



Wakefield Metropolitan
District Council **Fostering Service**

Statement of Purpose

2024–2025



Placement Services
Queens House

wakefieldcouncil

This Statement of Purpose is about Wakefield's Fostering Services. This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirements of Standard of the Fostering Services Minimum Standards (Care Act, 2000) and Regulations 3 and 4 of the Fostering Services Regulation 2002.

Foreword by Councilor Isherwood

The statement of purpose sets out the framework for Wakefield Metropolitan District Council's fostering service. In Wakefield, we aim to provide stable and high-quality placements for children in care, of all ages, to encourage them to grow, develop and to support them to reach their full potential.

We strive to ensure that our children and young people who are looked after are valued, receive the best possible care and support, and are encouraged to succeed in an environment which is nurturing and supportive.

We have a clear ambition in Wakefield for our children in care and recognize that when children are unable to remain within their birth family, they are most likely to thrive in a foster family setting.

Wakefield are committed to providing this within their own provision, enabling children and young people to reside in their local area, to maintain continuity within education and health services and to support family time within their local area.



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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 have a 'Statement of Purpose'. The statement outlines the aims and objectives of Wakefield's Fostering Service, and the services and facilities provided by it.

The National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Service Regulations govern the work of the Fostering Service Providers throughout England. They are used in inspecting and registering Fostering Agencies. The work of the Fostering Service is underpinned and guided by legislation and by Wakefield Council's policies and procedures.

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 Wakefield Council or Lead Member for Children and Young People's Services.

This Statement of Purpose links with the Children's Guide which is provided to all children, subject to the child's age and understanding at the point of placement. Wakefield Fostering is committed to offering and providing children and young people the best foster placements that meet their needs and offer them a happy, safe, and settled environment.

This Statement of Purpose is intended for use by foster carers and staff of the Children and Young People's Service, for staff in a range of agencies who work with the Local Authority, for any child (ren) we have placed with a foster carer, their parents, and for people who are interested in becoming foster carers. It also provides a benchmark for Wakefield children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies.

2. National Legislative and Policy Framework

Wakefield Fostering Service is compliant with the principles outlined in the following:

- Children Act 1989
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2013 (Amendments to the Children Act 1989)
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011)
- Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.
- Care Planning and Fostering Regulations (Amendments) 2015
- The Disability and Equality Act 2010
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Children (Leaving care) Act 2000
- Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD) for Foster Carers



3. Our Ambition

Wakefield Fostering Service believes that every child Looked After should be able to participate and enjoy the same quality of life and opportunities as all children across the district. Wakefield council has a clear ambition for our children and young people.

“Our Vision is for children and young people to tell us they are happy, healthy and safe and thriving in the communities where families and services work together to help them achieve their potential and dreams.”

Wakefield Fostering Service recognizes that most children and young people’s needs are best met by a nurturing family. Our first priority will be for children to be placed with family or friends. A child or young person will only become Looked After in Wakefield if it is clearly in their best interest and there are no other suitable options.

The provision of accommodation for a child/young person is on the assumption that the arrangements are short-term and aimed at uniting the child/young person with their parents or other person with parental responsibility within a short timescale, unless contrary to safeguarding their health and wellbeing.

In cases where a child is unable to return home or cannot live with a connected carer (family and friends) then other placements will be considered, such as early planning for fostering or adoption.

Wakefield Council is committed to placing children and young people with our local approved foster carers in order for them to maintain contact with families and friends, to remain at the same school, and thrive within their community wherever possible.

Each child/young person will have access to services that recognizes and addresses their needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability, and sexuality.

All placement decisions will consider the child/young persons assessed racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic needs and match these as closely as possible with the ethnic origin, religion, culture, and language of the foster carer.

Children’s safety and welfare will be actively promoted in all fostering placements and protected from abuse and other forms of harm.





4. Aims

Wakefield Council's main aim is to ensure that children in foster carer are provided with high quality placements that encourage the best possible standards of care, safety and life opportunities which contribute to promoting positive wellbeing and development.

Wakefield Council and the Fostering Service's main aim is to work 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 continuity of educational provision. In meeting these aims and objectives, Wakefield Council will work to secure 'sufficient accommodation' as required by Section 22G of the Children Act, 1989 (as inserted by the Children and Young

This 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 the 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.'

The Fostering Service aims to provide a high-quality child centered service that is responsive to local need delivered within the principles of good practice and statutory requirements. We work proactively with partner agencies to develop strong relationships in order to provide appropriate services to support the needs of children and young people. We engage our stakeholders to support service delivery, and the views of children, young people and carers underpins our continued improvement journey.

We are clear about our core functions to recruit and retain carers from our local community and from connected person networks to ensure placement sufficiency and ensuring good outcomes for children in care.

We are committed to supporting our mainstream foster carers and connected carers (family and friends) within a diverse community and offer support from the kinship networks of looked after children wherever this best meets their needs.

Wakefield Council is committed to placing children and young people with our approved foster carers and is dedicated in developing and investing in a comprehensive Fostering Service that actively works to meet the quality standards required and the diverse needs of the children who become looked after by Wakefield and their families.

A child's welfare is the paramount consideration. Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving and caring family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond. The needs and wishes, welfare and safety of the child or young person are at the centre of Wakefield's Fostering Service.

Children and young people should be brought up in their birth families wherever it is possible and safe to do so. The Children and Young People's Service, along with other agencies and with community groups, will work to ensure that there is a comprehensive range of services provided to support birth families and for them to provide safe and appropriate for their children.

The Fostering Service will aim to work in partnership with foster carers in an open and reliable way. Foster carers will be involved in planning, developing the service, and kept informed about practice and policy developments as any other member of the team would be.

5. Objectives

- To provide a choice of high-quality foster care placements to meet the complex and diverse needs of individual children and young people.
- To ensure that approved foster carers are clear about their role and that they are fully supported in their tasks, duties, and responsibilities by having appropriate support in place, as outlined in the foster carer agreement.
- To promote a safe, stable, and enabling environment ensuring that children and young people are listened to, respected, and protected from abuse and neglect.
- To promote the child's physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development by providing each child with the opportunity of developing to their full potential, through health care, education and leisure activities that will enhance their life changes.
- Siblings will be accommodated together wherever possible and appropriate.
- To promote family time (contact) for the child or young person and his/her birth family throughout their placement, to encourage and facilitate this as appropriate.
- To have a positive regard for the child or young person's racial, religious, and cultural needs.
- To ensure foster carers make children and young people aware of their rights and the complaints, compliments, and advocacy process by providing the relevant information.
- Ensure that children and young people are healthy, resilient, supported in all areas of their lives are regularly consulted with.
- Ensure that all practice promotes equal opportunities for all and value diversity of both foster children and carers regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, age, religious beliefs, disability, or marital status.
- To promote team and personal development and training for both staff and foster carers. Providing a competency framework with clear expectations for foster carers, together with a training and personal development programme that is aligned to a Skills Payment Scheme for carers.
- To regularly ensure that Service performance is monitored, assessed, and evaluated within appropriate frameworks.
- Consult regularly and learn from those that are in receipt of services through comments, compliments or complaints and have regular meetings and consultation with foster carers, senior managers, and elected members.
- Have a strong commitment to continuous improvement through the provision of wider placement choices for children in care.



