



# Member Report

## Fostering Service Statement of Purpose & Annual Fostering Report 2023/24

**Report to:** Cabinet  
**Report from:** Corporate Director for Children & Families  
**Portfolio:** Children and Families  
**Report Date:** September 2024  
**Decision Type:** Executive  
**Council Priority:** Meeting Residents' Needs

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### HEADLINE POSITION

#### 1. Summary of report

- 1.1 The Fostering Service is obliged to produce a Statement of Purpose and an annual report. These are required as the Fostering Service is a regulated service.
- 1.2 The Statement of Purpose for the Fostering Service sets out the aims, objectives, structure, and service arrangements and how these will be met, in partnership with Foster Carers, children and young people and their families, and other services and agencies.
- 1.3 The Statement of Purpose also outlines how the Fostering Service operates in accordance with legislation, guidance and regulatory frameworks including:
  - Children Act 1989
  - Care Standards Act 2000
  - Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
  - Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
  - The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 and 2015
  - Fostering Services – National Minimum Standards, 2011
  - Assessment and approval of foster carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Volume 4: Fostering Services, 2013
  - The Human Rights Act 1998
  - The Disability and Equality Act 2010
  - The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- 1.4 The Annual Report 2022/23 for the Fostering Service highlights the activities of the Fostering Team and the Fostering Panel.
- 1.5 The Annual report includes:

- The Values and pledges made by the service to children and young people.
- The current delivery model.
- The role and membership of fostering panel and activities during the year
- The approach to the recruitment and retention of foster carers along with statistics
- Details of children placed with foster carers.
- How we support existing carers
- Service developments
- The approach taken to achieve permanence.

## **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Statement of Purpose and the service activities for the year 23/24 within the Annual Report are noted by Cabinet.

## **DETAILED PROPOSALS**

### **3. What are the objectives of the report and how do they link to the Council's priorities.**

- 3.1 The objectives of the statement of purpose are to set out, for those receiving and delivering the service, the aims, objectives, structure and service arrangements and how these will be met, in partnership with Foster Carers, children and young people and their families, and other services and agencies. The statement of purpose includes details of our staffing structure and the qualifications of those delivering the service, to evidence that the service is compliant.
- 3.2 The objectives of the annual report are to provide an informative and transparent overview of the fostering service and how through such things as recruitment and retention of carers, including a comprehensive training programme and robust support it continues to strive to best meet the needs of local children and young people.
- 3.3 The fostering service is a statutory service which links to the Council priority of meeting residents' needs.

### **4. What options have been considered.**

- 4.1 It is a statutory requirement as part of the legislation to have an annually reviewed statement of purpose and annual report for the fostering service.

### **5. Impact Assessment**

- 5.1 Social Value – Where possible the service directly employs local foster carers so that children can be kept close to their communities as appropriate.
- 5.2 Legal – It is a statutory requirement to produce an annual report. The service is

governed by statute and is operated within a tight framework.

- 5.3 Financial – Employing foster carers directly is significantly more cost effective than utilizing independent fostering agency carers. The recruitment and retention of foster carers is included within the report.
- 5.4 Human Resources – The report details the staff within the team as part of the statement of purpose but there is no impact on HR matters.

## **6. Consultation and Engagement**

- 6.1 The two attached reports provide the current statement of purpose and a retrospective review of the previous financial year's activities. Consultation and engagement with foster carers, children who are in our care and families is an integral part of the fostering service.

## **7. Appendices and Background Papers**

- 7.1 Appendix 1 – Statement of Purpose
- 7.2 Appendix 2 – Annual report 2023-2024 for the Fostering Service

## **8. Contact Officer**

- 8.1 Name: Danielle Swainston
- 8.2 Position: Executive Director, Children and Families
- 8.3 Email Address: [danielle.swainston@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk](mailto:danielle.swainston@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk)
- 8.4 Telephone Number: 01642 771718

**Directorate of Children & Families  
Appendix 1**



**FOSTERING TEAM  
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

**June 2024**

## **CONTENTS**

1. INTRODUCTION
2. PRINCIPLES AND VALUES STATEMENT
3. AIMS
4. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE
5. QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF THE MANAGER
6. QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF THE STAFF EMPLOYED BY THE AUTHORITY FOR THE PURPOSES OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE
7. FOSTERING PANEL
8. SUPERVISION, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OF STAFF
9. SERVICES
10. INFORMATION AND SUPPORT FOR PROSPECTIVE AND APPROVED FOSTER CARERS
11. MONITORING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK
12. PROCEDURES FOR RECRUITMENT, ASSESSMENT AND APPROVAL OF FOSTER CARERS
13. SUPPORT, TRAINING AND REVIEW OF CARERS
14. COMPLAINTS
15. ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE NUMBER OF THE COMMISSION

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This Statement of Purpose sets out the aims, objectives, structure and service arrangements of Redcar & Cleveland Fostering Service and how these will be met, in partnership with Foster Carers, children and young people and their families, and other services and agencies. It outlines how the Fostering Service operates in accordance with legislation, guidance and regulatory frameworks including:

- Children Act 1989
- Care Standards Act 2000
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 and 2015
- Fostering Services – National Minimum Standards, 2011
- Assessment and approval of foster carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, *Volume 4: Fostering Services, 2013*
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Disability and Equality Act 2010
- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Children and Social Work Act 2017

This Statement of Purpose is made available to all fostering staff, prospective and approved foster carers. Parents will be made aware that they will be provided with a copy, should they require it, and a Children's Guide will be provided to children being cared for by foster carers. A copy of the Statement of Purpose will be available on Redcar and Cleveland's website and OFSTED will be provided with updated versions once approved.

This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed and updated by the Fostering Team Manager and approved by Fostering Panel Members and Elected Members on an annual basis.

## **2. PRINCIPLES AND VALUES STATEMENT**

### **Values:**

- The welfare and safety of children will be paramount in all considerations in the work of the Fostering Service.

- The Fostering Service will ensure that its service has a strong child-focus and that children's wishes, feelings and views are central within care planning and the delivery of services.
- The Fostering Service recognises that children's needs are best met by their family when it is safe to do so and is committed to placing children who are not able to remain in their own family within an appropriate, well-matched alternative family placement. Keeping children connected to their birth family, within their local area, with consistency of education and friendship groups will be prioritised where this is safe and in a child's best interests.
- The Fostering Service will work in partnership with the child, birth family members and other persons', professionals and agencies involved with the child to ensure the safety and welfare needs of the child and the successful implementation of the child or young person's care plan.
- Every cared for child will be cared for in an environment free from oppression, discrimination and prejudice, where they will be encouraged to develop a positive sense of their own identity.
- The needs, rights and views of the child or young person are at the centre of all practice and provision.
- Children and young people will be made aware of their rights and how to make a complaint or seek the support of an independent advocate via the National Youth Advisory Service.
- Individuality, difference and diversity are valued and celebrated.
- Equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice are actively promoted. The Service will respect human rights and ensure there is fair and equal access to services. The Service will be free of discrimination, prejudice and racism.
- Children and young people's gender, sexuality, ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and any disability will be recognised, positively valued and fully taken into account when placement and care planning decisions are made.
- Self-esteem and resilience are recognised as essential to every child or young person's development.

- Confidentiality and agreements about confidential information are respected as appropriate, unless a child or young person's protection and welfare would be compromised.
- Social inclusion and advancement of children and young people are actively promoted as specified in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- The Fostering Service will promote delegated authority to ensure that cared for children have as normal lives as possible with the same opportunities as other children.

**AIMS:**

- To ensure that there are sufficient foster carers with appropriate skills and accommodation to provide appropriately matched placements to children and young people in the Borough
- To ensure that assessments of prospective foster carers will focus robustly on carer's ability to safely meet the needs of children
- To ensure that children's wishes and views are considered in relation to all aspects of their care and that there is appropriate consultation in relation to their experiences of being cared for to inform foster carer reviews and wider Service development.
- To ensure that foster carers are acknowledged, consulted and celebrated as important partners who have a crucial role in providing stable and appropriate placements to children and young people in their care.

