

Durham County Council Fostering Service

Statement of Purpose 2022



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1. INTRODUCTION

This Statement of Purpose sets out the aims, values, principles and the objectives of Durham County Council Fostering Service and describes how these will be met in partnership with carers, children, young people, their families and other partner agencies. It also explains the facilities and services of the Fostering Service, which are delivered in accordance with relevant legislation and regulatory frameworks including:

- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services.
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: The Care Planning Placement and Case Review
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- The Fostering Services (England) Regulation 2011,
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011.
- Foster Carer Charter 2011.
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Permanence, long-term foster placements and ceasing to look after a child – Statutory Guidance March 2015

Durham County Council places great emphasis on working with children and their families/carers to promote and maintain stability, safety and security for children. Children have a right to a family life where they can form and maintain effective relationships, fulfil their potential and achieve best outcomes within a caring and positive environment.

Those children who are cared for by the Local Authority are likely to be the most vulnerable and in need of help and support. They may have experienced neglect, abuse, trauma and disruption in their childhood and could have complex needs as a result of their experiences.

A primary consideration in meeting such a child's needs is, wherever possible, to maintain or return them with their family of origin, including extended family. For some children in order to safeguard, secure and promote their current and future needs an alternative placement outside of their birth family will be considered to best meet their needs.

2. FOSTERING SERVICES

Values and Principles

Durham County Council Fostering Service is committed to the following values and principles which underpin and are set out in the Fostering Minimum Standards 2011:

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of their care.
- Children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefiting from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
- Children are entitled to grow up in a loving environment that can meet their developmental needs.
- Every child should have his or her wishes and feelings listened to and taken into account.
- Each child should be valued as an individual and given personalised support in line with their individual needs and background in order to develop their identity, self-confidence and self-worth.
- The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account
- The significance of family time for children in our care, and of maintaining relationships with birth parents and the wider family, including brothers and sisters , half-brothers and sisters and grandparents, is recognised, as is the foster carer's role in this.
- Children in our care deserve to be treated as a good parent would treat their own children and to have the opportunity for as full an experience of family life and childhood as possible, without unnecessary restrictions.
- The central importance of the child's relationship with their foster carer should be acknowledged and foster carers should be recognised as core members of the team working with the child.
- Foster carers have a right to full information about the child
- It is essential that foster carers receive relevant support services and development opportunities in order to provide the best care for children.
- Genuine partnership between all those involved in fostering children is essential to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes the Government, local government, other statutory agencies, fostering service providers and foster carers.

2.1 Commitment to The Fostering Network Foster Carers' Charter 2022

The Fostering Service is committed to reflecting the spirit and intentions of the Fostering Network Foster Carer's Charter. Having previously had a standalone charter, this year the service engaged with its carers via consultation events whereby it was agreed unanimously that the service and its carers would adopt the Fostering Network charter. The charter can be found at [Foster Carers' Charter 2022 - The Fostering Network](#)

2.2 Aim

DCC Fostering Service is committed to the continual development and delivery of high-quality services in partnership with other statutory, voluntary and independent agencies/providers in order to meet the diverse needs of children, their families and carers and achieve the best possible outcomes for them.

2.3 Objectives

The Fostering Service's key objectives reflect the Fostering Service Minimum Standards 2011:

- To provide safe and secure care for children which enables them to reach their potential, have a positive view of self, an understanding of their background and achieve the best outcomes
- To ensure that children benefit from a stable home, have sound relationships with their foster family and are cared for in accordance with their Care Plan/Placement Plan.
- To ensure that children live in a healthy environment where their physical, emotional and psychological health is promoted and where they are able to access the services to meet their health needs
- To ensure that children are able to enjoy their interests, develop confidence in their abilities and are supported and encouraged to engage in a wide range of opportunities/activities to develop their talents and skills to promote their development.
- To ensure that the education and achievement of children is actively promoted and valued as part of their preparation for adulthood. Children are supported to achieve their educational potential
- To ensure that children, birth parents/guardians and families are valued and respected, also that children's family time with their families and friends is supported and promoted, where this is in their best interests
- To ensure that children are listened to, have their views respected and fully taken into