6. Confidentiality and Conflicts of Interest

Foster carers are provided with all available information about the children being placed with them and are expected to respect high standards of confidentiality.

As an agency, we maintain records for carers and looked after children who are subject to National Standards and relevant Data Protection legislation. Staff and foster carers are expected to declare any potential conflicts of interest.

7. Principles and Standards of Care

Wakefield Fostering Service is committed to achieving and maintaining the highest standards and offering quality provision in accordance with the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards 2011:

- The welfare of the child is paramount.
- Children who are looked after are regularly consulted regarding their wishes and feelings in regard to all aspects of their care.
- Every child who is looked after will have a safe care plan, health plan and a personal education plan.
- Every looked after child will be encouraged to participate appropriately in religious and cultural beliefs, in accordance with their wishes and feelings and developmental understanding.
- Every child looked after will be cared for in an environment free from oppression, discrimination, and prejudice, encouraging them to develop a positive sense of their own identity.
- The fostering service will support the identified aims and objectives of the child or young person's care plan and work alongside other professionals in the implementation of this.
- The fostering service will work in partnership with other professionals to promote contact between looked after children and their family and other significant persons.
- Foster carers have a handbook (fact file) which guides their practice and clarifies expectations, responsibilities, and standards.
- The fostering service will support the identified aims and objectives of the child or young person's care plan and placement plan and work alongside other professionals in the implementation of this.
- Where children and young people are not able to remain with their birth family or within the wider family network, foster care should be the first choice, whilst their longer-term needs are assessed. Good childcare planning and practice are essential and undue delay and drift should be avoided.
- The Fostering Service will aim to ensure that there is a diverse and wide range of safe, stable, and nurturing family placements to meet the needs of Wakefield's children who are looked after in care. This will include respite care, short term, long-term carers and Connect carers who have a particular role in caring for disabled children. This may also mean that services are commissioned from Independent Fostering Agencies in order to meet needs.
- All placements need to take into consideration the need for the child or young person to be placed near to family and school. If at all possible, siblings should be placed together unless identified needs indicate otherwise.
- The Fostering Service will aim to ensure that full information is provided by the child's social worker about the child's background, family, needs and any issues of risk to inform the matching process and enable the foster carers to work to meet the needs of the child or young person in placement.

8. Children's Guide

Subject to the child's age and understanding, the child's social worker and the fostering service ensure that children in foster care receive the Children's Guide at the point of placement and that the foster carer explains the contents of the Children's Guide in a way that is accessible.

The Children's Guide includes a summary of what the fostering service sets out to do for children, how they can find out their rights, how a child can contact their Independent Reviewing Officer, the Children's Commissioners Office, and Ofsted if they wish to raise a concern.



9. Services Provided

The fostering service approves foster carers to look after children aged 0-18 years.

Many looked after children have experienced trauma as a result of abuse or neglect. Some children and young people present with very challenging behaviours, special needs, or complex health conditions.

The Fostering Assessment Team recruits, provides preparation training and assesses prospective carers. The assessing social worker supports the prospective foster carer until full fostering approval is confirmed at Fostering Panel and the Agency Decision Maker for fostering confirms approval. Once approval is given, the carers will be allocated a Supervising Social Worker from the supervisory team.

The Fostering Supervisory Social Worker holds case responsibility for approved mainstream foster carers providing ongoing supervision, training and support and an annual review of their approval.

Wakefield operates a fostering scheme called 'Payment for Skills' and all Foster Carers are financially supported via weekly allowance payments (child age related) in line with the National recommendation.

The Payment Scheme has four levels linked to skills, competency, and experience. Additional payments may be available to support foster carers; examples of such payments are setting up costs, equipment, and travel/ mileage costs.

There are a range of placements provided through the Fostering Service:

Connected Persons (Family and Friends)

Where children and young people are not able to live safely with their birth parent(s), consideration will be given to that child or young person being cared for within the extended family network. This type of care can provide the opportunity to bring and secure permanence for children and ensuring that the best outcomes are achieved for the child within their family.

This may involve approval of family/friends as foster carers or use of appropriate legislation such as Temporary Approval being sought for an immediate arrangement for a child to be placed, applications for Child Arrangement Orders or Special Guardianship Order.

An assessment for support from the child's social worker and Fostering Service in Wakefield will be carried out. A Family Group Conference may be considered appropriate in some situations to facilitate the family network.

All approved connected carers are eligible for the same framework of entitlements such as allowances, support, and involvement of the Kinship Team.

Short-term Placements

Carers undertaking short-term placements do so in a variety of circumstances and with a variety of children and young people. It may be for a very short, predictable period of time whilst for example a child's parent is in hospital or a carer may look after a child whilst Court proceedings are on-going,

Long-term/Permanent Placements

Carers offering long-term/permanent placements commit to caring for a child or young person whose 'permanence' Care Plan indicates that their needs will best be met in a foster placement that takes them through to adulthood and independence.

Emergency Placements

Carers offering emergency placements can be contacted at short notice, at evening and weekends, to accept unplanned placements of children. A list of carers with vacancies is updated weekly and forwarded to Social Care Direct (Out of Hours Team).

Breakaway Carers

The service has a small number of carers who offer breakaway care on a regular basis whereas a child's care plan has indicated that such arrangements will be helpful in supporting existing placements.

Short Break Service

This offers planned short-term breaks for children with disabilities to provide them with new experiences and social opportunities.

Leaving Care, Staying Put and Supported Lodgings Service

Foster carers can continue to care for young people after their 18th birthday through Staying Put arrangements. They can also become providers of supported lodgings so that young people who have lived with them can continue to do this beyond their 18th birthday. A range of services from Wakefield's Leaving Care Team is provided to young people who continue to need support with their social, educational, and housing needs. This includes the development of the Supported Lodgings service.