**KEY OBJECTIVES:**

- To further develop ways of actively recruiting foster carers within the Borough and from adjoining areas, developing closer partnerships with neighbouring local authorities and benefiting from the development of a regional hub focussing on driving foster care recruitment.
- To ensure that there is good support available to foster carers, including emotional, practical and financial support which will encourage carer retention and increase word of mouth recruitment of friends as foster carers.
- The Fostering Service will ensure that children's wishes and views are considered in relation to all aspects of their care and decisions about where they are to live. Children and young people will also continue to be consulted about their experience of living with their foster carers.



- Wherever possible, children should be brought up in their birth families, but where this is not possible, it is essential that children are securely attached to alternative carers capable of providing safe and effective care for the duration of their childhood.
- The matching process will be child centred taking into account the skills and experience of the foster carers and identifying the needs of the children.
- Children and young people should be provided with an opportunity to have introductions to foster carers prior to moving to live with them. They should receive a Children's Guide to Fostering when they move in.
- Services that are provided will value difference and be anti-discriminatory.
- Delays in achieving permanency for children can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and are to be avoided as far as possible.
- The Service will have as a high priority the need to recruit and retain foster carers who have skills and experience to meet the needs of children and young people who have a disability and or other complex needs including those related to trauma; as well as foster carers able to care for sibling groups.
- Children and young people's health and well-being will be actively promoted.
- Children and young people's educational needs are to be given high priority to support them to reach their full potential.
- Children and young people's personal and physical safety will be safeguarded, whilst allowing for risk and challenge, as appropriate to the capabilities of the child or young person. Appropriate safer care strategies and appropriate risk assessment frameworks will be used.
- The Service will value foster carers as an integral part of the team around the child and further develop consultation processes.
- The Service will work in partnership with family, foster carers and other professionals involved in the child's care.

- Working to implement the Sufficiency Policy to ensure we have a sufficient and diverse range of suitable placements including Independent Fostering Agency placements, in order to meet the individual needs of children in our care, including hard-to-place children and sibling groups. An important objective is to place siblings together wherever possible and appropriate. There continues to be a regular need to identify placements for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people.
- Having a dedicated workforce striving to deliver continuous improvement in all aspects of our work including gathering feedback from a range of sources, including foster carers, children in our care, panel members and social workers and other agency staff to develop and improve the fostering service.
- Working within the principles of the Children Act 1989 and working to exceed the requirements of the Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011.

#### **4. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF FOSTERING SERVICE**

The Fostering Team Manager is Victoria Hamer.

The Fostering Team Manager and Fostering Team are based at:

2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Seafield House  
 Kirkleatham Street  
 Redcar  
 Yorkshire  
 TS10 1SP

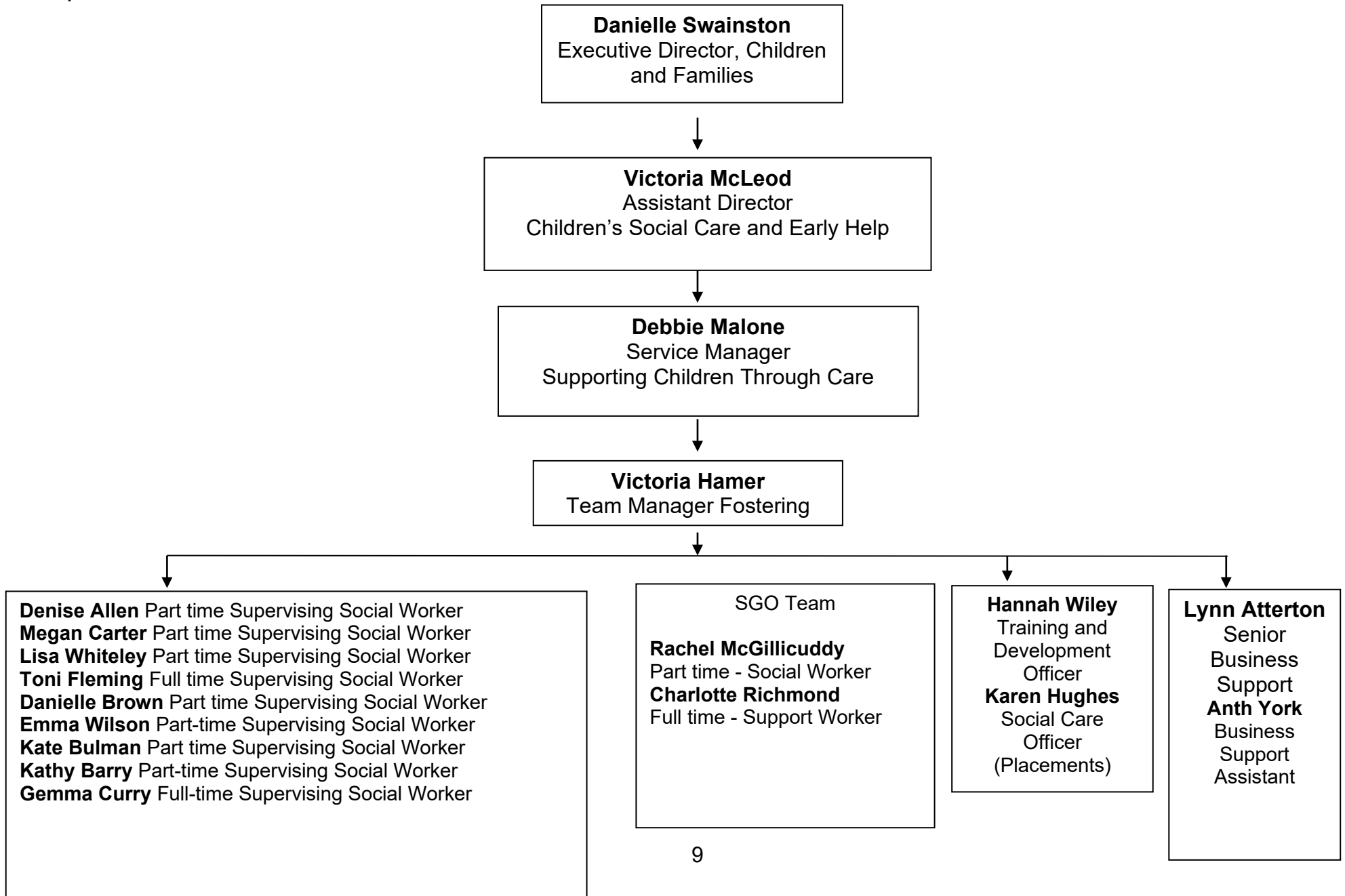
Telephone Number: 01642 771500

Email: [Victoria.hamer@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk](mailto:Victoria.hamer@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk)

The Fostering Service comprises of a Team Manager, a Deputy Team Manager, 4 full time and 7 part time qualified and experienced social workers; an SGO Social Worker, 1 Social Care Officer, a Training and Development Officer, a Senior Business Support Assistant, a Placement Officer and a part time Business Support Assistant. There is currently a plan to develop a Recruitment Officer post so that our aim to improve the recruitment and retention of foster carers can be achieved. There is a plan for the team to be further split into an assessment team and a supervisory team, ensuring that assessments are completed thoroughly and efficiently, meeting all deadlines and timescales as well as ensuring that all foster carers feel fully supported by their dedicated supervising social worker. The Service is currently divided into:

- Mainstream Fostering – Recruitment, Assessment and Support
- Connected Care – Assessment and Support
- Special Guardianship – Assessment and Support

**ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF REDCAR AND CLEVELAND'S FOSTERING SERVICE (AUGUST 2024)**



## 5. QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF THE MANAGER AND TEAM

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|-----------------------|--|
| <b>Name</b>           | Victoria Hamer   |
| <b>Job Title</b>      | Fostering Team Manager & Panel Advisor   |
| <b>Qualifications</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BA Social Work Hons (2:1)</li> <li>• Practice Educator Level 1</li> <li>• Practice Educator Level 2</li> <li>• CMI Level 5 Leadership and Management</li> </ul> |
| <b>Experience</b>     | Social Worker in the First Contact Team<br>Safeguarding Social Worker<br>DTM Children's Safeguarding<br>EDT Social Worker<br>Fostering Team Manager  |

## 6. QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF THE STAFF EMPLOYED BY THE AUTHORITY FOR THE PURPOSES OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

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| <b>Name</b>           | Kate Bulman   |
| <b>Job Title</b>      | Supervising Social Worker (Fostering)   |
| <b>Qualifications</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BA (Hons) Social Work</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Experience</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safeguarding Social Worker</li> <li>• MACH Assessment Team</li> <li>• Supervising Social Worker Fostering</li> </ul> |

