



City of Doncaster Fostering Service

Statement of Purpose 2023/24



**City of
Doncaster
Council**

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1. Foreword

As the Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Communities and Equalities, I have specific roles and responsibilities for children looked after. When a child comes into care, City of Doncaster Children's Services becomes the Corporate Parent. This means the council, elected members, employees and partner agencies all have collective responsibility to safeguard and provide the best care for the children who are looked after. Every member and employee of the Council has statutory responsibility to act for that child or young person in the same way that any good parent would act for their own child.

Our ambition is for children growing up in care to have equal life chances as other children growing up in Doncaster. We want their outcomes to be every bit as good as their peers. We recognise that a child's needs are best met by a nurturing family and we are committed to placing children who are not able to remain within their own family in an appropriate alternative family placement wherever possible. City of Doncaster Children's Services is committed to placing children and young people with City of Doncaster Fostering approved foster families. We have developed and invested in a dedicated and comprehensive Fostering Service that actively works to meet the quality standards required and the diverse needs of the children who become looked after by City of Doncaster Council. We are also committed to the increase the number of our foster carers so that every 'child looked after' who should be, is placed within their home borough. This will enable them to maintain contact with families and friends, continue at the same school, and thrive within their own community. Our aim is for each child/young person to have access to foster care services which recognise and address their needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality.

This statement of purpose sets out the framework for City of Doncaster fostering services. The main aim of City of Doncaster fostering service is to provide stable and high quality foster care placements for children of all ages that value, support and encourage them to grow and develop as individuals. It outlines our aims, standards, processes and support mechanisms to ensure we work together to deliver quality outcomes for vulnerable children and young people in foster care. We recognise the invaluable role our foster carers play in this, and we will strive to provide the best possible support to foster families to improve the life chances and choices for the children and young people they are looking after.



R Blake

Councillor Rachael Blake
Cabinet Member for Children's Social Care, Communities and Equalities

2. Introduction

It is a requirement of the Fostering Services England Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services that each fostering agency produces a Statement of Purpose which outlines its aims, objectives and service arrangements provided. The Statement of Purpose addresses the regulatory requirements and explains how the service is managed and its fitness to provide fostering services. It shows the policy and performance framework that underpins our work, how we recruit, train, support and supervise foster carers and how the welfare of all children placed is promoted with good outcomes being achieved.

The Statement of Purpose also links to our Children's Guides which are provided to all children, subject to the child's age and understanding at the time of placement.

The Statement of Purpose is publicly available on the City of Doncaster website and a hard copy can be provided to any members of staff, foster carers, children and birth parents. A copy of this Statement of Purpose is submitted to Ofsted and is updated and amended on an annual basis or whenever a significant change in service delivery/staffing occurs.

3. National legislation and guidance

The Statement of Purpose has been developed and produced to meet the requirements and principles contained within the following legislation and guidance:

- Fostering Services Regulations 2011, amended 2013 and 2014
- National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011
- The Care Standards Act 2000
- The Care Planning, Placement & Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- The Care Planning, Placement & Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) 2015
- Children Act 1989
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance & Regulations Vol 2; Care Planning, Placement & Case Review 2010
- Delegation of Authority: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance & Regulations Vol 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review 2010 (2013)
- Children Act 1989 Guidance & Regulations Vol 4: Fostering Services (2011)
- Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers: Amendment to the children Act 1989 Guidance & Regulations 2004: Fostering Services July 2013
- Children and Families Act 2014
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018
- Disability & Equality Act 2010
- Human Rights Act 1998
- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Training, Support & Development Standards (TSD) for Foster Carers

4. Aims and Objectives

City of Doncaster fostering service aims to provide high quality family-based care for children and young people who are unable for whatever reason to live within their own families and is committed to provide the best possible outcomes for all children placed with our foster carers, ensuring the child remains at the centre of all we do. The fostering service strives to provide the best possible support to foster carers and staff in order that foster families can improve the life chances and choices for all our children and young people.