- To ensure that children's identity, ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality are properly recognised, positively valued and promoted.
- To ensure that disabled children and children with complex needs have their needs fully recognised and taken into account.
- To ensure that children are prepared for, and supported into adulthood so that they can reach their potential and achieve economic wellbeing
- To recruit, train, assess and approve sufficient foster carers to meet the needs of those children requiring foster placements and who can provide children with a home where they feel loved, safe and secure
- To ensure that the information required is secured in order to facilitate an appropriate match with carers who are able to meet the child's needs
- To provide high levels of advice, guidance and support to foster carers, including family and friends foster carers, and their families in order to ensure children are safeguarded and their needs are well met.
- To ensure that there is a clear framework of training and development in place for foster carers and that they receive the training and development they need to carry out their role effectively.
- To ensure that the Fostering Panel and Agency Decision Maker make timely, quality and appropriate recommendations/decisions in line with the over-riding objectives to promote the welfare of children.
- To assess and review foster carers skills and competencies. To ensure that the Fostering Service contributes to those children's and foster carer reviews.
- To ensure that the service is provided and managed effectively and efficiently by staff who are suitable to work with children and have the appropriate skills, experience, knowledge, competence and qualifications to deliver an efficient and effective service
- To ensure that foster carers understand the Fostering Service's payment structures and to ensure that payments to them are fair and are paid in a timely manner
- To ensure that allegations and suspicions of harm are handled in a way that provides effective protection and support of children, the person making the allegation, and at the same time support the person who is subject of the allegation.
- To ensure that significant events relating to the health and protection of children cared for by the Service are notified to appropriate people

- To ensure that records are clear, accurate, up to date and stored securely, and contribute to an understanding of a child's life.
- To ensure users of the Fostering Service have opportunities to inform future service delivery.

3. FOSTERING SERVICES

The Service is based at Spectrum 8, Spectrum Business Park Seaham SR7 7TT.

The office venue provides a good working environment and although in 2020 – 2021 we responded to government advice, guidance and restrictions around covid home working, we are now using a hybrid model of working, part office and home working.

Spectrum 8 also has suitable facilities for meetings and the fostering panels to take place. The service utilises training venues across County Durham to ensure as much accessibility as possible to foster carers accessing training.

3.1 Organisation and Management of the Service

The Fostering Service is managed by the Strategic Manager, Children in Care, Care Leavers, Fostering & Adoption, Looked After Children and Permanence and the Service Manager, Looked After Children's Resources. The staff are organised and managed within 5 teams (see Appendix 1 for more detail).

The Recruitment and Retention Team

This Team delivers a targeted recruitment programme and supported by Durham County Council Marketing Officers. The team takes a lead role on advertising, information evenings, initial visits, preparation, training and completes all of the Form F assessments, as well as Retention events for foster carers, children and young people. The team is managed by a Team Manager, with Panel Advisor/Social Work Consultant and 4 FTE Social Worker posts.

Fostering Support Teams (North and South)

There are 2 fostering support teams, who are cover 2 localities across the county, North and South. Each team is responsible for supporting and supervising and completing foster carer reviews for the mainstream foster carers within their locality area. They also support Connected foster carers within their locality area. Both teams are managed by a Team Manager, a Social Work Consultant and 6 FTE Social Worker posts.

Connected Carers Team

This team completes all of the Form C assessments and SGO assessments, including private SGO applications. They also complete the Initial Connected Carers

Assessment when a child needs to live with family/friends under Reg 24, prior to the completion of the full form C. The Team has a Team Manager, Social Work Consultant and 7 FTE posts, however currently due to demand there are 3 Agency posts also attached to the team.

Placement Team

There is a Placement Team who are responsible for identifying and arranging appropriate and suitable emergency and short-term foster carer homes for all Children in our Care. The team is managed by a Team Manager (Social Work qualified), supporting 4 Placement Officers who are responsible for sourcing these homes.

The placement officers carry out searches of in house foster carers and independent fostering agencies (IFAs) both locally and nationally where necessary. The team source emergency and short-term foster carer homes ranging from 1 night up to 2 years. The team also source respite and short break care for children in need.