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| <b>Name</b>           | Emma Wilson   |
| <b>Job Title</b>      | Supervising Social Worker (Fostering)   |
| <b>Qualifications</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BA Social Work</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Experience</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safeguarding Social Worker</li> <li>• Fostering Social Worker</li> </ul> |

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| <b>Name</b>           | Denise Allen  |
| <b>Job Title</b>      | Supervising Social Worker (Fostering)   |
| <b>Qualifications</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint (BA Hons) in Social Work and Nursing</li> <li>• Practice Teaching Award</li> <li>• Leading Effective Teams</li> <li>• Level 5 Institution Leadership Management</li> </ul> |
| <b>Experience</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Worker in Safeguarding Team</li> <li>• Supervising Social Worker in Fostering Team</li> </ul>   |

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child in our Care Team Manager</li> <li>• Permanency Social Worker</li> <li>• Fostering Team Manager</li> </ul> |
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| <b>Name</b>           | Megan Carter   |
| <b>Job Title</b>      | Supervising Social Worker (Fostering)  |
| <b>Qualifications</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Work (Masters)</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Experience</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment and Care Planning Team – Middlesbrough</li> <li>• Duty Team – Rotherham</li> <li>• Fostering Team - Rotherham</li> <li>• Supervising Social Worker Fostering Team</li> </ul> |

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| <b>Name</b>           | Danielle Brown  |
| <b>Job Title</b>      | Supervising Social Worker (Fostering)   |
| <b>Qualifications</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BSc (Hons) Forensic Psychology</li> <li>• MSc (Hons) Forensic Psychology</li> <li>• MA (Hons) Social Work</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Experience</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nursing Assistant Forensic Mental Health</li> <li>• Social Worker- Children’s Hub</li> <li>• Children’s Safeguarding Social Worker</li> <li>• Adults Social Worker- Hospital Discharge Team</li> <li>• Supervising Social Worker Fostering Team</li> </ul> |

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| <b>Name</b>           | Kathy Barry  |
| <b>Job Title</b>      | Supervising Social Worker (Fostering)  |
| <b>Qualifications</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BA Hons English Literature</li> <li>• DipSW Social Work</li> </ul>                                |
| <b>Experience</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trainee Social Worker 2005-2009</li> <li>• Qualified Social Worker 2009 – present day.</li> </ul> |

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| <b>Name</b>           | Lisa Whiteley  |
| <b>Job Title</b>      | Supervising Social Worker (Fostering)  |
| <b>Qualifications</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MA Social Work – Durham</li> </ul>            |
| <b>Experience</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Worker in Safeguarding Team</li> </ul> |

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Therapeutic Social Worker</li> <li>• Supervising Social Worker Fostering</li> <li>• Clinical Supervisor</li> </ul> |
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| <b>Name</b>           | Toni Fleming   |
| <b>Job Title</b>      | Supervising Social Worker (Fostering)  |
| <b>Qualifications</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BA Hons Degree – Social work</li> <li>• Stage 2 Practice Educator</li> <li>• First Aid Mental Health</li> <li>• Sleep Counselling</li> <li>• Youth Work</li> <li>• Positive Behaviour Support</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Experience</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth Work (4 years)</li> <li>• Youth work – 4 years</li> <li>• Childrens residential – 3 years</li> <li>• Children social work team – 3 years</li> <li>• Adult assessment/case management team – 2 years</li> <li>• Adult Safeguarding – 8 years</li> <li>• Brain and Spinal cord injury case management – 15 months</li> <li>• Key Worker Team manager - 2.5 years</li> </ul> |

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| <b>Name</b>           | Gemma Curry   |
| <b>Job Title</b>      | Social Worker   |
| <b>Qualifications</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2:1 BA Hons Degree – Social Work</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Experience</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family Support Worker in Safeguarding</li> <li>• Team Clerk in Safeguarding</li> </ul> |

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| <b>Name</b>           | Rachel McGillicuddy  |
| <b>Job Title</b>      | SGO Social Worker  |
| <b>Qualifications</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BA (Hons) English Studies</li> <li>• MA in Social Work</li> <li>• Level 1 Qualified in DDP</li> <li>• Level 1 Qualified in Theraplay</li> </ul> |
| <b>Experience</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adoption Support Social Worker</li> <li>• Therapeutic Social Worker</li> <li>• SGO Social Worker</li> </ul>                                     |

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| <b>Name</b> | Charlotte Williams |
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| <b>Job Title</b>      | SGO Support Worker  |
| <b>Qualifications</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Years Teacher Status</li> <li>• Level 4 in counselling skills,</li> <li>• Level 4 in therapeutic approaches</li> <li>• Friends Resilience</li> </ul> |
| <b>Experience</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work within a therapeutic service</li> </ul>   |

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| <b>Name</b>           | Hannah Wiley  |
| <b>Job Title</b>      | Training and Development Officer  |
| <b>Qualifications</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint (BA Hons) Degree English Language and Human Communication &amp; English Literature</li> <li>• Qualified Teacher Status</li> </ul>                      |
| <b>Experience</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11 years teaching KS3 &amp; KS4 English Language and Literature.</li> <li>• Adoptive Parent</li> <li>• Training and Development Officer Fostering</li> </ul> |

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| <b>Name</b>           | Karen Hughes  |
| <b>Job Title</b>      | Social Care Officer/Placement Manager   |
| <b>Qualifications</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excel, Word, PowerPoint</li> <li>• Minute-taking training</li> <li>• Protocol training</li> <li>• Budget manager and support training</li> </ul> |
| <b>Experience</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIOC Team – Business Support</li> <li>• TARGET – Leaving Care Business Support</li> </ul>  |

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| <b>Name</b>           | Lynn Atterton  |
| <b>Job Title</b>      | Senior Business Support Officer  |
| <b>Qualifications</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excel, Word, Power Point</li> <li>• Minute Taking Training</li> <li>• Protocol Training</li> </ul>    |
| <b>Experience</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CIOC Team Business Support</li> <li>• Panel Administrator – Independent Fostering Provider</li> </ul> |

## 7. FOSTERING PANEL

The Redcar and Cleveland Fostering Panel is constituted in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

The role of the Fostering Panel is to make recommendations on:



- The suitability of prospective Foster Carers.
- The review of approved Foster Carers.
- The review and consideration of any allegations and complaints made against approved Foster Carers.

Fostering Panel Advisor is responsible for ensuring that Panel meetings are planned throughout the year and that Panel business is booked in and administered effectively. The Panel Advisor is available **before and during** Panel meetings to provide advice in relation to legislation and guidance as well as agency policies.

A Business Administrator ensures that appropriate Minutes of meetings including recommendations and reasons for recommendations are recorded.

The Agency Decision Maker uses these recommendations to make the final decision on foster carer approvals.

The Panel meets twice a month, with additional Panels being scheduled where the level of business requires this. A Fostering Service Annual Report is completed with this information and is presented to Panel on an annual basis.

Each Panel member has an annual appraisal. This focuses on their role within the Panel and is informed by feedback about the functioning of the Panel and its members. Panel members' views are taken into account to inform whether any improvements to Panel processes or wider Service delivery can be achieved.

There is an induction programme for all new Panel members to ensure they are clear about their role and expectations regarding the commitment.

Each new member is given the opportunity to observe Fostering Panel, prior to sitting on the Panel. Opportunities for joint training with the agency's fostering staff is provided as well as a dedicated annual Panel Training event focussing upon aspects of the Panel role.

## **8. SUPERVISION, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OF STAFF**

All members of staff are employed under the terms and conditions of Redcar and Cleveland Council and are appointed following the Council's procedures for recruitment and selection, including two written references and a clear, enhanced DBS check.

All social workers are registered with Social Work England and must comply with the standards, terms and conditions of this agency.

All newly appointed staff follow the Council's prescribed induction process.

All members of staff receive formal supervision as per the guidelines set out in the Policy on Supervision of Staff.

All staff participate in an annual appraisal which is reviewed mid-year. This identifies their achievements over the previous year, their targets for the forthcoming year and development issues.

Staff training and development needs are identified through supervision and is generally provided through the Department's Workforce Development Team. However, specialist training can be commissioned as appropriate.

