FOSTER CARER HANDBOOK

SECTION 1
Section 1

LEGAL/DEPARTMENTAL/PROCEDURAL

(1.1) Introduction to Foster Carer Handbook

- Introduction
- Controlled Copy
- Amendments
- Keeping The Handbook Up-To-Date
- Electronic Version
- If You Cease To Foster

(1.2) Understanding of Legislation, National Minimum Standards and Regulations

- Introduction
- Key Legislation
- Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (2011)
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- The Fostering Services (England) Regulations (2011)
- Statutory guidance. Delegation of Authority; Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2; Care Planning, Placement and Case Review July 2013
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services Regulations (Miscellaneous amendments) 2013
- Statutory Guidance For Family and Friends, Department for Education 2011 and 2013
- Assessment and approval of Foster Carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations – July 2013

(1.3) Statement of Purpose

- Introduction
- Aims And Objectives
- Website
- Review Of The Statement Of Purpose
- Related Documents - Statement Of Purpose Fostering Service 2013-2014 – Appendix 1
(1.4) **Children and Young People’s Guide**

- Introduction
- There Are Two Children And Young Peoples Guides
- Review Of The Children’s Guide
- Gateshead Care Pledge

**RELATED DOCUMENTS:**

- “Do you live with a Foster Family (Children aged 3-10 years)
- “What’s it like to be in Foster Care?” (Young people aged 10 years plus)
- Gateshead Care Pledge - Appendix 1 Section 1.3
- Parents Guide to the Fostering Service
- Looked After Children’s Team-Information about who we are and what we do (Available from the Looked After Team)

(1.5) **Foster Carer Agreement**

- Introduction
- Foster Care Agreement

**RELATED DOCUMENTS**

All sections of the Foster Carer Handbook are relevant to this agreement

**TEMPLATE 1 – Foster Care Agreement (All Foster Carers)**

- Terms and conditions of Approval
- Support and Training
- Training and Induction Standards
- Review and Termination of Approval of Foster Carers
- Termination of the Foster Care Agreement
- Placement of Children
- Legal Liabilities of Foster Carers
- Representation and Complaints
- Obligations on the Foster Carer
- Behaviour Management and Absence from the Foster Home
- Confidentiality
- Placement Plan (individual placements)
- Protection of Children Placed with Foster Carers
- Co-operating with Ofsted Chief Inspector
- Keeping the Local Authority Informed
- Entitlement of Skill Level Payment
- Signing the Foster Carer Agreement

(1.6) **Exemptions to the usual Fostering Limit/Changes to Approval**

- Introduction
- Exemption Of The Usual Fostering Limit
- Changes to Approval

**RELATED DOCUMENTS**

- Template 1 – Exemption to Usual Fostering Limit Form
- Template 2 – Changes to Approval

(1.7) **Confidentiality**

- Introduction
- Sharing Information
- Foster Carer Responsibilities
- Telephone Conversations
- Information On Computers
- Internet
- Breaches Of Confidentiality
- Legislative Requirements

RELATED DOCUMENTS
- Foster Carer Agreement – Section 1 Handbook

(1.8) Conflict of Interest
- Introduction
- Actions

RELATED DOCUMENTS
- Skills Level Document – Section 2 Handbook
- Skills Level Guidance – Section 2 Handbook
- Significant Changes Policy – Section 1 Handbook

TEMPLATES
- TEMPLATE 1 Conflict of Interest Form
- TEMPLATE 2 Decision Letter – Conflict of Interest

(1.9) Significant Changes
- Introduction
- Significant Changes

RELATED DOCUMENTS
- Skills Level Document – Section 2 Handbook
- Skills Level Guidance – Section 2 Handbook
- Conflict of Interest Policy – Section 1 Handbook
- Foster Carer Agreement – Section 1 Handbook

(1.10) Foster Carer Identity Cards
- Introduction
- Process

(1.11) Complaints, Compliments and Comments
- Introduction
- Departmental Complaints
- Procedure
- Stage 1 – Resolution
- Stage 2 – Investigation
- Stage 3 – Review Panel
- Independent Review Mechanism

RELATED DOCUMENTS
- www.gateshead.gov.uk/children-advocacy
- Children’s Services Complaints Procedure (available from SSW)
- Complaints leaflet available from Social Care Customer Services Gateshead Council or available online
- Children’s Services Complaints FAQ (available online)
- Complaints and compliments form (available online)
- Got a problem, issue or complaint (leaflet for children with disabilities, available from Gateshead Council)
- Got a problem, issue or complaint? Get it sorted! (Leaflet available from Looked After Team Gateshead Council)
(1.12) Foster Carers – Movement Between Agencies

- Introduction
- Key principles including aims
- Brief procedural outline for Gateshead Foster Carer/s wishing to change Agency & Timescales

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Recruitment Policy/Supervising Social Worker Handbook
- Transfer of Foster Carers Protocol England (21014)

(1.13) Family, Friends and Connected Persons

- Family And Friends And Connected Persons Fostering Policy – Overview
- Appendix 1 - Gateshead Council’s Family, Friends and Connected Person’s Policy

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Skills Level Document Section 2 Handbook
- Skills Level Guidance Section 2 Handbook
- Fostering Service Regulations, Standards and Guidance 2011
- Statutory Guidance for Family and Friends, Department for Education 2011 and 2013
- Section 2 Payment for Skills/ Financial support and information Foster Carer Handbook
INTRODUCTION

Following a recommendation of a Foster Carer’s approval from the Agency Decision Maker, a Handbook will be issued.

This Foster Carer Handbook contains the Fostering Service’s departmental policies and procedures for Foster Carers including important documentation concerning Payment for Skills. It also incorporates within the policies necessary legislative aspects and changes as a result of the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards and Regulations 2011, The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 and The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services Regulations 2013. Additionally further statutory guidance issued during 2013 along with good practice guidance inform these policies and procedures.

CONTROLLED COPY

The Foster Carer Handbook has a controlled copy number (stated on the Amendment Record Sheet). This is to ensure that you receive all up to date versions of the policies and procedures. This also enables the Fostering Service to make enquiries on your behalf if you believe you have not received new updates. This can be checked against the controlled copy number of your Handbook.

AMENDMENTS

When a Foster Carer receives an amendment to the Handbook, this amendment should be updated as soon as possible. This may involve replacing an existing policy, or adding a new policy. The Amendment Record Sheet located near the front of the Handbook should be signed and dated by the Foster Carer.

Where an amendment replaces an existing policy, the older version of the policy should be removed. You will receive instructions with amendments.

KEEPING THE HANDBOOK UP-TO-DATE

Please ensure that you keep your Handbook up to date. This is of vital importance as all Foster Carers must be working within the most current policies and procedures.
Section 1.1

Electronic Version

The Handbook is available in a PDF version via e-mail on request.

IF YOU CEASE TO FOSTER

Please return the Handbook to your Fostering Supervising Social Worker or delete PDF version from your system.
INTRODUCTION


KEY LEGISLATION


- **STATUTORY GUIDANCE. DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY; AMENDMENTS TO THE CHILDREN ACT 1989 GUIDANCE AND REGULATIONS. VOLUME 2; CARE PLANNING, PLACEMENT AND CASE REVIEW JULY 2013**

- **THE CARE PLANNING, PLACEMENT AND CASE REVIEW AND FOSTERING SERVICES REGULATIONS (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) 2013**

The above guidance and regulations builds upon the responsibilities of Local Authorities under Part 3 of the Children Act 1989, which concerns the provisions of Local Authority support for children and families. In particular the guidance describes how Local Authorities should carry out their responsibilities in relation to care planning, placement and case review for looked after children.

Sections relating to the placement of children is of particular relevance to Fostering Services and details regarding the Placement Plan and delegated areas of responsibility when a child is in a foster placement are covered within this handbook.


This guidance sets out the functions and responsibilities of Local Authorities in relation to Fostering Services under Parts 3, 7 and 8 of the Children Act 1989. It also sets out the responsibilities arising from the Children Act 2004 and the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 in relation to Fostering Services.
Section 1.2

It is issued as guidance under Section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, which requires Local Authorities in exercising their social services functions, to act under the general guidance of the Secretary of State.

This guidance is designed to provide a framework for practice in providing a Fostering Service, which emphasises the importance of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all looked after children.

It is not intended to be a detailed guide to good practice but to set out the core requirements of those providing Fostering Services, in order to deliver a responsive and quality service for some of our most vulnerable children.

This should be read in conjunction with Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011.

FOSTERING SERVICES NATIONAL MINIMUM STANDARDS (2011)

This document contains the National Minimum Standards (NMS) applicable to the provision of Fostering Services. The NMS, together with Regulations relevant to the placement of children in foster care such as the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act (2000) for the conduct of Fostering Services.

The NMS for Fostering Services are issued by the Secretary of State under section 23 of the Care Standards Act (2000).

The standards are issued for use by Ofsted, who take them into account in the inspection of Fostering Services. They will also be important in other ways. They provide a basis for the induction and training of staff and Carers; they can be used by parents and children as a guide to what they should expect a Fostering Service to provide and to do as a minimum.

Minimum standards do not mean standardisation of provision. They aim to enable, rather than prevent, individual providers to develop their own particular ethos and approach based on evidence that this is the most appropriate way to meet the child’s needs.

It is intended that the standards will be used to focus on securing positive welfare, health and education outcomes for children, and reducing risks to their welfare and safety.

FOSTERING SERVICES (ENGLAND) REGULATIONS AND STATUTORY GUIDANCE

The NMS are underpinned by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.
Section 1.2

These Regulations are made under the Children Act 1989 and the Care Standards Act 2000. They provide a regulatory framework for Fostering Services, by placing duties on the Local Authority.

These Regulations are statutory requirements. These regulations revoke and replace the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Further statutory guidance and regulations affecting Fostering Services was issued in 2013 and any changes have been included in the revised Foster Carer Handbook, updated as of June 2014. (see Related Documents below)

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- The Fostering Services (England) Regulations (2011)
- Statutory Guidance, Delegation of Authority; Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations. Volume 2; Care Planning, Placement and Case Review July 2013
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services Regulations (Miscellaneous amendments) 2013
- Statutory Guidance For Family and Friends, Department for Education 2011 and statutory guidance in 2013
- Assessment and approval of Foster Carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations – July 2013
INTRODUCTION

The Fostering Service has a clear Statement of Purpose, which is available to, and understood by, Foster Carers, staff and children and young people and is reflected in policies, procedures and guidance. It is available to the Local Authority and any parent or person with parental responsibility.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims and the objectives of the Statement of Purpose are child focused and show how the service will meet outcomes for children and achieves placement stability.

It explains the facilities and services the department provides along with systems in place to ensure the service meets those aims and objectives, in partnership with Foster Carers, education and health services and other agencies and professionals; and in partnership with children and young people and their families.

WEBSITE

The Statement of Purpose is available on the Gateshead Council Website.

REVIEW OF THE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Statement of Purpose is kept under review. It will be revised as appropriate, and on an annual basis.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Related Documents - Statement Of Purpose Fostering Service 2013 - 2014 Appendix 1
FOSTERING SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE
CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. National Legislative and Policy Framework
3. Service Aims and Objectives
4. Types of Placements Provided
5. The Structure of the Service
6. Commitment to children and families
7. Recruitment of new Foster Carers
8. The Fostering Panel
10. Service Performance
11. Complaints and their Outcome
12. Standards
13. Information on Registration Authority
1. **INTRODUCTION**

   It is a requirement of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, that each fostering Agency produces a Statement of Purpose, including it’s aims and objectives, a description of the service it provides and the facilities that are provided. This Statement of Purpose gives an outline of those requirements and also how the service is managed. It shows the policy and performance framework that underpins our work and outlines how we aim to achieve good outcomes for all children looked after by Gateshead Council. It also demonstrates the systems we have in place to recruit, train, supervise and support Foster Carers.

