

Fostering Strategy 2022-25

Three children are dressed as superheroes. The child on the left is a boy with a blue mask and a red cape. The child in the middle is a girl with a yellow mask and a white suit with a gold tie. The child on the right is a girl with a pink mask and a pink suit with a red cape. They are all holding a large white sign with the text 'Be a fostering superhero!' written on it. The background is a blue and white geometric design.

Be a
fostering
superhero!



North
Tyneside
Council

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Introduction

North Tyneside Council has made a commitment to the children and young people of the Borough that we will only care for them when we have first worked tirelessly to keep them safe within their family home. We successfully deliver on this pledge day-in, day-out. Hundreds of children remain within their family homes and connected to their communities because of the help and support the Council and its partners provide to make it safe for them to do so.

Sadly, sometimes it is necessary to move children and young people from their family home to live elsewhere in order to keep them safe. This is not a decision we take lightly. Children and young people have told us that carers known to them help to soften the impact of having to leave their own home. This is why we do all we can to place them in the care of someone known to them and part of their network. This also, importantly, keeps them connected to their community. We work incredibly hard to support carers to make their commitment to care for a child or young person a reality. At the current time there are over a hundred children supported in this way by the Council.

Unfortunately, sometimes it is not possible for family and friends around a child or young person to care for them. This is why foster carers play such an important role in what the Council does to safeguard children and young people. At any one time, approximately 100 children and young people are cared for by foster carers, people who open their homes to a child or young person in need of love and care. To us, they are true superheroes.

This ambitious strategy is all about supporting our foster carers and strengthening our pledge to **recruit the right number of foster carers with the right skills for the children and young people who need our care**. Together we can and will, make a difference.

Steven Phillips
Lead member for Children's Services

Julie Firth
Director of Children's Services



Steven Phillips



Julie Firth



Aims and objectives

The key aims and objectives of this strategy are as follows:

- 1 To increase the total number of local foster carers available for the children and young people of North Tyneside
- 2 To increase the number of foster carers with the skills to care for teenagers
- 3 To increase the number of foster carers with the skills to care for sibling groups
- 4 To improve the resilience of our foster carers through our support to them, reducing the number of fostering arrangements which break down
- 5 To reduce the use of independent fostering agency care arrangements for children new to care
- 6 Reduce the number of external residential homes for children and young people in favour of more inhouse skilled fostering households



National context

- Most children in care are cared for in fostering households. 57,380 (71%) children in care on 31 March 2021 were in fostering households, an increase in numbers from 57,000 in 2020; 55,760 in 2019; and 55,200 in 2018
- There has been a shift in the profile of children coming into care, with a slight decline in the number of children under the age of 1 and over the age of 16;
- The largest age group of children who are now fostered are teenagers aged 10–15 years (39%);
- The ‘Staying Put’ initiative has also changed the profile of foster care, with 19% of young people in foster care turning 18 and still living with their former foster carer;
- The children and young people entering care do so with ever more complex difficulties including serious physical and mental health problems and developmental problems;
- Local authorities have faced increasing problems recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of foster carers, particularly for those who require specialist arrangements. As a result there has been a significant use of and growth in independent fostering agencies (33% of all care arrangements);
- There is estimated to be a national shortage of 9,300 fostering households, demand is outstripping supply. This is a shortage increase nationally of 3,400 fostering households since 2018;
- The lack of foster carers means that matching – the decision which foster carers are best able to meet the needs of a child or young person – is overwhelmingly supply led and not needs led.



North Tyneside context

- Over the past few years, the number of children in the care of North Tyneside Council has increased reporting 44.3% per 10k at the end of January 23. We are now above both the statistical neighbours average of 35.1% and the England average of 26%;
- Over the last five years the number of foster carers has reduced;
- The age profile of our carers is increasing, with a number planning to retire in the near future;
- We have a particular need for foster carers skilled at caring for teenagers;
- We have a need for more foster carers who are skilled at caring for sibling groups, unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people;
- We recruit in an increasingly competitive market place for new carers;
- Some children and young people living in a children's home could be placed with skilled foster carers were such carers available;
- Our lack of foster carers means that matching - regarding the decision which foster carers are best able to meet the needs of a child or young person - is not always as needs led as it could be.