All staff are encouraged to contribute to the development of the service and to pursue specific areas of work, to enable them to develop their professional and personal skills.

The team undertakes an annual development event to look at key tasks and priorities for the coming year.

## **9. SERVICES**

All services delivered by Redcar and Cleveland Fostering Service are child-centred and promote positive outcomes for children.

The number of fostering households approved by Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council Fostering Service as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 was 123 inclusive of connected carers.

The Fostering Service currently provides the following types of placement:

**Short-term placements** – to provide substitute care where children are unable, for a variety of reasons, to live with their birth parents or extended family. Short-term placements continue whilst ongoing work and assessments are undertaken to ensure the child's long-term needs can be met, whether this is through reunification with family or through other permanent arrangements.

**Long-term/Permanent placements** - when the plan for the child precludes them from returning to live with their birth family, this provision provides permanent care up until independence.

**“Respite” placements** - to prevent family breakdown and a child or young person becoming brought into care. This service offers time-limited, planned short stays with foster carers. Foster Carers support the children and young people and also work closely with parents/carers, enabling them to work through problems with a view to having a settled home life.

**Parent and Child placements** – when the plan is for a parent to be placed with their baby in order to fully assess their parenting ability.

**Kinship Care placements** - when family members, friends or other persons with a connection to a child, have been identified by the child’s social worker as potential foster carers for the child, a thorough assessment will be undertaken to ensure the carers are able to provide the child with a safe placement which is capable of promoting his/her needs. Fostering regulations require that Family & Friend Foster Carers must be supported by the Fostering Service as any other foster carer would be and are given the same opportunities to attend training and support groups, social events and activities.

Family and Friend Foster Carers must demonstrate that they meet the Training, Support and Development Standards within 18 months of approval and are given tailored support to enable them to do this. The Fostering Service encourages, supports and enables Family and Friend Carers to participate in training and development opportunities and to build links with other Foster Carers.

**Emergency Placements** – carers who are available out of office hours to provide immediate placements for children, normally for only a few days until a suitable matched placement can be planned for children.

## **10. INFORMATION AND SUPPORT FOR PROSPECTIVE AND APPROVED FOSTER CARERS**

- The Fostering Team completes an initial visit to prospective carers following an initial enquiry made to Foster with North East.
- Staff will register suitable applicants through the ‘Skills to Foster’ preparation course through Foster With North East.
- Following receipt of an application to be assessed, Supervising Social Workers work alongside prospective foster carers and undertake an

evidence-based assessment utilising the Secure Base Model (see Recruitment, Assessment and Approval of Mainstream Foster Carers below).

- Following Panel recommendation and Agency Decision Maker approval, foster carers will have a named Supervising Social Worker; they will receive visits and a minimum of 3-monthly supervision.
- Foster Carers will have access to advice from suitably qualified staff from the team, including the out of hours Emergency Duty Team and a registration with The Fostering Network.
- Foster Carers will have access to the Standards of Care and Payments Protocol.
- Foster Carers will be paid an allowance and fee as per the payment policy and will be eligible for travel expenses associated with training and some journeys in relation to the care of children.
- Carers will be offered a programme of post-approval training that will be linked to the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care. Foster Carers will each have an annual Personal Development Plan which will identify any gaps or areas for development where training opportunities will support them in meeting the individual needs of the children or young people they have in placement.
- Foster Carers will have an Annual Review, undertaken by an independent Chair, which will be presented at Fostering Panel following the first year of fostering and then periodically including where there is a significant change in circumstances or an allegation. Foster Carer Reviews give an opportunity to highlight areas of good practice and areas of development and to inform the Local Authority of any issues of concern during the previous year.
- Foster carers are able to request respite and child-care provision from other approved foster carers. This must be in line with the child's care plan.
- The child's social worker has responsibility for ensuring that foster carers are provided with sufficient information about the child, their family and the circumstances of the child requiring to live in foster care.

- Carers will have access to services from other partner agencies, as appropriate to meet the child's needs.
- Redcar and Cleveland Council is participating in the Mockingbird Family Programme which is an innovative support programme which brings together foster carers into constellations of carers to benefit from peer support. Children benefit from the development of friendships with other cared for children and sleepovers and short breaks. Carers engage in joint training and social activities. The programme has been evaluated nationally and it is shown to improve the stability of fostering placements and strengthen the relationships between carers, children and young people, fostering services and birth families.

## **11. MONITORING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK**

Redcar and Cleveland Fostering Service is committed to providing services in accordance with legislation and regulatory frameworks as detailed in the introduction.

A range of monitoring and quality assurance activity is undertaken, including: monthly supervision and annual appraisals, where the quality of work and practice is monitored and training and professional development needs are identified; weekly placement meetings convened to discuss new referrals and placement stability; regular performance meetings, with both Service Managers and the Assistant Director are also held; and Foster Carer supervision files are also audited as part of the quality assurance process.

The Fostering Team Manager monitors all matters under Schedule 6 of the Fostering Regulations 2011 on a monthly basis. This includes children who go missing, complaints, accidents and any incidents of restraint.

The Fostering Team Manager in the role of Panel Advisor undertakes a quality assurance of documentation submitted for Fostering Panel and liaises with social workers identifying where there are gaps or additional information required for Panel to consider business. The Panel Advisor will also receive feedback from the Fostering Panel Chair and other Panel members which can further inform Fostering Service improvements.

Exit interviews are offered to foster carers who submit their resignations. This allows the Service to understand reasons why some carers decide not to continue as carers and to consider whether any improvements to service delivery may be needed.

Foster Carers are aware of how to make a complaint. Wherever possible, issues are resolved in the first instance by the Supervising Social Worker or the Fostering Team Manager.

Disruption Meetings are held where there are unplanned endings of permanent placements and advice, and recommendations are made to the Service to inform both learning and future practice.

Services provided by partner agencies through Service Level Agreements are formally reviewed by the Children's Commissioning Team and take account of contractual requirements, objectives and quality issues.

Monitoring arrangements are in place for the Regional Independent Fostering Providers Contract, in addition to the arrangements that are in place for the individual Service Level Contracts.

Fostering annual reports are presented to the Corporate Parenting Board, whose members take a role in the overall monitoring and review of Fostering Services.

## **12. RECRUITMENT, ASSESSMENT AND APPROVAL OF MAINSTREAM FOSTER CARERS**

### **Recruitment**

- The Fostering Team has a Recruitment and Retention Strategy with implemented procedures for marketing, recruitment, and retention of Foster Carers.
- Each year the team carries out a variety of recruitment and advertising activities and work alongside the Communications department. Adverts are placed in a range of local publications and are displayed on a range of council vehicles; the service is promoted through our corporate website and via social media. The Fostering Service has had a presence at a range of community, cultural and sporting events during the year. Events have included attendance at a Café Drop in at Locke Park; a Teddy Bears Picnic event; a stall at Saltburn Farmers Market and a stall at the Atrium of James Cook University Hospital.

- The Fostering Service Facebook page has proved to be popular with both the public and current foster carers. The team is able to promote the service and advertise recruitment needs and events through this platform.
- Foster Carers or council employees who recommend someone who subsequently progresses on to become an approved Foster Carer for Redcar & Cleveland, receive a £250.00 payment from the Fostering Service.
- Once a Form F assessment has commenced all statutory checks are completed, including DBS on all adult members of the household.
- A medical examination is completed by the applicant's GP, and then sent to the Department's Medical Advisor for comments and a recommendation as to the candidate's suitability to foster.
- Current employment references are taken up (if applicable) and there will also be reference requests from previous employers where an applicant has been working with children or vulnerable adults. At least 2 personal/independent referees are visited by Supervising Social Workers to ascertain their views on the candidate becoming a foster carer. Where an applicant has been in a previous relationship an ex-partner reference will be sought wherever possible.
- Other checks are taken up with relevant statutory agencies.
- The assessment generally consists of a minimum of eight visits both individually and together (if a couple) and with any other adults and children in the household.
- Prospective Foster Carers work in partnership with the Supervising Social Worker to complete the Form F Report and have an opportunity to comment upon the draft report. The completed Form F will be quality assured by Panel Advisor and once any amendments are made carers will have an opportunity to read and sign the finalised assessment.
- The Fostering Service endeavours to present the completed assessment to Fostering Panel within a timely manner of receiving the formal application to be assessed as foster carers for Redcar and Cleveland. These timescales are monitored through working closely with Foster With North East.

