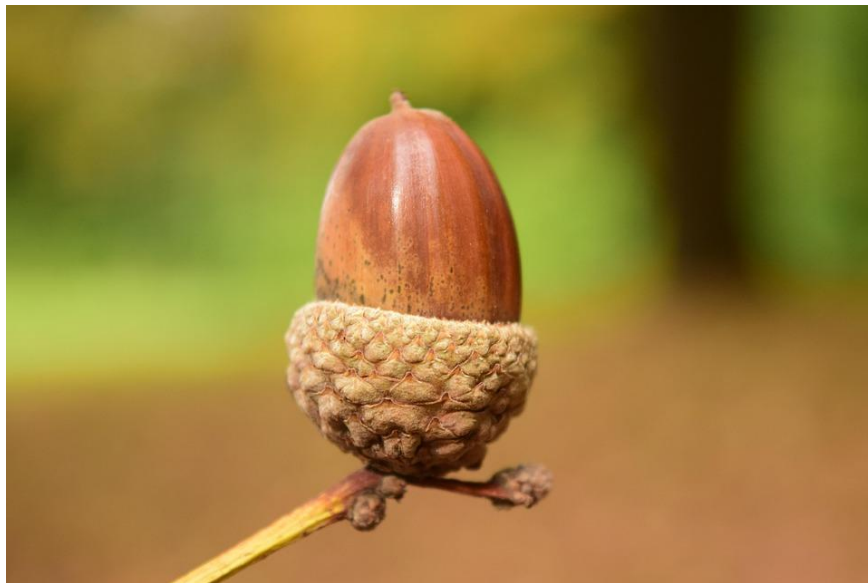




Statement of Purpose



May 2026

Registration Body: Ofsted
Registration Number: SC463071

Introduction

This document sets out the Statement of Purpose for At the Acorns, an Independent Fostering Provider whose office base is in Darlington, offering fostering homes for children and young people in partnership with their placing local authorities.

At the Acorns Statement of Purpose provides a range of information which is intended for a wide audience including:

- At the Acorns staff
- Foster parents and prospective foster parents
- Children and young people – who live with our foster parents
- The parents of children and young people in our care
- Local Authorities who are considering children and young people to be cared for by our foster parents
- Colleagues in children's social care
- General public

The Statement of Purpose for At the Acorns has been developed in accordance with regulations, statutory guidance and National Minimum Standards as applying to fostering providers, including:

- The Care Standards Act 2000
- The Children Act 1989 and The Children Act 2004
- The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (updated in 2013 and 2015)
- Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (2011)

This Statement of Purpose is reviewed and updated on a regular basis, and at least annually.

- 1 Our vision, objectives and mission statement
- 2 Status and constitution
- 3 Management structure and staffing
- 4 The way in which we work to achieve our objectives
- 5 Services provided by At the Acorns
- 6 Quality assurance

1 Our Vision:

Following the successful operation of residential care and supported living services in the North East, At the Acorns was founded to enhance the services that we offer to Local Authorities for children and young people in their care.

We believe that our foster parents are our greatest asset, forming a crucial part of the professional team around the children and young people in our care. Our foster families are without exception, committed, optimistic, enthusiastic, very hard-working, accepting and non-judgemental. We all work together to ensure that our children and young people have access to all of the opportunities available to their peer group and that they experience safety, security, fun, laughter and inclusion in all areas of their lives.