City of Doncaster Fostering aims:

- To ensure that all children looked after receive the best possible care and attention to their individual needs;
- To recognise the importance of matching and that children need to be matched as closely as possible, taking into account their assessed needs and circumstances, with appropriately skilled and trained foster carers in order that the children/young people can be offered security and stability for as long as is needed. Where there are gaps in matching e.g. culture, religion, language that these are addressed and resources put in place to ensure that these can be overcome;
- To ensure the voices of children, their parents and foster carers are sought and taken into account when evaluating services offered and planning new initiatives;
- To actively monitor and supervise all fostering households to ensure that all children placed are kept safe and free from harm, their needs are being met and their aspirations encouraged;
- To ensure all children have access to good education and health provision as well as having hobbies and social interests;
- To ensure that anti-discriminatory practice informs all aspects of the fostering services' work providing equal opportunities of access to all children in need, irrespective of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, age, gender, sexuality, disability or social class;
- To provide an environment where children and young people can form and maintain effective relationships, fulfil their potential and achieve best outcomes;
- To ensure family time between a child and their birth families and friends is promoted and that this is facilitated through a number of different means, as appropriate and in keeping with the child's Care Plan;
- To enable young people to 'Stay Put' with their foster families beyond their 18th birthday up to the age of 21 years;
- To promote the Virtual School to all foster carers to enable them to have support for the children and young people in their care to improve educational attainment;
- To ensure that children who have a disability are placed in an environment which recognises and caters for their disability, as well as promote their social inclusion and encourage their aspirations;
- To provide suitably skilled, experienced and competent staff who can deliver a quality foster care service ensuring that their own development and learning is addressed through supervision and training with clear lines of accountability;
- To ensure all staff employed in City of Doncaster fostering service and all foster carers have up to date DBS and other safeguarding checks;
- To work in partnership with Doncaster Foster Carer Association;
- To ensure the Foster Care Approval & Matching Panel remains effective and appropriately challenges the Fostering Service in relation to the standard of reports received. The Foster Care Approval & Matching Panel will focus on safeguarding and will put the welfare and safety of children at the heart of their work.

Objectives: The Fostering service needs to ensure that there is a choice of high quality foster families available to meet the needs of every child and young person who requires a foster placement. When a child or young person is placed, they can expect:

- Safe, warm and nurturing care from a foster carer who will listen to them
- To have their racial, religious and cultural needs met and evidence provided how these are being met;

- A foster carer who is well supported by a qualified social worker (Supervising Social Worker) and who has a Personal Development Plan which identifies required training and any new training needed due to the specific needs of children who are fostered;
- A foster carer who will advocate on the child's/young person's behalf and who will also encourage the child/young person to speak in meetings with their support in order that their voice can be heard and taken into account when decisions are made;
- Their health, education and leisure needs to be promoted and the development of any new interests and hobbies;
- A foster carer who will promote family time, encourage friendships and open their home to the child's/young person's friends as they would do for their own children, as well as birth families where appropriate;
- To keep in touch with their brothers and sisters through direct contact and in-direct contact such as Zoom and FaceTime;
- To understand how to make a complaint or a complement, how to access the Advocacy Service and to receive a copy of the age appropriate Children's Guide;
- To be valued for who they are and how they identify irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, age, religious beliefs, disability;
- To have their voice heard by their foster carer, social worker, the foster carers supervising social worker, their advocate, through Children's Council's and Groups or formal consultations such as Survey Monkey consultations.

5. Confidentiality and conflicts of interest

Foster carers are provided with full information about the children placed with them and are expected to observe high standards of confidentiality. As an agency we maintain records on carers and looked after children which are subject to National Standards and data protection legislation. Staff and foster carers are expected to declare any potential conflicts of interest.

6. Organisational Structure

City of Doncaster Fostering service comes under the overall leadership and direction of the City of Doncaster Council children's services. The Corporate Parenting Board is made up of elected members, foster carers, senior children's service managers, Health, the Virtual School and the Director of Learning, Opportunities and Skills, Learning and Opportunities (DCS) for City of Doncaster Council. The Corporate Parenting Board meets bi-monthly with the Multi Agency Looked after Partnership meeting bi-monthly.

City of Doncaster fostering service is based on the fourth floor of the Civic Building, Waterdale, Doncaster, DN1 3BU which is in the city centre and close to the train station. The offices are accessible to all.

Day-to-day management of the services is provided by a Service Manager who is the Registered Manager for the Fostering service alongside two team managers. Reporting to the service manager are the two team managers, two Advanced Practitioners who support the line management of Supervising Social Workers and Social Work Assistants along with the team managers. In addition the panel advisor reports to the service manager.