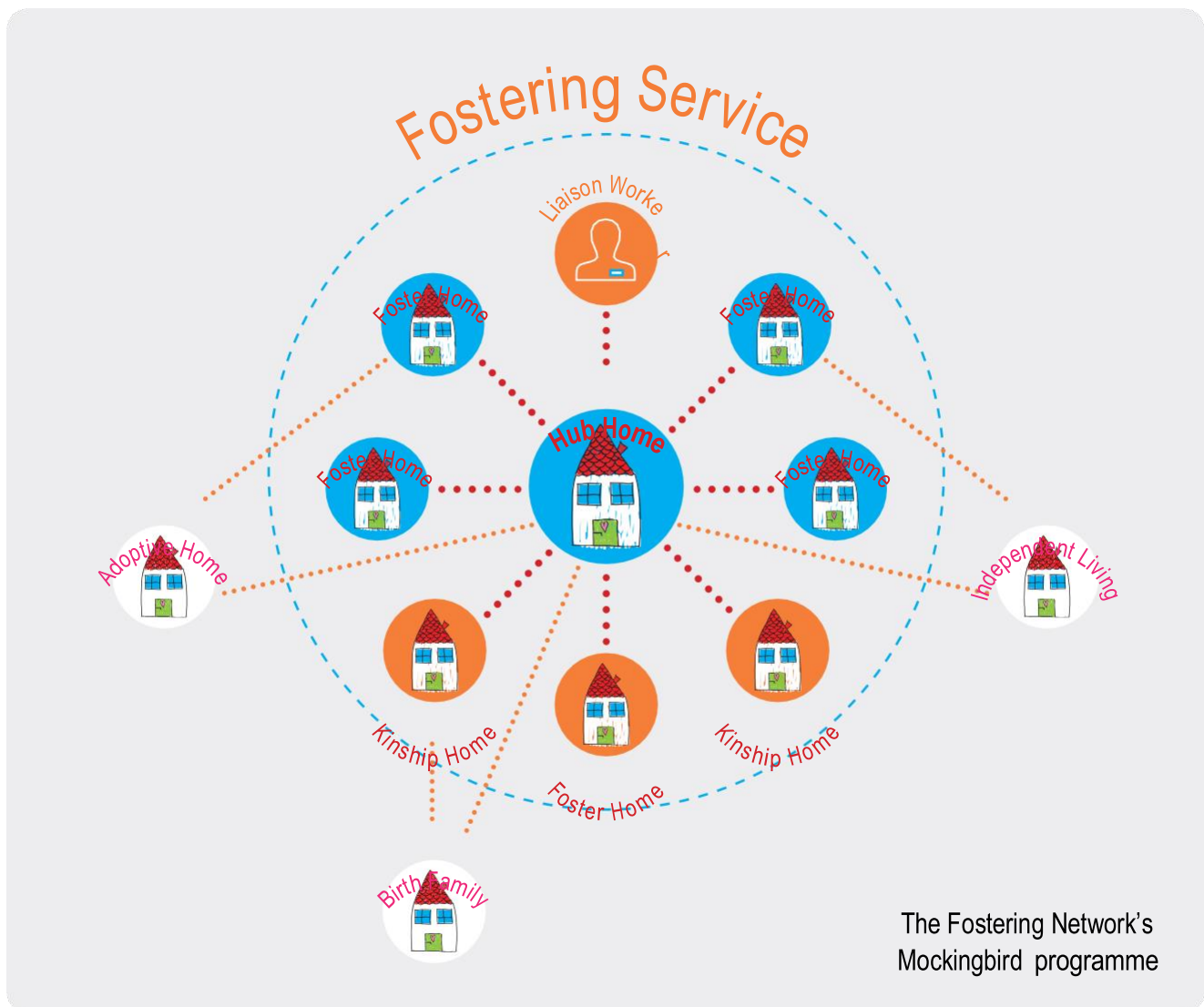
Parent and Baby Placements

These placements offer a supportive and nurturing environment for vulnerable parents with their child, whilst assessments are undertaken to determine future planning.

Mockingbird Family Model

Some of our Wakefield 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.
- Wakefield launched its first Mockingbird constellation in October 2020 and currently has one constellation in place. In Wakefield we aim to establish four constellations in 2024-25. Wakefield is also recruiting to a new Mockingbird and Fostering Training lead post in the team to further strengthen the Mockingbird model.

Matching for Placement

The Fostering Service provides a weekday duty service to field social work staff needing a placement for a child. Full information is given about the child's placement needs to assist in the matching process. As far as children are placed within the Wakefield District so that contact with family and friends, continuity with school and leisure pursuits can be maintained and links to services including health can be kept.

Wakefield have a matching matrix tool; utilized to identify and measure the strengths and vulnerabilities of proposed placement matches to ensure that children are placed with foster carers who are best placed to meet their needs and proposed care plan.

This tool is used for all proposed long-term planned placement matches and moves both within the Mockingbird constellation and within the fostering service.

In addition, all carers have a 'Carers Profile' that includes photographs of the carers, any birth children, their home, and any family pets as well as all names and key information. This is shared with Children in Care before they are matched and arrive at a placement, to try and offer children the most reassurance possible at what we realize is a very distressing time.

When an appropriate in-house fostering placement is not available, the Fostering Service will advise the child's social worker. The Team Manager and/or Service Manager will seek approval for an externally provided foster placement from the relevant Head of Service to allow an external placement search to commence.

Once permission has been received, the External Placement team will undertake a placement search, firstly through the White Rose Framework and the fostering providers who are registered on there. Should this not generate a suitable placement, an off-framework search will be undertaken. Where placement demand is high or where a placement is needed in an emergency an on and off search will be undertaken simultaneously.

Any placement expressions of interest or offers are sent to the relevant social worker/Team manager immediately, for further assessment in terms of suitability. Where a suitable placement is identified, agreement to place will be sought from the relevant Head of Service.

The Team and Service Manager for the Fostering Service attends a weekly placement meeting to review all children and young people who are in external fostering and residential provision. This is to ensure that a clear focus is maintained in returning children, wherever possible, to Wakefield Carers

Each week an emergency list of available foster carers is provided for use by the out of hours services.

10. Services Provided for Children in Foster Care

Participation of Children and Young People

The Children in Care Council (CICC) is led by children and young people. This provides them with a forum to tell us what they think about services and how they could be improved.

There are lots of different projects taking place as part of the CICC. They meet up regularly with the Service Director for Children and Young People and the Lead Member for Children and Families, who make sure their views are listened to and acted upon.

In Wakefield, all children in care and young people will have the opportunity to participate in decisions which affect their lives via access to a Participation Service. This delivers a wide range of consultation groups for looked after children ranging from age 4–25 years.

Our Build our Futures Groups (Wakefield Children in care Council) gives them opportunities to discuss their experiences of fostering and to drive forward their ideas for service changes and improvements. This work is supported by our Corporate Parenting Panel, who work collaboratively with the Children in Care Council to ensure their voices and experiences of fostering are listened to and valued at the highest decision-making level.

In March 2024, we held a Foster Carers' Conference where issues raised through CICC were shared and training presented by our young people to foster carers.

Wakefield's Fostering Service has a key responsibility to gather children's views about their fostering experience and to allow them to reflect on the quality of their foster placements.

These views are also gathered as part of foster carers' annual reviews.

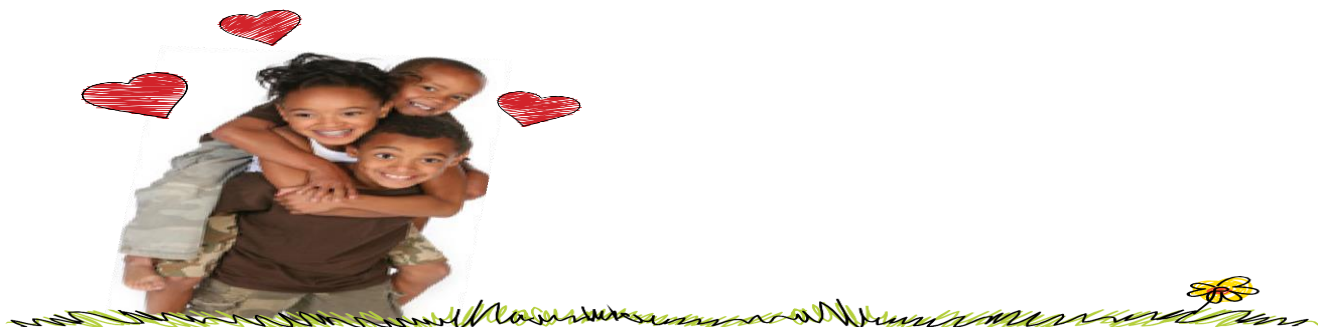
The role of the Participation Worker focuses on engaging children and young people in a range of supportive and positive activities. This includes fun days and award ceremonies and is a pivotal way to gather their views and feedback,

Foster carers are expected to support and encourage their foster children to engage with the participation service:

Wakefield's Children in Care Council (CiCC) is a representative group of Looked after Children with 3 main age streams which are:

- CiCC Juniors for children aged 4–11 years.
- Children in Care Council ages 12–15 years
- 16 Plus forum for young people and care leavers 16-25 years

All three groups meet with the relevant Managers and Lead Member to talk about issues that matter to children in care. CiCC's agenda evolves from the issues identified by the children and young people and develops into project ideas and or campaigns.