Our objectives:

- To provide children and young people with a high-quality family home matched to their individual needs.
- To recruit, assess, support and train foster parents to provide a range of fostering environments for children who are unable to live with their birth families.
- To ensure safe and nurturing environments and experiences for children and young people which promote and enrich all areas of wellbeing.
- To promote resilience and enable children and young people to achieve their potential.
- To respect and promote the racial, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds of children and young people.
- To ensure that the voice of the child or young person is heard in all decisions about their lives.
- To ensure that foster parents and their family are respected as an integral part of the core team around the child.
- To provide support, regular supervision and training opportunities to equip foster parents in meeting the complex needs of children in their care.
- To ensure that all regulatory and minimum standard requirements are met in relation to the approval, review and supervision of carers and placement of children, and to monitor that they are being met via quality assurance processes.
- To do everything possible to guarantee a stable fostering home, free from disruption, where a child or young person's needs are understood and met.
- To provide an out of hours contact service for foster parents.
- To commit foster parents and staff to collaborative working with children and young people, their families, the commissioning local authority and other agency colleagues in pursuit of positive outcomes for children and young people.
- To prepare young people adequately for when they leave their foster family and create lifelong attachments with foster parents.
- To maintain and promote family time between children and their birth families and or significant others and communicate effectively with parents as appropriate.

Our Mission Statement:

At the Acorns promotes a therapeutic parenting model to meet the needs of the children and young people in our care, directed by our consultant clinical psychologist. We continually search for innovative ways to improve outcomes for our children and young people and provide excellent training opportunities and support services for our foster families to empower them in their daily practice.

Our **MISSION** is to provide outstanding professional therapeutic fostering services informed by quality, innovation, value and positive responses to change.

2 Status and constitution:

At the Acorn Care (NE) Limited (Fostering at At the Acorns) is an independent fostering provider, a private limited company registered under the Companies Act 1985 (registered under number SC463071).

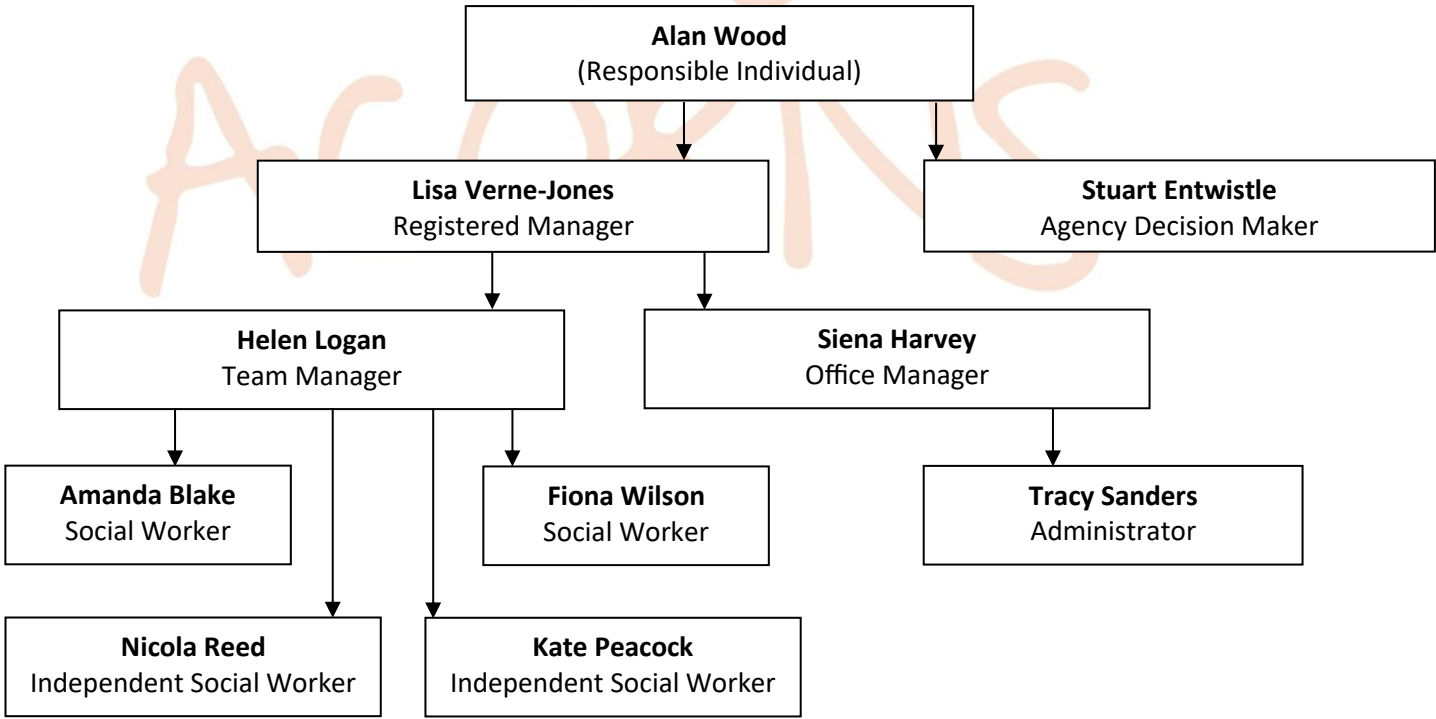
At The Acorn Care Board of Directors meet regularly to review the company wide performance and key performance indicators. The responsibilities of the Board are: -

