

Northern Ireland Fostering Services Minimum Standards

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Event Outline

- Background to the development of the standards
- Look at each individual standard
- Focus on areas of particular interest
- Questions / discussion

The story so far...

In 2013, the then Minister of Health decided to develop new fostering regulations.

The aim of the new regulations was:

- To strengthen the operation of fostering services across Northern Ireland;
- To provide a legal basis for independent fostering agencies to assess and approve foster parents on behalf of HSC Trusts; and
- To require independent fostering agencies to register with, and be inspected by, RQIA.

Consultation on draft regulations was carried out in early 2014 and then again in 2022.



Independent Review

The '*Independent Review of Children's Social Care Services*' ran from February 2022 to June 2023.

It was informed by significant engagement from across the sector, including foster parents and those in care.

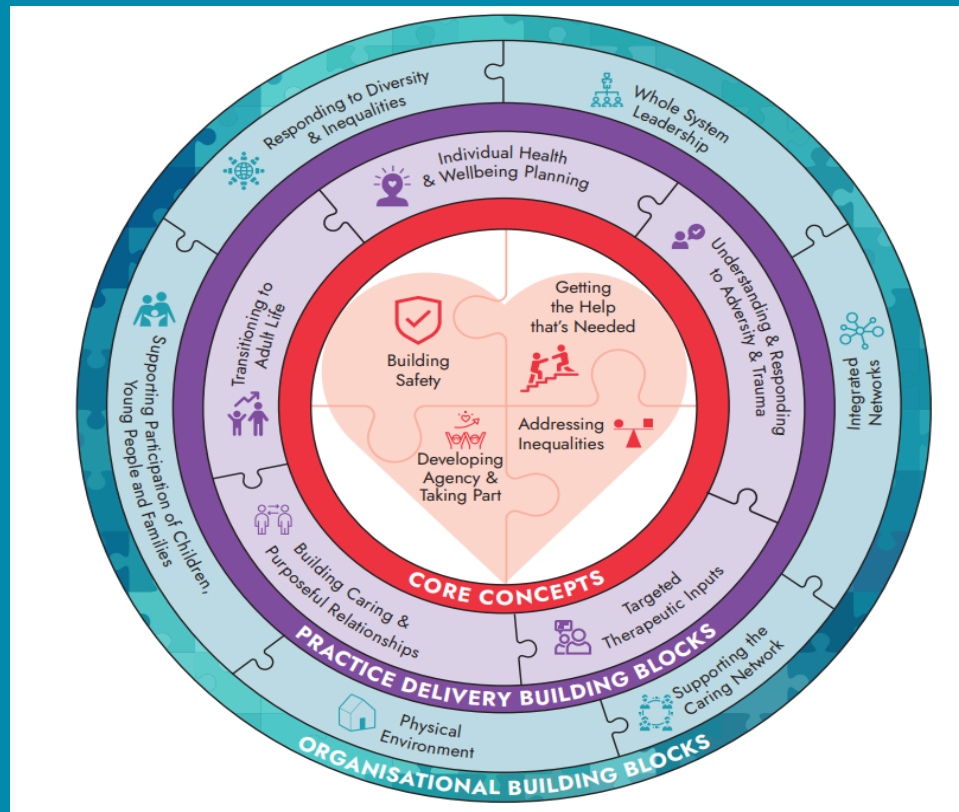
The primary recommendation was for a new, dedicated organisation for children's services.

The Report also made specific recommendations for foster care:

- That previous reviews of foster care policies and services were now progressed;
- That the role of foster carers was recognised and valued;
- That foster carers were provided with greater support, perhaps through the introduction of the Mockingbird model.



Northern Ireland Framework for Integrated Therapeutic Care (NIFITC)



NI Fostering Services Minimum Standards

The Department collaboratively drafted Minimum Standards with a working group consisting of representatives from across the statutory, voluntary and independent sectors .

Over the past 13 months, the standards have been refined and improved.

We want them to be good as they can possibly be – please respond to the online 12-week public consultation, as your views and opinions matter.



Values

- ✓ The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of their care.
- ✓ Children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefiting from parenting which supports them to access a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills that contribute to a successful adult life.
- ✓ The wishes and feelings of every child in foster care should be heard and considered.
- ✓ Each child in foster care should be valued as an individual and given personalised support in line with their individual needs and background to develop their identity, self-confidence, and self-worth.
- ✓ Genuine partnership between all those involved in fostering children is essential for the MS to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes Health and Social Care Trusts (HSC Trusts) and other fostering service providers, other statutory and voluntary and community organisations, and foster parents.

Overview of Standards

The overall standards document is made up of 11 individual standards.