The Children in Care Council work with the Corporate Parenting Committee to set their priorities. These priorities are explored by the three main CICC groups in meetings, and training for adults. We also have several co-design workshops which run monthly to allow young people to express their feelings and opinions and generate solutions in response to other requests for consultation. The activity groups act to ensure that children and young people with a range of abilities can participate and contribute.

Care experienced young people have representation in all the wider youth voice groups delivered by Wakefield Families Together. These include Youth Council, The Build Our Futures Forum (BOF), Stripes (LGBTQIA+) and The BOF Youth Summit. Their membership ensures that their interests are at the heart of decisions made about local, regional, and national issues. All young people in foster care receive information about the complaints procedure and how to make a complaint. This information is available in the Children and Young People's Guides to Living in Foster Care.

There is a Complaints Officer who provides a dedicated service to deal with young people's concerns. In addition to this all young people in foster care have access to The CAPs Advocacy Service from Barnardo's who act on behalf of the young person if requested to make a complaint or when a complaint occurs.

In addition to Fostering's Preparation Training, an additional workshop is delivered to prospective foster carers. The workshop is facilitated and presented by care experienced children and young people. A group of 3 to 5 young trainers have designed and delivered this training which explores the impact of living in care for young people. The trainers provide feedback from this training which contributes to the prospective carer's fostering assessment. This provides the young people with a real feeling of being involved and making a difference for children in care in Wakefield.



11. Services Provided for Children in Foster Care

Wakefield's children are from a range of cultural, racial, linguistic, and religious backgrounds and the Fostering Service will endeavour to recruit and retain carers who reflect these needs.

Particular attention should be given to ensuring that a proposed placement is suitable for a child who has a disability.

The Fostering Service has a detailed Recruitment and Retention Strategy which underpins our journey from Good to Great. Advertising is key to recruitment and Wakefield has a dedicated Recruitment and Retention Officer.

A wide range of marketing vehicles are utilized, including posters, radio, and social media. Podcasts, newspaper advertising and information evenings.

Foster carers are carefully recruited, trained, and given access to support services to enable them to provide high quality care for the child/ren placed with them. This will include support to enable the child or young person to make full use of educational, health, leisure, creative and sporting activities to develop self-esteem and life opportunities. They will also work to provide safe, caring, and appropriate boundaries for the child or young people.

Persons over the age of 21 may apply to become a Foster Carer (but between the ages of 21 and 25, evidence will be required of relevant transferable skills and / or related experience).

After making an enquiry, all prospective foster carers receive an information pack. If they wish to progress and it is suitable to do so, the recruitment team will undertake an initial home assessment visit to discuss their interest in fostering in more detail.

The majority of Initial enquiries are received via Wakefield Council Fostering website. These are responded to within 48 hours of receipt.

There is an immediate exclusion of any applicant who has been convicted of a serious offence against a child or adult.

Applications for foster carers will be accepted on the basis of the applicant's capacity to offer appropriate care to children in care, regardless of their background, race, culture, language, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, or ability.

Staff within the service will respond to enquiries and applications about fostering promptly and with high standards of customer care. Information sessions and recruitment events are regularly convened, and these include contributions from experienced foster carers. The Service will also ensure that children and young people contribute to efforts to recruit foster carers.

Enquiries are followed up by telephone contact where enquirers will discuss their understanding of the fostering task, motivation, skills, and experience as well as sharing details of household members. If it is assessed as suitable to progress, a home visit will be arranged for an initial assessment by a member of the fostering team.

At the home visit we will discuss fostering with prospective applicants and relevant household members and members of the family. We will also check that the home conditions are safe, warm, and clean and that the home can adequately provide space for a foster child.

If all parties agree that fostering could be suitable for the family and enquirers wish to proceed with their fostering application, they will be asked to complete an agreement/consent for statutory checks to be undertaken, which include health and employment references, A DBS will be commenced; Stage 1 of the assessment process.



Potential foster carers will be invited to the next available 'Introduction to Fostering' Wakefield offer. This course runs at least six times throughout the year and is held over three days.

This considers areas of child development, abuse and neglect, Attachment, Separation, and loss, Working Together, Safer Care, trauma informed practice and moving on.

A standard medical examination and report is requested from each applicant's doctor and any potential medical issues are discussed at an early stage before proceeding to a full assessment.

Written references are sought from at least two, usually three personal referees. Each referee is interviewed, and a written record made of their comments regarding the applicant's suitability to become a foster carer. Proof of identity and employment checks are also carried out.

Any children of the applicants will be interviewed and involved in the assessment process according to their age and understanding.

If applicants are divorced/previously have been in a long-term relationship, contact is usually made with previous partners.

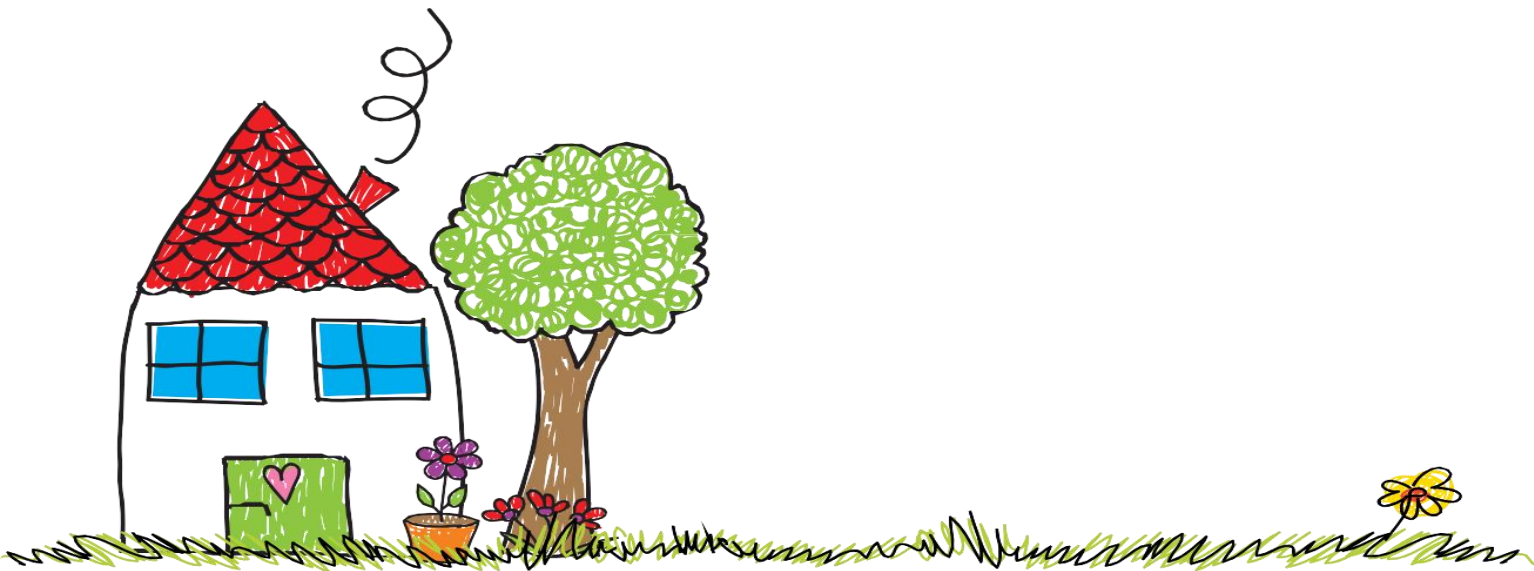
Where appropriate, further visits are made to the family to explore any areas of concern. Following completion of the preparation training, prospective foster carers are allocated an Assessing Social worker from the Fostering Service.