## **Approval**

- The completed Form F assessment is presented to the Redcar and Cleveland Fostering Panel, which makes a recommendation as to the suitability of the applicant(s). Applicants are invited to attend Fostering Panel when their approval is being considered.
- The Panel Meeting Minutes and Panel's recommendation regarding terms of approval is forwarded to the Agency Decision Maker, who would then make a decision whether to approve the prospective foster carers. Panel Chair will normally share Panel's recommendation with applicants and provide feedback on the reasons for the recommendation.
- Applicants are notified of the Agency Decision in writing.
- A Foster Care Agreement is signed by all new Foster Carers and they are issued with all appropriate documentation.

### **Approval of Connected Foster Carers:**

The Service recognises that for many children and young people, being cared for by a relative or connected person may be the best option when a child cannot live with birth parents. The term connected carer refers to a relative of the child ie. A grandparent, brother, sister, aunt or uncle, or a step-parent. However, it can also refer to others who are not related but "connected" in a more professional capacity eg. a childminder, teacher or youth worker.

Where consideration is being given by a child's social worker for a child to be placed in foster care with a connected carer, the social worker will undertake a viability assessment as to whether the placement could meet the child or young person's current and future needs. Where the viability is positive and there is not an immediate plan to place a child, the prospective connected carer will be referred to the Fostering Service for allocation for a fostering assessment.

In some circumstances an urgent placement with connected carers may be the option that a child's social worker seeks. Where this is the case, the child's social worker completes a viability assessment. Positive assessments will be given temporary approval by the Agency Decision-maker and an allocated Supervising Social Worker will have 16 weeks to complete a Form C assessment (with a further 8 weeks in exceptional circumstances) and present to panel for their consideration around approval.



During the assessment process, Kinship foster carers are invited to attend Foundations to Kinship Fostering, a training programme specifically written to support Kinship Carers through the fostering assessment and beyond.

### **13. SUPPORT, TRAINING AND REVIEW OF CARERS**

#### **Support**

- Each Foster Carer is allocated a named Supervising Social Worker who will visit carers once a child is placed and will provide formal supervision on at least a 3-monthly basis. These supervisions are recorded and can be retained by the Foster Carer and a copy is also placed on the Local Authority's database system.
- Foster Carers will also receive support from other Supervising Social Workers in the team. Foster carers are provided with the Emergency Duty Team's telephone number and are made aware of the need to report any serious concerns regarding children out of hours. '
- Monthly informal coffee mornings and formal quarterly team meetings are provided to foster carers. Foster carers must attend a minimum of two quarterly team meetings.
- Newly approved foster carers are given an opportunity to be buddied up with experienced foster carers for support.
- We provide all carers access to advice and support from a national organisation called The Fostering Network, which provides a wealth of resources, research and training opportunities. Carers also have access to independent support from The Fostering Network should they become subject to an allegation.
- Regular social events are organised for carers and children, including a Christmas party, Easter and summer events as well as a regular newsletter and sparkle moments, recognising achievements and long service of foster carers.
- Foster carers receive allowances and fees in accordance with the banded payments system. The payments system is linked to expectations outlined in the Standards of Care and Payment Protocol.

- The Mockingbird Family Model is now established within Redcar and Cleveland and provides participating fostering households with enhanced support through regular meetings, social activities, joint training and opportunities for children to participate in regular sleepovers with other children within their Mockingbird “constellation” of families.

## **Training**

A wide range of opportunities for Foster Carers to learn and develop are available, including e-learning, taught sessions, and provision of resources for self-directed learning.

- The team is committed to providing high quality, ongoing training jointly for both carers and staff on a regular basis.
- As required under National Minimum Standards, within 12 months of approval (or 18 months for Family & Friend Foster Carers), carers will be expected to have completed the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care.
- Carers will be supported to identify their individual learning and development needs and work with the Training and Development Officer and Supervising Social Worker to implement a Personal Development Plan (PDP). This will be monitored through supervision and at the Foster Carers Annual Review.
- Foster carers are expected to complete Trauma Informed Therapeutic Parenting. This course looks at how trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) impacts on children and young people and explores the principles of P.A.C.E model / therapeutic parenting strategies.

## **Foster Carers’ Annual Reviews**

- A meeting with foster carers, chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer, is held annually to discuss carers’ progress. Views are sought from their own children and the children and young people they care for. The child’s Social Worker and the carer’s Supervising Social Worker also share their views and if the carers have moved a child on to their adoptive placement, a social worker from the Adoption Tees Valley Service will also be asked to provide written feedback.

- This Review provides an opportunity to consider the Foster Carers current terms of approval and make recommendations as to whether this should change.
- Carers receive a written copy of any decision made about them by the Fostering Agency Decision-maker.
- All first foster carer reviews will be considered by Fostering Panel and Panel will subsequently consider reviews periodically, including where allegations or significant changes within fostering households occur.

#### **14. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

If an individual wishes to make a complaint regarding the service, contact can be made by:

- Speaking to the Fostering Team Manager in the first instance
- Telephone and speak to the Complaints Officer on 01642 774774
- By Post to Redcar & Cleveland House, Kirkleatham Street, Redcar Yorkshire. TS10 1RT
- Online: [www.redcar-cleveland.gov.uk/about-the-council/compliments-and-complaints](http://www.redcar-cleveland.gov.uk/about-the-council/compliments-and-complaints)
- Or by E-mail [Complaints@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk](mailto:Complaints@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk)

#### **15. LOCAL GOVERNMENT & SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN**

If your complaint is about a local authority fostering service, and you are not happy with the final outcome following the Stage 3 / Independent Review Panel, you can contact the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

If you have a serious concern about the Fostering Service, you can contact Ofsted. You can also contact Ofsted if you are not satisfied with the Fostering Service's response after you have followed its complaints procedure or you feel unable to contact the service concerned about this particular issue.

Complaints may be made to Ofsted as the Regulatory Authority. Their contact details are:

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester

M1 2WD

Tel 0300 123 4666

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



## Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council

### Annual Fostering Report April 2023 – March 2024

## **CONTENTS**

- 1. INTRODUCTION**
- 2. CURRENT SERVICE**
- 3. FOSTERING PANEL**
- 4. STATISTICS**
- 5. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF FOSTER CARERS**
- 6. TRAINING AND SUPPORT OF FOSTER CARERS**
- 7. OTHER SERVICE DEVELOPMENTS**
- 8. ACTION PLANNING**

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## 1. Introduction

This report is to be read in conjunction with the Redcar and Cleveland Fostering Team Statement of Purpose.

This report highlights the activities of the Fostering Team and the Fostering Panel throughout the period April 2023 to March 2024.

Redcar and Cleveland Council Children and Families Service has a vision: **“Thriving Children, fulfilling their dreams”** and has a Mission **“to work in partnership to deliver excellence for children and families”**

### Our Values:

#### **Child-Centred:**

Offering the compassion and patience we would expect for our own child; supporting them to flourish and fulfil their dreams and aspirations.

Encouraging and empowering children to share their voice, listening and respecting their thoughts, feelings and opinions.

Sticking with children, especially when things are most worrying.

#### **Respectful:**

Valuing, trusting and supporting each other to achieve the best for our children and families.

Embracing our diversity and differences, not only in our children and families but across our relationships with colleagues and partners.

Communicating openly and honestly so that everything we do is fair, transparent and understood.

#### **Creative:**

Being bold and ambitious, embracing change and looking for better ways to deliver our services.

Building and sharing new skills to create services that suit the needs of each child and family.

Striving for excellence and not just doing what we've always done if it isn't getting the results our children deserve.

## **Our Pledges to all children:**

Pledge 1: Keep you at the heart of everything we do

Pledge 2: Encourage you to speak out and always listen to you

Pledge 3: Support you to live safely within caring, family environments

Pledge 4: Encourage you to do the best you can and celebrate your successes

Pledge 5: Offer you a safe and trusted space whenever you need support or advice

Pledge 6: Support you to grow up in a community, knowing who you are and how you fit in the world, with the same opportunities as everyone else

Pledge 7: Provide the best opportunities we can to help you grow into a successful adult, acquiring the skills you need for the future

Pledge 8: NEVER give up on you

## **2. Current Service**

The Fostering Team currently provides the following services:

- The recruitment of mainstream foster carers.
- The assessment and approval of connected carers.
- The initial visits of potential foster carers who wish to foster for Redcar & Cleveland.
- The assessment of potential foster carers.
- Post approval support for foster carers, including high-quality supervision; bespoke training & development; and facilitate Foster Carer Team Meetings and informal coffee morning.
- Ongoing fun events for fostering families.
- A Mockingbird Constellation.
- Support for Special Guardianship Families.