- 1. Development of the group’s vision and mission and the prioritisation of action.
- 2. The formal approval and prioritisation of the statement of purpose.
- 3. The continual review and development of the company structure.
- 4. The review, development and approval of company-wide policy.
- 5. The approval of the company business plan at least annually.
- 6. The allocation of budgets.
- 7. The review of performance and compliance with current legislation.

At the Acorns is committed to promoting foster family participation in the company’s direction, acknowledging that every stakeholder forms an important part of our team. Alan Wood is the ‘Responsible Individual’ (awaiting registration) for At the Acorns. Alan Wood reports directly to the Board and line manages Lisa Verne-Jones, who is the ‘Registered Manager’.

3 Management structure and staffing:

At the Acorns organisational structure – May 2026



Job roles and qualifications:

Responsible Individual/ Registered Manager

Are professionally qualified Social Workers registered with Social Work England and hold management qualifications. The Responsible Individual/ Registered Manager are responsible for the overall operation of the fostering services to foster parents, children and young people.

The Responsible Individual/ Registered Manager are responsible for budgetary control and are involved with the development and implementation of the strategic aims and objectives of the organisation. The Responsible Individual / Registered Manager are responsible for the management of the Team Manager, ensure all policies and procedures are up to date, complete audits of the service to ensure a high standard, and monitor and advise on serious complaints and allegations ensuring appropriate procedures are followed and safeguards are in place.

Team Manager

Is a professionally qualified Social Worker registered with Social Work England and is responsible for the supervision and management of the Social Workers and Apprentice Social Worker. The Team Manager takes responsibility for developing training and supporting services for foster parents. They coordinate training alongside responsibilities for recruitment and assessment.

Supervising Social Workers (SSW)

Are qualified Social Workers registered with Social Work England and undertake the assessment, matching, support and annual review of foster parents. SSWs work in partnership with the child in care's Social Worker to promote good outcomes. SSWs also support training, help coordinate At the Acorns activities alongside the hub carers and cover the out-of-hours support service.

Independent Social Worker

Our independent social workers complete Form F assessments, audits, and IRO work. If required they can also complete Standards of Care reports.

Administrators

Undertake a wide range of admin tasks to support the work of the service such as inputting and monitoring of statistical data, coordinating training, ensuring all checks and repeat checks are completed.

Summary of current staffing

There is a range of experience in the team from 25 years' experience in fostering and social care including childcare, social work, safeguarding, administration and customer service.

4 The way in which we work to achieve our objectives:

Recruitment & Assessment

We place the child at the centre of everything we do, and recruit foster families who have the emotional and physical capacity to meet the needs of our children and young people without compromising their own familial relationships. We acknowledge the inevitability of change and recognise individual strengths and limitations and promote a company-wide culture of innovation, embracing change as an opportunity to improve what we do. At the Acorns works with children and young people aged 0 – 17 and young adults aged 18 plus who may wish to remain with their foster families under a “staying put” arrangement. Where appropriate, we strive to keep siblings together and some of our families have the capacity to take sibling groups.