The Coram BAAF Form F Framework is used during the assessment process and is part of Stage 2 of the process. The home study assessment will be undertaken and includes a personal profile of the applicants' own experiences and relationships. (past and present), parenting capacity, experience and understanding of issues facing looked after children and their families.

This assessment should be completed within three months from the formal application being made (unless prospective carers indicate otherwise (All information will be shared with the prospective foster carer in a written report, and this must be signed and dated by them.

After commenting on the report, applicants are invited to attend the fostering panel and will be present for part of the panel discussion relating to their application.

Approval is usually given for 0-18 years, though we do ensure that an age 'preference' will be included that is more appropriate for foster carers arrangements or restrictions.



Connected Carers

Connected Carers are subject to an alternative assessment due to the nature of the task and the requirements of Schedule 4 (Care Planning Regulations 2010).

The Coram BAAF form C is used for connected person/family and friend's assessment and will be completed normally within 16 weeks. If potential foster carers are unable to proceed with the assessment for any reason, the assessment ceases.

Recommencement of the assessment process may be started, with completion of a new application.

Foster Panel, Approval and Reviews.

Wakefield Fostering Service has two Fostering Panels per month. The Panel is convened in accordance with the National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

Foster Panels are chaired by an Independent Chairperson and provide regular opportunities throughout the year for approval of new foster carers. The Panel considers all matters relating to fostering, family and friends care and matching children to long term placements.

The assessing social worker completes a Form F Assessment or Brief report (dependent upon the stage of assessment) and presents the report to the Fostering Panel. They will consider the application and make a recommendation about the applicant's suitability to foster. The Panel makes a recommendation to either approve or not approve a foster carer.

The Panel's recommendation is considered by the Agency Decision Maker. The Agency Decision Maker for Wakefield Council is the Head of Service for Children in Care and Corporate Parenting.

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 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, a supervising social worker will be allocated to the foster carer.

Where an applicant does not agree with the Agency Decision, they may make representation to the Agency within 28 days of the decision OR 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 they disagree with the Agency decision.

All applicants are invited to attend the panel and are supported to do so by the assessing social worker.

Following consideration of cases, the panel makes a recommendation, and a verbal outcome is given immediately to attending applicants. All applicants will receive a verbal and formal written notice of the Decision Maker's decision about their approval.

Foster carers are required to notify the Fostering Service of any change in their family or households' circumstances.



Foster carer's terms of approval are reviewed every year, and a range of information is collated for a review meeting. This is chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer. The review will address the previous year's experiences of the foster carers as well as any quality of care, support needs, training and learning needs.

The supervising social worker has responsibility for ensuring that the foster carer's annual review takes place and coordinating all contributions and reports for the review. The review process is an opportunity to acknowledge foster carers' achievements and to identify their strengths and areas for further development.

The first review after approval will be undertaken within 12 months and returned to the Fostering Panel. Additionally, Fostering Panel will consider the reviews of foster carers where there have been specific and significant complaints, allegations, or issues about standards of care or other major changes in circumstances. Whilst the emphasis in these circumstances is on the safety of any child involved, there will also be regard to the support and needs of the foster carers and attempts to resolve the situation satisfactorily.

A review will always be held following any issues/ investigations in the standard of care or following a section 47 investigation. This review report will be submitted to the fostering panel.

The review meeting will also explore whether the terms of approval should be recommended for change. Changes of approval through the review process will be submitted to the fostering panel then presented to the agency decision maker. A review will be held, and a report will be written supporting change, and this will be presented to the agency decision maker.

The Fostering Service has the responsibility to recommend to the Fostering Panel the termination of approval of any foster carer if it is no longer satisfied that the foster carer/s or the household are suitable.

The foster carer will have 28 days to make representations if there are changes recommended by the panel to their approval terms or status. Appeals can be made to the foster panel or the IRM.

When Foster Carers decide to retire or resign from the fostering service, this is also formally reported to the fostering panel.



12. Training for Foster Carers

The Fostering Service facilitate regular preparation training groups for prospective foster carers. There are contributions from experienced foster carers and the opportunity to link in with them for further advice and support. Children in Care are also involved in the “Introduction to Fostering” rolling programme of training.

The Fostering Service will work to retain foster carers through a comprehensive training programme that offers development opportunities, together with a 24-hour support package, and an equitable payment scheme to recognize their value and skills.

We facilitate foster carer support groups face to face. The groups are held geographically across the district. An Induction Group is held for newly approved carers where they can be supported in completion of their training and development (TSD) standards and as well as having the opportunity to meet new carers.

Training for carers is supported through our Learning Academy and as part of our offer to foster carers. we are committed to training all foster carers to understand and offer a therapeutic approach to caring for Children In Care.

We have a comprehensive offer of core training for foster carers to develop their skill and knowledge base, to care for children who have experienced separation and loss.

We have introduced therapeutic based parenting as part of our core training offer. This is to assist carers in supporting children who have experienced significant trauma.

Our Team Managers and Advanced Practitioners are trained to deliver these to our foster carers (Secure Base and NVR).

This ensures our training offer is consistent, regular and can be reviewed to determine any improvements which are required to enhance this further.

Introduction to Therapeutic Parenting

Two half day workshops to cover the basic principle of therapeutic approach to parenting. This course will cover.

- Brain development and the impact of neglect
- Introduction to shame and the impact of toxic shame of children.
- Communication – ruptures and repair through restorative questioning.

Secure Base

The Secure Base Model (6 day workshops) provides a positive framework for therapeutic caregiving, which helps infants, children, and young people to move towards greater security and builds resilience. The course will cover;

- Understanding of the key principles of attachment and bonding is critical for healthy development.
- Understanding of how healthy attachment is facilitated.
- Understanding of the various ways that neglect and abuse negatively influence attachment and exploring the consequent challenging behaviours.
- To have strategies to help children with attachment difficulties.