Once foster carer homes are identified the team liaise between the in-house carers or IFA and the children's social worker to arrange taking the child to the carers home. They then carry out after work such as allocating carers to children's placements plans.

3.2 Provision of Services to Children

Durham County Council Fostering Service provides services for children under four broad headings. These are:

- Selection of appropriately approved foster carers to meet the child's identified needs, including connected carers.
- Providing information about Fostering Services.
- Supporting Foster Carers with children in their care.
- Providing group support to children who foster and foster carers.

The Fostering Service provides a range of temporary and permanent homes with foster carers who have a range of skills and experience. These are:-

- Emergency families.
- Short-term families who provide support to families or facilitate the assessment of the needs of the child.
- Parent and child families which are an arrangement to enable a parent and child to live together. It encompasses both parent and child being Looked After and therefore both will be in our care or it may be that either the parent or the child may be cared for and therefore only one of them may be in our care. This may provide the opportunity to undertake a parenting assessment.
- Respite care which supports children and families who need additional help or is used to support other foster carers to sustain stability.

- Connected foster carers who are approved and supported to provide immediate or longer-term care for children unable to live with their own birth parents.
- Permanent or long term families who are provided where it is not appropriate or possible to place the child with family or friends or for adoption. These families will support young people through transition to adulthood and beyond where appropriate.

The Fostering Service works closely with the child's social worker. The child's social worker provides support to the child and co-ordinates the child's care plan. A care team will be in place and members of this will include other professionals directly involved or working with the child and family e.g. The Full Circle, Fostering Social Workers, Looked After Nurse, Looked After Children Education Services (LACES), CAMHS, Community Support or people with a significant relationship or contact with the child i.e. Birth Family members.

3.3 Education

Education provision is planned and provided in partnership between Durham Virtual School and the young person's school or setting. At Durham Virtual School we champion the education of looked after children and young people. Every child in our care in Durham is allocated a caseworker who monitors their progress, supports the Personal Education Plan, ensures that the looked after children pupil premium funding has an impact, supports statutory assessment where appropriate and provides continuity of support for the young person.

The wider team provides a holistic approach to addressing barriers to learning and avoiding exclusion. This team provides therapeutic input, counselling, education psychology support, occupational therapy, speech and language support, academic tuition and inclusion placements.

At Durham Virtual School we work with parents, corporate parents, carers, schools and educational settings to support children in our care so that they:

- Attend a school or setting which best meets their needs
- Attend regularly
- Make progress and achieve
- Have a voice that positively impacts on the services they receive
- Have stability in home, care and education placement
- Receive good advice and guidance to progress into further education, employment and training and, where appropriate, university
- Are well-prepared for adulthood
- Receive recognition for their achievement and have their successes celebrate

Work experience is provided to older children in our care through the 'Teenagers to Work' Programme, where appropriate.

3.4 Health

Health care, health assessment and health promotion are provided through partnerships with NHS Trusts who provide acute and primary care as well as community child health services. Specialist Looked After Children Nurses are employed to facilitate health assessments and to monitor the quality of health reviews and to promote positive health outcomes for children in our care. The Nurses work closely with foster carers offering consultation, advice and support.

The Full Circle Therapeutic Service provides access to advice and consultation regarding the emotional and psychological well being of children and young people. This includes access to a Consultant Clinical Child Psychologist, Therapeutic Workers and wider access to CAMHS Services when necessary.

The Full Circle Therapeutic Service provides dedicated support to children in our care and their carers. These services include provision of planned surgeries, training, attachment and therapeutic support groups, as well as individual therapeutic work.

The Medical Advisor to Panels also provides advice to panel in relation to the prospective carers ability to care for the child/children both in the short and long term, as appropriate.

3.5 The Children in Care Council and Investing in Children

The Fostering Service works with the Children in Care Council and Investing in Children. Contact details are included in the Children's Guide to the Fostering Services.

3.6 Independent Support for Children

Durham County Council has a service level contract with the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS), which is available to all children receiving a service.