All line managers and Supervising Social Workers hold social work qualifications and are registered with Social Work England. City of Doncaster Council supports all its staff to enhance their portfolio of academic and professional qualifications to continually develop their practice, skills and knowledge. Supervising Social Workers are responsible for up to 20 foster carer households who they will visit, provide support and supervision through regular contact.

In addition to our Supervising Social Workers, the Fostering service employs Assessing Social Workers who undertake assessments of prospective foster carers and kinship carers. All staff members participate in support groups, activities and events for foster carers and children.

The social work staff team currently comprises:

- Team Manager Mainstream Fostering
- Team Manager Kinship & Private Fostering
- Panel Advisor
- Advanced Practitioners x 2
- Supervising Social Workers full time x 10 (one role vacant)
- Supervising Social Workers part time x 2
- Assessing Social Workers full time x 2
- Assessing Social Workers part time x 2
- Social Work Assistants x 2 (one vacant role)
- Liaison Worker x 1

City of Doncaster Fostering is supported by a team of administrative staff.

Recruitment of foster carers is the responsibility of a dedicated recruitment & assessment team who work together with the whole fostering service to ensure that prospective foster carers understand the needs of the fostering service when discussing terms of approval.

Supporting temporarily approved, kinship carers and private foster carers is the responsibility of the Team Manager Kinship & Private Fostering who has a small staff team of Assessing and Supervising Social Workers.

City of Doncaster fostering service has a fostering panel which is the responsibility of the Panel Advisor. The Panel meets regularly to consider applications from prospective foster carers, annual reviews of approved foster carers and other matters brought to them by the social work team.

Independent Fostering Reviewing Officers chair the Foster Carers Annual Review and are employed by City of Doncaster Council, they are placed within a team of Independent Reviewing Officers who undertake children in care reviews.

Staff training is provided by a Workforce Development Team within City of Doncaster Council who provide specialised commissioned courses as well as internal training and refresher courses. City of Doncaster Council Children's Services also has qualified and experienced Practice Educators which enables students on social work courses to be placed in the fostering service.

All payments to foster carers are undertaken by the Placements and Payments Team who work closely with the fostering service.

7. Children's Guides

Subject the child's age and understanding, the fostering service ensures children receive the age appropriate Children's Guide at the point of placement and that the foster carer explains the contents of the Children's Guide in a way that is accessible. There are two Children's Guides, one for children aged 0 - 10 and another for children and young people aged 12 – 18 years.

The Children's Guide includes a summary of what the fostering service sets out to do for children, how they can find out their rights, how they can contact their Independent Reviewing Officer, the advocacy service, how to let us know how they are feeling, and contact information for Ofsted if they wish to raise a concern.

8. Services we provide

The fostering service approves foster carers to look after children aged 0 - 18 years or 5 - 18 years. Many of the children placed have experienced difficulties including abuse or neglect before being fostered. Some children and young people present with very challenging behaviour, special needs or complex health conditions.

Doncaster operates a skills based payment scheme, which incorporates the majority of approved foster carers. All foster carers are supported via weekly allowance payments (child age related). The skills based payment scheme has three levels linked to skills and competency.

The placements we provide are described below:

Short Term Foster Placements

Children and young people can remain with a short term foster carer for up to two years while decisions are made in respect of their permanence plan, which may be to return home, to be placed with kinship carers, to be placed for adoption or to be placed in longer term care.

Long Term/Permanent Placements

When a foster carer makes a commitment to a young person that they will remain with them until adulthood and benefit from 'Staying Put' which means they can remain with their foster carer until they are 21 years or up to 23 years, our Fostering Panel will consider making the placement permanent. This is for all children who cannot return home and for whom adoption is not an option. The Fostering service celebrates every child who is placed permanently with their foster carer.

Bridging Placements

These placements tend to be for a number of weeks or months, where children and young people can be cared for while their permanent placement is being made ready for them which may be an adoption placement, a longer term foster placement, a return home or to kinship carers or onto independent living.

Brother and Sister Placements

We have a number of foster carers who have bigger homes which means that we can keep brothers and sisters together.

Parent & Child Assessment and Support Placements

The fostering service is developing a scheme to provide three parent & child assessment or support placements where the parent(s) and child will remain for a 12 week period.