The Fostering Service had a specific drive and focus to modernize and enhance the training offer for our foster carers, to ensure they are highly skilled and can meet the needs of our looked after children.

Training is essential to the fostering task and every encouragement is made to ensure that foster carers attend training through reimbursement of expenses, potential provision of crèche facilities and training times which are flexible for foster carers.

Our bespoke foster carer training offer ensures flexibility and includes face to face training sessions, online and virtual training, as well as a range of recommended online resources, seminars, wider reading, research, and films/documentaries.

More recently introduced is The Training Hub. This is an on-line training provider whose mission is to provide exceptional educational courses that build confidence, develop carers, and promote well-being. The training material is provided by leading sector experts, practitioners, and exceptional sector-specific individuals with valuable lived experiences, allowing them to craft insightful learning outcomes.

Fostering Wakefield currently have access to a bundle of 33 mandatory fostering courses, 2 free specialist courses every 6 weeks, a suite of 150 well-being courses, parenting courses and courses to support young people's journey into adulthood.

Foster carers receive training prior to approval. They attend a bespoke preparation course developed by Wakefield Fostering Assessment Team, "Introduction to Fostering." During the first 12 months approved foster carers must complete the TSD (Training, Support and Development Standards). For Connected Carers they have 18 months in which to complete the TSD. This was formally the CWDC and is linked to the induction standards for foster carers.

Supervising social workers will regularly discuss foster carers' training needs on their supervisory visits to foster carers and the annual foster carer review will address carers' training and development needs.

A key expectation is that carers will continue to develop their skill knowledge base and undertake a minimum number of five training activities/opportunities each year enhanced their skills as carers.

The Payment for skills scheme is closely linked to foster carers' training needs in the framework of competencies.

We encourage all newly approved carers to attend our Induction Group for a minimum of six sessions. The induction group provides information about the service and entitlements that carers can access. Professional speakers are invited to present information on attachment, emotional wellbeing and health, education, and participation of children in foster care. During the group carers receive support in meeting the requirements and completion of the TSD workbook.



13. Foster Carer Support

All foster carers are linked with a qualified social worker (fostering supervising social worker) who provides supervision and support. The supervising social worker undertakes a minimum of four supervisory visits per year to approved carer(s) and additional support visits as required. They also undertake at least one unannounced visit every six months.

The Fostering Service have a placement stability offer which provides enhanced support to any carer where there are concerns about the stability of the placement.

The fostering service believes that it is important that foster carers are able to access support when they need it. During office hours if a foster carer is unable to contact their own supervising social worker, they can contact our Duty worker for advice and support. The allocated supervising social worker will usually be the first point of contact for the foster carer and can offer support, advice, guidance, and supervision regarding most matters relating to fostering.

Children in foster care will have an allocated social worker and they will usually be the first point of contact for the foster carer for any information and advice on issues that relate to the child.

Where additional support is required outside office hours, evenings and weekends, foster carers can contact our Emergency Duty Service.

For Out of Hours support, the process is:

- If a Child in Care is missing then the Police will need to be contacted and Integrated Front Door (IFD) informed, in line with the child's missing plan (if applicable). EDT will be contacted by the Police or IFD if there is a significant concern.
- When a Child in Care returns from being missing then the Police will be contacted and the IFD or EDT will be contacted by Police if there is a significant concern.
- If a carer or provider is significantly worried for the safety of a Child in Care then they will contact the Police and IFD, who will then contact EDT.

All approved foster carers are members of Foster Talk, who can provide comprehensive support on a number of areas such as legal and financial matters.

Full Foster Carer memberships benefit the whole household and includes:

- Foster Carers Legal Advice Service
- Foster Carers Legal Expenses Insurance
- Arrest and Interview Assistance
- Foster Carer Accountancy and Tax Advice
- Foster Carers Counselling Helpline
- Foster Carers Education Advisory Service
- Fostering Advice Helpline
- Foster Carers Independent Financial Advice
- Foster Carers Medical and First Aid Helpline
- Foster Talk Member Discounts
- Foster Carers Online Forum
- Foster Talk Magazine



We fund an Independent Support Service through Foster Talk to foster carers in cases where carers find themselves subject to allegations or practice concerns.

Independent advice and support is provided by allocation of a FISS advisor provided by Foster talk.

Allegations

All allegations in relation to foster carers are investigated and actioned through the Children's Safeguarding Teams or Children in Care teams reporting to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). The Fostering service will ensure that carers are kept informed, and that information is shared where possible within the parameters of the investigation.

Complaints procedure

Wakefield Council operates a complaints service which is independent of the fostering service. Foster carers are given a Complaints and Compliments leaflet and information including contact points detailing if they wish to make a complaint at any stage.

Prior to any formal process being initiated, the service will seek to resolve any issues or concerns in the first instance, via the Fostering Team Manager.

The Fostering Service will update and consult foster carers on local and national developments in fostering and services for looked after children to keep them informed. of current proposals and developments which will affect them.



Provision of Educational Support

Specialist educational support is available to our foster carers. The 'Virtual' Head Teacher for children in care will focus on improving attainment issues and partnerships with schools in the Wakefield district.

The fostering service works closely with carers in supporting the educational needs of children in their care. We fully support children achieving 100% attendance and within children's services we have a clear expectation that holidays will not be taken in term time and that children are not routinely taken out of school.

Exceptional circumstances are considered on an individual basis.

Provision of therapeutic services

The fostering service works collaboratively with dedicated colleagues from the Emotional Wellbeing Team who provide consultation to carers and therapeutic input to children and young people. They also work closely with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to ensure referrals are appropriately managed and support provided.

The implementation and development of the Foster Carer Clinic provides monthly wellbeing drop-in sessions facilitated by the Fostering Panel Advisor and the Emotional Health and Well-Being Team Manager. These offer therapeutic and trauma informed support to in house foster and kinship carers.

Provision of leisure, sport, cultural and religious activity

The fostering service promotes the importance of leisure provision for children in care and the expectation that carers will seek out and support. New experiences, and activities, to enhance children's self-worth, social development, and independence.

Foster carers are provided with Wakefield Leisure cards (Activate Cards) which enable them and their children to participate in leisure activities either free of charge or at a discounted rate together with the children they look after.

We offer a family train pass which entitles our carers to discounted rail fares for the full year.

Additionally, regular enrichment opportunities are available for our carers / foster children to interact such as excursions, sporting events and theatre trips. Our carers are entitled to the same employee benefits as WMDC staff. A full list of benefits are given to all carers as part of their welcome pack.

The Fostering Service will promote links with a range of support services and agencies that are involved in children's placements and are important for the foster carer. These will include:

- CAMHS
- Looked After Children Nurses
- Virtual Schools for the education of looked after children.
- Youth Offending Team
- Leaving Care Team
- Children's Advocacy Services
- Participation Service for Looked after Children
- Emotional Wellbeing Team

14. Team Structure

The day-to-day management of the Fostering Service is the responsibility of the Fostering Team Managers. The service is comprised of:

The Recruitment and Assessment Team who oversee the recruitment and assessment of mainstream prospective carers.

The Kinship Team focus on the assessment and supervision of Kinship Carers

The Supervisory Team who support and supervise mainstream foster carers.