   **The Statement of Purpose will be made available upon request to**

   - all members of staff
   - any Foster Carer or prospective Foster Carer of the Fostering Service
   - any child/young person placed with a Foster Carer by the Fostering Service
   - the parent of any such child

   It is also available on Gateshead Council’s website

   The Fostering Service Provider must ensure that the Fostering Service is at all times conducted in a manner that is consistent with its Statement of Purpose. The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed, updated and modified whenever necessary, and as a minimum this will be done annually.

   The Statement of Purpose is logged with Ofsted and they will be notified within 28 days of any amendments made.

   **Mission Statement of the Fostering Service**

   The Fostering Service aims to provide safe and secure care for children and young people, to enable them to achieve the best possible outcomes for life.

2. **NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK**

   Gateshead Council Fostering Service is run in accordance with the principles outlined in the:

   - Children Act 1989
   - Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
   - Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (2011)
   - Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)
Section 1.3

Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

The Disability and Equality Act 2010

The Human Rights Act 1998

The Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care (2007)

Statutory Guidance and Regulations issued in 2013 related to fostering

Gateshead Council Fostering Service strives to follow the best practices outlined in the UK National Standards for Foster Care and Code of Practice on the recruitment, assessment, approval training and support of Foster Carers 1999

3. SERVICE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The Fostering Service is part of Gateshead Council’s Looked after Children’s Service based within the Social Work – Children and Families Department. The overall aim of the Fostering Service is to safeguard and promote the welfare, safety and individual needs of looked after children, through the provision of a high quality fostering placements, where the child’s health needs are met, educational achievement is promoted and by the council fulfilling its corporate parenting responsibilities each looked after child is enabled to achieve his/her full potential.

The overall aim of Gateshead Council Fostering Service is to provide, develop and deliver a comprehensive and high quality service to meet the life long needs of children and their families/usual Carers. This is undertaken by the implementation of a skill based approach whereby children are matched with Foster Carers who have the appropriate level of skill.

| High Quality | Continually improving standards of practice and service in line with legislative responsibilities and National Care Standards, targets and frameworks to achieve best value and best possible outcomes for children. |
| Integrated   | Developing a partnership approach delivering responsive services on a branch, inter Agency, voluntary, independent, local, regional and national basis. |
| Equality and Diversity | Ensuring that services are provided in a manner that promotes equal opportunities and do not discriminate against any individual on the basis of age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic origin or culture. |
Section 1.3

The Fostering Service provides between 75 and 85 per cent of the placements needed by Gateshead Council’s children’s services with its range of skilled, approved Foster Carers who have been trained to provide safe and nurturing care for looked after children and with an increasing number of Family and Friends Foster Carers.

During 2013 Gateshead Payment for Skills has been introduced in order to meet the placement needs of children and match these with the skill level of Foster Carers. Its foundation documents, the Skills Level Documents, ranging from Levels 1-4, in addition to the accompanying Guidance and Policies, sets out the range of provision and Care Objectives for children. These documents also outline the Criteria and skills needed in order to ensure placement needs are being met.

The following aims and principles guide the practice of the service:-

- The child’s welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of their care including their need for placement stability.

- Whenever possible children are kept within their own community, Family and Friendship networks.

- Children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefiting from excellent corporate parenting.

- Children should be placed with Foster Carers who have the relevant level of skill to meet their varied needs in order to maintain placement stability and improve their life chances.

- Foster Carers will be rewarded financially for the work that they do and the contribution that they make.

- Every child’s needs, wishes and feelings should be listened to and taken into account when decisions are being made regarding them.

- Children and young people have the right to continuity in their lives in order to enable them to develop and maintain positive self esteem and identity, promote their physical and mental wellbeing and achieve their full potential.

- Each child should be valued as an individual and given personalised support in line with their individual needs and background in order to develop their identity, self confidence and self worth.

- Siblings will be placed together wherever possible and appropriate.
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- The cultural, religious, racial and linguistic identities of children, their parents and Carers must be respected in the development of the foster care service and in making, supervising and supporting placements.

- Foster care is a partnership between a Foster Carer, a Supervising Social Worker and the child’s Social Worker, all working together with the child’s birth family and other relevant professionals as a team to help the child to reach their full potential.

- Openness and transparency is a key feature in how the service operates with an evidence base which is founded upon a competence framework.

- Foster Carer are expected to prepare for their role and are responsible for making use of development and training opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge, in addition to making a significant contribution to the evidence and competence framework.

- The reflective supervisory and supervision process between a Foster Carer, a Supervising Social Worker is key in ensuring and maintaining good quality care for children.

- The purpose and goals of each placement and the responsibilities of all parties must be stated in writing and be made available to all the parties.

- Formal decisions relating to individual children in foster care should be taken in consultation with them, their parents and the Foster Carers.

- Foster Carers, Social Workers, birth family members, looked after children and the children of Foster Carers must be given the opportunity to record their views and feedback about placements.

- Foster Carers, birth family members, children and young people should be able to challenge decisions and plans proposed by the Fostering Service and are made aware of how to make a complaint.

- Young people leaving care must be offered Agency support that recognises that all young people need preparation and support into adulthood.

- Consulting and learning regularly from those that are in receipt of services through comments, compliments or complaints and having regular meetings with Foster Carers, senior Managers and elected members.

- Consulting regularly with children who are fostered, using a variety of methods to ensure their voice is heard.
Section 1.3

- The Fostering Service should make every effort to place children with Foster Carers approved by Gateshead in order to promote placement stability through the payment for skills structure.

- Promoting team and personal development and training for both staff and Foster Carers.

- Ensuring all practice promotes equal opportunities for all.

In addition to the above the content and spirit of the Foster Carer Charter is embedded in service delivery and in doing so our Foster Carers are engaged, supported and fully consulted at every stage of a child’s placement with them, to enable them to achieve best outcomes for each and every child in their care.

4. TYPES OF PLACEMENTS PROVIDED

The Fostering Service recruits and approves Carers to look after children aged 0 – 18 years. Many of the children placed have experienced difficulties including abuse or neglect before being fostered. Some children present with very challenging behaviour, special needs or complex health conditions, and therefore the Agency needs to provide a range of placement types to meet these diverse needs. Children are placed with Foster Carers who have the appropriate level of skill to provide for their level of need. The Skill Levels are from levels 1-4, Level 4 Foster Carers providing for the most complex placements.

The following types of placement are offered:

- Short term - Foster Carers are approved as short term Carers with a focus on the task centred nature of their work. These placements are not intended to be long term or permanent. Most children will return home or move to a permanent fostering placement or adoption. Occasionally a short term placement can be re-assessed and approved as a suitable long term placement to support the best interests of a child.

- Long term - For children who are unable to live with their birth family and adoption is not in their best interest long term fostering may the right placement choice. Foster Carers are approved at panel and then matched by the service to a particular child/children.

- Home from Home – Foster Carers are assessed and approved to provide short breaks for disabled children. Following approval they are matched and linked to named children.
Section 1.3

- Parent and child assessment – the Fostering Service looks to provide this service with experienced Carers. The assessment period is generally 12 weeks, with the Foster Carer directly contributing to the parenting assessment. As placements are made with Foster Carers the age of the parent is generally restricted to 18 years or under, however this can be negotiated with the Foster Carer.

- Single occupancy placements where Carers work intensely with the child and the team given the level of complexities the child may have in terms of behaviour.

- Short break – Carers are assessed as being able to offer time limited placements to support other Foster Carers with planned short breaks. This might be required to meet the particular needs of the child and/or the fostering family.

- Family, Friends or Connected persons – These placements occur when people who are connected to a child or young person put themselves forward to care for a looked after child. The Fostering Service undertakes an assessment of the suitability of the Carer to continue to provide care for a named child/children.

All Carers receive a fostering allowance, which is in line with the recommended national minimum allowances published by the Government.

Other payments relating to meeting the child’s individual needs are met by the service in accordance with the Finance Policy and this information is provided to all Foster Carers and re-circulated after any amendments or annually if no amendments have been made.

During 2013 the service introduced the new fee payments system for Foster Carers. All Foster Carers will be offered the opportunity to receive a fee for their skills and there is a fee for each child placed. This is primarily a task, skill and competency based model, with the opportunity for all Carers to progress within the model and be paid proportionately for the task they undertake. Levels 3 and 4 Foster Carers will care for the most complex placements. Full details can be found within the Payment for Skills documentation.

Support Services

The Fostering Service maintains the following links in order to provide relevant support to Foster Carers, children, young people and their families, with the aim of achieving best outcomes for looked after children in Gateshead.

- The Referral and Assessment team and Safeguarding and Care Planning teams, in relation to requests for foster placements and making Regulation 24 placements. (See relevant policies i.e. Admissions policy and Family Friends and Connected Persons Policy).
The Looked After Children’s under 15 team for children who have plans to remain looked after.

The Looked After Children's over 15 team, who provide pathway planning for children, transitions to adult life and the Staying Put scheme.

The Adoption Service in relation to Foster Carers whose children are moving on to adoption and for children who have been unable to achieve adoption and need long term fostering placements.

Children with Disabilities team who provide social work support for children and young people aged 0 – 18 years. Close links are maintained with this team as a number of children and families are linked to the Home from Home scheme.

The Children’s Rights Officer, independent advocacy support and independent visitor provision to ensure views of children and young people are requested, listened to and used to assist in service planning.

The contact service works with our Foster Carers and children to support parental contact.

Health - to promote the health care needs of looked after children and assessing the health of Foster Carers for initial and continued approval.

We have a range of dedicated health professionals to meet the needs of looked after children (LAC health team), who provide an annual report in relation to the work they undertake.

Specialist medical advice for children and Carers is available from the Consultant paediatrician, who acts as medical advisor to both the Fostering and Adoption Panel.

Specialist psychological advice and support from the child psychologist with specific responsibility for Looked After Children. Close links are maintained with CAMHS to ensure children can access a range of services when necessary.

The Fostering Service also has close links with the Social Work Therapy Team who take direct referrals to work with Looked After Children and their Carers.

Each looked after child has, as a minimum, an annual health assessment to ensure all health needs are managed

The implementation of the Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire has enabled the service to monitor the emotional well-being of Looked After Children.
Section 1.3

- Education - to ensure each child has a personal education plan and to monitor the effective co-ordination and planning for education placements.

- REALAC (raising educational achievement for looked after children) are actively involved with children and Foster Carers to ensure all children have appropriate education provision. They also help organise and host the annual celebrating achievement awards ceremony for looked after children.

- Education Explained training is also provided to Foster Carers from an educational psychologist. This aims to help them get a general understanding of the education system and some of the issues Looked after children might face in school.

- Emergency duty team provide telephone support outside of office hours to all Foster Carers.

- Corporate links, including safeguarding training, procurement, complaints, finance, marketing, press and publicity.

- Participation groups enable looked after children to raise issues, influence and shape service delivery and develop practice across all services. The Care pledge has been endorsed and was implemented by the Fostering Service.

- Elected members are part of the Looked After Overview and Scrutiny Committee and fostering report to them on an annual basis to update them on service delivery.