27<sup>th</sup> September 2023 saw the launch of Foster with Northeast Backed by the Department for Education. Foster With North East is the first port of call for prospective carers offering a warm welcome, directing enquiries to their local authority, and providing support throughout the application process.



The scheme seeks to help recruit carers from a range of different backgrounds and circumstances in the region.

As part of the hub, Foster with North East offers regular Skills to Foster training sessions across the region to provide people with the necessary information about the role of fostering. Within these sessions prospective foster carers can meet and speak with approved foster carers to get a 'real life' perspective on what being a foster carer means. There has been positive feedback from all applicants who have attended the training this year in terms of the quality of the training and the level of information provided.

In addition to Skills to Foster, Foster With North East also ensures that that applicants have an experienced foster carer as a buddy to support them from the initial stages of assessment through to approval and beyond. Michelle Smith, an experienced and long-term foster carer is the buddy for Redcar and Cleveland. Given that Foster With North East has not been running a full year, it is difficult to ascertain what this means in terms of approvals.

Priority continues to be finding homes for Children in Our Care with people with whom they already have an existing relationship with. As a result, there has been a recorded increase regarding in the number of kinship carers assessments completed by the fostering team over the last twelve months. When it is not possible to identify a connected person, it is imperative that the fostering service has the opportunity to appropriately match a child with an approved Local Authority foster carer. Therefore, mainstream foster carer recruitment remains a priority, however as identified nationally, remains a challenge.

In response to the increase in Kinship Carer assessments, and the challenges of mainstream recruitment, the LA have invested into the team by increasing the number of social work posts as well as reconsidering the key functions of the team and the role of each worker. The aim is to ensure that all kinship carer assessments continue to be completed within the sixteen-week timescale as well as ensuring that there remains a focus on the recruitment and assessment of mainstream carers.

To achieve this, a new team structure has been agreed. We will be recruiting a deputy team manager, two social workers and a recruitment officer.

The fostering team will be divided into two teams: assessment and supervisory. The assessment team will work closely with the SGO support

team, and children's social workers, to ensure that the children who are able be cared for under other Legal Orders can be identified as soon as possible. This ensure that permeance for children in our care is promoted.

### **3. Fostering Panel**

The Fostering Panel has a Central List of 21 core members which is an increase of 6 members available to sit on Panel, ensuring a wide range of skills and knowledge is reflected in the Panel Process.

Fostering Panel is now convened twice monthly to meet the needs of the service.

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## Central List

| NAME              | ROLE                    | EXPERIENCE                   |
|-------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Chris Priestman   | Panel Chair             | Social Worker/IRO            |
| Malcolm Bullock   | Independent Member      | Foster Carer/Panel member    |
| Di Reed           | Vice Chair              | Social Worker/Adopter        |
| Jenny Goldstein   | Vice Chair              | Solicitor (Child Care Law)   |
| Susan Rowney      | Independent member      | Speech Therapy               |
| Nicola Hall       | Agency Member           | Manager -Early Help Service  |
| Fiona Oliver      | Agency Member           | Service Manager – H Visiting |
| Amanda Olvanhill  | Agency member           | Head of Employability        |
| Alison Barnes     | Independent Member      | Education                    |
| Karen King        | Independent Member      | Prev. Foster Carer           |
| Olivia Allen      | Redcar SSW              | IRO                          |
| Denise Allen      | Redcar SSW              | 3 years + qualified SW       |
| Megan Weallens    | Redcar SSW              | 3 years + qualified SW       |
| Kate Bulman       | Redcar SSW              | 3 years + qualified SW       |
| Sharon Bircumshaw | Redcar SSW              | 3 years + qualified SW       |
| Jean Sharrocks    | Independent member      | Foster carer/panel member    |
| Helen Clarke      | Independent (SW) member | 3 years + qualifies SW       |
| Pauline Douglas   | Agency member           | Virtual School               |
| Jo Johnson        | Agency member           | Virtual School               |
| Alison Blacklock  | Independent Member      | Education                    |
| Grace Marsay      | Redcar SW               | Qualified SW 3 years +       |

Fostering Panel has access to advice from the following persons:

Legal Advice: John McEnaney (Legal Advisor - Cygnet Law)

Medical Advice: Dr Ruth Barron (Medical Advisor - Child Health Department)

Panel Administration and Minute-taking is coordinated by Lynn Atterton, Senior Business Support Officer.

The Agency Decision-maker is Debbie Malone – Service Manager Supporting Children and Young People Through Care

The Fostering Panel has met on the following dates:

24.04.23/ 22.05.23/ 26.06.23/ 24.07.23/14.08.23 (cancelled)/ 11.09.23/  
25.09.23/ 16.10.23/ 30.10.23/ 13.11.23/ 27.11.23/18.12.23

2024 panel dates – 29.01.24/ 26.02.24/ 11.03.24/ 18.03.24

Panel members receive their Panel documents electronically 10 days in advance of Panel meetings and have a template to assist them in identifying strengths, vulnerabilities, and potential questions. Panel members have demonstrated a strong commitment to thoroughly reading documentation and being well prepared for Panel meetings. Panel members have contributed well to quality assurance processes and provide constructive feedback in relation to the quality of assessments and reviews presented to Panel.

During the year Panel has considered 10 Form F assessments, 22 Form C assessments and 33 Foster Carer Reviews.

#### The role of Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel has responsibility for making recommendations in relation to:

- The approval of foster carers for short-term, task centred and long-term/permanent placements.
- The approval of family members or friends as “connected person” carers for children who are cared for by Redcar and Cleveland Council.
- The first annual foster carer review of all foster carers and connected persons carers.
- Reviews of foster carers where there have been safeguarding concerns or significant concerns raised regarding foster carer’s standards and suitability.
- Supervising Social Workers can take short reports to Fostering Panel for advice in relation to carers and National Fostering Minimum Standards.

## Annual Reviews of Panel Members

In line with the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4, appraisals are completed by the Panel Chair and Panel Advisor.

Appraisals provide an opportunity for Panel Members to consider their contribution to the overall functioning of the panel and provides a forum for discussion and reflection. The Fostering Panel Chair/Vice Chair will continue to have an opportunity to meet periodically with the Assistant Director/Service Manager responsible for the Fostering Service so that learning in relation to the quality of assessments and reviews, panel processes and wider practice issues can be shared.

### **4. Statistics and Performance Indicators**

**Between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024**

**Table 1 Annual Performance In-house foster carer recruitment**

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| 30  | Enquiries received around becoming a foster carer.  |
| 15  | Invited to the training sessions: <i>Skills to Foster</i>   |
| 7   | Attended the Skills to Foster training  |
| 9   | New mainstream fostering families approved (providing the potential to care for 15 children).   |
| 15  | New connected carers approved (providing care for 26 children)  |
| 4   | Prospective Foster Carers still progressing through the assessment process  |
| 130 | Total in-house fostering households, including family and friends' carers (at March 2024).  |
| 19  | Total of foster carers who resigned from being an approved foster carer <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1 resignation was a Family &amp; Friend carer seeking an SGO</li><li>• 17 mainstream carers either resigned or retired from fostering. (12 of these initiated their own resignation / retirement &amp; 5 were initiated by the fostering service.</li><li>• 1 foster carer transferred to an IFA.</li></ul> |

## 5. Recruitment and Retention of Carers

In March 2024, Redcar and Cleveland Fostering Service had 100 foster carers providing foster care to 118 unrelated children. In addition, there were 30 connected care foster carers caring for 26 children. It is recognised that there is a national shortage of Foster Carers and recruitment of carers remains a challenge for many local authorities.

The Service continues to review the sufficiency of provision in line with its Sufficiency Policy and its Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention Strategy.