NYAS is an independent organisation which can assist children and young people in a range of ways to ensure they are able to express their views and are listened to. NYAS information is included in the Children's Guide.

3.7 Services to Birth Families

The child's social worker works with birth families throughout the time the child is in our care.

Responsibility for the supervision of direct family time between children in our care and a birth family member is the responsibility of the child's social worker.

However, where appropriate, foster carers will actively support and supervise family time for any children placed with them.

Birth parents are invited to give feedback for foster carer's reviews.

When children are in our care and the plan is confirmed as adoption, information, advice, counselling and support to birth parents is provided by members of the Adoption Service or PAC UK, an independent adoption support and counselling service.

3.8 Services to Adults who were Fostered

Durham County Council provides advice and assistance to adults seeking access to information about their time in our care through a dedicated social work (Access to Records) post that provides information, support and counselling as required.

3.9 Services to Prospective and Approved Foster Carers

Services for prospective foster carers are under the following main headings:

- Information and advice about fostering.
- Information about the needs of children locally requiring care and recruitment priorities to meet those needs.
- Preparation via Group Training sessions and individual learning.
- Assessment and approval utilising BAAF assessment forms.
- Individual and/or Group support prior to and following approval, and placement and caring for our children.
- Annual Reviews of approval.
- A comprehensive annual training and development programme.

Payment for Skills

Payment for Skills offers foster carers a career pathway to be financially rewarded as they progress in developing skills and experience. If foster carers can demonstrate skills and competence, in accordance with the criteria and expectations of each skill band, a fee paid reward (in addition to the age related fostering allowance for the child) is payable depending on experience.

This is to be fully reviewed in 2022 to ensure that foster carers in Durham receive the appropriate financial recompense for the role they fulfil.

Foster Carers Annual Reviews

Every foster carer is required to have a formal annual review which evaluates progress over the last year and makes recommendations about continuing approval, terms of approval, future training, support needs and the level of banding for Payment for Skills.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) undertake all foster carers annual reviews. IRO's are independent of the Fostering Service.

Foster carer reviews are presented to a Fostering Panel and the Agency Decision Maker at the end of the foster carers first year of fostering. Following this each year the recommendations of all other foster carer reviews are sent to the Agency Decision Maker for final decision making, and any foster carer review can be referred to the Fostering Panel, including where there is a significant issue or change in circumstances. All foster carers have a review following any Standards of Care meeting and this is then presented to panel.

Foster Carer Training, Professional & Personal Development

Comprehensive training opportunities are provided throughout the year to meet foster carers training needs and to support them in achieving the Training, Support and Development (TSD) standards for foster carers which is a legal requirement for all foster carers to complete.

There is a comprehensive training programme which includes mandatory, core training and a wide range of supplementary training, including nationally recognised qualifications. In addition, foster carers are encouraged to undertake further training when the opportunities present.

As a result of virtual training during Covid, the training programme is currently run on a hybrid model with some face to face training some via Teams and some e-learning.

Group Support

A range of individual and group support services are available to foster carers throughout the year. These are provided with other professionals and agencies. There are monthly support groups and also twice yearly consultations.

Services for foster carer's children

The Service invites all prospective foster carer's own children aged 8+ to attend Preparation for Fostering training. Younger children's needs are addressed as part of the assessment processes.

In addition, the Service has developed a Children who Foster group (M8's) to support foster carers' own children.

Out of Office Hours Support

Support is available to foster carers, children and families through the Emergency Duty Team out of working hours where it is required.

Advice and Mediation

Durham County Council has a Service Level Contract with the Fostering Network for the provision of advice and mediation for foster carers.

Regional Contract with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's)

The Fostering Service works with other Local Authorities within the North East Region to compliment in house resources and address the needs of children via a regional contract with IFA's..

4. RECRUITMENT, ASSESSMENT, TRAINING AND APPROVAL OF PROSPECTIVE FOSTER CARERS

4.1 Recruitment

Durham County Council's Fostering Service has an identified Business Partner within the Marketing and Communications Department. There are regular meetings between the Fostering Service and the Marketing and Communications Department to seek to enable the Fostering Service to maximise marketing opportunities to recruit foster carers. There is a joint annual marketing plan which informs advertising and recruitment.