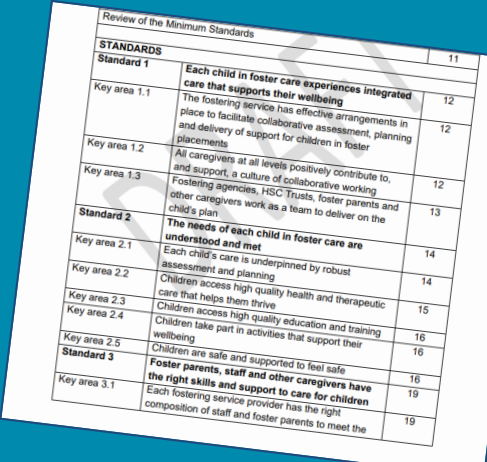
Together they set out :

- how fostering services should be managed;
- the support they provide to children, young people and foster parents; and
- how they make sure that care is properly planned and delivered.

Each standard consists of:

key areas and supporting **'indicators'** - examples of how the fostering service can **show** they are doing everything right.

It is planned to check at least every 3 years that fostering services are adhering to the Standards.



STANDARDS		11
Standard 1	Each child in foster care experiences integrated care that supports their wellbeing	12
Key area 1.1	The fostering service has effective arrangements in place to facilitate collaborative assessment, planning and delivery of support for children in foster placements	12
Key area 1.2	All caregivers at all levels positively contribute to, and support, a culture of collaborative working	12
Key area 1.3	Fostering agencies, FSC Trusts, foster parents and other caregivers work as a team to deliver on the child's plan	13
Standard 2	The needs of each child in foster care are understood and met	14
Key area 2.1	Each child's care is underpinned by robust assessment and planning	14
Key area 2.2	Children access high quality health and therapeutic care that helps them thrive	15
Key area 2.3	Children access high quality education and training	16
Key area 2.4	Children take part in activities that support their wellbeing	16
Key area 2.5	Children are safe and supported to feel safe	16
Standard 3	Foster parents, staff and other caregivers have the right skills and support to care for children	19
Key area 3.1	Each fostering service provider has the right composition of staff and foster parents to meet the	19



Standard 1: *Each child in foster care experiences integrated care that supports their wellbeing*

Key area 1.1: *The fostering service has effective arrangements in place to facilitate collaborative assessment, planning and delivery of support for children in foster placements*

Key area 1.2: *All caregivers at all levels positively contribute to, and support, a culture of collaborative working*

Key area 1.3: *Fostering agencies, HSC Trusts, foster parents and other caregivers work as a team to deliver on the child's plan*



Standard 2: The needs of each child in foster care are understood and met

Key area 2.1:*Each child's care is underpinned by robust assessment and planning*

Key area 2.2:*Children access high quality health and therapeutic care that helps them thrive*

Key area 2.3:*Children access high quality education and training*

Key area 2.4:*Children take part in activities that support their wellbeing*

Key area 2.5:*Children are safe and supported to feel safe*



Standard 3: *Foster parents, staff & other caregivers have the right skills and support to care for children*

Key area 3.1:*Each fostering service provider has the right composition of staff and foster parents to meet the needs of children in foster care*

Key area 3.2:*Recruitment, assessment and review processes identify the right foster parents with the core values, skills and knowledge to meet the needs of children*

Key area 3.3:*Foster parents and fostering service staff are supported to develop their values, competencies and skills*

Key area 3.4:*Foster parents and fostering service staff feel safe and secure in their roles, know that they are valued and that what they do matters*

Key area 3.5:*Foster parents and those in their household are empowered to support the wellbeing of the child*



Standard 4: *Leaders inspire and enable high quality care that delivers the best possible outcomes for children*

Key area 4.1:*Senior leaders and managers are clear about the purpose of the fostering service and communicate this well to foster parents, staff, children and key stakeholders*

Key area 4.2:*Senior leaders and managers promote a vision of high quality care and high expectations of what can be achieved for children*

Key area 4.3:*There are effective governance and management arrangements within HSC Trusts and fostering agencies*

Key area 4.4:*The Registered Manager or HSC Trust Head of Service of the fostering service ensures that children are receiving high quality care*

Key area 4.5:*Senior leaders foster a culture of collective leadership that delivers high quality care*



Standard 5: *The physical environment within the foster home is welcoming, safe and inclusive for children*

Key area 5.1:*The physical environment promotes the safety of children*

Key area 5.2:*The foster home provides a comfortable and homely environment*

Key area 5.3:*The physical environment gives a strong message to children that they are valued*



Standard 6: *Children and their foster parents are meaningfully involved*

Key area 6.1:*Foster parents provide an environment where children are safe, comfortable and supported to express their views and preferences*