Our ambitions



Within three years we will:

1

Reduce the use of independent fostering agency care arrangements for children new into care

2

Recruit an additional 30 fostering households, of which 10 will offer specialist homes for teenagers or sibling groups

3

Where possible we will look to place children in care with our own local foster carers, keeping them connected to their communities

4

Where appropriate to do so, we will look to keep sibling groups together'



Our plan

Consult more widely and more often

The development of this strategy is evidence of our commitment to change. We have worked in partnership with the fostering community to develop our plan, listening closely to what our foster carers have told us.

We will:

- Increase our use of surveys to foster carers, to ensure the collective voice of our fostering community is heard and their views and experiences understood;
- Increase the range of foster care support groups so that our fostering community has a representative voice on issues affecting particular aspects of the role;
- Ensure that leaders and managers of the fostering service meet regularly with as many members of our fostering community as possible. We will make full use of our foster carers' experiences and ideas to develop the best possible service for children and young people;
- Undertake regular reviews of the progress of this strategy so that it delivers in the way we intend it to.





Pay more and pay differently

We will retain our payment structure, having simplified some elements and enhancing others. We will make it more transparent.

We will:

- Retain Payment for Skills structure with three payment bands linked to competency, skills and training: 'accredited', 'advanced' and 'specialist';
- Align the allowances we pay to carers to the recommended national minimum levels and ensure these are raised in line with annual increases;
- Continue to pay our carers the additional fee on top of their 'skills to foster' fee for caring for two or more children;
- Remove inconsistencies in additional fees paid to accredited carers who receive the teen fee by simplifying the allowances to align with national minimum levels
- Continue to pay the full amount carers are required to pay in council tax for having spare rooms available in their home;
- Commit to review the payments on an annual basis to ensure we pay our carers an amount which is fair and competitive in an ever-changing marketplace.





Offer more and better support

Our fostering community does an extraordinary job welcoming into their homes, their families and their lives, some of the most vulnerable children and young people in the Borough. They do so with warmth, skill and good humour and regularly show remarkable resilience and tenacity that goes way beyond. Our carers advocate, care for and love the children and young people placed with them as if they were their own, and in so doing provide the best possible homes for children in care. We know however, that occasionally, the fostering role can be overwhelming, frustrating, sometimes too much and scary. We know it is at this point that we need to provide high quality, effective and meaningful support.

We will:

- Ensure you have a specialist support from a fostering social worker;
- Replace the foster carer advice and support telephone service with more effective support;
- Continue to launch Mockingbird constellations – a model of foster care which replicates an extended family, offering support from experienced foster carers 24/7 in order to increase stability of care arrangements for children, and support to carers;
- To continue to offer our fostering community the opportunity to ‘buddy’ with other carers for peer advice, support and mentoring;
- Continue our foster care support groups within the borough, recognising the diversity of our fostering community;
- Provide specialist support to our fostering community from the Health, Information and Advice, Virtual School and Emotional Wellbeing Team (HIVE Team) including:
 - Attachment training
 - Theraplay
 - Counselling
 - Behaviour management strategies
 - Therapeutic parenting
- Enhance our training offer to our fostering community with a particular focus on equipping carers to meet the needs of children and young people with complex additional social, emotional and mental health needs;
- Continue to support our HIVE fostering clinic which is a safe space for foster carers to receive support with secondary trauma;
- Provide @@@@ cards enabling our fostering community to access local facilities such as libraries and leisure centres at reduced rates;
- Negotiate with providers of leisure activities within the Borough, possible reductions in costs for our fostering community;
- A commitment to explore best practice models and approaches.

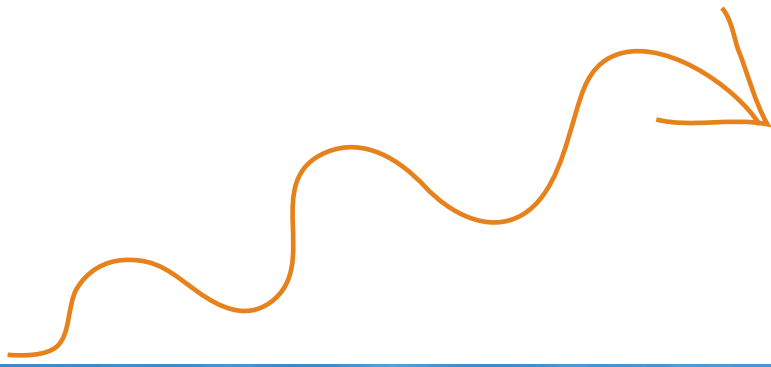
Make the fostering role more visible and more accessible

We are aware of the difficulties of recruiting foster carers in a competitive market. We are therefore committed to trying new things and doing things differently than we have done before.

If you need us to do anything differently (reasonable adjustments) to help you access our services, including providing this information in another language or format, please contact **(0191) 643 2540** or email **fostering@northtyneside.gov.uk**.

We will:

- Have a dedicated annual budget allocated to the fostering service to support marketing activities;
- Continue with advertising:
 - on local radio;
 - on social media;
 - on banners in public areas within the Borough
 - through the distribution and display of posters and postcards in public areas within the borough
- Continue to use North Tyneside Council's communications to residents;
- Work with partners such as police, health and education to raise awareness of the fostering role and recruitment through the development of a 'toolkit' of messages and images that can be used;
- We will continue to deliver and increase the number of information events;
- Target the employees of the council's key 'neighbours' on the Cobalt Business Park and large employers within the borough with awareness raising literature;
- Attend an increased number of key community, borough and regional events with awareness raising 'stalls';
- Improve the fostering service web content on North Tyneside Council's website, regularly updating with marketing campaign key messages;
- Increase the responsiveness of the fostering service to expressions of interest;
- Evaluate what works and what does not as we go along.



Offer more training to more skilled carers

We will continue working with our fostering community to develop and shape our training offer to ensure this meets the needs of foster carers and the children and young people they care for.

We will:

- Continue to maintain a dedicated training post within the fostering service;
- Provide a greater range of times and venues for the delivery of training to our fostering community, improving accessibility;
- We will work harder to meet the individual circumstances of foster carers to enable them to access training, including the provision of alternative care for a child or young person;
- Broaden the providers of our training, with increased participation from HIVE, CAMHs, Youth Justice, Education Psychology and others.



How we will know if our plan is working

This strategy is deliberately ambitious. We know there is a lot to do. We want to:

- Consult more widely and more often
- Pay differently
- Continue to ensure foster carers have access to specialist support from a fostering social worker
- Make the fostering role more visible and more accessible
- Offer more training to ensure our carers have the necessary skills to care for children and young people

We will not lose sight of the aims of the strategy.

The following seven questions will be key:

- Have we reduced the number of independent fostering agency care arrangements?
- How many of our children in care are placed with our own local foster carers?
- How many children have we supported back into a fostering family from a residential home?
- Have we achieved greater stability for our children in care?
- How many additional fostering households have we recruited?
- How many of our sibling groups have we been able to place together?
- How many foster carers are no longer caring and why?

Of course, our strategy will not be a success if our fostering community does not feel that the difference we are trying to achieve has improved their own experience of the fostering role. We will be asking them on a regular basis how they think we are doing.

Finally, the success of this strategy should mean that children and young people have the right care at the right time in the right place with the right carers. This strategy is all about them. We will be asking our children and young people in care how they think we are doing.





How to contact the Fostering Service

If you are interested in joining our fostering community or you have any questions about this strategy, we would love to hear from you.



Please contact:

North Tyneside Council Fostering Service
Quadrant, The Silverlink North
Cobalt Business Park
North Tyneside, NE27 0BY

Telephone: (0191) 643 2540

fostering@northtyneside.gov.uk
www.northtyneside.gov.uk/fostering



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