AAR 30D (4) sets out the steps that the agency must take. As with the original approval process, the report that the agency presents to panel in these circumstances must be shared with the prospective adopter so that they may make comments. The rest of the process, including the rights of the prospective adopter in the event of an unfavourable outcome, is the same as for the original approval process.

In some cases the prospective adopter may accept, with the help of counselling, that they are no longer suitable to adopt, or that they no longer wish to go ahead. The agency should note this on the prospective adopter's case record and ensure that the panel is informed, as part of the six-monthly panel report, that the prospective adopter has withdrawn. If this occurs prior to the prospective adopter's review report being prepared or submitted to the panel, there is no need for the agency to carry out the subsequent actions set out in AAR 30D. The prospective adopters must be informed of this in writing. The usual conditions regarding qualifying determinations and right of appeal apply. However, there are serious concerns about the safety of any other children there should not be any delay in referring to the DBS.

The case only needs to be referred to the panel if the agency proposes to terminate approval. If this is the case, it must prepare a report giving its reasons. The prospective adopter must be given 10 days to comment on this before it goes to the panel. The prospective adopter must be invited to attend panel (Guidance 3.69). The panel makes a recommendation, having requested further information if required. The decision-making process is then as already described, with the prospective adopter having the right to apply to the IRM. (Effective Adoption Panels, 2016, p.53).

For Fostering

A foster parent review and return to panel must be held following a substantiated allegation, with the usual considerations of the quality of their fostering since the last review. An internal investigation, review and return to panel may still be held following an unsubstantiated allegation (decision to be made by the Registered Manager).

The foster parents should always be informed of any action being undertaken and must be given the usual opportunities to contribute to the review in writing, have sight of the SSW Report at least two weeks before the review and attend the review.

Where panel recommends termination of approval and this is agreed by the ADM there is a legal responsibility to refer to the Disclosure and Barring Service.

The foster parent must be informed of this in writing. The usual conditions regarding qualifying determinations and right of appeal apply. However, where there are serious concerns about the safety of any other children there should not be any delay in referring to the DBS (See Duty to Refer below)

Where a foster parent resigns before the conclusion of the investigation or foster parent review there should still be presentation to panel to consider whether they would have given serious consideration to recommending termination of approval. The (former) foster parents should be invited to the panel and asked to explain and defend the concerns, allegations, or complaints about their practice. They must be informed that where the panel would have given serious consideration to recommending termination of approval the duty to refer to the Disclosure and Barring Service still applies. The foster parents should be informed of the outcome of panel in writing even if they do not attend the panel. In such cases, the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) does not make the final decision, as the resignation renders the approval void. The panel's views and those of the agency should be recorded and retained on the foster parent's file. The information may be shared in references with other fostering services or other agencies, in line with safeguarding and data protection requirements.

Duty to Refer

The duty to refer to the DBS or equivalent includes the referral of both foster parents /adopters where jointly approved, if the investigation has concluded that both individuals have met the criteria.

It is a **legal requirement** for the company to refer anyone who they have terminated from approval as a foster parent/adopter because there is a concern that they have:

- behaved in a way that has harmed a child, or may have harmed a child or adult
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child or adult
- behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates s\he may pose a risk of harm to children or adult
- behaved or may have behaved in a way that indicates they may not be suitable to work with children or adults

This also applies if the foster parent /adopter resigns before approval could be terminated, but would have or may have terminated a foster parent's/ adopters approval had they not resigned.

The DBS or equivalent will send all the evidence to the foster parents/adopters and will seek their

written representations as to why they should not be placed on the Children's/Adults

Barred List, and will then make their decision, and inform the foster parents/adopters. DBS will not inform the agency of the outcome since they have no right to know because the foster parents/adopter are no longer fostering/adopting with them.