The Fostering Service utilises management information on children, (numbers referred, gender, ages, brothers and sister groups, children's needs etc.) to inform, prioritise and target recruitment to meet the needs of children requiring foster care. Durham County Council has its own website with information about the Fostering Service, an online Expression of Interest form and links to other relevant websites.

Information on the website provides advice to enquirers on a full range of fostering issues from the initial enquiry to support services. Information can also be requested to be posted.

The Fostering Service recognises the value in attracting enquirers from diverse backgrounds. Advertising material and written information is designed to highlight children's needs for safe and stable parenting and emphasises that enquiries and applications are encouraged from people from a wide variety of backgrounds.

The marketing approach to fostering recruitment seeks to raise public awareness of the needs of children and the rewards and challenges of becoming a foster carer. The timing of advertising is planned to facilitate a professional and speedy response to enquiries and is co-ordinated with planned preparation groups. Recruitment activity, preparation groups, assessments and the staffing requirements to facilitate a smooth transition for applicants through these processes are planned in advance.

4.2 Initial Enquiry

There is a dedicated recruitment line which responds immediately to all enquiries. A fostering social worker is on duty from the Recruitment and Retention team for a

week at a time to provide continuity and consistency from a customer focussed point of view.

Enquirers are also given an opportunity to attend a monthly face to face information session or a virtual Q & A session where they might feel they need a little more time to get their heads around fostering before taking the next step.

These enquirers are screened by being informed of local priorities for children requiring a home with a foster family. This ensures staff retain a focus on making and accepting enquirers where applications are most likely to meet the needs of those children requiring foster carers.

4.3 Initial Visit

Initial visits are undertaken to prospective foster carers as soon as possible after they have made their enquiry and had a basic screening. This is an exploratory session to enable a two-way sharing of information. The service will take into account the current children requiring foster carers alongside the enquirers information to decide whether they will be progressed to the next stage of the process.

If they can progress enquirers are sent an application to foster form and given dates of the Skills to Foster Preparation Training Course.

The assessment process is separated into Stage One and Stage Two, although these often run concurrently to ensure time is utilised efficiently and potential carers are kept motivated.

4.4 Stage One

Preparation & Training

All those applying for approval as foster carers are required to participate in a series of group preparation sessions. The course is run in a relaxed manner using the applicant's own experiences, alongside guided teaching about fostering.

Topics included in the Skills to Foster Preparation Training are as follows:

- Why children need to be Looked After in Foster Care.
- The Foster Carers Role and Responsibilities.
- What is abuse/neglect?
- Attachment, loss and resilience.
- Communicating with children who have experienced some sort of trauma.
- Medical and background issues affecting children's development/behaviour.
- Understanding and managing behaviour, parenting from a trauma informed position.
- Safer caring.
- Working in partnership with families.

- Managing family time
- Record keeping.
- Fostering support services.
- Legal requirements.
- The Assessment process.
- Role of the Fostering Panel & Applicants attendance.

The preparation training sessions are intended to cover a range of issues relating to the fostering task and expectations of the Fostering Service. The sessions provide an opportunity for those attending to increase their knowledge and to make an informed decision about whether to proceed with their application to foster.

The groups are led by the Fostering Trainer and a Fostering Social Worker from the Recruitment and Retention Team, with the assistance of experienced foster carers.

The team work closely with the Children in Care Council to ensure potential foster carers have an understanding of walking in the child's/young person's shoes. The Children in Care Council also enable the team to ensure realistic issues are kept at the forefront of practice during the training and assessment process. Therefore, one of the preparation training sessions is facilitated by care experienced children/ young people.

Additional opportunities for learning are available following attendance at training. These can be facilitated by meeting other foster carers, shadowing in residential and through having meetings or discussions with social workers.

4.5 Checks, References and Medicals

The assessment of prospective foster carer's suitability will take account of a range of safeguarding and checking processes designed to protect children from harm, abuse or exploitation.

All fostering applicants are required to provide proof of identity and to give written consent to a comprehensive range of enquiries, checks, reports and references being obtained from other organisations or individuals.