Mainstream Short Breaks (formally called 'respite')

Foster carers who provide support mostly to fellow foster carers consisting of weekend and holiday stays for children and young people.

Children with Disabilities

We have a number of foster carers who can provide mainstream short breaks for children with disabilities as well as short term and permanent foster care.

Kinship Care & Connected Persons

The fostering service has a dedicated team who support placements where the child/young person is known to their foster carer.

Staying Put Placements

Foster carers are encouraged to provide Staying Put to young people who were placed with them before they reached 18 years. A young person is no longer looked after once they reach 18 years of age but can benefit from continued support until they are ready for independent living.

Mockingbird Hub Carers

City of Doncaster fostering service has five Mockingbird Hub foster carers who look after a satellite of 8 - 10 fostering households. Mockingbird Hub foster carers provide rich support to their linked foster carers which includes day care and sleepovers.

Matching

The Fostering Service places great importance on the careful matching of children with foster carers who can best meet their needs. The foster carers skills, experience and knowledge are considered against the assessed needs of the child or young person. Any gaps in skills, knowledge and/or experience are documented in the Placement Planning Meeting with a plan put in place to address these.

9. Foster carer recruitment

The fostering service works closely with our colleagues in the communications and marketing team who are part of City of Doncaster Council. A three-year marketing strategy is in place which drives ongoing recruitment through a range of media. The branding of the fostering service, since the return of the fostering service to City of Doncaster Council, has been developed in consultation with foster carers to help members of the public to recognise the fostering team when they are in the community, the 'foster for Doncaster' brand will be used in all advertising and publicity.

We promote our need for foster carers, as well as celebrate our foster carers, through local radio, print, social media, community meetings and information sessions. Our marketing strategy has been approved by our Corporate Parenting Board and Councillors take a keen interest in supporting the fostering service in its recruitment activities.

10. Foster carer assessment

Anyone over the age of 21 years may apply to become a foster carer, however applicants aged between 21 - 25 years will need to evidence relevant transferable skills and

experience. The Fostering Service responds promptly to all enquiries from potential applicants which are received by telephone, by email or direct from the fostering service website. After a conversation with the potential applicant, if it is agreed to proceed then a home visit will be undertaken where the potential applicant can ask questions and hear about fostering for Doncaster in more detail.

At this visit a walk around the home is undertaken, the potential applicants' motivation to foster is discussed in more detail, their experience is taken into account as well as any practical considerations before concluding with a discussion as to whether they are ready to apply to foster. If appropriate, an application form will be left with the applicant. Once statutory checks are completed, an invitation to the training and preparation group is then made.

The preparation training utilises the Fostering Network's Skills to Foster course which covers child development, working as a team, the impact of trauma and abuse on children, safer care and moving on and is a three day course.

The fostering service runs a number of Skills to Foster courses a year which are run during the week, weekends and evenings. The course facilitators are qualified fostering social workers, experienced foster carers and includes contributions from care experienced young people.

When preparation training is complete, the applicants begin an assessment that includes the requirements laid down in Schedule 3 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards in Foster Care (2011), Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers 2013 (amendments to Children Act 1989) and Schedule 4 of the Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (where children are fostered by relatives and friends).

The application to foster process is split into two parts:

Stage 1 comprises of all the formal checks with all applicants being subject to a number of statutory checks and references:

- Disclosure and Barring Service checks on all members of the household over the age of 18
- Child protection checks
- Children & Young People's Social Care records check
- Department of Health checks
- 2 personal references
- in addition, interviews are conducted with grown up children and children living in the household

Applicants are additionally asked to undertake:

- a full medical examination with their GP
- a work reference from present or previous employer
- to agree to the department making contact with any schools which their children attend to ascertain the school's view on their involvement/suitability
- to agree to the department making contact with ex partners regarding their application to foster

Once all the checks are received a formal decision will be made as to whether the applicant(s) should proceed to Stage 2.

Stage 2 is an in-depth 'home study' based on CoramBAAF Form F and is undertaken by a qualified and experienced Assessing Social Worker. A number of home visits are scheduled in order to complete a comprehensive report which covers analysis of significant relationships, the family dynamics and characteristics of the applicants. A detailed assessment of their past and present experiences, skills and competencies which the applicants would bring to their new role, helps the applicants to think about their reasons to become foster carers. The assessor will also use the process to assess the applicant's suitability to foster children with differing needs and will make a recommendation as to the applicant's suitability to foster and state clearly the terms of approval requested.