Learning lessons

At the conclusion of the process, the employer and the Designated Officer or equivalent may review the circumstances of the case to determine whether there are any improvements to be made in relation to how the allegation was managed. This should include consideration of the level of support provided to the foster Parents/adopters during the investigation of the allegation. Agencies should consider producing a summary report for internal learning following each completed investigation, capturing any procedural gaps, themes, or improvements required. These reports should feed into staff training and quality assurance audits.

Definitions and Abbreviations

ADM – Agency Decision Maker – senior manager/s in the fostering or adoption agency authorised to make decisions on behalf of the agency as to the approval of parents/adopters, and the terms of foster parents approval.

Designated Officer – (Previously known as LADO - Local Authority Designated Officer) role established by the Children Act 2004 to take responsibility for management and oversight of allegations against professionals working with children in England – each LA is required to designate an officer or team of officers – from 2015 new appointments must be qualified social workers. In Wales, this person is known as the 'Child Protection Coordinator or Manager.'

DBS – the Data and Barring Service – formed in December 2012 by merging the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA). The DBS provides checks of criminal records, cautions, etc., and maintains the list of those barred from working with children (Children's Barred List) and the list of those barred from working with adults (Adult's Barred List)

Independent Support Service e.g., AST, an organisation providing independent support to foster parents.

Fostertalk – independent advice line, which can access a range of specialist advice as required, including legal advice. All agency foster parents and staff have membership.

IRM – Independent Review Mechanism – an independent panel to which differences of opinion about the suitability of a person to foster, or about the terms and condition of their approval to foster, can be referred for an independent recommendation, following which the Agency Decision Maker proceeds to their decision, taking into consideration the recommendation of the IRM.

SSW – Supervising Social Worker – social worker responsible for supervising, monitoring, and supporting the work of a foster parent.

Review Dates

N/A

Appendix 1

Process for Strategy Meetings

The Strategy Meeting must consider:

- a. The nature of the allegation, its source and reliability;
- b. Background information relating to the foster/adoptive family, how long the family has been known, how many children have been placed there, the family's known strengths and weaknesses and any exceptional features about the child and the placement;
- c. The involvement of other agencies, for example if the child was placed by another local authority;
- d. Consideration should be given to informing other agencies that have placed, or are currently placing, children in the foster/adoptive home.
- e. The safety of all children in the household including the foster/adoptive parent's own children and whether any action is necessary to protect the children including the removal of all or any of the children while the investigation is conducted;
- f. How the needs of any child who has to leave the placement will be met including contact with other children in the placement;
- g. How and by whom the investigation is to be conducted. (It is important that careful consideration is given to the planning of criteria when a joint investigation is recommended. For Fostering, in situations where the Police or Crown Prosecution Service or equivalent recommend no further action then the social worker must interview the foster parents about all allegations and concerns. Interview notes must be taken and made available to future meetings and/or the Fostering Panel); For adoption, liaison will take place with the LA/Trust Social Worker to consider next course of action;
- h. The time-scales for the investigation (see below) and any contingencies should timescales prove unlikely to be met;
- i. How the child should be informed of the procedure to be followed and supported through the process;
- j. Whether the alleged perpetrator should be asked to leave the home while the investigation is conducted and confirmation that the Social Worker or Team Manager will inform the foster/adoptive parents of the safeguarding concern verbally and then in writing;
- k. Informing the child's parents of the allegation and devising a 'communication strategy' to ensure they are kept up to-date (where this is appropriate). Also to consider, depending upon the nature of the allegation, whether this impacts upon any contact arrangements that are in place. (Note that where a child is accommodated under section 20 Children Act 1989, the local authority does not have Parental Responsibility);
- l. Once informed of the decision what support to offer the foster/adoptive parents, including independent support;
- m. How reports on the investigation will be shared with the foster/adoptive parents and the child or children in the placement;
- n. Whether further placements should be made in the meantime;
- o. Arrangements for reconvening the Strategy Meeting.