Key area 6.2:*Children and their foster parents are meaningfully involved in decisions about their care and support*

Key area 6.3:*Children take an active role in influencing decisions about their routines, the activities they undertake and the services they receive when living in the foster home*

Key area 6.4:*Children and foster parents have confidence in procedures for making complaints or representations about any aspect of a fostering service*



Standard 7: The intrinsic worth of each child in foster care is valued and promoted

Key area 7.1:*Equality and inclusion are promoted, and inequalities are challenged*

Key area 7.2:*Children experience dignity, respect and have their legal and human rights upheld*

Key area 7.3:*Children are supported to develop a positive self-identity*



Standard 8: *The unique experiences of each child in foster care are recognised and responded to with tailored support that acknowledges and addresses adversity and trauma*

Key area 8.1:*There is a shared knowledge base for understanding and responding to adversity and trauma*

Key area 8.2:*Foster parents seek to understand a child's story and respond to their behaviour and needs sensitively*

Key area 8.3:*Foster parents are supported to deliver trauma informed care*



Standard 9: *Children benefit from relationships with foster parents, birth families and people important to them*

Key area 9.1:*Children are supported to develop and sustain safe and nurturing relationships with foster parents, their families, friends and people who are important to them*

Key area 9.2:*Visits with birth families and people important to children are supported*



Standard 10: *Children benefit from well-managed, positive and individualised transitions*

Key area 10.1:*Decisions about where a child will live are made and implemented in a way that is strongly child-centred*

Key area 10.2:*Children are equipped for leaving their foster home, to return home, live in a different care setting or move to independent living arrangements*

Key area 10.3:*Children are supported and empowered to develop life skills to support their independence*



Standard 11: *Children in foster care with more complex needs receive timely, high quality specialist interventions to help them recover and thrive*

Key area 11.1:*The need for, and delivery of, specialist mental health or therapeutic care is reflected in the child's care plan*

Key area 11.2:*Children receive the high quality specialist care they need in a timely manner*

Recruitment and Assessment

The standards provide more details to fostering services on how recruitment and assessment of foster parents should be carried out. This includes the different ways that fostering services must support potential foster parents.

- Existing and potential foster parents are treated **fairly** and **respectfully** at all times
- The assessment process should be **clearly explained** to the potential foster parents, including any **checks** which may need to be carried out on foster parents or members of their family;
- The fostering service should clearly explain the **help** which potential foster parents can have during the assessment process
- The fostering service should **regularly update** the potential foster parent on progress, and provide updates in writing.
- Fostering services have clear and effective processes for **reaching decisions** regarding potential foster parents;
- Potential foster parents can **attend meetings** where their approval is being discussed.



Support for Foster Parents

The standards provide much more detail on the support that foster parents can expect from their fostering service.

- Throughout the standards, the role of foster parents is valued, and they are treated fairly and politely;
- Authority for making decisions concerning a child in their care is delegated to foster parents in line with the relevant Department of Health circulars, and foster parents are clear about the decisions that they can or cannot make;
- Foster parents undergo an effective induction programme, and are given further opportunities to learn;



Support for Foster Parents

Continued:

- Foster parents are provided with copies of all of the fostering service's policies and procedures that they need to help them care for a child;
- Foster parents are given the training and guidance they need to help keep a child in their care, and others in their household, safe;
- The fostering service asks foster parents their views on the support available to them, and considers those views when reviewing;
- Foster parents are given clear information on the support they can expect to receive, including training, peer support, financial support and breaks from caring;
- The standards specify further detail on how fostering services should deal with complaints.

Monitoring and Review



It is important for every foster parent, and for the children they care for, to understand how reviews are carried out, and how their views are taken into account.

Foster parents should also be given more information about the timescales for their review, including when and how they will be informed of the outcome.

The standards require that:

- Foster parents are given four weeks notice of the start of the review;
- Reviews are carried out against clear and consistent criteria; and
- Foster parents, foster children and others in the home all have the opportunity to contribute to the review.

Care Planning

In the Standards:

- Everyone involved in providing care to a child should be involved in writing their plan, and be clear on their role in implementing the plan;
- Fostering services must encourage and support foster parents to take part in assessing, planning and reviewing the care for a foster child;
- Everyone works together well to provide the foster child with all of the support that they need;
- There is careful matching between children and foster parents, to ensure that the needs of the child can be met during the placement;
- Foster parents are provided with all of the information and support that they need to safely care for a foster child.



Next Steps

- Public consultation ongoing until 7th September 2025
- Analysis of consultation responses
- Draft and publish Consultation Response Report
- Further amendments to standards following consultation
- Approval to be sought from Minister to the standards
- Implementation towards the end of 2025



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