The Team Managers report to the Service Manager for Fostering and Support services.

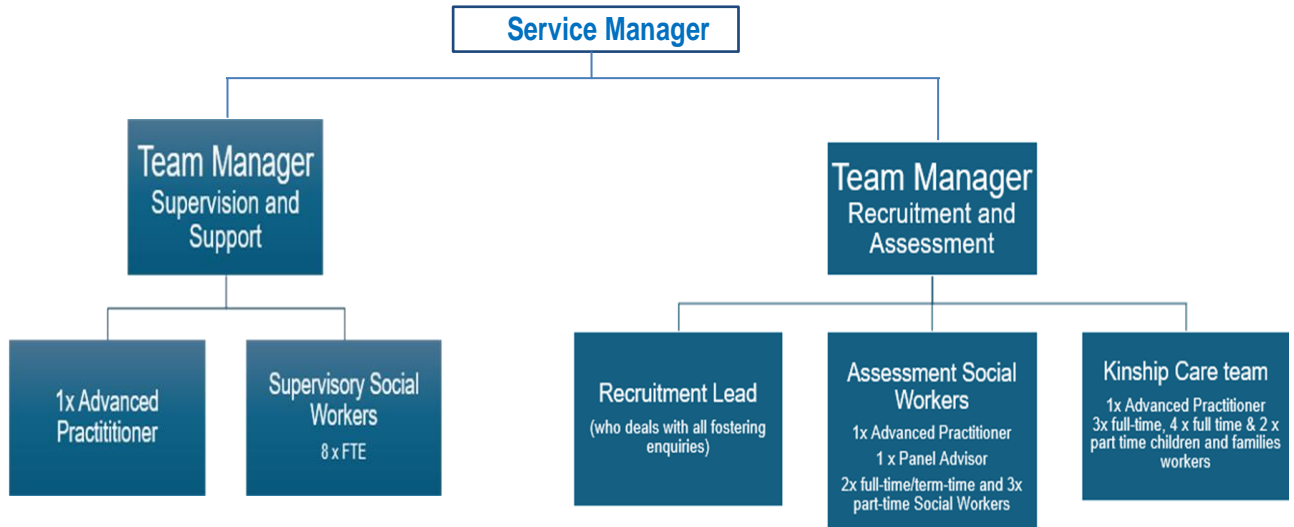
As the Fostering Service is a Local Authority Council Service, it is also accountable to the Council's cabinet.

The service is also supported by a Recruitment and Retention Lead Officer. This role assists the fostering team with foster carer recruitment and retention, working collaboratively with our Communications Service focusing on competitive marketing strategies. The role is pivotal to our Recruitment and Retention Strategy.

All new staff receive local authority and service induction. Induction is underpinned with a thorough training needs analysis to identify support and training required. This is monitored within regular supervision by their line manager.

The Fostering Service is committed to multiagency working and developing partnerships with organisations with which we can progress the needs of our children. We work at all levels, in partnership and through co-location, with One Adoption West Yorkshire, Children in Care services, Participation Worker, education and health services to enable direct access to relevant professionals and promote the well-being of children under Wakefield's care.





15. Leadership and our Pledge

Wakefield fostering service is supported by a strong and dedicated senior management team. They have a clear vision for the service with a strong focus on local placement for local children.

Our Main Message to children in care:

Promise to involve you in decisions about your lives.
Listen to your voices and experiences.
Experts are those in care.
Directing you towards the path to a positive future
Getting you the best – that includes, foster carers, social worker, placements, and all that is offered while in care.
Encourage and support you as we would our own children.

When a child or young person lives in care we will:

- Listen and take their wishes and feelings into account in all our work and explain when we may have to override these.
- Make it our Mission to provide stable placements where they can feel happy, safe, and settled.
- Help foster carers understand the importance of 'Stick-ability' to provide them with the best care through good times and the times that may be harder.
- Help them understand why they are in care.
- Confidentiality - to only share information about them if we are sure, it is in their best interests to do so.
- Make sure that training for corporate parents promotes respect and understanding that all children and young people are unique.
- Ensure Participation and Voices training is mandatory for all new carers and staff working with looked after children.
- Provide them with information about their entitlements when they become looked after or when they need it via our dedicated website www.care4us.co.uk.
- Make sure their social worker gets to know them and listens to what they have to say. Involve them in having a say in their care plan and let them see a copy of it so we are open with them about how we will provide their care.
- Involve Children and Young People in the recruitment and training of foster carers and in the recruitment of new staff directly working with looked after children ensuring we employ the best people to work with them.
- We will help them to keep a record of important events, achievements, and people in their life; this is often called a Life Story Book.



Support children and young people to stay connected with family and friends.

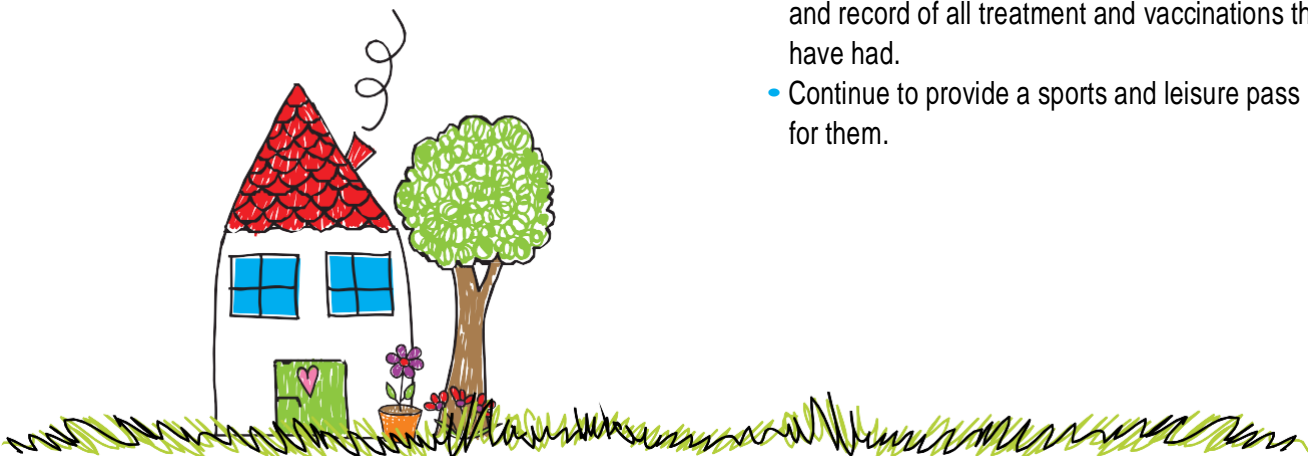
- Try to keep siblings together when they come in care.
- Be creative in types of family time venues, as well as activities to ensure this is a positive experience.
- If they want to sleepover at a friend's house, as a one-off, their social worker and carer should be able to agree this (as long as it's safe). If it's many times, we will need to make checks and if a sleepover is not allowed, they will be told why.
- Support them if their contact does not go well or if family members do not join in.