Objective 3 of the Strategic Plan for children in our care and care leavers is to ensure we have “a family for every child.” The key challenges to achieving this, as identified in the recruitment and retention strategy, are having to increase the number of in-house foster carers. Currently we have a higher proportion of children in in-house provision in comparison to the number placed with an IFA’s (Independent Fostering Agency)

The sufficiency statement highlights the need for increased provision to accommodate separated migrant young people children. In response to this, we have successfully assessed a single female foster carer who plans to provide this type of placement to many young people as she has experience in fostering and caring for children who have travelled to the United Kingdom seeking asylum.

There are two key challenges in the recruitment of foster carers. The Council must generate interest in the idea of being a foster carer, whilst also selling itself as the best fostering organisation to work for, within an increasingly competitive market. Redcar & Cleveland provide a discount on Council Tax, which is identified as a significant recruitment strategy. This is not replicated in Independent Fostering Agencies or other local authorities.

The voices and experiences of our foster carers are central to our foster carer recruitment campaign, and the fostering team recognise that our ‘unique selling point’ is the community support foster carers offer each other. Foster carers have regularly been featured in Redcar and Cleveland’s Magazine, which is delivered to all households across the borough, as well as featuring on social media and the Redcar and Cleveland Fostering Service website, as well as case studies and coverage with Foster With North East. These shared experiences allow us to promote fostering in a positive light and show that there is no typical or standard foster carer.

With the support of the council’s communication team, there are plans for a targeted recruitment campaign using the images of foster carers within the

postcode in which they reside. It is hoped that general members of the public will be encouraged to make links between people who live in their area who are 'just like them' and be encouraged to consider whether they could be a foster carer, breaking down any misconceptions about their 'type' of people who foster.

Advertising with the use of banners and flyers across the borough has continued, and more recently advertising on council waste collection vehicles resumed. Social media content on Facebook continues to play an important role in our recruitment campaign. There is continued scope to build on and update website content.

Members of the Fostering Team as well as local councillors have attended a range of community events and meetings where the need for more foster carers has been promoted. This has included coverage across the borough during Foster Care Fortnight with 'pop up' events, a recruitment stall at James Cook University Hospital and attendance at cycle events in the borough.

Carer retention continues to be a priority particularly as 19 carers resigned or were deregistered between 2023 -2024, including 1 Kinship Carer who sought an alternative order for the child. Evidence would suggest that most resignations were from foster carers who had come to the natural end of their fostering career, with foster carers citing either age as a barrier to continue fostering, or changes within their own family circumstances, such as supporting elderly relatives. It is important that the fostering service monitors closely the average age of its carers and acknowledges that older age and other caring restrictions can impact on foster carer retention. In contrast, the fostering service did approve several fostering families who have young children. Therefore, there will be a targeted recruitment efforts in encouraging young families with or without children to consider the fostering role.

It is worth noting that only one fostering couple transferred to an Independent Fostering Agency, and no carers have transferred to another authority.

In consultation with foster carers, the fostering service streamlined the support available to carers in response to the need for carer retention. Carers are now provided with monthly informal coffee mornings, which take place in two locations across the borough as well as formal foster carer team meetings, which are facilitated quarterly and are offered to carers in two locations plus an out of hours session via Microsoft Teams for carers who live out of the region or who have employment commitments.

As part of the efforts to retain foster carers, and as recognition for the commitment to fostering, the fostering service holds several family events

throughout the year. This year saw a picnic in the park to mark the King's Coronation; a large-scale family fun day; a private hire of the Air Trail facility at Tees Barrage and a Christmas party.

These events are free for fostering families to attend and include children who foster. The cost of the events is covered by the fundraising activities of the fostering service. The main source of fundraising comes from sponsorship of members of the team, elected members and foster carers and their families taking part in the annual Boxing Day Dip at Redcar Sea front.

There has been a concerted effort to ensure foster carers feel valued and acknowledge their continued commitment through the re-introduced newsletter and 'Sparkle Moments', which celebrate individual carers for their efforts.

Our priorities as identified in the recruitment and retention strategy 2021-24 were:

- Increase the number of foster carer enquiries by delivering an effective recruitment campaign
- Increase the number of successful assessments by supporting prospective foster carers through the application process.
- Maximise retention by providing excellent support service to foster carers and their families.

Our priorities moving forward into 2025 will echo these, however we will work in collaboration with Foster with North East and the twelve North East Local Authorities.

#### Temporary Approvals and Connected Carer Assessments:

During the year there has been significant activity in relation to the temporary approval of foster carers. There have been 64 temporary approvals approved during the year with 15 being approved as connected carers following Panel. A significant number of carers have obtained legal orders, including Child Arrangement Orders/Special Guardianship Orders prior to being fully approved as foster carers.



### Use of Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's)

During the past year there has been a continued need for Independent Foster agency placement with 10 more IFA placements required than the previous year. Part of the reason for this continued use is the number of children who continue to enter the care system and the bedroom capacity of our in-house foster carers.

For a small group of children, with very complex needs, it has been difficult to identify foster carers either in house or via Independent Fostering Agencies following referral through the Tees Valley Procurement Framework. The local authority has demonstrated an ability to work creatively to develop safe, bespoke care arrangements, working with existing foster carers and staff to provide short term care to children while longer term care arrangements are identified.

**TABLE 2: Children placed with in house carers versus in IFA.**

| <b>Date</b> | <b>No. in-house</b> | <b>% in-house</b> | <b>No. IFA</b> | <b>% IFA</b> | <b>TOTAL numbers</b> |
|-------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------|----------------------|
| March 2018  | <b>85</b>           | 52%               | <b>79</b>      | 48%          | <b>164</b>           |
| March 2019  | <b>91</b>           | 54%               | <b>78</b>      | 46%          | <b>169</b>           |
| March 2020  | <b>130</b>          | 65%               | <b>70</b>      | 35%          | <b>200</b>           |
| March 2021  | <b>120</b>          | 69%               | <b>55</b>      | 31%          | <b>175</b>           |
| March 2022  | <b>109</b>          | 63%               | <b>64</b>      | 36%          | <b>174</b>           |
| March 2023  | <b>123</b>          | 69%               | <b>57</b>      | 32%          | <b>177</b>           |
| March 2024  | <b>100</b>          | 62%               | <b>63</b>      | 37%          | <b>167</b>           |

**TABLE 3: Approved Mainstream Carers and placements generated.**

|                                | <b>2018-2019</b> | <b>2019-2020</b> | <b>2020-2021</b> | <b>2021-2022</b> | <b>2022-2023</b> | <b>2023-2024</b> |
|--------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| New mainstream carers approved | <b>15</b>        | <b>18</b>        | <b>18</b>        | <b>16</b>        | <b>10</b>        | <b>9</b>         |
| Placements created             | <b>22</b>        | <b>30</b>        | <b>35</b>        | <b>35</b>        | <b>16</b>        | <b>15</b>        |

## Existing Foster Carers

The Service benefits from having a broad range of carers, with a vast amount of life experience. Foster carers are provided with effective supervision and support from a Supervising Social Worker. Foster carers are encouraged to meet with other foster carers, via informal monthly coffee mornings, for mutual support and development and we have a group of foster carers who are identified as mentors, to assist new carers as they settle into their role. Most of our foster carers live within the Borough itself, however, we do have carers (including connected carers) who live in adjacent/ nearby borough's but have been attracted to foster for Redcar and Cleveland.

The Fostering Service seeks to match children with foster carers who have appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding of children's needs. It is recognised that foster carers require appropriate levels of information about children to ensure they can provide appropriate care.

Foster carers receive good support and supervision by Supervising Social Workers who understand the impact of trauma and poor attachment upon children.

Annual Foster Carer Reviews are undertaken by an Independent Reviewing Officer in accordance with appropriate legislation, fostering regulations and guidance, and reflect on the foster carer's suitability to continue fostering and approval.

Where allegations are made in relation to foster carers the Fostering Service offers carers access an independent advice service through The Fostering Network. It is dependent on the foster carer themselves as to whether they wish to access this service. The Fostering Team Manager oversees and monitors the progress of any safeguarding allegations and ensures that there is appropriate consultation with professionals and that foster carers are kept informed of the progress of any investigation and its outcome.

The Fostering Service keeps its fees and allowances under review and has continued to pay allowances in line with the National Minimum Allowance levels and offers fees and incentives.