We take an inclusive approach to ensure that we recruit foster parents with a wide range of skills and experience and which reflect the cultures and communities around us. At the Acorns welcomes applications to become a foster parent regardless of gender, marital status, sexuality, race, disability, religion, culture or employment status.

On receiving an enquiry from a prospective foster parent, the service requests basic information and will complete an initial enquiry form. An initial home visit is then arranged, if appropriate, by a supervising social worker from the team to discuss in more detail the work of At the Acorns and to answer any queries or concerns the enquirer may have. A decision will be reached as to whether the prospective foster parents wishes to and is suitable to proceed. Following this, a rigorous assessment and approval process is undertaken with each prospective foster parent. These assessments are completed by qualified and experienced social workers and are presented to our Fostering Panel.

Providing children and young people with a high-quality fostering family matched to their individual needs. To recruit, assess, support and train foster parents to provide a range of fostering care for children who are unable to live with their birth families.

- We recruit foster parents with a wide range of skills and experience.
- A rigorous assessment and approval process is undertaken with each foster parent.
- Foster parents are provided with regular supervision and we undertake comprehensive reviews.
- Children and young people are carefully matched with foster parent(s) able to meet their needs, using a checklist to ensure every important aspect is considered.
- Dependent upon the assessed needs, our consultant clinical psychologist will draw up a therapeutic personal development plan for the foster family to work with. Stability in childhood is key, and our hope is that when a child moves into an At the Acorns family, it will be their final move within the care system.
- Additional support is provided to foster families such as regular short breaks, increased supervision, assistance with family time and specialised training.
- All families are taught about attachment theory and are encouraged and supported to provide the “secure base” model described by Kim Golding.

Safe and nurturing environments and experiences for children and young people.

- A child specific Safer Caring Plan is completed for each child. This is updated annually or whenever circumstances change.
- We ensure the homes of our foster parents fulfil all health and safety requirements.
- We ensure that all foster parents are competent and confident in safer caring and in protecting children from harm.
- At least one unannounced visit is made to foster homes each year.
- The agency and carers are keenly aware of the established potential link between children who go missing and child sexual exploitation and are proactive in discussions with young people and local authorities where there are concerns.

Ensuring that the voice of the child or young person is heard in all decisions about their lives. Promoting resilience and enabling children and young people to achieve their potential.

- Foster parents encourage children and young people to make choices in their daily lives.
- Children and young people are encouraged and supported to attend and contribute to meetings such as the Reviews of their care plan held by the responsible authority.
- Foster parents advocate for children and young people, so that their needs are met and support is offered by all those in the team around the child when required.
- Information and assistance are provided for children and young people to access an independent advocate when needed.
- The views of children and young people are monitored at foster carer reviews, and also in the monthly management meetings, and actions are taken in response.
- At the Acorns is proactive in encouraging the delegation of authority for everyday decisions to the foster parent, to enable them to support the child or young person's reasonable choices in their lives.

Ensuring that foster parents and their family are respected as an integral part of the core team around the child. To maintain and promote family time between children placed and their birth families and or significant others as appropriate.

- We have developed materials to help prepare the birth children of prospective foster parents for fostering. Well-prepared birth children are better able to accept, care, support, and empathise for our looked after children when they join the family.
- Accessible methods of communication are utilised to ensure that disabled children are able to fully communicate their views.
- The delegation of authority to foster parents to make reasonable and appropriate decisions on behalf of their foster child is actively promoted by At the Acorns.
- Foster parents and their foster children are listened to and involved in decision-making and planning and are provided with full information about each other.
- Foster parents have access to a specialist independent support scheme.
- A level of financial support is provided that values the skills of foster parents.

Providing support, regular supervision and training opportunities to equip foster parents in meeting the complex needs of children placed.