Supporting children and young people in Education, we will;

- Do everything we can to enable them to do as well at school as they can.
- Provide a special team (REACH) dedicated to improving their experience of education.
- Provide them with grants of up to £500 to help them do activities related to learning, aspiration and achievement as agreed in their plans.
- Ensure there is a designated teacher (a teacher that supports Children in Care) at every school to help them settle in and support their needs.
- Work with partners and other organisations to help schools plan services and support for them while they are looked after.
- Provide work experience placements and employment opportunities within the Council and partner agencies.
- Expect our carers to take an active interest in their education and support them to do their homework and attend parents' evenings.
- Make sure they have access to IT needed for education and training.
- Celebrate their achievements at an Annual Award Ceremony.

In supporting children and young people's health and emotional wellbeing, we will:

- Provide a dedicated health and emotional well-being team to support them and find out the best ways to engage with children and young people.
- Listen to how they want their health reviews.
- Provide dedicated nurses for them.
- Give them a care summary of their Health Plan and record of all treatment and vaccinations they have had.
- Continue to provide a sports and leisure pass for them.



When a young person moves into adulthood, we will:

- Provide an allocated leaving care worker to support with all issues around their future.
- Do all we can to make sure accommodation provided is safe, suitable, and secure and of a good standard and ensure they have a say in where they live.
- Make sure they have a pathway plan and are involved in making decisions about getting ready to leave care.
- Offer a leaving care forum – an opportunity to have their voices heard around issues relating to leaving care.
- Give them a chance to have a say about what their 'setting up home' grant is spent on.
- Make sure they have a bank account, birth certificate, passport, and national insurance number soon after their 16th birthday.
- Make sure when they leave school they receive an offer of education, employment or training, and the opportunity to discuss this with a career's advisor.
- Provide them with accommodation when they are home from college or University.
- Help them learn life skills linked to accredited courses.
- Provide help and financial support to go into higher education.

We will make sure we listen to the views of children and young people.

Children and young people are encouraged to get involved by contacting the Participation Service. We need new members, fresh ideas and everyone from a care background is welcome.

Why Pledge?

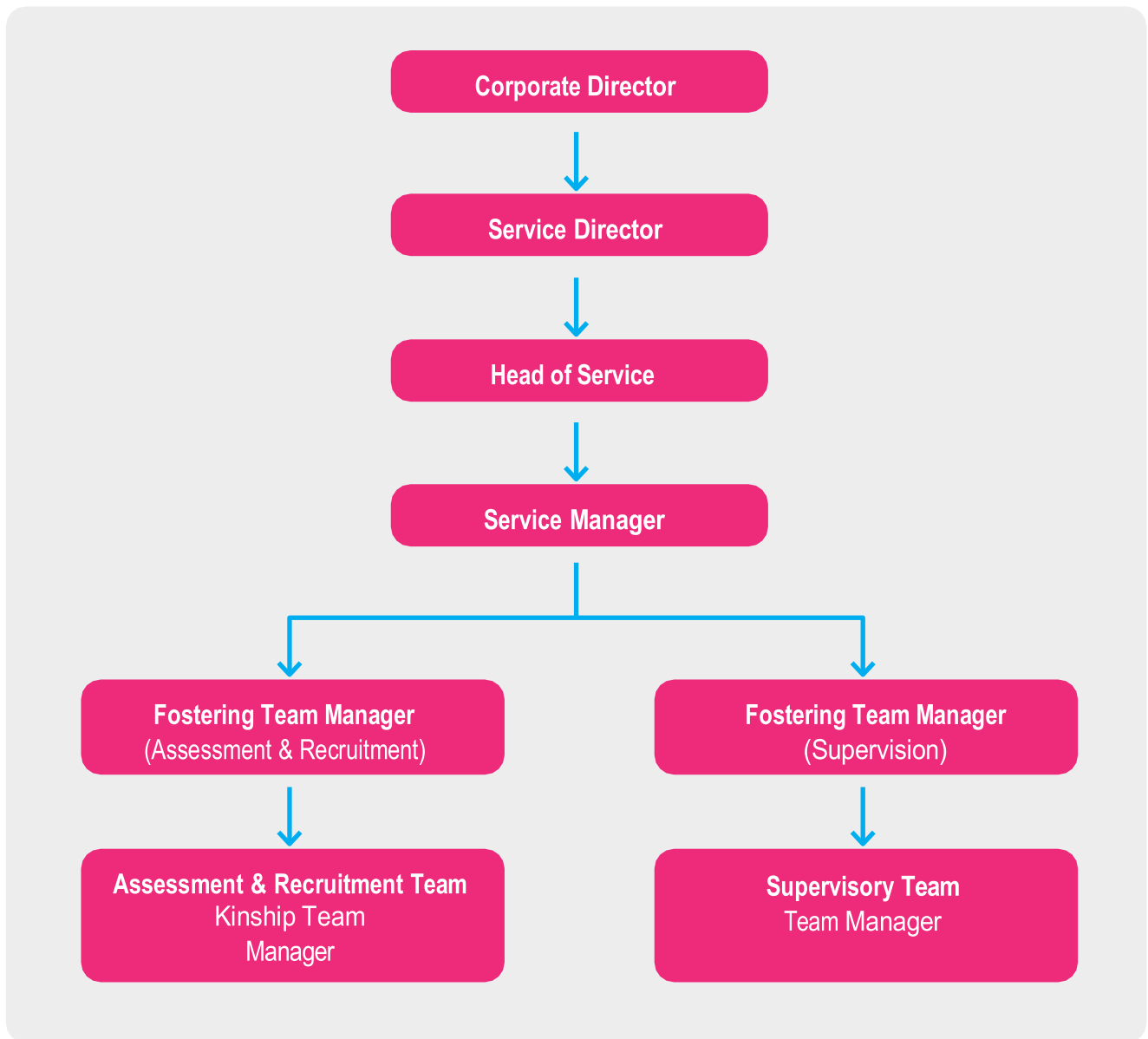
A pledge is an important part of running a service for Children in Care and Care Leavers. It tells Children and Young People what we promise to do for them as their corporate parents.

The pledge is for all children and young people in our care from birth to twenty-five. It is designed to help children and young people understand all of the things we can offer them and help them get most of the support we have to offer. This can be found on the [Care4Us](#) website.



There is a clear pledge from leaders and managers to set us up for success and be positive role models.

Reports and updates are presented to Elected Members and the Senior and Directorate Management Teams that give more detailed information about activity and performance of the Fostering Service. In addition, we submit an annual Data Set to Ofsted that provides relevant data about the service such as figures on households, children in care, recruitment process and supporting performance figures on looked after children.



Useful Contacts

Fostering Team

Services for Fostering
in Wakefield are based at:

Queens Row
Market Street
Wakefield WF1 1DF

T: 01924 302160

F: 01924 304215

E: fostering@wakefield.gov.uk

W: wakefield.gov.uk/fostering

Duty desk: 01924 302163

Duty email:

sc_cffosteringduty@wakefield.gov.uk

Children's Advocacy and Participation Service

Civic Centre
Ferrybridge Road
Castleford WF10 4JH

T: 01977 552493

Complaints & Representations

County Hall
Bond Street
Wakefield WF1 2QW

T: 01924 302840

Office of the Children's Rights Director

Children's Commissioner

Rachel De Souza
Children's Commissioner for
England

Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

T: 0207 783 8330

W: childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

Department of Education

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Piccadilly Gate
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