Kinship foster carers are subject to an alternative assessment taking into account the nature of the task and the requirements of Schedule 4 (Care Planning Regulations 2010), using CoramBAAF Form C.

Applicants are expected to attend the Foster Care Panel and their applicant will be stood down if they do not do so. Other than references, the report is shared with the applicants before the report is submitted to the Foster Care Panel, and they are encouraged to record their view on the assessment and the process.

City of Doncaster fostering service has one Foster Care Panel which meets twice a month on a Wednesday. The Panel is independently chaired and panel members come from all walks of life and have a variety of backgrounds. Panel membership currently includes members from Education, Health, social work, foster care and care experienced individuals. The Foster Care Panel considers and recommends the approval of all foster carers, foster carers annual reviews, permanent matching of children with their foster carers, foster carers de-registration and matters of practice or concern which requires a recommendation from the Panel.

The Foster Care Panel's recommendations are presented to the Agency Decision Maker who makes the final decision on the suitability of the applicant to foster and on the suitability of approved foster carers to continue to foster. Should the Foster Care Panel recommend a foster carer is no longer suitable to foster and this is agreed by the Agency Decision Maker, the foster carer is provided with a letter which sets out what action they can take if they wish to appeal the decision. Any appeal must be made within 28 days and may either make further representations to the Foster Care Panel or have their case reviewed by the Independent Review Mechanism who, in turn, will make a recommendation back to the Fostering service.

11. Approval and continued approval of foster carers

Once approved, or continued approval granted, the foster carer will receive a letter from the Agency Decision Maker confirming the terms of their approval. Foster carers will also receive a Foster Care Agreement following their initial approval and subsequently every time their approval changes, or if the Foster Care Agreement has been reviewed.

Newly approved foster carers are encouraged to join the Doncaster Foster Care Association which is run by foster carers approved by the Fostering service. The Association has a weekly Youth Club and runs regular activities for foster families and is a great source of support. The fostering service also pays for the annual membership of Fostering Network for all its approved foster carers which provides carers with a range of 'Signpost' leaflets on relevant topics.

Following approval, the newly approved foster carers will undergo an induction with their Assessing Social Worker prior to being transferred to their Supervising Social Worker on a joint home visit.

12. Foster carers annual reviews

Foster carer's suitability to foster is reviewed every year in accordance with the Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards. There are occasions when the Annual Review is brought forward and these are usually due to:

- Serious concerns regarding foster carer's practice
- A serious incident or allegation made against a foster carer
- A change in the foster carer's circumstances such as a relationship breakdown, a new relationship, significant changes to their lifestyle or a significant death.

All annual reviews are chaired by an Independent Fostering Reviewing Officer, which must be attended by all approved foster carers for the household, and draws on contributions from the children's social worker, children's Independent Reviewing Officer, Supervising Social Workers, birth children's views and those of the foster carer(s).

Following the Review, the Independent Fostering Reviewing Officer prepares their report and sends to the foster carer for their comment, allowing five days for them to do so. Once the report has been returned to the Independent Fostering Reviewing Officer the report will be sent to the Panel Advisor either for inclusion in the next Foster Care Panel or to be sent directly to the Agency Decision Maker.

The first review following a foster carer's approval must be submitted to the Foster Care Panel and the foster carers are expected to attend. At every third review, following the first review, the reports will be presented to the Foster Care Panel and the foster carers are expected to attend, and any review where there have been significant changes to the terms of the foster carer's approval. All reviews held following complaints, standard of care or allegations must be presented to the Foster Care Panel.

13. Support and supervision of foster carers

All approved foster carers will be supervised by a named and appropriately qualified social worker, known as the supervising social worker. This will include carers who are temporarily approved under Regulation 24 (Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010)).

The role of the supervising social worker is to assist the foster carer in their task of providing care to a child in care which will improve the child's well-being and life chances by promoting the individual outcomes for children. The supervising social worker should be ensuring that they observe the children in the placement and develop relationships with them. All work must be child focused.