Process for Position of Trust Meetings

This meeting will consider -:

- The current allegation;
- Is there a concurrent Police investigation?
- Any previous allegations against the foster/adoptive parents(s);
- Any previous allegations by the child(ren) concerned;
- Whether the child should remain in the placement or whether the foster/adoptive parent should move out or live elsewhere whilst the investigation is carried out;
- The safety and wellbeing of other children living with the foster/adoptive parents (s) or having contact with them;
- Support to the family to be offered by the fostering service and any independent support and support to be offered to the children;
- Who will inform the foster/adoptive parents of the actions/meeting?
- What information will be given to the parents of the children placed with the foster parents?

The meeting will reconvene to consider the outcome of the investigation and, if the allegations have been substantiated, make recommendations as to any further action required, including as to training, supervision and support of the foster/adoptive parents as well as whether for fostering, a formal Foster parent Review should be convened under the review of the Foster parents procedure.

Appendix 2 - Frequently Asked Questions

1. What support should be provided to a foster parent /adopter who is the subject of an allegation?

Polaris provides membership of Fostertalk for foster parents, and this provides free legal advice as part of the service. In addition, any foster parent facing an allegation will always be given the option of an independent adviser from an Independent Support Service

Polaris provides a first-year membership of Adoption UK who provide support to adopters facing allegations.

However, support should also continue from the person's usual support structures within Polaris. While Supervising Social Workers/Social Workers cannot provide any information about the allegation without authority from the investigating body (police or social care) they can provide information about the process of investigation, answer questions about the current progress, show understanding of the impact the allegation is having on the foster parent/adopter, and help to reduce their feeling of isolation.

or

Consideration will be given as to whether foster parents/adopters can attend support groups dependent on the nature and seriousness of the allegation to be determined by the Registered Manager/ Head of Service. If this step is undertaken, then alternative mechanisms for support should be agreed and communicated to the foster parent/adopter. Also, during this process, any form of supervision of foster parents should be agreed by the Supervising Social Worker/Social Worker.

2. What about the foster parent's /adopter's family?

Experience from previous situations has shown the importance of providing support to the whole fostering/ adopters household/. Their lives are affected too, and it is easy for them to feel outside the support structures being provided to the foster parent/adopter. The SSW/SW should take time to meet with household members at an early stage in the investigation and to maintain contact throughout, with the same purpose as the support provided to the foster parent/adopters themselves. There is a similar need to ensure that the second carer in a partnership is involved and supported too.

3. The foster parent /adopter against whom the allegation has been made also works with children / vulnerable adults with another organisation or company – should any action be taken in respect of their other work?

Yes. If the person against whom the allegation has been made works with children / vulnerable adults in any other capacity, this information must be provided at the time of the referral, or as soon as possible afterwards if not known at the time of the referral. This includes voluntary work, such as Scouting or Guiding, helping at a school, in church or community youth groups, parent and toddler groups etc.

Where two partners are both approved as foster parents/adopters, information should also be provided about partner not named in the allegation, as there may have been collusion or a failure to protect the child on their part.

4. The investigation is lengthy

This might be the case because the investigation of a relatively minor allegation is delayed because matters that are more serious have to take priority with the police or social care or further information has become available during the course of the investigation. The company will always seek to minimise the time taken to investigate, by fully cooperating with the police/social care, and by making the point about how much this is affecting the foster parent/adopter.

5. Now that it is finally all over, I would like to have a letter from Children's / Adult's Social Care giving the outcome of the investigation.

This would be very helpful, but it is not the practice in the vast majority of local authorities / health and social care trusts. However, the agency will usually have the outcome in writing in the minutes of meetings or in communications from the Designated Officer (or equivalent). The minutes of meetings cannot be shared without the agreement of the chair, but the agency can provide parents with a letter, which quotes the outcome as set out in the minutes. The text of the proposed letter should be sent to the Designated Officer or Chair of the meeting, and the email of their agreement with the proposed wording should be placed on the file.