- Leisure services - all Looked After Children and members of foster families have Council Leisure cards and MAX cards, which provide free or reduced cost entry to museums and many other local attractions.

- Consultation and Support groups enable Foster Carers to be involved in developing the service as well as participating in training and peer support.

- The Youth and Play Service provide details of activities in the borough to increase the participation of children and young people in social activities and skills development projects.

- There is a wide range of training available to Carers and staff related to the developmental needs of children and the fostering task. This has received further investment and has been further developed in line with evidence requirements for Payment for Skills.
Section 1.3

- Fostering Services provided by Service Level Agreements with partner fostering Agencies are formally reviewed and take account of contractual requirements, objectives and quality issues.

5. STRUCTURE OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

The Fostering Service is part of the Social Work – Children and Families directorate. The Assistant Director for Children & Young People is responsible for the service and the Head of Children and Families and Young Offenders has direct line management responsibility for the Service Manager – Looked after Children.

The current structure of the Fostering Service, aims to provide a quality service that meets the current and projected service needs. There are 3 elements to the service;

- Admissions and Placements Service
- Short term duty team
- Long term/permanence team
MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE OF SOCIAL WORK – CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Strategic, Director

Frances Powell
Service Director, Social Work – Children & Families

Service Director, Children, Young People & Family Support

Service Director, Children’s Commissioning

Service Director, Learning & Schools

Director, Families Gateshead
Section 1.3

**Line Management/Delegation**

There are clear line management decision making structures between the Head of Service, Service Manager and Registered Manager.

**Staffing**

The service is lead by a qualified Social Worker who also has a management qualification, which was obtained in 2009.

The majority of the staff are qualified and registered Social Workers with the exception of 3 staff. They all have relevant qualifications associated with their roles - 1 teacher, 1 occupational therapist and 1 NVQ working with children and young people.

Social Workers hold either a DipSw or CQSW. Copies of staff qualifications, references, and DBS checks are kept on personnel files and the Fostering Service also maintains its own record of dates of DBS checks.

All staff receive regular supervision and annual Performance Appraisal Reviews.

The Fostering Service Manager is responsible for the supervision and performance appraisal of the Assistant Team Managers, Senior Practitioner and to 3 members of staff who support the team and the marketing and recruitment officer, as well as providing group supervision in the monthly team meetings for all staff.

The Fostering Service Manager is a member of the external resources panel, attending monthly meetings to review the placements of Gateshead Council looked after children, providing advice about fostering issues and the availability of in house fostering resources.

The Manager monitors, reviews and evaluates the operation of the Fostering Service and prepares strategic material, policy and procedure in accordance with legislation, statutory and departmental guidance.

The Fostering Service Manager acts as adviser to the Fostering Panel and with its members works on the development of panel’s practice.

The Assistant Team Managers support this work, leading the teams to ensure performance targets are met. They deputise in the absence of the Fostering Service Manager. Each Assistant Team Manager is responsible for the supervision and development of the Social Workers and staff in their teams. In addition they have responsibility for specific day-to-day practice issues, the fostering duty system, implementation of Payment for Skills, development of the permanence team, supervision of Agency and sessional workers and running preparation training and other project work.
6. COMMITMENT TO CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

By striving for improving placement stability, the Fostering Service will promote children's health, educational, emotional and social needs so that they develop self-confidence and a sense of self worth. This will include promoting a sense of their ethnicity and identity and meeting their cultural, religious and linguistic needs.

Children and young people will be treated with respect and dignity and will be protected from neglect, abuse and exploitation by the provision of safe placements.

All prospective foster care applicants will be subjected to stringent background checks, which include DBS checks, medical checks, personal references, and other statutory checks. The assessment of the skills and competencies of Foster Carers will be thorough to ensure appropriate motivation, personality and commitment are evident in order to ensure that children are respected and protected.

The service will assist children and young people to remain in contact with their birth families in the most appropriate way for their circumstances.

All children and young people have a right to be kept informed about what is happening in their lives and to participate in any decision making about them. The Agency will inform and involve children and young people in these processes according to their level of understanding and maturity. Children and young people’s wishes and feelings will be sought and taken seriously. Their age, level of understanding and maturity as well as any disabilities will be taken into account in deciding the most appropriate way to seek their views.

Commitment to Applicants

All applicants will be considered as potential Foster Carers. Assessment priority will be determined according to the needs of children and young people requiring placements and the current available resources. These details will be reflected in the operational plans of the recruitment strategy.

Applicants will be fully involved in their assessment process and will identify, collect and organise the evidence together with their assessing Social Worker to demonstrate that they meet the seven standards in fostering. The assessing Social Worker will ensure that the applicant(s) understand their responsibilities as Foster Carers during the assessment and also the evidence requirements which are needed to satisfy approval. The assessing Social Worker will additionally ensure that the prospective Foster Carer understands the evidence requirements regarding Skill Level which are needed concerning level of fee and will, along with their Manager, make a recommendation to the Fostering Panel.
Section 1.3

Gateshead Fostering Service operates within a framework of openness and transparency, along with an evidence base and applicants are entitled to information about decisions made about them together with the reasons for the decisions made, subject to Gateshead Council’s responsibility not to disclose confidential information about third parties. If an applicant disagrees with the recommendation of the Fostering Panel they have the right to appeal a recommendation either to the Agency or the Independent Review Mechanism within 28 days. They will receive written information following a panel recommendation.

Where possible conflict of interest issues exist, the Fostering Service Manager will review such issues on a case by case basis.

**Commitment to Approved Foster Carers**

The experience and views of Foster Carers will be valued and they will be fully involved in the planning and decision making around the children and young people with whom they are working.

Foster Carers will be treated with respect and consideration. Their practical needs relating to each placement will be addressed prior to or at the time of the placement. Social Workers will respect the Foster Carer’s family life whilst undertaking their necessary supervision duties.

In the event of an allegation being made against a Foster Carer, the Fostering Service will carry out an investigation according to Gateshead’s Child Protection procedures. Foster Carers will be kept informed at each stage of the process unless it is deemed that this will interfere with the investigation. All Carers will be given written confirmation of the outcome of any investigation. The Fostering Service will offer support to Foster Carers and provide independent support via the Fostering Network during any investigation. Any Foster Carer going through an investigation process will be reminded of these supports at the earliest opportunity. The Manager of the Fostering Service is responsible for ensuring that Foster Carers receive the support they require.

If a child’s placement is ended as a result of an allegation, Foster Carers who are in receipt of a reward element (fee) will continue to receive this during the investigation period.

All Gateshead Council Foster Carers have Fostering Network membership fees paid by the Fostering Service, which entitles Carers to free independent advice and legal representation. Carers can also access information through the Fostering Network Helpline.

Gateshead Council Fostering Service is committed to working in partnership with Foster Carers therefore Foster Carer representation is often requested for working parties and other planning and practice development groups.
Foster Carers are provided with a range of training and development opportunities to enable them to meet with other Carers, share experiences and develop their knowledge and skills. Continuous professional development training is available through an annual programme which offers training for all Carers, including Family and Friends and Connected persons Carers. All Gateshead Council Foster Carers are expected to undertake both minimum and mandatory requirements with regard to sessions of training, the levels of which vary and expectations increase through the Skill levels. Level 4 Foster Carers, for instance must undertake the most training, reflecting the increasing level of training needed to care for the most complex children. Training must be undertaken annually, which must include face to face training. Identifying individual training needs will form part of the regular discussions between Foster Carers and their Supervising Social Workers. Certificates are issued on completion of a course.

Foster Carers are also able to access the Gateshead Council Safeguarding Board training and are sent this training programme annually.

**Foster Carers Association for Carers in Gateshead Council**

The Foster Carers Association was set up in 2010. It has an elected chair and treasurer and members of the Foster Carers association. The main aim of the association is to represent the interests of Foster Carers. It also provides advice and guidance to all members and meets on a regular basis with the Fostering Service management team.

7. **RECRUITMENT OF NEW FOSTER CARERS**

A Market and Recruitment officer is appointed by the service, the aim being to increase the pool of approved Foster Carers, thus providing more in house foster placements for Gateshead Council’s looked after children. The marketing and recruitment officer produces an ongoing campaign in the press supported by community events to maintain a high profile and alert all sectors of the community to the need for local Foster Carers for Gateshead Council’s looked after children.

The strategy is accompanied by an annual service plan, which is amended as necessary throughout the year. The processes within the Fostering Service for recruitment, assessment and approval have been reviewed and streamlined in 2013.

Over the last 12 months the service has worked hard to recruit new Carers and progress is being made. A new recruitment process enables the Service to track the process with regard to prospective Carers from their initial enquiry through to approval, thus providing important recruitment statistical data such as timescales.
Section 1.3

The Fostering Service is now recruiting Foster Carers in line with the structure within the Payments for Skills structure whereby the skillbase and competence of each applicant will be assessed as well as their suitability to foster. This is a key component with regard to recruitment in order to ensure that resource shortfalls are met and that children receive good quality care. It is also anticipated that the introduction of a payment of a fee for all Foster Carers will improve the recruitment and retention of Foster Carers in a very competitive market.
Section 1.3
Foster Carer Enquiry & Recruitment Process Flow Chart

Enquiry made to Fostering Service (various avenues)
↓
Initial information taken and Fostering enquiry pack sent out
↓
Expression of Interest form returned and, if suitable, applicants invited to attend
↓
INFORMATION EVENING
↓
Decision to proceed to Home Screening made by Management Team within 5 working days
↓
If considered unsuitable, advised and counselled appropriately
↓
Home Screening visit arranged by allocated Social Worker
↓
HOME SCREENING VISIT
↓
If considered unsuitable, advised and counselled appropriately
↓
If considered suitable decision made to progress to Stage 1 of assessment. Stage 1 application form completed and returned.
↓
References requested & statutory checks completed
↓
Decision to proceed to Training made by Management Team within 5 days
↓
Prospective Foster Carer(s) invited to 3 day Skills to Foster Preparation Training
↓
Decision to proceed to Stage 2 of the Assessment made by Management Team.
↓
Fostering Application form completed and returned to Fostering Service
↓
Assessment allocated to Fostering Social Worker
↓
Visits to prospective Foster Carer(s) and family
↓
Completion of competency based Assessment
↓
Completed assessment presented to Fostering Panel
↓
If approved, await placement
Preparation & Training

Gateshead Council requires those interested in applying for approval as Foster Carers to participate in a series of group preparation sessions. The course is run in a relaxed manner using the applicant’s own experience alongside the training material.

The Assessment Process

In July 2013 a new stage assessment process was implemented.

The assessment of prospective Foster Carer’s suitability will take account of a range of safeguarding and checking processes designed to protect children from harm or exploitation.

Stage 1

All foster care applicants are required to provide proof of identity and to give written consent to a comprehensive range of enquiries, checks, reports and references being obtained by the Agency from other organisations or individuals. The requirement for DBS checks applies to all residents in the prospective Foster Carer’s household who are 16 years or over. Applicants are required to consent to medical information being provided after a medical examination.

Stage 2

All fostering assessments are undertaken or overseen by qualified Social Workers. Completed assessments are presented to the Fostering Panel for a recommendation prior to the Agency Decision Maker making a decision on the application.

Applicants have the opportunity to attend the Fostering Panel and are informed verbally and in writing of the outcome of their application.

Foster Carer Agreement

Foster Carers complete a written Agreement with the Fostering Service. By signing this they agree to comply with its terms in adherence with statutory requirements. This will also include agreement concerning the Care Objectives and Criteria/Expectations of the Skill Level for which they are/will be receiving payment.