- Foster parents have an induction programme, which ensures they receive training in their role as a foster parent in a systematic manner.
- Foster parents will be provided with therapeutic parenting training so that children and young people are provided with a secure base that every child needs.
- A full programme of courses are available and foster parents' training needs are constantly monitored through supervision. Foster parents are able to access training on-line and well as via classroom-based sessions.
- Where the agency is not able to provide a specific training course for foster parents, learning is enabled in an alternative way such as through reading material or an external course.
- The agency will support carers that wish to undertake further training through a diploma or equivalent.
- At the Acorns foster parents are committed to attending training and workshops on a regular basis to help maintain good standards of care and develop their skill base and knowledge.

Doing everything possible to guarantee a stable fostering home, free from disruption, where a child or young person's needs are understood and met. To provide an out of hours contact service for foster parents.

- We help children and young people to settle into new placements by providing them with information about their foster parents in the form of a welcome booklet.
- Wherever possible, an information sharing meeting takes place to ensure full information and an understanding of the child's needs is provided prior to introductions between the child or young person and their foster parents.
- Planning meetings are prepared with the responsible local authority prior to each child moving into our care which include essential information, care plans and clarity of delegation of authority to foster parents regarding the individual needs of the child.
- Foster parents and children/young people are provided with access to support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. They will also have direct access to our consultant clinical psychologist for advice or any questions that they have regarding the children in their care.
- The supervising social worker provides monthly supervision and regular telephone support.

- Where there are concerns about the possible unplanned ending for a child, a meeting is held with the local authority and other agencies to attempt to address those concerns.

- If a disruption does occur, a Disruption Meeting will endeavour to learn lessons from this sad event to avoid a similar occurrence in the future.

- Foster parents are resilient, and committed to doing all they can, supported by the agency, to ensure stability and to make a positive impact on the lives of children and young people.

Foster parents and staff are committed to collaborative working with children and young people, their families, the commissioning local authority and other agency colleagues in pursuit of positive outcomes for children and young people.

- At the Acorns staff and foster parents are committed to working together, and with other professionals involved with children and young people, in an open, honest and respectful manner.

- All significant incidents are promptly shared with the responsible authority.

- Outcomes trackers are completed for every child in care review, which monitor outcomes for each child or young person.

- The agency has processes in place to monitor progress and celebrate achievements.

ACORNS

To respect and promote the racial, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds of children and young people.

- We have a diversity action plan in place to address additional needs of children specific to their racial, cultural and religious backgrounds.
- Foster parents will be provided with additional targeted training in order to support the children in their care.
- The supervising social worker will provide additional support to foster parents in this area and will link families in with local provisions/services, if applicable.
- Where possible the agency will seek support from interpreting services/specialist services, if required, in order to support children and young people.

Preparing young people adequately for when they leave their foster family and create lifelong attachments with foster parents.