The requirement for Enhanced DBS checks applies to all residents in the prospective foster carers household who are 16 years old or over. Applicants are required to consent to having a medical undertaken by their G.P and then information being provided after a medical examination to the local authorities medical advisor.

4.6 Stage Two

Assessment

Durham County Council Fostering Service uses the Coram BAAF Assessment Form F as a practical tool and guide in the completion of fostering assessments.

The Fostering Service endeavours to complete assessments of prospective carers within 6 months of the receipt of a completed application form.

Applicants are encouraged wherever possible to make their own written contribution to the assessment.

Self-evaluation combined with professional evaluation and judgement is crucial to the assessment and decision-making process.

All fostering assessments are undertaken or overseen by qualified and experienced social workers.

Completed assessments are presented to one of the Fostering Panels for a recommendation prior to the Agency Decision Maker making a decision on the application.

Applicants are encouraged to attend the Fostering Panel and are informed verbally on the day of panel and in writing following ADM of the outcome of their application.

Those applicants assessed but who are not considered suitable to foster are fully informed of the processes to have this decision reviewed via panel and/or through the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

Assessment, training and approval of Connected Foster Carers.

The processes outlined above apply to the assessment and approval of connected carers in a slightly different way. These processes are summarised below:

- An initial screening discussion is held between a Fostering Social Worker and the Child's Social Worker
- An Initial Connected Carers Assessment (ICCA) is then conducted jointly by the Fostering Social Worker and the Child's Social Worker if a child is to be cared for under Reg24 , as in prior to the Form C being presented to panel and ADM.
- If the child is not going to live with the family/friends an ICCA is not needed and following screening, if positive, a full Form C assessment will be completed.
- The ICCA is presented to the Agency Decision Maker who makes a decision about whether temporary approval as foster carers is to be granted, if it is required or a full Form C assessment , or no further assessment.
- The Form C assessment is then completed whether this be because the child is living with the carers and they have temporary approval or they are to be assessed before the child is placed. Also when this is a contingency plan, should the child not be able to remain in parents care.

5 FOSTERING PANELS

There are 4 Fostering Panels, 3 approve Connected Foster Carers and 1 approves Mainstream Foster Carers. There is a Panel Advisor who sits on all 4 panels and

provides the advice, which ensures consistency across the panels. These are constituted in accordance with Fostering Services (England) Regulations, Guidance and Standards 2011. The Panels make recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who considers the information and reaches a decision. The Agency Decision Maker is the Service Manager, Looked After Children's Resources.

The remit of the Fostering Panels is to:

- Consider the suitability of prospective foster carers and make recommendations about their terms of approval.
- Consider the suitability and approve connected foster carers.
- Provide feedback on the quality of reports presented.
- Consider the first annual review of all foster carers approval, as well as any other review which the fostering service considers necessary i.e. after a Standards of Care Meeting and subsequent FCR.
- Periodically monitor the effectiveness of the review procedure.
- Give advice and make recommendations on such other matters or cases as the Fostering Service may refer to it.

5.1 Specialist Advisors to the Fostering Panels

Legal Advice

The Legal Adviser to the Fostering Panels is not a member of the Panels , but is available to provide written or verbal advice to the Fostering Panels and the Agency Decision Maker.

Legal advice is also available to staff and managers when required.

5.2 Medical Advisor

A Medical Advisor is available to provide advice to each of the Fostering Panels.

The Medical Advisor will evaluate prospective foster carers' medical information.

5.3 Education Advisor

Educational advice is available to the Panel.

5.4 Training and Conduct of Panel

The Fostering Service has an Induction Pack, Process and training for new Fostering Panel members. In addition training events for all Panel members are arranged at least annually. Fostering Panel members contribute to identifying their individual training needs within their Annual Appraisal meetings.

The Fostering Panels Chairs, Vice Chairs and Senior Managers meet at Business Meetings which are held quarterly to discuss any relevant fostering issues affecting the Panel and/or Service.

The Fostering Panel fulfil their responsibilities in relation to quality assurance and monitoring of fostering cases. Quality issues on cases presented are recorded in Panel minutes and are brought to the attention of the Agency Decision Maker for any action as required.