Connected People/Connected Person

Staff within the whole service undertake assessments of potential.
Section 1.3

Where a placement has been made under regulation 24 of the Fostering Regulations 2011 and the person is a temporary Foster Carer for a period of up to 16 weeks, a qualified Social Worker will complete a full Foster Carer assessment of their suitability to be approved as a Connected Person Carer. In exceptional circumstances, a further period of assessment not extending beyond a further 8 weeks will be allowed.

Some cases will require an urgent assessment to be completed within tight timescales as part of court proceedings. In these instances approved independent Social Workers may be commissioned by the service to undertake this work.

Connected Person Carer are given written information about the assessment process which was updated in line with statutory guidance. On completion of a successful assessment, this is presented to the Fostering Panel for consideration of approval to care for a named child or children where there is a pre existing relationship.

Connected Person Carer receive the same level of support and supervision as other approved Foster Carers. They have equal access to all development and training opportunities and equipment and receive regular correspondence from the Fostering Service about different events. They receive the same level of maintenance allowance as all other Foster Carers. They also have the opportunity to be paid under the Payment for Skills Scheme if they are able to demonstrate they meet the criteria.

8. FOSTERING PANEL

Fostering Panel

The Gateshead Council Fostering Panel includes people with a wide range of experience and skills. The panel has an independent chair and vice chair. Panel members include representatives from education, health, the Fostering Service, the looked after children service, two councillors and independent members including Foster Carers from another Local Authority, fostering Social Workers from another Local Authority and a previously looked after young people. The panel advisor is the Fostering Service Manager. The panel also has a legal advisor who is based within the council.

The Fostering Panel implemented changes during 2011 in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

The Fostering Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker on:

- The suitability of prospective Foster Carers/review of approval.
- Whether long term fostering is in a child’s best interest.
Section 1.3

- The suitability of placements and matching for children and Carers for permanence.
- The level of Skill Level Payment
- Give advice and make recommendations on such other matters or cases as the Fostering Service provider may refer to it.

The Fostering Panel fulfil their responsibilities in relation to quality assurance and monitoring of fostering cases.

Suitability of Prospective Foster Carers Assessment and Review of Approval

The Fostering Service is responsible for the assessment of prospective Foster Carers. A Social Worker from the Fostering Team will undertake a comprehensive assessment of families wishing to foster.

The assessment is considered by the Fostering Panel, who make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker who will then consider whether or not approval will be made and also, in the event of an approval, a decision about Skill Level payment. The decision can be re-evaluated through an appeals process if the applicants choose to contest the decision.

The Fostering Placements Regulations require that Foster Carers are annually reviewed to consider their suitability to continue as approved Foster Carers. This will also review and give consideration to the Skill Level Payment. Additional reviews can be completed if there is a change of circumstances or as directed by the Fostering Panel or Fostering Service Manager or in accordance with departmental policy/guidance.

There is a clear policy and procedure for undertaking Foster Carer reviews with a tracking system so that reviews take place within the annual time scale. Foster Carer reviews collect in writing the views of everyone concerned with a placement and is evidence based. The papers are collated prior to the review meeting which is held in the Foster Carer's home. The meeting is chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer who is based in the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service.

All Foster Carers are invited to attend the panel and it is usual practice that they attend. They are sent in advance a guide to the Fostering Panel which explains the remit of panel and its processes.

Whether Long Term/Permanent alternative care is in the child’s best interests

The Social Worker of the child undertakes the assessment work relating to the child. The Fostering Panel considers the Social Worker's assessment information of the child's background and needs which will be part of any placement considerations. This includes issues around appropriate contact with any significant people within the child’s life, if it is in the child's best interest.
The Fostering Panel will consider all issues related to the proposed plan for the child and make a recommendation. The Agency Decision Maker will then consider the Fostering Panel’s recommendation.

Suitability of Matching Placements

Information is provided to the Fostering Panel, indicating matching considerations of children with families. The panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker, who will consider ratifying the panel’s recommendation and whether or not approval shall be given.

Panel Process

Since 2012 due to the increased business at panel there are now 2 panels per month. Each panel has a core membership and can also draw on the Central List when additional members are required.

Every panel member has an annual review undertaken by the panel chair and Agency advisor. The Panel Chairs review is undertaken by the Agency Decision Maker.

In 2012 a protocol for applicants was developed to try and make their experience less daunting.

Information about panel membership is currently being revised, which will be available for everyone attending panel to read.

Panel also ask for feedback from everyone who attends. This information is collated and used to inform panel development.

Panel has revised its working to ensure good time keeping and a clear focus on cases. The panel discusses all the cases, formulating questions for applicants prior to their allocated time slot, with each panel member making a contribution to the questions.

These questions are then given to the applicants ten minutes before they are due to attend panel so that they can formulate their answers. This approach to panel business has proved successful to ensure all cases receive adequate time and attention and with the result that most applicants are seen on or close to their allocated time slot.

The panel makes recommendations which are passed to the Agency Decision Maker who is the Assistant Director of Children’s Services. She will receive a final copy of panel minutes within 7 days to make her determination. All Carers who attend panel receive the outcome of the panel meeting in writing.
Section 1.3

If a Foster Carer’s approval is terminated the reason for this will be made clear in the minutes and will be for one of the following:

- Resignation
- Retirement
- Standard of Care Issues

Following a panel recommendation which proposes termination of approval the Foster Carers will receive written notification and will be advised of their right to appeal to either the Fostering Service or to the Independent Review Mechanism.

The panel undertakes one training day each year to ensure that members are up to date with changes in legislation, guidance and to develop their skills and knowledge.

The panel prepares an annual report of its business.

9. **CHILDREN’S GUIDE TO FOSTERING**

The Fostering Service has produced two Children’s Guides. One for younger children 4 - 10 years and one for older children age 11 years and above. Consultation with One Voice Youth Network, (the Children in Care Council) in Gateshead Council took place about the design and content of the guides.

These guides explain in simple terms what fostering is and provide contact details for Foster Children about useful local and national organisations.

At the start of each new placement Foster Children are given their copy of the guide either by their Social Worker or Foster Carer.
10. **SERVICE PERFORMANCE UPDATE NEEDED**

The details for 1st March 2012 – 30 September 2013 are as follows:

**Numbers of Foster Carers and children**

There were 184 approved Foster Carers providing 240 full time places for Looked After Children. The tables below gives a breakdown of Foster Carers by general type and the number of children placed (30.09.13).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF RESOURCE</th>
<th>NUMBER 2013</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short Break</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Term</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Centred</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Term/Permanent</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home from Home</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and Friend and Connected Persons</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>184</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Number of Children placed as

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF RESOURCE</th>
<th>NUMBER OF CHILDREN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short Break</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Term</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Centred</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long Term/Permanent</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home from Home</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and Friend and Connected Persons</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>240</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. **COMPLAINTS AND THEIR OUTCOME**

Gateshead Council Fostering Service has a clear complaints, compliments and comments policy. Complaints and their outcomes are centrally held by the Fostering Service Manager. Outcomes are also recorded and held centrally.

Foster Carers are actively encouraged to have a discussion with a Manager from the Fostering Service on any issue that affects their role and functioning as a Foster Carer for Gateshead Council, this includes their Skill Level fee. This is available outside of the complaints procedure.

Formal complaints are dealt with through the complaints and representation procedure. These are monitored centrally and all complaints received should be responded to within 20 working days of receipt and recommendations are shared with senior Managers.
12. **STANDARDS**

Gateshead Council Fostering Service is a Regulated Service and is inspected by OFSTED on a regular basis to ensure that standards are being met.

Staff and Foster Carers receive regular supervision, support and training to assist them in maintaining a high standard of foster care. This includes the annual Foster Carer review for all approved Foster Carers and performance appraisals for all staff and Fostering Panel members.

13. **REVIEWING OF STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually, with the next review taking place October 2014. This will be led by the Fostering Service and we will review what we have done well and what areas we could improve in. We will seek the views of foster carers, children and young people, birth families, staff and other professionals. We will also use research to support us in our task of continuously improving our service in endeavouring to meet the needs of the looked after children in Gateshead.

14. **INFORMATION ON REGISTRATION AUTHORITY**

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)
Tel: 0300 1231231

Address: Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Registered Manager
Fostering Team
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INTRODUCTION

The Fostering Service has a responsibility to ensure that children and young people who are ‘looked after’ in fostering placements are aware of their rights; know what to expect from foster care; and know what to do and who to contact should they be unhappy about any aspect of their care, or any other matters.

The Children’s Guide includes a summary of what the Fostering Service sets out to do for children and young people.

There are two Children and Young Peoples Guides:

“Do you live with a Foster Family?” (Children aged 3 – 10 years)

“What’s it like to be in Foster Care?” (Young People aged 10 years+)

When a child or young person is initially placed with Foster Carers, the Fostering Service is responsible for ensuring the child or young person receives the relevant guide at the point of placement.

The child or young person’s Social Worker and Foster Carer will ensure that the child or young person:

- understands this guide and what to expect from foster care;
- is aware of their rights and;
- knows what to do and who to contact if they were unhappy about anything.

There are relevant contact numbers detailed on the back of every guide.

The child or young person may choose to keep this guide in a safe place, or allow the Foster Carer to keep this. If the Foster Carer takes responsibility, the guide must be kept in sight and accessible to the child or young person at all times.
Section 1.4

The Children and Young People’s Guide belongs to the child or young person and should a child or young person move placements, this guide should move on with them.

There is also a leaflet available to the child or young person’s parents entitled “Parent’s guide to the Fostering Service”. The child or young person’s Social Worker is responsible for ensuring parents are aware/have a copy of this information leaflet.

REVIEW OF THE CHILDREN’S GUIDE

The Children’s Guide is reviewed on an annual basis. Following any updates, a new Children’s Guide will be issued to fostered children/young people, and Foster Carers.

GATESHEAD CARE PLEDGE

The 2007 Government White Paper “Care Matters: Time For Change” requires every Local Authority to create a pledge to all of its looked after children and young people. Our care pledge is Gateshead’s promise to work with and for looked after children and young people and care leavers.

The promises in the pledge have come directly from consultation with our children and young people.

The pledge is part of Gateshead’s commitment to give looked after children, young people and care leavers the best opportunities they can have in life. It describes how we want to put them at the centre of everything we do.

RELATED DOCUMENTS:

- “Do you live with a Foster Family?” (Children aged 3 – 10 years)
- “What’s it like to be in Foster Care?” (Young People aged 10 years+)
- Gateshead Care Pledge – Appendix 1 – Section One - 1.3
- Parents Guide to the Fostering Service – Available from the Fostering Service
- Looked After Children’s Team - Information about who we are and what we do (Available from the Looked After Team)
Appendix 1

Our Care Pledge
For Looked After Children in Gateshead

1. Looking After you
   - You will get your own Social Worker who is properly qualified to work with you
   - We will make sure your Social Worker doesn’t change unless there is a good reason for it, unless you want to change who your Social Worker is
   - Your Social Worker will stay in touch regularly to check you are OK
   - You will have a care plan which is all about you and your needs, and which is looked at regularly

2. Finding the Right Place for You
   - If it is part of your care plan for you to go back home we will make sure this happens as quickly and as safely as possible. We will check to make sure you are safe after you go home
   - If you can’t go home we will find the right place for you and make sure you live with people who care about you.
   - We will try to give you a choice about where you live and who you live with.
   - If we can we will find someone in your family who can care for you.
   - If we can we will keep you with your brothers and sisters.
   - We will help you keep in touch with your birth family wherever possible. If it’s not possible we’ll tell you why.