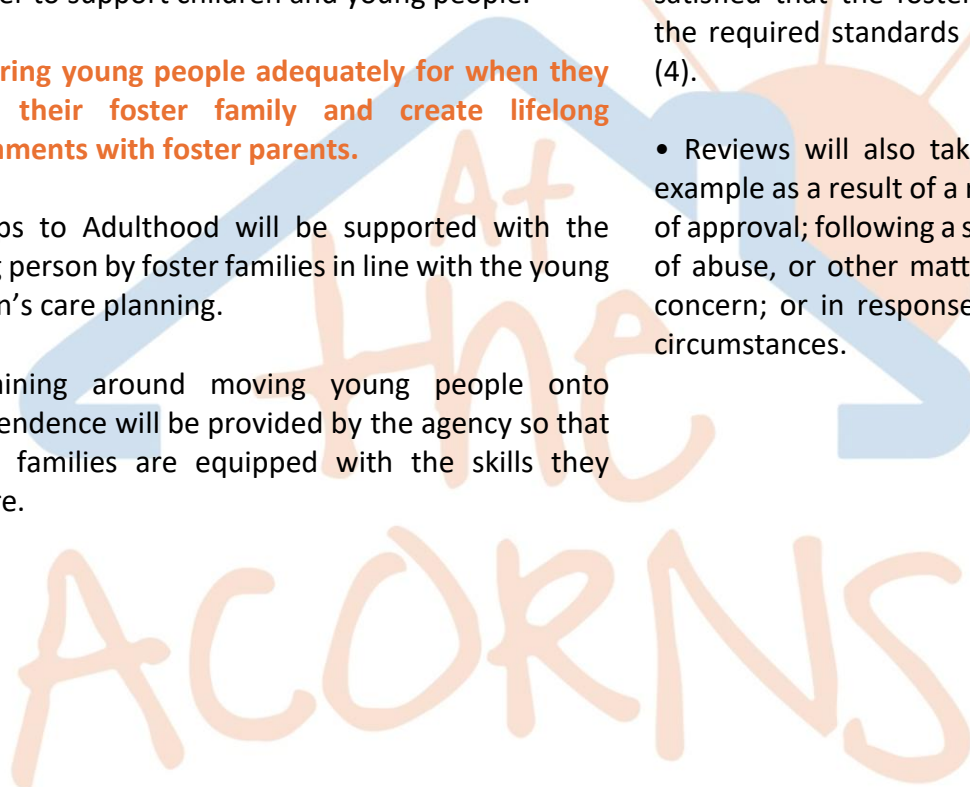
- Steps to Adulthood will be supported with the young person by foster families in line with the young person's care planning.
- Training around moving young people onto independence will be provided by the agency so that foster families are equipped with the skills they require.

- The agency will work closely with the placing authority in order to ensure that the Pathway plan is supported and that the actions are achieved.

- When a child comes to move on positively this will be acknowledged and celebrated by the agency.

To ensure that all regulatory and minimum standard requirements are met in relation to the approval, review and supervision of carers and placement of children, and to monitor that they are being met via quality assurance processes.

- Reviews will take place in line with the regulatory requirements of a foster carer Regulation 28 (2). A first review will take place within 12 months after approval and subsequent reviews will take place every 12 months thereafter. At the Acorns must be satisfied that the foster parents continue to meet the required standards as set out in Regulation 28 (4).
- Reviews will also take place at other times for example as a result of a request to change the terms of approval; following a serious complaint, allegation of abuse, or other matters of serious/safeguarding concern; or in response to a significant change of circumstances.



5 Services provided by At the Acorns:

Placement types provided

Emergency

We have foster parents who can provide unplanned / emergency care for individual children or sibling groups.

Short Breaks (respite)

We have foster parents who provide short break either on a regular basis or one-off holiday breaks. These can be for children living at home with their birth parents, children within our agency or those children from another fostering agency.

Short-term

Short-term care can last for up to two years, while long-term plans are being formulated.

Bridging

Bridging generally forms part of a longer-term plan for a child or young person. At the Acorns works with children/young people and their families towards reunification or prepares children/young people for joining adoptive or long term/permanent fostering families or for moving to a semi-independent or an independent living arrangement.

Long-term/permanency

Permanency is achieved with long-term foster parents who can take individual children or sibling groups and offer a fostering home until a child becomes independent. Long-term plans are matched in accordance with placing authority procedures.

Disabled children and young people

At the Acorns can deliver a range of services for disabled children including long term, short term, short breaks and emergency foster parents.

Parent and Child

We are able to provide foster care for parents and their child or children, so that they can receive support in developing parenting skills. Foster parents will have completed the relevant Parent and Child training. Foster parents can assist local authorities with their assessments by providing information relating to parenting capacity/capabilities.

Remand

For young people who are remanded by the court or bailed, this specialist fostering provision will normally last about three months, but this can vary.

Solo children

Solo care is offered to children who could be a risk to other children and young people, or whose behaviour is so challenging that carers cannot offer enough support if other children are present.

Sibling Groups

Many of our foster parents are able to care for larger sibling groups to enable children to remain together.

Staying Put Arrangements

These are to enable young people to remain in their fostering home post 18 to support their transition into adulthood.

Transitions

We offer fostering homes to children and young people who are ready to move on from residential care into a family environment. Planning and preparation, introductions and additional support will ensure a successful transition into foster care.