## 6. Training Of Carers

Redcar and Cleveland Fostering Service recognises the importance of high-quality training and development opportunities, with clear expectations of training outlined in the Standards of Care protocol, which all foster carers have access to. There has been an increase in carers accessing training, which continues to improve due to training being a key focus within foster carers supervisions and the annual review process. This includes carers who have traditionally been 'hard to reach' now acknowledging the requirement to engage with their Personal Development Plan.

Foster carers are offered access to:

- At least 1 monthly training session (either face to face or on Teams).
- Access to courses via The Foster Care Training Hub
- Monthly coffee mornings in Redcar and Skelton Green.
- Quarterly Foster Carer Team meetings in Redcar, Loftus and out of hours virtually.
- Therapeutic parenting support groups

The Service recognises that many children who are in foster care have complex needs associated with adverse childhood experiences and trauma, and so has invested in Trauma Informed Therapeutic parenting training for carers.

Foster carers are now offered spaces on Trauma Informed Therapeutic Parenting. This course looks at how trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) impacts on children and young people and explores the principles of P.A.C.E model / therapeutic parenting strategies. Foster carers also have access to a follow up Therapeutic Support Group.

A cohort of foster carers accessed the 6-week course Foundations to Attachments through our in-house therapy team and a further cohort attended the 18-week course 'Nurturing Attachments'. This 18-session group-based programme is DDP-informed based upon the Dyadic Developmental Therapy and Practice model developed by Dan Hughes (2009, 2011). It is underpinned by an understanding of Attachment Theory and the impact of trauma on children's development and security. Within the Nurturing Attachments programme this theory is linked to the 'House Model of Parenting' which aims to help parents to develop their parenting skills matched to the emotional and behavioural needs of the children. Carers are encouraged to support behaviour but within the much broader context of meeting emotional needs. Carers are helped to build trust and security with the children, emotionally

connecting with them in ways that increases their sense of safety and enhances their development.

There is also an increase in carers accessing DDP with our in-house therapeutic service to support foster carer retention and placement stability. DDP is a therapy, parenting approach and model for practice that uses what we know about attachment and developmental trauma to help children and families with their relationships. Developing trust with the help of PACE, DDP provides interventions for families and those who support them.

The use of virtual reality headsets continues to be offered within training courses, providing carers with enhanced insights into the lives of children who have experienced adverse childhood experiences.

## **6.1 Online Training**

The fostering service offers carers access to The Foster Care Training Hub, which is an online platform that enables foster carers to complete training online. Alongside the Foster Care Training Hub, foster carers can also access free training under 'The Big Initiative' which includes parenting courses and wellbeing courses.

### Support Groups / Team Meetings / Coffee Mornings

In 2023, the fostering service renewed the offer of support groups to foster carers. It was felt as though the way in which support groups operated did not meet the needs of foster carers, or of the Local Authority. As such, a 're-brand' of support was launched in 2023.

The Fostering Service facilitates monthly coffee mornings in Redcar and Skelton Green. These coffee mornings are an informal setting for carers to come and extend their support network of other foster carers. Different members of the fostering service attend the coffee mornings to develop relationships between carers and the fostering service.

In 2023, the fostering service launched quarterly Foster Carer Team Meetings. These run in Redcar, Loftus and one virtually out of hours. There is an expectation that carers attend a set number of these meetings as per the Standards of Care protocol. The meetings are more formal with an agenda circulated to foster carers ahead of time and provide foster carers with updates from the fostering service, dates for diaries and any other information which requires sharing. Foster Carers are also given the opportunity to add to the agenda in respect of issues they would like to raise. After each 3 meetings are facilitated, notes and actions are circulated to all carers.

## **7. Other Service Developments:**

### **7.1 Mockingbird.**

Our first Mockingbird constellation was launched in September 2022. Unfortunately, the constellation was paused in December of 2022 after the resignation of the Hub Home Carer. In May 2023, the constellation was launched again, with new Hub Home Carers in place. Since the re-launch, the constellation has gone from strength to strength, despite challenges with the relationship between the Local Authority and The Fostering Network.

To date, the constellation is supporting 6 Satellite families and benefits 14 Children in Our Care, offering them the support an extended family would bring.

In 2024, the Local Authority received funding from the Department for Education to launch another Constellation. Currently, satellite families have been identified however the challenge of appointing a Hub Home Carer with the right skills and attributes, and availability remains. The fostering service is hopeful that a second constellation will launch before Autumn 2024.

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## **7.2 Permanence and Leaving Care:**

### **Planning and Matching Meeting**

In addition to the Fostering Panel, the Fostering Service held a bi-monthly Planning and Matching Meeting which considered the long-term plans for children in our care, and long-term fostering matches with their foster carers. It has been identified that moving forward this process will sit within the remit of the Fostering Panel.

### **Staying Put Arrangements**

Staying Put arrangements provide young people with stability at a key point of their life beyond the age of 18 years. At the end of the year there were 6 active Staying Put arrangements, with 3 of those 6 becoming a Staying Put arrangement from a fostering arrangement within the year. The Service seeks to promote the benefits of Staying Put and there are good links with Target, Leaving Care Service in ensuring that staying put arrangements are appropriately supported.

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## **Action Planning:**

The Fostering Service has an action plan as part of its Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention Strategy to ensure that recruitment and retention remains an important focus.

During the year ahead it is planned that key objectives for Recruitment and Retention will be to:

1. Increase the number of foster carer enquiries through a targeted recruitment campaign.
2. Continued the work around our fee payment model to foster carers and work together with FwNE to consider the implication of fee harmonisation across the 12 north east local authorities.

Generating more recruitment enquiries about fostering is the first step to increasing the number of foster carers. To do this we need an ongoing marketing campaign at both a community and borough wide level. Whilst we need to increase foster carers overall, we specifically need more foster carers to look after older children, sibling groups and children with a disability or higher-level needs.

We also need to recruit more foster carers to provide respite placements; this will support our full-time foster carers to maintain placement stability. Being a respite foster carer is a great option for people who want to foster but cannot commit on a long-term basis.

3. Increase the number of successful assessments by supporting prospective foster carers through the application process via the regional hub.

Deciding to foster is an important decision for any family which involves a lengthy application and assessment process. We will work with Foster with Northeast to support prospective foster carers to make an application.

We will review the information that we provide throughout the assessment process to ensure that prospective foster carers understand the process and timescale. We aspire to provide feedback to prospective carers during the assessment process and will provide explanations of any emerging issues which may preclude approval.

4. Maximise retention by providing excellent support services to foster carers and their families.

It is vital that we provide excellent services to support our foster carers and their families so that they can continue fostering. This includes ongoing training, access to advice and social activities for Children in Our Care and children who foster. We want our foster carers to feel valued, listened to and involved in decisions about the children they look after. We will put in place clear mechanisms for foster carers to share their views and use their feedback to strengthen our support services.

The restructuring of the team (assessment and supervisory) will allow members of the team to remain focused on meeting the needs of Kinship carers, mainstream carers and the children they care for, to promote better outcomes for Children in Our Care.

Objectives for the Fostering Panel will be:

1. To retain Panel members.
2. To involve Panel members in the consideration of changes to assessment and review forms and what is presented to Panel.
3. To further refine Panel's quality assurance and feedback processes.
4. To continue to offer training to ensure Panel Members are trauma informed.

Wider objectives of the Fostering Service:

1. To take forward a reorganisation of team structure to allow specialisation and focus on discrete areas of work, including assessment and support.
2. To implement revised assessment and review documents.

The fostering team are committed to completing robust and in-depth assessments of prospective carers and to reviewing the approval of carers both annually and following any significant event which would warrant an early review. The team works hard to review the documents to ensure that the information gathered is relevant and accurate and can help in the recruitment of carers who can meet the needs of the service.

3. To implement a revised fees and allowances structure.



The fostering team will continually review fostering fees and allowances to ensure that the fees are in line with Government guidance. The team will continue work with FwNE regarding a potential regional harmonisation of fees.

4. To review all policies and procedures and update the Recruitment and Retention Strategy.
5. For the Supervising Social workers to attend training with CoramBaaf to refresh and update assessment skills, knowledge and experience on best practice
6. To develop and refine the LCS (Childrens System) Fostering module

This is the database and recording system used for all foster carer activity, which requires development to support consistency of recording, and the ability to produce reports to inform practice and performance.

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