3. Involving You
   - We will take your feelings into account in decisions that affect you.
   - We will make sure you are fully involved in your reviews.
   - We will help you to have your say and listen to your views.
   - If you want to make a complaint we will provide you with access to an advocate to help you get your views across.
Section 1.4

4. Treating You Right
   - We won’t talk about you to other people where its none of their business – unless we need to, to keep you or others safe.
   - We will always listen to you and treat you with respect.
   - We will explain what is going on in words you understand.

5. Getting a Good Education
   - We will make sure you get a place at a good nursery or school.
   - We will make sure that you don’t have a change of schools wherever possible, especially in years 10 and 11.
   - There will be a designated teacher at your school to make sure you’re doing OK – but they won’t treat you differently to others.
   - We will let you know who your designated teacher is so you know where to go if you need help in school.
   - We will make sure you don’t miss any school because of things happening in your life and help you get back on tract with extra support if you fall behind.

6. Keeping You Healthy and Happy
   - We’ll make sure you get regular health-checks and if you need any treatment or support that you get it quickly.
   - We will work together with your school, Carers and the health team to make sure all your health needs are met.
   - We’ll make sure you have opportunities to do fun things, including free access to our leisure facilities, and give you opportunities to get to know other Looked After Children.
   - We’ll help you find out about activities that are on so that you can get involved.
   - We will make sure you can keep going to activities you are involved in if you move placement.
Section 1.4

7. Helping You Get on in Life

- We will give you the help you need when it’s the right time for you to move on from care to find a place to live and learn to live on your own.

- If you can’t live on your own we’ll make sure that choices are there for you after you are 18.

- We will make sure you have enough money and help you learn to manage it well.

- We will help you if you want to do an apprenticeship, go to college or university.

- We’ll help you get ready for the world of work, find a job or training placement and give you the chance to get work experience.
INTRODUCTION

The Fostering Service is required under Regulation 27 (5) (b) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, to provide Foster Carers with a Foster Care Agreement. Schedule 5 of the Regulations set out the matters and obligations to be included in the Foster Care Agreement.

Gateshead Council has also included within the agreement important matters which Foster Carers are made aware of and are asked to agree to with regard to the Payment for Skills system in operation.

FOSTER CARE AGREEMENT

The Foster Care Agreement details the roles, responsibilities and expectations of Foster Carers and the responsibilities of the Fostering Service. The Foster Carer will retain a copy of their Foster Care Agreement and a copy will be placed on the Foster Carer’s file.

The Foster Care Agreement is signed by the Foster Carer following their initial approval, and must be signed annually following the annual Foster Carer Review. There may be other situations where a new agreement is required, including where there is a change in terms of approval. Proposed changes to Skills Level Payment would also necessitate a review and new agreement to be signed.

As well as detailing the legal responsibilities and obligations of the Foster Carer, the Foster Carer agreement will also detail the support and training the Carer will receive.

All Foster Carers irrespective of their terms of approval must sign the Foster Care Agreement and comply with the contents as failure to do so will risk continuing registration as an approved Foster Carer.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

Template 1 – Foster Care Agreement (All Foster Carers)

All sections of the Foster Carer Handbook are relevant to this agreement.
GATESHEAD COUNCIL
SOCIAL WORK – CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

FOSTER CARE AGREEMENT

This Foster Care Agreement is a written statement of the partnership between yourselves as foster carers and Gateshead Council Social Work – Children and Families Service; it is in accordance with Regulation 27(5)(B) and Schedule 5 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011 and departmental policy.

This agreement details the terms and conditions of your approval as Foster Carers and this Service’s responsibilities to you as Foster Carers. The contents apply to all children placed with you.

1. Terms and Conditions of Approval

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Carer</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Address</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Supervising Social Worker</th>
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Your Form F/Re-assessment/Foster Carer Review/Short Break Assessment (delete as appropriate) was presented to Panel/took place on (delete as appropriate) DATE.

Your terms of approval, including your Skill Level, agreed by the Agency Decision Maker are:

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2. Support and Training

2.1 Training and Induction Standards

Every Foster Carer will attend preparation training prior to their approval. Gateshead Council provides Foster Carers with ongoing training to assist and support the fostering task and provide development opportunities to improve and maintain levels of skill as part of a Development Plan which will be kept up to date via the review process. The Fostering Service provides Carers with a training directory which details courses available. There are mandatory courses which all Foster Carers need to attend and keep up to date which are detailed within the training directory and there is a minimum number of courses required to be undertaken annually which varies according to the Skill Level approval, this being detailed within the Skills Level document.
Section 1.5

As part of their induction all new Foster Carers are required to complete the Children’s Workforce Development Council’s Training, Support & Development Standards for Foster Care. Short Break Carers who are approved Foster Carers are required to achieve the Training, Support & Development Standards for Short Break Carers. Family and friends Foster Carers are required to achieve the Training, Support & Development Standards for Family and Friends Foster Carers. Foster Carers are expected to achieve the Training, Support & Development Standards within 12 months of approval (or within 18 months for Family and Friends Carers and Short Break Carers). Fostering households may use the same evidence workbook.

2.2  (1) Individual Support

Individual support will be provided by:

- Your Supervising Social Worker will visit you regularly to offer support as well as undertaking four formal supervisory sessions in a year. You will be able and expected to contribute to the agenda and the sessions will provide guidance to you and your family in relation to the fostering task. Also there will be an unannounced visit at least once a year.

- The Child’s Social Worker will support the child and liaise with you in respect of the individual needs of the child/children placed with you. Matters relating directly the child should initially be discussed with the Child’s Social Worker whenever possible.

- The Emergency Duty Team outside of normal office hours, when necessary.

- Independent support, advice and mediation can also be provided by the Fostering Network.

- As an approved Foster Carer you will receive Gateshead Council’s Foster Carer Handbook.

(2) Group and Peer Support

- You will be required to participate in local Foster Carer groups and consultations. It is important to attend these groups and consultations as they provide links with other Carers and give opportunities to input into service development. The number of sessions you are required to attend will vary in accordance with your approved Skill Level within the Skills level Document (SLD).

- The Fostering Service encourages Carers to make individual links with other Carers to provide peer support.

2.3  (3) Financial Support

The basis of financial support to all Carers is through the weekly fostering allowance, which is to meet the overall cost of caring for a child. This allowance is paid when a child/young person is placed with a Foster Carer. In addition to this Foster Carers are rewarded on a weekly basis for the Skills they have and are prepared to utilise in terms of the type and complexity of placements they provide for between the Levels 1-4. The Levels correspond with the Care Objectives and Eligibility Criteria within the Skills Level Document. Any further financial assistance is detailed within the Financial policy.
Section 1.5

Foster Carers are responsible for informing the appropriate person if they believe an incorrect payment has been made to them. Any monies owing to the Service must be paid on request.

3. Review and Termination of Approval of Foster Carers

3.1 Review

Your approval as a Foster Carer for Gateshead Council will be reviewed annually; however circumstances may require an early review as part of the terms and conditions of your approval. The circumstances that may call for an earlier review would include:

- following any significant incidents.
- complaints or allegations of abuse or neglect
- following a Standards of Care Meeting.
- non-compliance to the Foster Care Agreement.
- Requests for a change in Skill Level payment

The Service in conjunction with Carers themselves can initiate a review to consider a Carer’s continued approval or terms of approval. If an early review is to be considered there should first be discussion between the Foster Carer and Supervising Social Worker to consider the reasons for and implications of an early review.

The review documentation consists of:

- Details of Foster Carers, including current approval and statutory checks.
- Foster Carer’s evaluation and appraisal of the service, support and their performance.
- Contribution from Social Workers who have supervised placements of children placed since approval/last review.
- The views of the children fostered.
- Foster Carers own children’s contribution.
- Any issues raised by the review process.
- Supervising Social Worker’s evaluative summary and appraisal including recommendations in relation to approval details and Skill Level approval.
- Birth Parents’ Consultation.

Foster Carers will be made aware of the content of the written reports and able to comment upon this. Carer’s comments will be noted and expanded upon in the summary of the review. First reviews and contentious reviews will always be presented to the fostering panel.
3.2 Termination of the Foster Care Agreement

This agreement can be terminated by:

1. The Foster Carer not wishing to continue their approval with Gateshead Council. In such circumstances, the Foster Carer should provide written notice that they do not wish to continue their approval with Gateshead Council. Following this, Carers will cease to be approved after 28 days. It should be noted that Carers cannot retract their resignation, however, they must abide by this agreement until the date that they cease to become Foster Carers.

2. The Service’s judgement that the Carers are not meeting the standards in relation to their approval as Foster Carers.

If the Local Authority decides there are grounds for de-registration the Carer will receive written notification within 10 working days of the fostering panel recommendation.

If a Foster Carer disagrees with the decision of the Local Authority they can make a representation in writing within 28 days of the notification. (Regulation 28 (7) (b) (i) Fostering Services Regulations 2011).

The representation will be considered at the next fostering panel and the Agency’s decision will be communicated within 10 working days following this panel.

A representation can also be made through the Independent Review Mechanism as opposed to through Gateshead Council should Foster Carers prefer to do this.

When a Carer’s approval has been terminated, all property which is held by the Carers on behalf of Gateshead Council will be returned where appropriate. (Property includes: equipment, computers provided to Foster Carers, Foster Carer handbook, ID Card, information relating to children previously placed).

4. Placement of Children

Prior to (or on placement in emergency situations) the service expects all Carers to be provided with essential information in relation to the child. Upon placement, a Placement Plan will be drawn up and agreed in relation to the individual child. The placement plan includes:

- Aim and objectives of the placement.
- Anticipated duration of placement.
- Tasks of Carers/promoting diversity and heritage, culture and language, religious observance.
- Contact arrangements with family and friends.
- Promoting health care (including medical consent), Dental examination and Diet.
- Safety needs and equipment for the child.
Section 1.5

- Any needs arising from disability.
- Managing behaviour, to include routine (e.g. bedtime, coming in time).
- Promoting education at school, education arrangements and contact with the school (e.g. school trips permission, attendance at parent events, uniform, transport arrangements).
- Details of school, and Designated Teacher.
- Ensuring children are not taken out of school unnecessarily – this would include not arranging holidays during term time).
- Promoting leisure, recreational activities and social contacts.
- Contact and frequency of visits from child’s Social Worker.
- Delegated responsibilities and overnight stays away from the Foster Carer.
- Name and contact details of Independent Reviewing Officer.
- Co-operation by the Foster Carer with the Local Authority regarding any arrangements for the child.
- Compliance to the Foster Care Agreement.

5. **Legal Liabilities of Foster Carers**

5.1 **Parental Responsibilities**

Foster Carers are responsible for safeguarding and promoting the child’s physical and emotional welfare.

Foster Carers have no “parental responsibility” in relation to the children they foster however, certain tasks can be delegated to Carers by those individuals who have this responsibility. Any requirement for parental permission will need to be agreed prior to or during placement from either a Service representative responsible for the child and/or the parent.

Foster Carers will be expected to act in accordance with delegated duties agreed within Placement Planning meetings and the care planning processes and in accordance with departmental policies.

5.2 **Insurance**

All Foster Carers should have their own adequate household and motor insurance and must inform their insurance company that they are approved Carers.

Gateshead Council has public liability insurance and third party insurance to cover specific circumstances.
5.3 **Motor Insurance**

It is the Carer’s responsibility to ensure that their car has an up to date MOT certificate and motor insurance which adequately covers them for transportation of foster children. Please check you have the appropriate level of cover with your insurer.