The supervising social worker will ensure the foster carer has access to adequate social work and other professional support, information and advice, to enable the foster carer to provide consistent, high quality care for a child or young person placed in their home. All newly approved foster carers including those that have transferred across from another Fostering Agency will receive monthly supervision for the first 12 months or until the Training, Support and Development Standards workbook has been completed and successfully signed off by a manager and receive a minimum of two unannounced visits each year.

After this a minimum of six weekly supervisory visits will take place, with the date of the following supervision being confirmed with the foster carer in supervision. A minimum of two unannounced visits each year is required. If there are two foster carers in the household,

both carers must receive supervision, with the second foster carer being part of alternate supervision sessions, any deviation from this will require the team manager's approval.

The fostering service believes that foster carers must be able to access support when they need it. During office hours, if a foster carer is unable to contact their own supervising social worker, they can contact the duty supervising social worker for advice and support. In addition, every child has an allocated social worker and this person will usually be the first point of contact for the foster carer. If the child's allocated social worker is not available there is a duty worker available to deal with any urgent problems or issues.

If additional support is required outside of office hours, the Fostering Service operate a support line from 5pm – 10:30pm every evening and daytime up to 10:30pm for weekends and Bank Holidays. An Emergency Duty Service is also available every evening, weekend and Bank Holiday 24/7.

Doncaster provides an Independent Support Service to foster carers which is purchased from the Fostering Network. All foster carers upon approval gain free individual membership of Fostering Network which provides a range of benefits, including independent advice and support.

Doncaster provides good allowances to foster carers which covers the cost of looking after a child and are in line with the Government's recommended minimum rates. Travel and other additional payments are made available to foster carers as well as essential equipment. The Fostering service operates a payment for skills scheme, and these weekly payments are made for Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 foster carers.

Insurance cover for foster carers against accidental damage or damage caused by a child who is/has been fostered with them is provided by Zurich Insurance.

Fostering staff, as well as our Special Guardianship Support Team, are all involved with support activities which include our Walks around the Lakes which start with a hot drink and bun, a range of foster carer support groups and information events.

The Fostering service have commissioned the Doncaster Foster Care Association to undertake four separate support/activity sessions for children who foster (birth and 'owned' children of foster carers).

A programme of the Mockingbird Family Model has been achieved in Doncaster establishing five Hubs of geographically located satellite carers receiving 24/7 placement support and advice from experienced Hub Carers. Enhanced support for foster carers and improved placement stability for children and young people cared for via this Model has been assessed as positively impacting upon placement stability and improved outcomes for children.

Doncaster has an established relationship with Doncaster Foster Carer Association which promotes the profile of work of foster carers in Doncaster and are involved in service developments.

14. Training and development

The fostering service believe that a comprehensive training programme for both staff and foster carers is key to their personal and professional development. Foster carers begin their journey of training and professional development during the approval process and then build on this as they complete the Training Support & Development Standards. Foster carers are supported to attend a number of mandatory training courses within their first year

of approval, or 18 months for Kinship/connected person's foster carers. Mandatory training includes safeguarding, safer care, equality and diversity, health and safety, paediatric first aid.

Training programmes are refreshed annually to ensure the programme is challenging and interesting to foster carers and to reflect any changes in legislation or practice guidance. Training is delivered both face-to-face during the day and in evenings as well as a catalogue of courses available online. Kinship foster carers are also provided with targeted training opportunities more suited to the fostering task of caring for family members or friends' children.

Each payment for skills level has its own training pathway and foster carers will be made aware of this by their Supervising Social Worker and evidenced in their Personal Development Plan. Training and learning opportunities enable foster carers to increase and refine their skills and knowledge and to develop professional competence and confidence.

Staff working for Doncaster are also encouraged and support to attend training, some of which is mandatory and requires attendance every three years. It is important to the fostering service that all its staff have access to training and opportunities to continue their professional development.

Training courses are evaluated with carers providing feedback, which is then collated and used to inform future practice and courses offered. Support groups can contain a training component at some sessions such as tax and national insurance, Keys to My Future, Special Guardianship Orders and Staying Put.

15. Complaints and representations

In seeking to constantly improve the quality of its fostering service, we welcome and encourage constructive feedback from service users, providers and partners. The fostering service recognises that children, their families, and foster carers themselves are best placed to identify the strengths and areas of development of the fostering service, and inform the changes and developments needed to ensure continuing improvement.