Information provided by Panel is considered by the Service in relation to the training and professional development needs of all staff involved with fostering cases.

The business of the Fostering Panels is reported within an Annual Report which is presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

6 MONITORING, QUALITY ASSURANCE AND COMPLAINTS

Durham County Council is committed to providing services that comply with Fostering Services Regulations, Guidance and Standards 2011. Monitoring and quality assurance is undertaken by the following methods:

- Staff are provided with monthly supervision and annual appraisal where the quality of work and practice is monitored, and training and professional development needs are identified.
- Fostering Team Meetings are held on a monthly basis and provide opportunities to evaluate the effectiveness of fostering systems, processes and practice issues
- Management information systems track children for whom fostering is planned, prospective foster carer's assessments and availability.
- Monthly Fostering Service Performance Meetings are held with the Fostering Management Team (TM's and SWC's), Service Manager, Strategic Manager and the Performance Team, to monitor and improve performance across the service.
- Team Managers conduct regular case file audits.
- Safeguarding Meetings are held bi-monthly re: accidents and incidents of violence and aggression.
- Matching for permanence is addressed in two ways via weekly family finding meetings held by the 2 SWC's from the support teams, North and South and also monthly via the Permanency Review meeting which is chaired by the Strategic Manager,
- Disruption Meetings in relation to the break down of a permanent home are chaired by an Independent Review Officer and advice/recommendations are presented to the Service to inform both learning and future practice.
- Services which are provided by Service Level Agreements with partner Agencies are formally reviewed and address contractual requirements, objectives and quality issues.
- Regional monitoring arrangements are in place for the Independent Fostering Providers Contract.
- A Recruitment Report is produced to collate and analyse the effectiveness of the recruitment strategy and inform future recruitment processes.
- Fostering Panel/Service reports are produced on an annual basis which record and evaluate key activity and service developments. These are

presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel who takes a role in the overall monitoring and review of Fostering Service.

The Fostering Service aims to obtain service users' feedback during different stages of the fostering process. The Fostering Panels also monitor feedback from all who attend. This information is analysed and reported in the Annual Fostering Service report.

Methods of gathering views include:

- Applicants' feedback on attendance at preparation to foster training.
- Feedback from those who attended Fostering Panels
- Feedback on written information at time of match and a child becoming cared for by the foster carer.
- Feedback from children who are cared for by us via placement feedbacks and Looked After Children Review process.
- Children's wishes and feelings are ascertained during various key stages of their fostering journey.
- The Children in Care Council feedback children's views
- The M8's group feedback the views of children who foster
- Twice yearly consultation meetings which are held face to face and virtually the same day to allow as much participation as possible.

Comments, Compliments and Complaints

Durham County Council has established procedures and information leaflets in relation to any representation from service users. Additionally, information for the public on the Complaints procedure is available via the Durham County Council website:

<http://www.durham.gov.uk/media/1711/Childrens-Services---Compliments-Comments-Complaints/pdf/ComplimentsCommentsComplaintsChildrensServices.pdf>

Information on how to complain is also included in the Information Pack sent to all foster carer enquirers.

Durham County Council maintains centralised records and management information in relation to corporate complaints and their outcome. Children's Services maintains centralised records in relation to statutory (social care) complaints and their outcome.

In addition foster care applicants who are not satisfied with the recommendation of the Fostering Panel and the Agency Decision Maker's decision concerning their approval as foster carers are provided with a 28 day period to make representations and to provide any additional information in support of their application. Arrangements are then made for the case to be re-presented to a Fostering Panel. Such applicants also are informed of their rights regarding the Independent Review Mechanism.

MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING STRUCTURE OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

Durham County Council Fostering Service Address is:

The Fostering Service
Durham County Council
Spectrum 8
Spectrum Business Park
Seaham, Co. Durham
SR7 7TT

The Recruitment Telephone Line for Fostering Enquiries: 03000 269400

The management and staffing structure for the Fostering Service is set out in Appendix 1.

The Fostering Service Structure 2022

Appendix 1