- All Carers are responsible for their own arrangements regarding individual insurance cover.
- The Foster Carer will be required to provide proof of insurance cover to their Supervising Social Worker upon request.

6. **Representation and Complaints**

Foster Carers have a right to make a complaint through the Service’s complaints procedure in respect of:

- A child or young person they are caring for on behalf of the Service.
- On their own behalf in respect of the service they receive in relation to their role as Foster Carers.
- Decisions made in relation to their terms of approval. A complaint with this regard may be made via the fostering panel or the IRM (Independent Review Mechanism).

7. **Obligations on the Foster Carer**

7.1 As Foster Carers you agree to:

- Care for any child placed with you as if they were a member of your family.
- Promote and support the identity of the child and contribute to life story work.
- Promote religious and cultural needs and support any child or young person in their religion. The Foster Carer does not have authorisation to agree to a change of religion.
- Promote the child’s welfare having regard to the long and short-term plans for the child.
- Ensure all placement endings are planned in accordance with the Care Plan. If this is not possible Carers must provide notice of intentions to end the placement. This is subject to certain criteria depending upon the individual Carer’s approval status.
- Promote and support contact between the child/young person and other individuals agreed by the Local Authority.
- To work in partnership with the Local Authority, birth parents and relevant others.
- Agree to allow any person authorised by the Local Authority access to the child/young person in your care at any time.
7.2 Carers must give prompt written notifications to the Fostering Service in relation to:

- Change or intended change of address.
- Change or intended change of composition of their household.
- Any change in personal circumstances and or/events affecting their capacity to care for a child in placement or their suitability to be considered for a placement, or suitability of household (including criminal offences).
- Any request or application by the Carers to adopt, or for registration as an early year’s provider or a later year’s provider under Part 3 of the Children Act 2006.

7.3 Foster Carers must comply in the updating of statutory checks which includes:

- Completing the DBS form and providing relevant documentation in a timely manner
- Completion of the medical form.
- Attend a medical if/when required.

This also applies to relevant household members in relation to DBS checks.

8. Behaviour Management and Absence from the Foster Home

8.1 Corporal Punishment

In accordance with the Fostering Service Regulations 2011 Regulation 13(2)(a)(b)(c) Foster Carers:

a) Must not administer any form of corporal punishment including slapping, punching, squeezing, shaking, throwing missiles rough handling or any other humiliating forms of treatment or punishment. This also includes any verbal threats towards the child.

b) Must not use any form of control, restraint or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable.

c) Must not use physical intervention on a child unless this is necessary to prevent likely injury to the child, other persons or serious damage to property. This must be agreed as part of the child’s risk assessment.

Carers should be particularly aware of the vulnerability of foster children and their susceptibility to bullying and being bullied. This must be reported directly to the Fostering Service and or the child’s Social Worker.

8.2 Children/young person missing without permission

If a child is absent from a Foster Carer’s home without permission, their whereabouts are unknown or they are ‘not at their proper place’ the child is deemed missing and the Foster Carer must:
Section 1.5

a) Report the circumstances to social work staff i.e. Child’s Social Worker or Social Work Team Manager or Duty Worker or Emergency Duty Team Staff and the Fostering Service.

b) If the Carer believes the child/young person to be in immediate danger they should contact the police directly, without delay.

9. **Confidentiality**

As Carers you agree to ensure that any information relating to a child placed with you, to the child’s family, or to any other person which, has been given to you in confidence in connection with a placement, is kept confidential and is not disclosed to any person without the written consent from the Fostering Service.

Any information given to you in relation to a placement (or potential placement) is to be returned when the child leaves or the placement is not made.

Foster Carers must maintain daily recording for each child in placement. These records are confidential, are the property of the Local Authority and should be accessible at all times.

Any breach of confidentiality will be regarded as serious and could jeopardise your approval as a Foster Carer.

You agree to continue to maintain confidentiality concerning all information about children and their families even after ceasing to be a Foster Carer, on the basis that the need for confidentiality remains equally necessary in circumstances when Carers cease to foster.

Confidentiality is a two-way process and as a Service we undertake to keep confidential and secure the records we hold in respect of you. This complies with the Data Protection Act 1998.

10. **Placement Plan (individual placements)**

Foster Carers must comply with the Placement Plan for each child/young person placed with you.

11. **Protection of Children Placed with Foster Carers**

As a Foster Carer you agree to;

11.1 Comply with an up to date written safe care family policy which must be in place in relation to foster children placed and everyone else in the household. This will be completed in conjunction with the Foster Carer, their Supervising Social Worker and the Child’s Social Worker. This must be clearly explained in an age appropriate way to the child.

11.2 Report any disclosure from a child in their care as soon as possible to the relevant individual i.e. Child’s Social Worker, Social Worker’s Team Manager, Duty Worker, and Fostering Service, or Emergency Duty Team if out of hours.
Section 1.5

11.3 Policy and Procedures including child protection and behaviour management.

12. Termination of placements by the Local Authority

Under regulation 14(1) when the local authority proposes to terminate a placement they must carry out a review of the child or young person’s case and ensure that the views of all people concerned have been heard.

The review will consider what, if any, support and services could be provided which would avoid the need to terminate the placement.

However, where the local authority considers that there is an immediate risk of significant harm to the child or young person or to protect others from serious injury, the child or young person’s placement must be terminated without a meeting.

Alternative appropriate accommodation must be found as soon as possible and the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) informed as soon as is practical 14(2)(a)(b).

13. Co-operating with Ofsted Chief Inspector

Foster Carers must co-operate as reasonably required with the Chief Inspector and in particular to allow a person authorised by the Chief Inspector to interview the Foster Carer and visit the Foster Carer’s home at any reasonable time.

14. Keeping the Local Authority Informed

As Foster Carers you agree:

- To keep the relevant parties involved with the child/young person up to date with the child/young person’s development and progress.
- To contact the relevant parties immediately of any significant events affecting the child including serious illness, injury, disclosure of abuse, missing without permission.
- To advise if you or a relative are involved with any other fostering Agency, either Local Authority or private or if you take any additional work after you have been approved as a Foster Carer to allow the Fostering Service to consider any conflict of interest which may arise.

15. Entitlement of Skill Level Payment

- Skill Level payments, including Skill Level 1 will depend upon supplying evidence from day to day practice which Foster Carers are expected to collate and provide written evidence of. This is as detailed within Payment for Skills Policies and within the Supervision and Review Policies and process. Gateshead Council will provide advice and guidance in this area although this is Foster Carers’ own responsibility for the most part.
- Failure to provide the necessary evidence, which includes keeping evidence and skills including training up to date, can affect Skill Level payment which could, in certain circumstances, cease.
Any changes in the type of placements to be provided (which may differ from the Care Objectives of the Skill Level for which Carers are currently approved) can affect Skill Level payment. In certain circumstances this will result in an increase in payment in line with the prescribed Care Objectives, however, in other circumstances it may result in a decrease in payment, again in line with the prescribed Care Objectives. Therefore, before considering changes to the type of placements offered, in line with the Foster Carer Annual Review process and Personal Development Plan, it is the Foster Carer’s responsibility to fully explore any financial implications.

In the circumstances previously outlined, Foster Carers need to discuss this fully with their Supervising Social Worker at the earliest opportunity so that any changes with regard to financial implications can be fully explained. Such discussions will also include any areas where there may be evidence shortfalls which would need to be addressed.

The Foster Carer Annual Review process is the appropriate time to consider a change in Skill Level payment, should Foster Carer/s be able to provide the necessary evidence to support a change in Skill Level Payment in line with their Personal Development Plan. It should be noted that Gateshead Council will commence any changes to Skill Level payment from the date from which the recommendation has been made following the Foster Care Review or Panel process before which all evidence must be collated.

Gateshead Council will keep the payments structure and weekly payments concerning Skill Level including its criteria under review and these may be subject to change.

Gateshead Council Fostering Service operates a financial policy which is reviewed annually.

It should be noted that Foster Carers have access to the representations process and the Independent Review process in the event of a complaint regarding Skill Level payment.

16. **Signing the Foster Carer Agreement**

   Foster Carers must sign their Foster Care Agreement upon issue. Failure to sign the Foster Care Agreement will jeopardise approval as a Foster Carer.

   

Frances Powell,
Service Director, Social Work
Terms and Conditions of Approval

Name of Carer

Address

Supervising Social Worker

Your Form F/Re-assessment/Foster Carer Review/Short Break Assessment (delete as appropriate) was presented to Panel/took place on (delete as appropriate) DATE.

Your terms of approval, including your Skill Level, agreed by the Agency Decision Maker are:

15. Signatures

Foster Carer/s

Name:

Signature ................................................................. Date .................................................................

Name:

Signature ................................................................. Date .................................................................

Supervising Social Worker

Name:

Signature ................................................................. Date .................................................................
INTRODUCTION

A Foster Carer’s terms of approval provides details of the type of placements the Foster Carers can provide, the number of children they are approved for, their age range and the sex of the children and young people. The number of children or young people does not include the Carers own children, or any child or young person placed with them under the Adoption Regulations or Residence or Special Guardianship Orders.

Schedule 7 to the Children Act 1989 limits the number of children who may be fostered by a Foster Carer. The ‘usual fostering limit’ is set at three. This means that no one may foster more than three children unless:

- The foster children are all siblings in relation to each other or,
- The local authority within whose area the Foster Carer live exempts the Foster Carer from the usual fostering limit in relation to specific placements (in which case they must adhere to the terms as detailed below), and
- The Foster Carer’s terms of approval allow it (any terms of approval must be compatible with the number of children the Foster Carer is caring for even if an exemption to the usual fostering limit has been granted, unless the placement is in an emergency and for less than six days).

EXEMPTION OF THE USUAL FOSTERING LIMIT

An exemption is a legal requirement. In considering whether to exempt a Foster Carer from the usual fostering limit, the local authority will have regard, in particular, to:

- the number of children or young people whom the Carer proposes to foster;
- the arrangements which the Carer proposes for the care and accommodation of the fostered children or young people;
- the intended and likely relationship between the Carer and the fostered child or young person;
- the period of time for which Foster Carers propose to foster the child or young person; and
Section 1.6

- whether the welfare of the fostered children or young people (and any other children or young people living at the accommodation) will be safeguarded and promoted;

For further details see Template 1 at the end of this section.

Where the local authority exempts a Foster Carer, they will inform the Carer by notice in writing:

- that the Carer is exempted;
- of the children or young people, described by name, whom they may foster; and
- of any condition to which the exemption is subject.

NOTE: An exemption can only be granted for named children or young people.

The local authority may at any time, by notice in writing, vary or cancel an exemption or impose, vary or cancel a condition to which the exemption is subject. The exemption is subject to regular review and monitoring by the local authority.

Gateshead Council has a senior officer with delegated powers who grants exemptions where required with the appropriateness of an exemption being regularly discussed at a senior level within the authority.

Foster Carers can make representations and complaints with regard to exemptions which should be addressed to the senior officer who is the Service Manager for Looked After children.

For Carers who live outside Gateshead any exemptions would need to be approved by a Senior Officer within the relevant Local Authority and subject to the same reviewing mechanism.

**CHANGES TO APPROVAL**

Decisions to change a Foster Carer’s terms of approval can be implemented immediately, in line with statutory guidance if the Foster Carer provides written agreement to the change and there is a written statement concerning the foster family’s support needs. Template 2 provides details of this.

In certain circumstances a Carer may care for additional child/ren in an emergency whereby an exemption is required after which they would require a change to their approval to enable them to continue to care beyond the six day period in line with regulatory requirements.
Section 1.6

In other circumstances Foster Carers may seek a change to their approval to enable them to care for more children than they were approved for. This should normally happen after a recommendation by the fostering panel following an annual review, when a full assessment of the home circumstances has been undertaken. It can, however, also can happen in other instances when Carer’s situations may change between reviews and they have more time to give to fostering or as they become more experienced in the fostering role, or in the event that they wish to care for children whom they have cared for previously in order to provide continuity of care.

Any instances where changes to approval are to be considered must be carefully discussed by Supervising Social Workers with their Manager and joint agreement reached. Following any change in approval Supervising Social Workers must ensure that the support needs identified are implemented. Changes will also need to be fully reported on in the next Foster Carer’s Annual Review.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Template 1 – Exemption to Usual Fostering Limit Form
- Template 2 – Change of Approval form
Template 1

GATESHEAD COUNCIL
SOCIAL WORK – CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

APPLICATION FOR EXEMPTION FROM THE USUAL FOSTERING LIMIT

(Local Authority Foster Carers)

PART ONE: To be completed by the Supervising Social Worker -

A. CURRENT POSITION

1. Details of Foster Carer/s who is/are requesting an exemption

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<th>Surname:</th>
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<td>Forename:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date of Birth:</td>
<td>Date of Birth:</td>
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<td>Religion:</td>
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<td>Ethnic Origin:</td>
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<td>Employment:</td>
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<td>Hours of Work:</td>
<td>Hours of Work:</td>
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<td>Address:</td>
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2. Other Adult Members of the Household

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
<th>Relationship to Carer</th>
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Section 1.6

3. **Children Currently in the Household**  
(Do not include any foster children)

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
<th>Relationship to Carer</th>
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4. **Details of the Accommodation** (Describe house and use of rooms).

5. **Current Demands on Foster Carer’s Time** (i.e. employment, childminding, leisure, ill-health, etc.)

6. **Foster Carer’s Current Terms of Approval**

   Number of Children: 
   
   Gender of Children: 
   
   Age Range: 
   
   Skill Level and Type of Placement 
   
   Date of Approval: 

7. **Foster Children Currently Placed in Foster Home**

   **Child One**

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
<th>Expected Length of Placement</th>
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   Reason for Placement: 

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### Child Two

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**Reason for Placement:**

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### Child Three

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<th>Expected Length of Placement</th>
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**Reason for Placement**

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### B. PROPOSED POSITION

1. **Foster Child/ren Whom it is Proposed will be Placed in the Foster Home**

**Child One**

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
<th>Expected Length of Placement, including dates.</th>
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**Reason for Placement:**

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**Child Two**

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Reason for Placement:

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**Child Three**

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Reason for Placement:

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APPLICATION FOR EXEMPTION FROM THE USUAL FOSTERING LIMIT

PART TWO:

* To be completed in consultation with the Foster Carer/s, Supervising Social Worker, any Social Worker who is supervising a child currently placed in the foster home and the Social Worker of any child who it is proposed to place in the foster home.

Please give an assessment on whether the exemption should be granted by answering the following questions:-

1. Why is this particular foster home viewed as appropriate for this/these particular child/ren.

2. The arrangements which the Carer proposes for the care and accommodation of the fostered children/young people
   
   i) Sleeping arrangements of all of the children/young people (specify individual sleeping arrangements), and give an assessment of overall accommodation suitability
   
   ii) Management of any risk assessment issues and any risks associated for all of the children of the household having regard to the proposals.
   
   iii) Detail the impact of the requirements of any day to care issues, e.g. school attendance, contact, health, etc
   
   iv) What effect is the proposed placement likely to have on the household overall
Section 1.6

3. The intended and likely relationship between the Carer and the fostered child or young
   person

   i) How will the child/ren whom it is proposed to place fit into and respond to the
      Carer/s

   ii) How will the child/ren whom it is proposed to place/be placed fit into and respond
       to other members of the existing household

4. Should the exemption be subject to any conditions.

5. Social Worker/s Comments/Perspectives of children already placed and the Social
   Worker of the child/ren to be placed

Form Completed By: ____________________________ Date Form Completed: ____________________________
Supervising Social Worker

Team Manager’s Comment:

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Team Manager Signed: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________

Service Manager Signed: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________
Template 2

Report Requesting Change of Fostering Approval

Carers:

Address:

Other Members in the Household:

Date of last Foster care review/Date at Panel:

Current Approval Status:

Proposal for change of approval: (lowering age of children)

Reason for Request for change of approval:

Brief History of Carers

Strength and Limitations
Section 1.6

Recommendations


Signed


Signed (Supervising Social Worker)


Signed (Team Manager)


Signed (Agency Decision Maker)
INTRODUCTION

Social Work – Children and Families staff and representatives have a general responsibility under common law to safeguard the confidentiality of personal information, which they hold in connection with their working functions.

Gateshead Council has a Caldicott Guardian who is responsible for ensuring adherence to confidentiality principles.

SHARING INFORMATION

- During the course of their duties on behalf of Social Work – Children and Families, it is necessary for Foster Carers to share information with others about a child or young person in order to be able to provide a holistic, effective and informed service.

- Sharing of information will occur as a direct result of everyday working practices between staff and Foster Carers, and between staff and other agencies concerned and involved with a Foster Child or young person’s care plan and placement plan.

- A Foster Child or young person may want to confide in a Foster Carer and ask that the information is not shared with anyone else. In matters relating to child protection, you cannot give an undertaking not to share information. It is important that a child or young person understands this information must be shared with the child or young person's Social Worker.

- The Fostering Supervising Social Worker will provide advice and guidance concerning the sharing of information in respect of the child or young person with any other person and you should approach them for guidance if you are unsure of any aspect of sharing confidential information.
Section 1.7

FOSTER CARERS RESPONSIBILITIES

All information provided about a child or young person and their family is confidential.

All Foster Carers are required to sign the Foster Care Agreement which details responsibilities relating to confidentiality:

- As Carers you agree to ensure that any information relating to a child placed with you, to the child’s family, or to any other person which, has been given to you in confidence in connection with a placement, is kept confidential and is not disclosed to any person without the written consent from the Fostering Service.

- Any information given to you in relation to a placement (or potential placement) is to be returned when the child leaves or the placement is not made.

- Foster Carers must maintain daily recording for each child in placement. These records are confidential, are the property of the Local Authority and should be accessible at all times.

- Foster Carers are reminded to take care when discussing issues with colleagues in public settings. To safeguard confidentiality children and young people’s issues should not be discussed in places where they may be overheard by persons who do not have a right to know the information.

- You agree to continue to maintain confidentiality concerning all information about children and their families even after ceasing to be a Foster Carer, on the basis that the need for confidentiality remains equally necessary in circumstances when Carers cease to foster.

Confidentiality is a two-way process. The Fostering Service undertakes to keep confidential and secure the records held in respect of Foster Carers.

TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS

Care must be exercised in releasing or discussing confidential information over the telephone:

- You should not be overheard by others in your home.

- It may be necessary to check that the caller is who they say they are. Once satisfied as to the caller’s identity arrangements should be made to telephone the caller back.

- If the caller is known to you and the voice is recognised confidential information can be discussed but only if this is in normal professional activity of the caller.

- In respect of mobile phones, no confidential information should be shared via text messages.
Section 1.7

Please note:

- Care and consideration should be taken when leaving messages for individuals on their answer phones or voicemails: e.g. NO confidential information, names etc. shall be left on an answer-phone or voicemail, always question whether a message should be left or not.

INFORMATION ON COMPUTERS

Due to issues of Data protection, Foster Carers are advised not to record electronically. Further work is being undertaken to try and resolve this issue. If, under special circumstances you need to use a computer you must use the child’s P number to ensure anonymity.

INTERNET

- **Under no circumstances** will information about children and young people in foster care be shared by Foster Carers via social networking sites including Facebook.

- If Foster Carers use social networking sites they must be mindful of the information they disclose about themselves, their family and the location of their home.

- Photographs that feature children and young people in foster care must never be placed on social network sites or sent via email to Foster Carers family or friends.

- Foster Carers will not use social networking sites or emails to keep in touch with children or young people who have moved on from their care.

- Emails about children and young people will not be sent to other relevant professionals from personal email addresses as these are not considered secure.

BREACHES OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Any breach of confidentiality will be regarded as serious and could jeopardise your approval as a Foster Carer.

LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS

To meet legislative requirements it is essential that Social Work – Children and Families, its staff (including Foster Carers) and anyone acting on their behalf ensure all information is protected in all its forms i.e. electronic, verbal and paper information.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Foster Carer Agreement - Section 1 Handbook
INTRODUCTION

A conflict of interest can arise if a Foster Carer, or a relative, is involved with any other fostering Agency, either Local Authority or private, or if a Foster Carer takes any additional work after they have been approved as a Foster Carer, (including work with charitable organisations) unless the intention to do so was known about during the assessment and included in the report presented to Panel for approval.

A Foster Carer cannot be approved by another fostering Agency unless the approval as a Foster Carer for Gateshead Council has been terminated.

Examples of other situations that can arise are:

- If a Foster Carer or relative is, or intends to become, involved in the management committee/board of an independent fostering Agency.
- If a Foster Carer or a relative is considering submitting to tender to contract to do work or supply goods to Gateshead Council.
- If a Foster Carer is, or becomes, the trustee of a charity.

ACTIONS

During the course of the Form F Assessment and after approval Foster Carers must advise the Fostering Supervising Social Worker of any existing additional work or existing potential conflict of interests.

In relation to employment, paid or voluntary, see Policy entitled Significant Changes, Section 1 Handbook, and reference also Skills Level Document and Skills Level Guidance which give more detail. Note Conflict of interest Templates Parts A and B must be completed by the Foster Carer and submitted to the Fostering Service, the Supervising Social Worker will then complete Part C. Agreement from management must then be sought.
Section 1.8

In terms of process the following must be adhered to. Before taking on any work or business, which may relate to your duties the Foster Carer must:

1. Discuss any potential conflict of interest issues with the Fostering Supervising Social Worker, identifying any possible areas of conflict and, if possible, agree any necessary safeguards or arrangements which could be put in place to eliminate such conflicts.

2. The Fostering Supervising Social Worker will provide the Foster Carer with a Conflict of Interest form to complete. This should be completed and returned to the Fostering Service. This will outline the proposed project/work and detail the arrangements and safeguards to ensure the child’s needs will continue to be met. (Parts A and B of Conflict of Interest form).

3. The Supervising Social Worker will complete Part C of the Conflict of Interest form along with a recommendation, (sending a copy to the Foster Carer) and this will then be forwarded to the Manager for agreement to be sought.

4. The Manager will write to the Foster Carer advising them of the decision including reasons.

5. There might be occasions when a conflict of interest is considered too great and approval is not able to be given. The reasons for this will be clearly discussed by the Fostering Supervising Social Worker with the Foster Carer.

6. The associated documentation will be kept on the Foster Carer’s file along with the Carer’s written proposal and arrangements/safeguards that have been agreed between the Fostering Service and Foster Carer.

7. Supervisory sessions and Foster Carer Reviews will monitor this area and ensure that the child’s needs continue to be fully met.