Regulation

All children and young people with At the Acorns foster parents are made and monitored in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (updated in 2013 and 2015).

This means that:

All foster parents are properly approved, reviewed and have signed a 'Foster Care Agreement.'

All children's placements are made using individual 'Foster Placement Agreements' which are prepared either before or at the point of placement and which include essential information sharing and information about the placement plan.

Wherever possible planning meeting is undertaken, including introductions between foster parents and child(ren). For emergencies, immediate care and planning is given very rapid attention.

Social work service

At the Acorns values the work that foster parents do and the contribution they make to the lives of children and young people in their care. The key to a successful, stable fostering home is the quality of support that foster parents receive. At the Acorns offers the following support to all our carers:

- A comprehensive post-approval training programme which is linked to (TSDS) Training, Support and Development Standards.
- All Foster Parents are supported in developing a Personal Professional Development Plan (PPDP) which sets out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development needs, experience and the needs of the children placed or may be placed in their care.
- Where possible, we offer our foster families 14 nights short breaks every year and we operate the extended Family Model via our Hub Carers. This means where we can, children will go to the same foster parents for every short break.
- Good quality liaison and working arrangements with local authorities including attendance at relevant meetings such as Education (PEP), Child in Care Reviews and Care Planning Meetings.
- A level of financial support that values and recognises foster parents' skills, achievements and time including a foster care fee and fostering allowance.
- A buddy system for our families to share experiences and receive advice and support.
- Supervision and support from a named qualified and experienced Social Worker Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm.
- Access to an out of hours service.
- Frequent visits, (minimum of once per month), negotiated with the carer and regular telephone contact from the supervising social worker. Including at least one unannounced visit per year.
- Regular reflective workshops with our consultant clinical psychologist and / or Buddy Support.
- Events for all of our children and foster parents.

6 Quality assurance:

At the Acorns, our number one priority is to keep the children in our care safe from harm. We have a robust recruitment and retention of staff policy together with a complaints policy, a confidentiality policy, a safeguarding and child protection policy and a child sexual exploitation policy. All of our staff and foster carers are aware of the policies which are strictly adhered to and fully comprehensive and appropriate to any given situation.

Complaints are taken seriously and addressed immediately, especially if they concern an expression of dissatisfaction by a child or young person. Our children and young people are told how to make a complaint in the welcome pack that they receive when they join us and all complaints will be dealt with by either the Registered Manager or the Responsible Individual. If the complaint is about either the Registered Manager or the Responsible Individual, the complaint will be dealt with by a Director at board level. Allegations are handled robustly but sensitively, and additional support is given to foster families in the event that an allegation is made against them. We view complaints as an opportunity to learn and to improve the services that we offer and we regularly review and monitor what we do and how we do it to assure the highest quality in every area of our service.

Every child and young person has an individual child specific safer caring plan which is regularly reviewed to ensure that they remain current and relevant. These documents can be reviewed at any time in response to life events.

At the Acorns follows the procedures and guidance provided by our local safeguarding partnership and follows their protocols for children and young people who are missing from care. Our child protection and safeguarding policy is reviewed at least annually. All of our policies and procedures are available to all of our stakeholders via our website and can be produced in any format or language to suit the stakeholder's requirements.

External Inspection

As a registered children's social care service, At the Acorns is subject to regular external inspection by Ofsted. At the Acorns welcomes such inspection. The reports of these inspections are publicly available via the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Ofsted may be contacted at:

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Piccadilly Gate

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Manchester

M1 2WD

Ofsted Information Helpline: 0300 123 1231

Service improvement

We promote a culture of continuous improvement, giving careful attention to feedback about our services provided by any individuals or organisations.

For further information about At the Acorns, please contact our office:

**At the Acorns, 33 Kellaw Road, Yarm Road Industrial Estate, Darlington,
County Durham, DL1 4YA**

01325 466525

or visit our website fosteringattheacorns.co.uk