Where necessary, more serious complaints, by children or their families, or by foster carers, the City of Doncaster Council's complaints procedure, which is independent of the fostering service, will be used. The Customer Experience Manager has an important Quality Assurance role in receiving and recording complaints, determining where the complaint should be directed, and monitoring responses to complaints.

In most fostering situations, areas of potential tension or conflict can be minimised through careful planning at the point of placement, or resolved through early discussion/negotiation involving the child's social worker and/or the foster carers' supervising social worker, as appropriate.

City of Doncaster complaints procedure involves two stages. Where the complaint cannot be resolved by the relevant Team Manager, within 10 days (Stage 1) an Independent Manager will be appointed to investigate (Stage 2). Customers of the fostering service can refer more serious or unresolved complaints to the Ombudsman. In addition, complaints about the Fostering Service can be made directly to Ofsted, at the address / telephone at the end of this document.

16. Allegations against foster carers

All allegations in relation to foster carers are investigated and actioned by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) on behalf of Doncaster's Safeguarding Children's Partnership under the procedures for 'Responding to Allegations against Staff, Carers or Volunteers'. Doncaster Safeguarding Children's Partnership policies and procedures are followed. Foster carers who are subject to an allegation are offered independent support during this process which can be accessed via their supervising social worker or by self-referral.

Allegations of abuse against foster carers or other members of the carer's household (including other foster children) may result in a formal investigation under the provisions of Section 47 of the 1989 Children Act. The Procedures and Protocol to be followed in such cases are contained in the Foster Carer Handbook (this is currently being revised but a copy of the relevant policy can be obtained from the Fostering Service).

17. Monitoring performance

The fostering reports on its performance regularly through a variety of means:

- Ofsted will inspect regularly to ensure that the Doncaster fostering service complies with legislation and standards
- A robust Foster Care Panel with the majority of Panel Members having independent status with annual appraisals scheduled throughout the year
- The Agency Decision Maker reviews all Annual Reviews completed by the fostering service for all approved foster carers
- Agency (Panel) Advisor post to assist with the quality assurance of documentation being submitted to the Foster Care Panel and ADM, this role includes recruiting new Panel Members, including a Panel Chair, and working with the fostering service providing training, support and guidance to the staff team
- Feedback forms provided to all who attend the Foster Care Panel evaluated by the Agency Advisor. The Panel also provides feedback to the fostering service on the quality of reports presented and the presentation of the Fostering Service staff members/Independent assessing social workers
- Fostering Improvement Board chaired by Service Manager Permanence & Sufficiency which meets on a monthly basis to review service improvement plans and set key targets for achievement. The Board is attended by Advanced Practitioners of the Fostering work-streams, Panel Advisor and Team Managers.
- Service Improvement Plan for the Fostering Service with individual Team Action Plans supporting the overall strategy. The managers will report on activity and present to the Fostering Improvement Board
- Agency Decision Maker decisions provided to the Foster Care Panel to assist their development as a Panel
- Regular reporting to Corporate Parenting Board
- Regulation 35 reports submitted to the Executive Leadership Board quarterly
- Completion of Ofsted annual dataset

The Fostering service also monitors the following key areas of activity:

- Number of children placed in foster care
- Number of placement disruptions
- Recruitment of new foster carers against agreed targets
- Completion of assessments of potential foster carers against agreed targets
- Induction of newly approved foster carers within one year

- Auditing of foster carers case files to monitor statutory compliance and good practice standards

18. Contact details

City of Doncaster fostering service is based at:

Civic Office
Waterdale
Doncaster
DN1 3BU

Telephone: 01302 737789
Visit: www.fosterfor.doncaster.gov.uk

Information about our fostering services can be accessed via Fostering Advice Line on 0345 0020012 or email fosterfor@doncaster.gov.uk

Ofsted

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Useful Contacts

Childline

Telephone: 0800 1111

NATN 1111
London E1 6BR
Children's Advocacy and Participation Service Complaints & Representations

The Office of the Children's Commissioner

Children's Commissioner for England
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Telephone: 020 7783 8330

Email: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

The children's Commissioner - Help at Hand - Offers advice and representation for children in care, living away from home, working with social services and care leavers

Telephone: 0800 528 0731

Email: help.team@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk