

# **Rotherham Council Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2023-2024**

**Forward by Councillor Cusworth.**

*As Corporate Parents, all Councillors are part of the team around the child in Rotherham and it is vital that we listen to the views of young people. They know the issues they face and how services can support them, so young people's input continues to be at the heart of how we shape our work to meet their needs.*

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This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirements of Standard 1 of the Fostering Services Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act, 2000) and Regulations 3 and 4 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

## **1. Introduction**

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (Standard 16) and the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (Regulation 3(1)) state that the Fostering Service Provider must compile a written statement in relation to the Fostering Service, a 'Statement of Purpose', which details the aims and objectives of the Fostering Service and the services and facilities provided by the Fostering Service.

The National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Service Regulations govern the work of the Fostering Service Providers throughout England and will be used in inspecting and registering Fostering Agencies. The work of the Fostering Service is underpinned and guided by legislation and by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's policies and procedures.

This Fostering Statement of Purpose has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the standards and regulations and will be a useful source of information to Members of the Council, staff, foster carers and prospective foster carers and children and young people who are placed with Rotherham carers. It will also provide a benchmark for Rotherham children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies.

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis, at least annually and modified as necessary.

In accordance with Fostering Regulation 4b, the Fostering Service will notify the Ofsted Chief Inspector of any revision within 28 days, for the purposes of this Statement the 28 days will be taken from the point of ratification by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (or Lead Member for Children and Young People's Services).

## **2. Principles and Values**

The needs, wishes, welfare and safety of Looked After Children are at the centre of the Rotherham Fostering Service. We believe that all children and young people needing foster care, have the right to live within a safe and nurturing family environment which meets their needs throughout childhood and which enables them to realise their full potential.

### **One Rotherham Values**

The Fostering Service is designed to operate within the corporate vision and values of the Council, in particular the One Rotherham Values which demonstrate how all staff behave with each other, our partners, elected members and customers:

- **Honest:** Open and truthful in everything we say and do
- **Accountable:** We own our decisions, we do what we say and we acknowledge and learn from our mistakes
- **Respectful:** We show regard and sensitivity for the feelings, rights and views of others
- **Ambitious:** We are dedicated, committed and positive, embracing change with energy and creativity
- **Proud:** We take pride in our borough and in the job that we do

### **The Rotherham Family Approach**

The Rotherham Family Approach underpins the work of all of children's services including the Rotherham Fostering Service and describes our focus on the question 'Would this be good enough for my children and family?'. In line with the Rotherham Family Approach the Fostering Service will draw on the methodologies of Signs of Safety, Restorative Practice and Social Pedagogy in our work with fostering families and Looked After children in order to clearly evidence the following in practice.

- *A relentless focus on children:* Children are always at the heart of quality practice that helps to build safety, wellbeing and success.
- *Working 'with' families* to help them solve problems, maximising their existing strengths, resources and networks.
- Enabling '*space for positive change*' within families through empowerment and real opportunity to help that change occur.
- *Building meaningful relationships:* Improved communication that includes high challenge and high support in collaboration with families that enables change for children.

- *The lived experience of the child is evident in all that we do.* Children and young people are actively involved in work that affects them and are always consulted on their wishes, feelings and decisions about their lives.
- *Effecting long term, sustainable change.* Families are supported so that they can be clear about what the problems are, what needs to change and how it needs to change. They can then feel empowered to take action to make things better for their child(ren).
- *Risk, worries, danger, safety, success and wellbeing goals are clearly evidenced* and articulated to families. We work with families to support their understanding of why there are worries concerning their children and what the 'bottom line' is.
- *Language that cares:* Rotherham has taken part in national consultation with children and young people to establish preferred language when describing children within the statutory care system. Practitioners are being encouraged to consider this work when working with, writing and/or talking about children and young people in order to ensure that their voice is heard:

"The language of care is so mixed up with our everyday language that it is difficult to separate the two. These words that we challenge are used by everyone: foster carers, social workers, teachers, Independent Reviewing Officers, administrators and even children and young people. We should challenge ourselves and challenge people who we hear using them."  
Rotherham Young People; TACT (2019) Language that Cares

## **Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2023-2028**

The Fostering Service will contribute to 'Rotherham's Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2023 – 2028 which has a strong, clear vision for children and people's services:

*"Working with Rotherham's children, young people and families to be resilient, successful and safe", which aligns to the Council Plan: Council Plan 2022-25 – Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council*

The strategy sets out the following principles. and these principles underpin and inform the Fostering Service:

1. Welcome and care

Our Rotherham Family Approach is informed by respectful, collaborative relationships and a stance of critical enquiry and “locating grand aspirations in everyday practice where the experience of the child is at the centre”.

## 2. Value and include

Whilst the local authority is the lead agency in developing and implementing this strategy, it has been developed in collaboration with a wide range of partners and will be owned and implemented by all professionals working with children, young people, their parents, and carers.

## 3. Communicate

Rotherham Council are committed corporate parents, we use language that reflects this, we want everything to be the best that parents want for their children: • That they are happy and healthy both physically and emotionally. • That we keep them safe and protected from harm and exploitation. • That we support them into adulthood and that we prepare them for independence. • We are ambitious for our children; we want them to achieve their potential and participate in decisions which affect their lives.

## 4. Work in partnership

We want our children and young people to work with us and, along with parents and carers, shape the services we offer to them. We value our children and young people and parents and carers as equal partners; this strategy is underpinned by our commitment to deliver the promises developed with our Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

At the heart of these is trust.

## **Our Core Principles**

In addition, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and the Fostering Service:

- Recognise that the needs of Looked After Children are paramount;
- Recognise the value, skill and commitment required of foster carers and treat them, their families and homes with respect;
- Aim to provide a range of quality placements to meet the identified needs of children who require substitute care;
- Are committed to maintaining siblings together wherever possible and promoting positive contact with family members;

- Are committed to engaging other agencies in the assessment of the needs of children and working together to clarify roles and ensuring that their needs are understood and prioritised;
- Recognise that many children will have had traumatic experiences prior to placement in foster care, as well as the effects of separation and loss;
- Recognise their mental health needs may be complex and their need for understanding of their past and access to therapeutic input is essential;
- Recognise that foster carers caring for traumatised young people will encounter unknown situations on a daily basis and their own support needs need to be assessed and appropriate support systems deployed;
- Recognise that foster carers who are caring for the majority of Rotherham's Looked After Children are very valuable and that their time and commitment is worthy of a reasonable remuneration system;
- Recognise that all staff and carers involved in meeting the needs of children with complex needs require a robust commitment to training and learning opportunities;
- Recognise that foster carers are an integral part in supporting Looked After Children in reaching their educational potential;
- Recognise children with disabilities as children first. The same principles of service apply, while accepting that additional support services will be required to meet all their needs;
- Recognise the transition into adulthood is a major step requiring positive daily living support and enhanced connections with the adult world of opportunity and responsibility;
- Are committed to facilitating young people remaining in the foster placement into early adulthood wherever possible and that a flexible range of accommodation and support options to meet different levels of need will be a factor in the services for young people leaving care;
- Are committed to implementing the Children's Workforce Development Council's standards for foster carers and will support carers in achieving the standards.

### **3. Aims and Objectives**

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and the Fostering Service are committed to working with service users, carers, the wider community, and partner agencies to promote the welfare of the Looked After Children and improve their life chances by providing services which:

- Support families;
- Provide stable, safe effective alternative care at the right time and for the right length of time and which are responsive to individual needs, circumstances and choice;
- Maintain wherever possible continuity of educational provision.

In meeting these aims and objectives, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council will work to secure 'sufficient accommodation' as required by Section 22G of the Children Act, 1989 (as inserted by the Children and Young People Act, 2008) which places a general duty on Local Authorities to secure sufficient accommodation within their boundaries to meet the needs of Looked After Children. Accommodation should be sufficient, not only in number of beds provided but also in respect of diversity and quality of provision available. Local Authorities need to demonstrate that they are taking steps at a strategic level to secure accommodation as is 'reasonably practicable'.

Reasonably practicable is defined as:

- Appropriate;
- Near the child's home;
- Does not disrupt the child's education or training ;
- Enables the child to live with accommodated siblings;
- Within the area and suitable.

The key objectives in providing quality placements are underpinned by the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 and are:

- To provide placement choice and positive matching of a child with a placement through identification of child's needs and taking account of any wishes and feelings of the child. (NMS 1, 10);
- To, where possible and appropriate provide a placement that is in reasonable proximity to a child's home and addresses the child's culture and heritage. (NMS 2);
- To, where possible, provide and support a placement within the child's extended family network. (NMS 2, 9);
- To promote an environment that ensures adequate safeguarding measures are in place for the child and the culture within the foster home promotes models and supports positive behaviour through adherence to policies and the skills of the foster carer. (NMS 3, 4, 5);
- That where possible and in the best interests of the individual children, as identified within assessed needs, siblings should be placed together. (NMS 2, 9);

- To allow the promotion of proactive, positive health care and well-being thorough Safer Care policies, promotion of child interests and aptitudes, access to relevant leisure opportunities and Health professionals. (NMS 6,7);
- To promote the maximisation of educational opportunities and achievements for children through access to relevant support and professionals. (NMS 8);
- To ensure placements wherever possible have planned beginnings and endings. (NMS 11);
- The promotion of positive contact with family and friends through effective care planning. (NMS 9);
- To listen to the children and young people and involve them in decision making. (NMS 1);
- To work in partnership with parents. (NMS 8);
- To provide stability of placement - a minimum number of moves for each child. (NMS 11);
- To minimise the length of time between a child becoming looked after and moving to a permanent placement, if this is required. (NMS 11);
- To prepare young people for independence and facilitate a smooth transition into adulthood (NMS12);
- Standards of care for effective planning for the transition of care to independence. (NMS 12).

#### **4. Services Provided**

The Fostering Service is an integral section of Children and Young People's Services and offers a comprehensive service to Looked after Children and Young People, operational teams, approved and prospective mainstream and family and friends foster carers.

The Fostering Service aims to provide suitable placements for all children and young people who are looked after in Rotherham and offers a range of foster placements:

- Task centred foster placements for children of all ages needing emergency and short term placements;
- Respite care (also known as Second Home care), offering time-limited breaks to families;



- Day care for looked after children and young people when foster carers need to attend meetings or training events;
- Long term permanence placements for children and young people who cannot return to birth family and where adoption is not the plan;
- Families Together – short break placements in partnership with parents/carers, for children and young people with a disability.
- Family and friends foster care (also known as kinship care) to enable children and young people who are unable to live with their parents, to be cared for by extended family members, friends or other people who are connected with them;
- Transition foster care for children and young people who are currently placed in residential care but for whom their longer-term care plan is foster care. These carers undergo an additional assessment to determine their suitability for the role. They then work alongside the residential care home to, with support from the Rotherham Therapeutic Team, gradually transition the child or young person from the residential home and into their fostering family. These carers receive a weekly fee, which accounts for the high level of commitment and skill required, as well as high levels of support from both the fostering service and the Therapeutic Team.
- Leaving care and 'staying put' arrangements – there is a commitment to ensure that young people in foster care are actively encouraged to remain living with their foster carers when they approach their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. This 'Staying Put' approach has enhanced the future outcomes for many previous children looked after who have then remained in their foster placement until their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday and beyond. Foster carers can continue to care for young people after their 18th birthday through a 'staying put arrangement'.

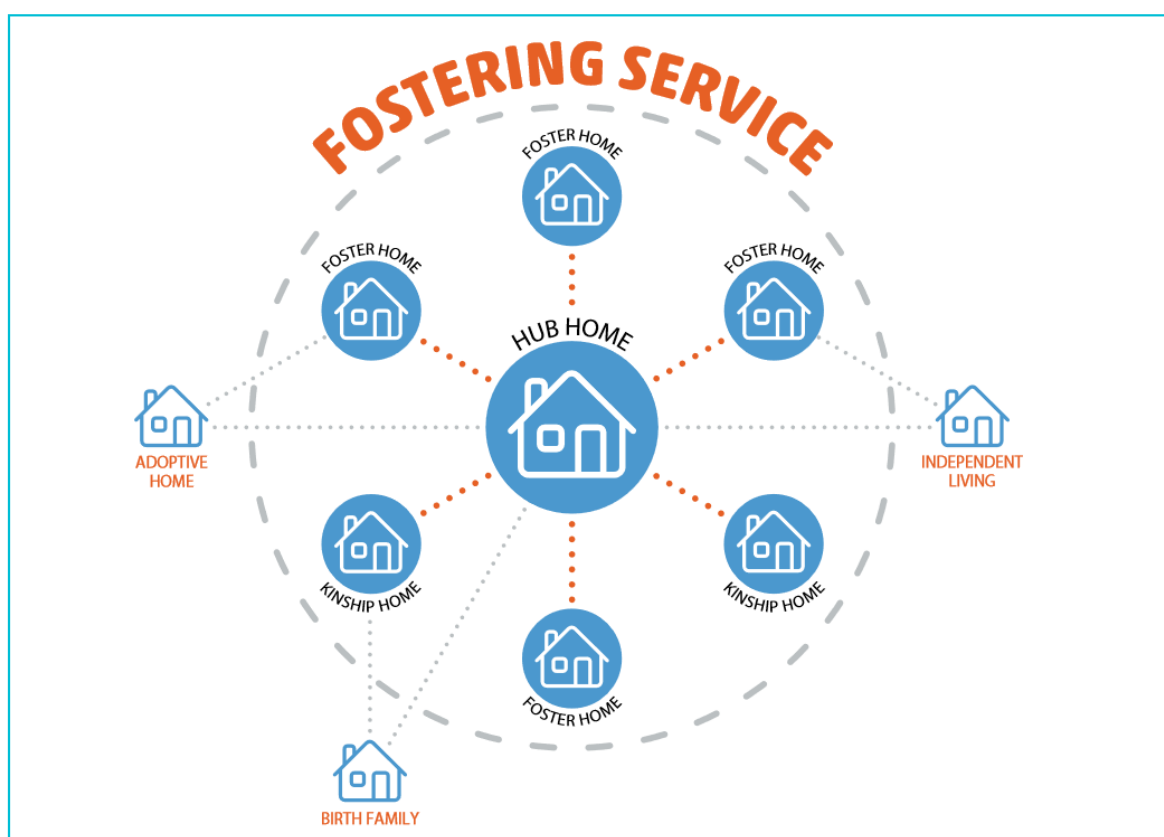
## **Foster Carer Payments**

The fostering service utilises a payment for skills model to ensure that foster carers are paid a weekly fee based on their skills. The model ensures that foster carers can be assessed against a clear set of skills and paid accordingly. Foster carers can then work up the levels by evidencing the acquisition of the higher-level skills within a progression assessment. Kinship carers enter the model within their own level but can then progress through the levels as with any other foster carer. New foster carers entering the service can also be assessed according to their prior experience and skills level upon entry to ensure that they are being paid according to their skills from the outset of their fostering career. A carers' skills level is kept under review to ensure that if a carer no longer meets the requirements of the skills level they are currently paid at, there is a process for reviewing and adjusting this if necessary.

## Mockingbird Family Model

Some of our Rotherham fostering families are part of The Fostering Network's Mockingbird Family Model. This is an extended family model that provides respite care, peer support, regular joint planning and training, and social activities.

The programme improves the stability of fostering placements and strengthens the relationships between carers, children and young people, fostering services and birth families.



Expected benefits to both carers and looked after children and young people include:

- Improved placement stability and reduction in placement breakdown.
- Stronger relationships that support looked after children, young people and fostering families.
- The provision of a robust and resilient structure, which offers support through times of crisis and transition.
- Improved respite care.
- Increased skills, confidence and role satisfaction for foster carers.
- Higher levels of foster carer retention and recruitment.
- Improved experience of peer support.
- Better experience of birth family contact, including siblings.

- Costs saved and costs avoided.

Rotherham launched its first Mockingbird constellation in May 2018 with a second following shortly afterwards, and then a third being set up in July 2021. There are plans to create a further two constellations in 2023/24.

## **5. Recruitment, Approval and Assessment of Foster Carers**

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's Fostering Service has a recruitment and retention strategy which is based upon the needs of Looked After Children.

The aim is to have a choice of placements to meet the individual needs of every child; recruitment of foster carers is a major priority for the service and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council.

The recruitment and retention strategy is reviewed annually.

Foster carers are recruited by a variety of methods, including personal recommendation or media campaigns highlighting a particular area of need. Adverts or articles placed in newspapers, on television or radio, use of posters, distribution of information leaflets, attendance at local shows, fetes and other public access centres.

From September 2019 the Fostering Service began a partnership with Brightsparks – a creative communications and business development agency. Brightsparks are working with the service to use social media marketing strategies in a targeted recruitment campaign. Brightsparks' strategy aims to increase numbers at all 6 marketing stages:

1. Awareness – significantly increasing social media impressions to drive traffic to the website
2. Interest – nurturing leads through emails, targeted content and newsletters
3. Consideration – initial enquiry calls/live chats/emails to provide specific information to leads using case studies, testimonials and literature that explain the options available
4. Intent – screening visits and scheduled calls which provide bespoke and tailored information and keep people engaged
5. Sign up – assessments initiated when application completed and retention strategies ensure applicants remain engaged
6. Approval – the increase in numbers in stages 1-5 results in an increase in newly approved foster carers

There are two stages to the assessment process and these can be run concurrently. In Rotherham, unless there are clear concerns indicated from the outset that may be

resolved within stage one checks, we will generally run stages concurrently to reduce the amount of time an assessment takes.

#### Stage 1:

- Provides the enquirer with sufficient information to decide if fostering is suitable for the family; it also provides the Fostering Service with sufficient information about an applicant's suitability to progress to a more detailed assessment without unnecessary bureaucracy or expenditure of time and resource for either the enquirer or the Fostering Service; this includes a medical assessment, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, Local Authority checks and two references.
- This should take no more than two months and commences when an enquirer's registration of interest in fostering is accepted.

#### Stage 2:

- This is a more detailed assessment of an applicant's suitability to foster. It determines the applicant's capacity to meet the needs of any child/children likely to be placed with them.
- The assessment is completed using the Coram BAAF Form F template and guidance via a social worker, undertaking a series of visits to the applicant's home.
- Applicants are encouraged to undertake self-assessment during the process and are given regular feedback throughout the process. The assessment is carried out in line with National Minimum Fostering Standards 2011 and Fostering Services Regulations 2011.
- Applicants are expected to attend the Skills to Foster Pre-Approval Training course; this provides the applicants with an opportunity to learn much more about fostering on a programme facilitated by fostering social workers and approved foster carers.
- The Fostering Service recognises and values the contribution of existing foster carers to the recruitment process and actively supports their involvement in recruitment activity. As such, foster carers co-facilitate the pre-approval training with Fostering Service social workers. The course runs over three days and is an integral element of the assessment process.
- The course introduces applicants to the challenges of foster care, the kinds of experiences children may have had and why they may behave in certain ways; it provides information about professionals that foster carers work with and sets out expectations of being a foster carer.
- This stage should take no longer than four months.

The service also follows a specific process for foster carers transferring from Independent Fostering Agencies. This makes use of the records already held on a carer within their current agency and enables us to significantly reduce the time taken to complete an assessment, therefore allowing the carer to transfer agencies much more quickly.

## **6. The Fostering Panel**

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council has at least two Fostering Panels a month. The Panel is convened in accordance with the National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2011. The Panel considers all matters relating to fostering and family and friends care. Matching of children to long term placements is considered in a separate Long Term Matching Panel. The assessing or supervising social worker completes a report and presents it to the Fostering Panel, which will consider the application or review and make a recommendation about the applicant's suitability to foster. The Panel makes a recommendation to either approve or not approve as a foster carer.

The Panel's recommendation is considered by the Agency Decision Maker. The Agency Decision Maker for Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council is the Head of Service for Looked After Children, Fostering and Adoption. There is a deputising arrangement in place to cover if the ADM is not available and this will be another senior manager of suitable seniority. The National Minimum Standards 2011 (14.10) states that the agency decision must be conveyed orally within two working days of being made. The assessing or supervising social worker will be responsible for conveying this decision. The panel administrator will inform the applicants of the decision in writing within five working days.

On approval of new foster carers, a supervising social worker will be allocated to the foster carer.

Where an applicant or existing carer does not agree with the Agency Decision, the applicant may make representation to the Agency within 28 days of the decision or make representation to the Independent Review Mechanism for the Agency decision to be reviewed independently by an alternative independent panel. The independent review panel does not have the power to change the decision but can refer the matter back to the Local Authority Fostering Panel and Agency Decision Maker for reconsideration if the independent panel disagrees with the Agency decision.

The service benefits from a dedicated fostering panel advisor who sits as a part of the management team and whose role it is to advise the panel chair, panel members and the Agency Decision Maker in an unbiased and impartial manner and to act as the liaison between the independent panel and the fostering service. The panel advisor also manages the business and running of panel, quality assures all the

paperwork and provides feedback to the service on any matters that arise during panel meetings. In addition to this the panel advisor has a role in overseeing policy and practice review across the fostering service.

### **Exemptions to the usual fostering limit:**

A person may not foster more than three children in each foster home, except where all children are siblings. Applications for exemptions will usually be made because of the following exceptional circumstances:

- The child concerned was previously placed with the foster carers and his or her placement elsewhere has disrupted;
- The foster carers have special skills to meet the child's needs which are not available elsewhere;
- The placement of the child over the limit is the most appropriate way of meeting the child's needs arising from disability, race, religion, language and/or culture;
- The placement is required to keep the siblings together.

The application can only be made with the agreement of the foster carers and the application is made to and agreed by the Agency Decision Maker. All exemptions will be reported to the next available Fostering Panel for ratification. The Fostering Panel will have responsibility for the ongoing monitoring of the exemptions.

## **7. Supervision of Foster Carers**

The service recognises that supervision and support for carers is vital. It is important that the carers' work is recognised as providing the major component in meeting the needs of Looked After Children in Rotherham.

Carer satisfaction and retention is essential for a healthy fostering service.

All carers (including family and friends carers) have an identified supervising social worker. The supervising social workers visit carers regularly (NMS21) to monitor the standards of care provided, assist the carer to play their part in the child's Care Plan and identify any training and development needs.

Supervising social workers are responsible for ensuring that the care offered to children in foster care meets the required standards.

The supervising social worker visits and telephones the carer regularly whilst the child is in placement. Home visits to the foster carers take place at a minimum of six weekly intervals. These can be increased as assessed need determines, for

example, fostering households where there are exemptions, newly-approved foster carers who require a higher intensity of support, placements where more challenging and complex children and young people are placed, or placements where additional support, guidance, training or education is required by the carer.

As part of the monitoring of the work of foster carers, there will be at least one annual unannounced visit by the supervising social worker to the foster carers' home (as stipulated in NMS 21:8).

Supervising Social Workers will also facilitate a variety of support groups and activities designed to meet the support needs of foster carers and their families.

## **8. Foster Carer Reviews**

In accordance with Fostering Service Regulation 28, all approved carers undergo an annual review, which is chaired by the Foster Carer Reviewing Officer. The Foster Carer Reviewing Officer is independent of the Fostering Service and is based and managed within the Safeguarding Team. The first review following approval is always presented to the Fostering Panel (Regulation 25(5)). Subsequent annual reviews may also be presented to the Fostering Panel in situations where termination of approval is sought, when significant changes in the terms of approval are being considered, where there are major concerns about suitability of the carer or following the investigation of any allegations against the carer. Rotherham's practice is to formally present a carers' annual review to panel at least once every three years in order to reinforce the safeguarding aspect of this process and the Fostering Panel's role in review and scrutiny. All reviews are quality assured by fostering managers.

The main aim of the review is to determine whether the carers' approval continues to be suitable and whether there should be any changes in the terms of the registration.

The review is an opportunity to look at the progress the carer has made and to set targets and goals for the next year; within the Personal Development Plan, training, learning and development needs are also assessed and identified; a recommendation for future approval is made by the Supervising social worker and IRO. Following every review the Agency Decision Maker will agree the foster carer's terms of approval and written confirmation of this will be sent to the carer.

## **9. Family and Friends Foster Carers**

Two social workers are identified in the Supervisory Team to undertake Family and Friends Assessments, including those placed under Regulation 24 (Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010). Regulation 24 placements are approved by a nominated person (the Agency Decision Maker) at the point of placement.

The Fostering Panel is notified of all placements made and requests for extensions under regulation 25 as well as full family and friends assessments are returned to the Fostering Panel for a recommendation to be made.

Recommendations from the Panel are then considered by the Agency Decision Maker.

Family and Friends foster carers are able access the foster carer support groups, as well as being entitle to the same levels of support and training as other RMBC foster carers.

## **10. Training and Development**

The Fostering Service Regulations 2011 (17 (1)) state that the Fostering Service must provide foster carers with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them.

Standard 20, 'Learning and Development of Foster Carers': Outcome and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 states that 'Foster carers receive the training and development they need to carry out their role effectively'.

A clear framework of training and development is in place and this is used as the basis for assessing foster carers' performance and identifying their training and development needs. Training, learning and development of foster carers are also key elements of the Foster Carers Charter.

The role of all foster carers is valued by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council; there is a strong commitment to ensure that foster carers have access to the right support and development opportunities. Training and development is an intrinsic part of fostering. Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council has a clear expectation that all foster carers will participate in training offered by the Authority as fully as possible. There is an expectation that foster carers will complete the CWDC Training, Support and Development Standards portfolio and this expectation is endorsed by Fostering Panel on approval.

These opportunities enable foster carers to meet the often complex needs of the children and young people for whom they care and to develop skills and knowledge to keep the foster family and the fostered children safe and protected.



It is also important that foster carers are able to document and evidence their skills and knowledge throughout their fostering career.

*Learning and development within Rotherham Fostering Service is comprised of three tiers:*

- 1. Pre-approval (Skills to Foster Course)*
- 2. Induction which comprises of first year mandatory training and completion of Training, Support and Development standards*
- 3. Continual personal development*

All foster carers are required to complete 3 learning and development activities, in a 12 month period in line with annual reviews, a least one of which is a face to face training course.

We encourage all carers to keep their own CPD portfolio either electronically or in paper form. Foster Carers training and certificates should be recorded on the carers electronic file.

The Training Policy details the elements contained in each of these tiers, the requirements of the Children's Workforce Development Council, the associated standards as well as outlining the variety of training methods employed.

Foster carers' training needs are constantly monitored by supervising social workers and formally evaluated through annual reviews of the carers' terms of approval.

Each foster carer has a Personal Development Plan, as required within Section 7 of the CWDC standards, drawn up in conjunction between the Fostering Supervising social worker and foster carer.

The Personal Development Plan is reviewed annually at the Foster Carer Review by the Independent Reviewing Officer, the foster carer and the Fostering Supervising social worker.

A Payment for Skills Scheme is in operation and foster carers can progress through the Skills Levels 1 to 4 by developing a portfolio of evidence of skills, abilities and knowledge they have in meeting the required criteria with a clear expectation of what training must be completed in order to progress to the next level.

## **11. Support to Foster Carers**

### **Fostering Supervising Social Workers**

Each foster carer is linked with a supervising social worker, who visits regularly to provide support and supervision.

They monitor standards of care, encourage high standards and help the carer manage problems which arise. They are also available for telephone consultation and liaise with the social worker for the child.

### **Independent Support**

Foster carers are eligible for individual membership of The Fostering Network. This allows them access to advice and support, including legal advice, independently of the service. In respect of support during serious allegations or complaints against foster carers, independent support is provided via Foster Talk.

### **Support for Foster Carers and their families**

There are three support groups facilitated across the borough, which are run at various times of the day to maximise foster carers opportunity to attend one of these. A balance of virtual and in-person formats are used to boost options for foster carers who may work or have other commitments in addition to their fostering role.

Each provides expert speakers on matters of interest and an opportunity for carers to share and problem solve together.

The groups are:

- General carers evening group
- General carers daytime group
- 0-4 years carers group

In addition, newly approved foster carers are supported by being linked up with an experienced foster carer as 'buddies'.

### **Websites**

Information is available on Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's website about the fostering task, with clear links to the recruitment sites. In addition, Rotherham Fostering also have active Facebook and Twitter account, which is used to share information about fostering and events, share success stories, and promote recruitment,

Facebook: Fostering Rotherham

Twitter: @fosterrotherham

### **Out of Hours Service**

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council has an Out of Hours Team and foster carers can contact this team of social workers outside of office hours, should the need arise.

### **Rotherham Therapeutic Team**

Therapeutic services, advice and support is provided by Rotherham's Therapeutic Team and by other Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) providers through a single point of access.

### **The Virtual School**

Education is a key priority for Looked After Children in Rotherham. Improving educational outcomes for Looked After Children is actively supported by the Corporate Parenting Panel. Foster carers are expected to support and encourage children in their education and develop good working relationships with the looked after child or young person's school. Rotherham has a 'Virtual School' which provides guidance and support to Looked After Children and their carers in relation to education. This team recognises that education is life-long learning, and thus provides training to foster carers on Personal Education Plans and the education of Looked After Children, including pre-school, primary, secondary education, and beyond.

### **Leaving Care Service**

The Fostering Service works closely with the Local Authority Leaving Care Service, which is responsible for providing support and guidance to all Looked After Children post-16 years and those leaving care. The Leaving Care Service includes a designated Staying Put/Supported Lodgings Co-ordinator who also sits on the Long Term Matching Panel to support foster carers who are committing to long term foster care for a child to also consider offering staying put or supported lodgings arrangements once the child leaves care. The Local Authority is committed to providing Staying Put placements to as many care leavers as possible. In addition, the Local Authority also manages a Post-16 Accommodation Project, which includes two semi-independent homes for care leavers providing sixteen placements in total as well as several dispersed properties and an outreach service for care leavers in their own tenancies.

### **Health**

Rotherham has a named nurse to promote the health of Looked After Children. Carers are expected to actively promote the well-being of children in their care. The Looked After Nurse provides a link into a wider LAC Health Team to ensure effective co-ordination and delivery of Health Services to Looked After Children.

In addition, Rotherham also has a named nurse specifically to meet the health needs of children subject to CSE who sits within the Evolve (CSE) team.

## **Provision of leisure, sport, cultural and religious activities**

foster care a training and supervision promotes the importance of leisure activities for looked after children and there is an expectation that foster carers will encourage new experiences and activities to enhance children's self worth social development and independence.

Information about play schemes clubs and holiday activities and other initiatives are provided to foster carers on a regular basis through 'mail shots' and information sharing events. we aim to support all young people in their religious and cultural beliefs and customs and to ensure that information is available to provide understanding of different cultures and religions. we will provide resources may be needed to enjoy people are able to practise their beliefs and customs we aim to ensure that all young people are given appropriate support in line with their individual needs and background (in accordance with the duties of the Equality Act 2010).

## **Child's Social Worker**

Social workers for children in placement have an important role to play in supporting foster carers. The dedicated Looked After Children's Social Work Team ensures this support is consistent. They provide essential information about the child and family background, inform the foster carer about the plans for the child and involve them in the care planning process. It is an important part of their role to represent the wishes and feelings of the child, especially where the child is very young and less able to do this him/herself. The child's social worker carries out statutory requirements in relation to the child, including statutory visits, ensuring reviews and medicals take place and that the plans for the child are progressed without delay.

## **Annual Events**

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council fostering services works closely with foster carers to organise and host a variety of inclusive social events throughout the year. These include parties, picnics and an annual Pride of Rotherham Awards event that recognises the achievements of looked after children and young people. The purpose of these events is to thank carers for all their hard work and acknowledge their dedication to children and families. It is also an opportunity for carers to meet with one another, with Children and Young People's Services' staff and Elected Members in a pleasant and informal setting.

## **Consultation with Foster Carers**

Consultation with foster carers takes place on a number of levels, at training events, at support groups and in surveys focusing on specific topics. The Foster Carer Forum is held quarterly and is an opportunity an opportunity to come together to learn and be made aware of any updates to the service. The service also promotes attendance at quarterly working together groups which provide an opportunity to consult with foster carers about any planned changes and to hear their views and

experiences in order to ensure that the service is providing the best support possible and well as allowing for foster carers to raise any concerns or questions that they have, directly with fostering management staff.

### **Rotherham Foster Carer's Association**

In 2019 the service supported Rotherham's foster carers to set up the Rotherham Foster Carer's Association (RFCA). The RFCA is an charity independent from the Fostering Service (charity no. 1184570) which exists to be a voice of, provide support to and create a community for all Rotherham Foster Carers and all of our children. The RFCA holds termly events for our Fostering Families including parties, discos, weekly youth hub, fundraising and other events that may be raised with the committee. These events are run by RMBC Foster Carer's using local community resources i.e. local community centres.

### **Right2Rights Service**

Rotherham's Right2Rights (R2R) supports young people who are or have been looked after by Rotherham Council. They provide an individual advocacy service, facilitate involvement in voice and influence opportunities and provide information in creative and imaginative ways.

The Rights2Rights advocacy service helps children to talk about things that matter, ensures they are listened to and makes sure that the right people do something about what children and young people are saying.

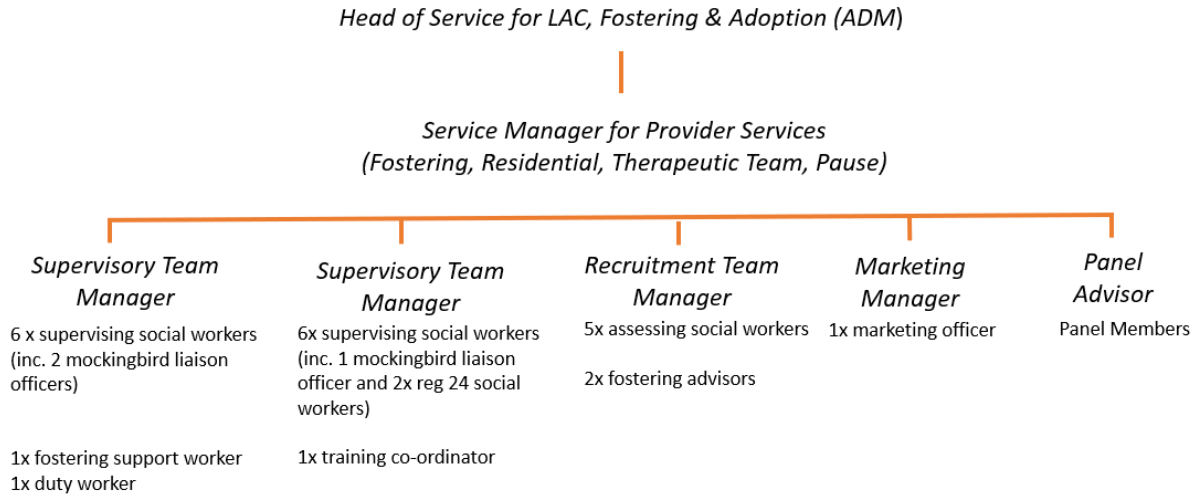
Right2Rights can also offer an Independent Visitor service. Independent Visitors are volunteer befrienders who will be matched with a child, particularly those children who have little or no contact with family/friends. They offer the child quality one to one time and organise activities and outings as well as providing advice and support.

Looked After Children can communicate with this service via telephone, text messaging and e-mail.

## **12. Structure of the Fostering Service**

The Rotherham Fostering Service reports to the Members of the Council. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services is Councillor Gordon Watson.

All managers in the service hold a social work qualification, as well as management qualifications and post qualification experience in services for children.



### **13. Staff in the Fostering Service**

The Fostering Service has four key teams:

Fostering Recruitment Team – Responsible for recruiting and assessing new foster carers.

Two Fostering Supervisory Teams – Responsible for assessing and supervising foster carers in our specialist categories: Regulation 24; Families Together; Private Fostering as well as for supervising general foster carers.

Business support – The service receives administrative and business support from a team of support staff.

In addition, the service has a marketing and communications officer, a training coordinator and a fostering support worker.

The staff of the fostering Service are recruited and managed following the principles of positive selection, supervision, induction and appraisal processes of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and incorporating practice outlined in the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards 2011.

All social workers within the team have a social work qualification and previous experience of working with children and families and are subject to Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's corporate standards for continuous professional development.

All staff are subject to the Council policy on recruitment, staffing, equal opportunities and discipline. All social workers are subject to enhanced D.B.S. checks; administrative staff have D.B.S. checks.

### **14. Monitoring, Evaluation and Management of the Service**

Regular performance and statistical information is collected in relation to the work of the Fostering Service. Performance information about the Service is reported to the Fostering Panel and Agency Decision Maker, the Director of Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting and Elected Members via the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Rotherham has an increasingly high number of children in its care. There has been a consistent upward trend year on year in the numbers of children and young people looked after by the Local Authority. The LAC Placement Sufficiency Strategy has been created to address the council's approach to meeting the needs of it's looked after children and young people.

A number of quality assurance measures are in place to monitor the quality of the Fostering Services.

- Fostering Panels are Chaired by an Independent Person and regular liaison takes place between the Chair of the Panel and the Fostering Service to identify any quality assurance issues and training requirements;
- Reviews of foster carers are undertaken by a Foster Carer Reviewing Officer and these are presented to Fostering Panel on a three yearly basis. This was a change in practice in 2020 where previously reviews were presented at panel biennially. The reduction ensures that the Fostering Panel retains a high level of scrutiny over the practice and compliance of the service but also allows for an increase in Panel capacity to account for the increasing numbers of Prospective Foster Carer Assessments being presented to Panel. This frequency remains considerably higher than the requirement of the National Minimum Standards, which is for reviews to be presented to panel following the first year of fostering, change in circumstances or following a safeguarding investigation.
- All papers presented to the Panel are quality assured by the relevant Team Manager and the Fostering Panel Advisor;
- Foster carers have access to the complaints procedure;
- File audits are undertaken by the Fostering Managers within a Quality Assurance Framework;
- All staff have regular supervision and annual Performance Development Reviews.

## **15. Equalities and Diversity Issues**

The Rotherham Fostering Service is committed to promoting equal opportunities in every aspect of its service. Training on equality and diversity is strongly promoted during the preparation process for new foster carers and forms part of the assessment. Ongoing training on equality and diversity is provided to all approved foster carers.

The need to recruit foster carers who are representative of the general population is reflected in the recruitment and retention strategy for foster carers, with a particular emphasis on the developmental work with the black and ethnic minority communities of Rotherham. All promotional material makes it clear that foster carers from across the population are needed, including same sex carers, older carers and carers from the black and minority ethnic communities.

The Service has succeeded in recent years in increasing the number of carers in the Service who are from different ethnic minority backgrounds and in recruiting same sex foster carer couples.

Specialised Fostering Services for children with disabilities are provided through the Families Together Scheme.

Management information on race, gender and disability of the children requiring a fostering service are analysed on a regular basis.

## **16. Allegations against Foster Carers**

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and the Fostering Service:

- Recognise the crucial role that foster carers play in looking after its most vulnerable children;
- Acknowledge that Looked After Children may exhibit behaviour that can be damaging, both to themselves and those around them;
- Acknowledge that dealing with Child Protection concerns, serious incidents and complaints is a stressful and difficult time for foster carers and their families;
- Will ensure that enquiries are progressed in a way that is fair and open to the carer and their family as well as to the child;
- Will ensure that decisions and actions are taken without delay and in line with legislative and Local Authority timescales;
- Ensure that foster carers have immediate access to information and advice from an independent support if there is an allegation against them or the Fostering Service has informed them that they have a serious concern about their practice or standards of care. (NMS 22);
- Ensure that foster carers are prepared, through pre-approval training and assessment, of the possibility that allegations could be made against them.

All allegations of abuse made by children against foster carers, or members of the foster carers' family, are thoroughly investigated in an unbiased way. Local procedures for handling child protection allegations are followed. The investigation is evidenced based and takes a balanced view of the allegation; unfounded allegations are sometimes made.



A decision as to how to proceed will be made which will be in the best interests of the child.

Where a complaint against a foster carer constitutes a safeguarding allegation, this is dealt with as a safeguarding enquiry under Section 47 of the Children Act, 1989, and is investigated under safeguarding procedures.

## **17. Complaints and Compliments**

The Children Act, 1989, requires Local Authorities to have a robust procedure for investigating complaints made by young people receiving Social Care services or complaints made by adults on their behalf.

The complaints procedure is viewed as a useful tool for indicating where services may need adjusting. It is a positive aid to inform and influence service improvements, not a negative process to apportion blame.

The complaints procedure consists of three stages;

Stage 1 is based on local resolution, where staff and the complainant discuss and attempt to address the complaint within ten working days with an additional ten working days for more complex issues or if an advocate is required.

Stage 2 involves an investigation into the circumstances of the complaint. This is carried out by the Children's Complaint Investigating Officer who reports their findings and conclusions and makes recommendations to an Adjudicating Officer. In addition, an Independent Person is engaged to oversee the investigation to ensure that the process is open, transparent and fair. The Adjudicating Officer is responsible for deciding on the report recommendations. This process should take twenty five working days with a permitted maximum of sixty five working days

Stage 3 involves a Review Panel giving further consideration to the complaint. The Panel consists of three independent people. The Panel must be convened and operating within thirty working days, it has five working days to issue findings and the Local Authority must respond within fifteen working days.

Wherever possible, complaints are dealt with informally. Where appropriate, in the first instance, any complaint by or against a foster carer will be dealt with on a problem-solving basis. There is a written procedure given to all foster carers as part of the Fostering Handbook. The Council has both corporate and Children's Services Complaints Procedures that operate if no resolution can be achieved at the problem solving stage.

Where a complaint against a foster carer constitutes a safeguarding allegation, this is dealt with as a safeguarding enquiry under Section 47 of the Children Act, 1989, and is investigated under Safeguarding procedures.

Our children's guide is specifically designed for children and young people which advise them what to do if they have a complaint.

Regular monitoring reports on the numbers and outcomes are presented to Children and Young People's Services' Management Team and an annual report is received by the Rotherham Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Compliments: We need to know when we are performing to, and beyond your expectations. Please email [fostering@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:fostering@rotherham.gov.uk) with your positive feedback.

## **18. Fostering Service Details**

The Fostering Service is based at: Riverside House Main Street Rotherham S60 1AE

Tel: 01709 382121

Email: [fostering@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:fostering@rotherham.gov.uk) Website: [www.rotherham.gov.uk/fostering](http://www.rotherham.gov.uk/fostering)

## **19. Useful Contacts**

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's Fostering Services are regulated by Ofsted.

Ofsted Tel : 08456 404045

Email : [commshelpdesk@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:commshelpdesk@ofsted.gov.uk)

Website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted>

Childline

Tel: 0800 1111

Website: [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

The Office of the Children's Commissioner

Tel: 020 7783 8330

Email: [info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk)

Website: [www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk](http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)

The Fostering Statement of Purpose is reviewed and updated annually by the Fostering Service and modified as necessary. If you have any comments or suggestions in relation to this document or the Fostering Service please email: [fostering@rotherham.gov.uk](mailto:fostering@rotherham.gov.uk)

## **20. Signatories**

**Signed:**

**Date:**

**Cllr Cusworth Cabinet Member**

**Signed:**

**Date:**

**Nicola Curley Strategic Director of Children and Young People's Service**

**Signed:**

**Date:**

**Jane Wood Head of Service, Children in Care**

**Signed:**

**Date:**

**Foster Carer Representative**

[www.fosteringrotherham.com](http://www.fosteringrotherham.com)

or call 01709 823976

F: Fostering Rotherham

T: @fosterrotherham