NOTE: The confidentiality of information received by the Foster Carer must be respected and never used for personal or financial gain. The Foster Carer must not make improper use of their position and role as a Foster Carer e.g. to pursue personal financial gain. The Foster Carer must not expect any child or young person placed with them to assist with any outside business interests of the Foster Carer.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Skills Level Document – Section 2 Handbook
- Skills Level Guidance – Section 2 Handbook
- Significant Changes Policy – Section 1 Handbook

TEMPLATES

- TEMPLATE 1 - Conflict of Interest Form
- TEMPLATE 2 - Decision Letter – Conflict of Interest
Full Name:  

Role; Foster Carer  

Service; Fostering  

In accordance with the Council’s Code of Conduct, I hereby declare the following interests which may conflict with the Council’s interests:-  

Financial/non-financial (delete as appropriate)  

This form should be forwarded to the Fostering Service
Section 1.8

**Conflict of Interest**  
(To be completed where a Foster Carer is working, paid or not)  
**NOTE; Foster Carer to complete Parts A and B**

### Part B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details of the work</th>
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<tr>
<td>Full time/part time including number of hours worked</td>
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<td>Place of work (include if any home working)</td>
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**Detail nature/type of work:**

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**Detail any areas of conflict of interest:**

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**Age and number of children fostered including plan i.e. short tem/long term:**

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**Any specific care needs of the children fostered over usual levels of need:**

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Section 1.8

Comment regarding how settled the child/ren are currently within the placement:

Views of the child/ren about proposed working arrangements:

Details of who is willing to assist within the support network including in the event of any immediate help needed:

How long will the support Carer be willing to sustain this arrangement?

How will you be able to ensure that the child attends all appointments/meetings/facilitate contact and can ensure the child’s social needs continue to be met? Please detail.

Foster Carer Signature 1  Date

Foster Carer Signature 2  Date
Section 1.8

Part C

SUPERVISING SOCIAL WORKERS EVALUATION INCLUDING RECOMMENDATION
(include views of Social Worker of children placed)

Supervising Social Worker Signature  Date
# Section 1.8

## MANAGER DECISION INCLUDING REASONS

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Manager</th>
<th>Date</th>
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© Gateshead Council 2014
Dear Foster Carer,

I acknowledge receipt of your application for paid/unpaid work (delete as appropriate) in connection with a potential conflict of interest under Code of Conduct.

I have considered the information you have forwarded along with the additional information and evaluation supplied by your Supervising Social Worker. It has been decided to approve/not to approve this request delete as appropriate)

The reasons for the decision is

________________________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________________________

(In the event of refusal)
You have the right to make a complaint about this decision and can access the Complaints procedure, however, I am willing to speak further with you about this if this will assist in the first instance, and you can contact me on 0191 4338333.

Yours sincerely

Manager

Gateshead Council  Civic Centre  Regent Street  Gateshead  NE8 1HH
Tel 0191 433 3000
Policies & Procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service:</th>
<th>Social Work – Children and Families</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title:</td>
<td>SIGNIFICANT CHANGES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manual:</td>
<td>Foster Carers Handbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure Number:</td>
<td>FCH-1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Reviewed:</td>
<td>01/07/2014</td>
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<tr>
<td>Next Review Date:</td>
<td>01/07/2017</td>
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INTRODUCTION

Foster Carers are required to notify the Fostering Service of any significant changes in the family and household.

SIGNIFICANT CHANGES

The list below are some of the changes the Fostering Service considers to be significant:

- Change or intended change of address/contact details (telephone numbers) – Foster Carer must provide written notification.
- Change or intended change of composition of their household - Foster Carer must provide written notification.
- Written notification must also be given concerning any change in personal circumstances and or/events affecting capacity to care for a child or young person in placement or suitability to be considered for a placement. This will include suitability factors within the Care Objectives of the approved Skill Level.
- Any factors concerning suitability of the household (including criminal offences) - Foster Carer must provide written notification.
- Any request or application by the Carers to adopt, or for registration as an early years provider or a later years provider under Part 3 of the Children Act 2006 - Foster Carer must provide written notification. In relation to becoming an early years provider, see Skills Level Document and Guidance.
- You are going on holiday (including extended holidays).
- There are major alterations made to the house or emergencies relating to the home environment.
- Any family member dies.
In the case where it is proposed there is not to be a Foster Carer available 24/7, due to proposals or changes in respect of employment (either paid or unpaid), including changes to working hours and working status, the Fostering Service must be alerted to any potential changes at the earliest opportunity for agreement to be sought, **prior to changes** (see Skills Level Document and Guidance). Relevant forms are to be completed: Conflict of Interest, Parts A and B by the Foster Carer, part C by the Supervising Social Worker. *(See Conflict of Interest Policy Section 1 Handbook)*.

- Change in your working status e.g. if you start or stop work.
- Severe marital or relationship difficulties, including one partner leaving home – even temporarily.
- Serious deterioration in the health of any family member.
- Any foreseen or current financial difficulties.
- Diagnosis of a serious illness.
- Any member of the family who is charged with a criminal offence.
- Any pets intended to be introduced into the household.
- A dog owned and kept by you becomes registered under the Dangerous Dogs Act.
- Additional or changes to commitments and pressures on the Foster Carers and/or family.

This list is not exhaustive and if there is any other significant change or event which you think it is important to share you should contact your Fostering Supervising Social Worker. If in any doubt you must discuss with your Fostering Supervising Social Worker.

The Fostering Supervising Social Worker will usually visit you when notified of a change, dependent on nature of change, and will discuss this change and its impact with you. This will be discussed with the Team Manager.

The Team Manager will decide whether a Foster Carer review is necessary at that point.

Foster Carers should inform their Fostering Supervising Social Worker/Fostering Manager or the Emergency Duty Team (if the occurrence is out of hours) as soon as possible, but no later than 24 hours of a significant change occurring or likely to occur.
Section 1.9

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Skills Level Document – Section 2 Handbook
- Skills Level Guidance – Section 2 Handbook
- Conflict of Interest Policy – Section 1 Handbook
- Foster Carer Agreement – Section 1 Handbook
INTRODUCTION

Following approval at Panel an identity card will be issued for each approved Carer in accordance with statutory guidance.

PROCESS

1. Following approval Foster Carers are asked to send in passport sized photographs to the Fostering Service.

2. The Fostering Service will take responsibility for the production and distribution of the Identity card.

3. You are responsible for the safe keeping of the card.
   - You must report by telephone to the Fostering Service any loss or damage to the card immediately. The telephone number is 0191 4338333.
   - You must not allow anyone else to use the ID card.

4. The ID Card should be carried on your person and used to confirm your identity where necessary e.g. when collecting a child from school.

5. A telephone number is provided for anyone who needs to verify your identity. You are asked to co-operate fully when anyone wishes to use that method to confirm who you are.

6. You card is the property of Gateshead Council. You must return it to the Fostering Service if you cease to foster. A letter will be sent to you requesting the return of the card. On return the card will be destroyed.
INTRODUCTION

Foster Carers have the right to express their views and have these taken seriously. Social Work – Children and Families Complaints Procedure explains what will happen if you make a complaint, compliment or suggestion to the Service.

Foster Carers have the right, under the Children Act 1989, to make a complaint in respect of a child or young person they look after on behalf of the Service. Foster Carers also have the right to complain on their own behalf in respect of the ‘service’ they receive from Social Work – Children and Families in relation to their role as Foster Carers. These complaints will be dealt with under the Complaints Procedures. An example of a complaint may relate to the level of support that either they or a young person in their care receives.

Foster Carers may also make a complaint concerning their approval terms including their Skill Level payment. In such circumstances they have the right to make a complaint via the Independent Review Mechanism, which is a regionally based independent fostering panel considering matters appertaining to approval.

DEPARTMENTAL COMPLAINTS

Complaints which do not directly relate to a user of our services are dealt with by Social Work – Children and Families under the Corporate Complaints Procedure.

A copy of Social Work – Children and Families Complaints Procedure and the Complaints and Compliments Form is available from your Fostering Supervising Social Worker. These are also available on the Gateshead Council website with relevant contact numbers.

It is hoped that Foster Carers will feel able to discuss any concerns in the first instance, with their Fostering Supervising Social Worker or the child or young person’s Social Worker dependent on the nature of the concern. Fostering Supervising Social Workers and children and young people’s Social Workers will discuss any complaints with their Team Managers.

If attempts to resolve the issues are unsuccessful, the Foster Carer may wish to have their complaint dealt with through the appropriate complaints procedure.
PROCEDURE

There are three stages to the procedure. However, you may not go through all of these.

STAGE 1 - RESOLUTION

You can make your complaint:

- Over the telephone, (0191) 4332692
- In writing, Social Care Customer Services, Gateshead Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead, NE8 1HH
- In person, to the member of staff you know best
- By email using the online form (Gateshead Council website)
- By email to enquiries.cbs@gateshead.gov.uk

An advocate can be provided to assist if you need help with your complaint. An issue that happened over 12 months ago may not be able to be investigated.

Once the complaint has been received an acknowledgement letter will be sent within 2 working days. The letter will tell you who will be looking into your complaint and how long you can expect to wait for a response.

Most complaints are resolved at this stage.

After investigations are complete, you will receive a letter explaining the outcome within 20 working days.

STAGE 2 - INVESTIGATION

At the end of Stage 1, if you are not satisfied with the outcome you can chose to have your complaint investigated further. The Social Care Complaints Manager will contact you directly to discuss the detail.

However, it may be more appropriate to ask the officer who has investigated your complaint at Stage 1 to look again at the issues you remain unhappy with. This may be all that is needed to resolve the complaint to your satisfaction.

If it is decided that a Stage 2 Investigation is necessary, an investigating officer independent of the service complained about is then appointed. An external independent person is also required to shadow the investigation to ensure that the process is fair and thorough.

So they can be sure of what is to be investigated, you will be asked to sign a definition of complaint. This will comprise of the issues you remain unhappy with after Stage 1 and your desired outcome (what you want the service to do to put things right).
Once they are clear on your definition and outcome, the investigation can start and you will receive a letter telling you when your complaint has been registered.

The investigation will then commence. The investigating officer and independent person will contact you to arrange a meeting to discuss your complaint and how they plan to investigate it.

Once a draft report is ready, you may be asked to comment on what has been found. If you wish to ask for any changes to this report, please discuss this with the investigating officer.

After the investigation is complete, a senior Manager responsible for the service complained about will adjudicate on your complaint.

You should receive a letter within 25 working days, (In complex situations, this could take up to 65 working days), confirming:

- What was found;
- What the service has decided to do about it;
- Why the decisions were reached;
- What you should do should you remain unhappy.

You will be kept informed of any delays.

**STAGE 3 – REVIEW PANEL**

When you receive the written outcome of stage 2, you will also be sent details of how to ask for the complaint to be heard by a Review Panel.

If you wish the review panel to consider your complaint, you must apply within 20 working days of receiving the written outcome to Stage 2.

A Review Panel is made up of three panel members independent of the Local Authority who will consider your complaint and advise the Local Authority on what they could do to put things right.

Once you have received your final outcome from the Chief Executive, it will include information about what you must do if you remain unhappy.
INDEPENDENT REVIEW MECHANISM

If your complaint concerns a matter concerning your approval terms or re-approval, (including Skill Level payment) you can make a complaint to the Independent Review Mechanism. The letter which is sent to you by the Agency Decision Maker following the decision which has been made explains this and your Supervising Social Worker or their Line Manager will also explain this in further detail.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- [www.gateshead.gov.uk/children-advocacy](http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/children-advocacy)
- Children's Services Complaints Procedure (available from SSW )
- Complaints leaflet available from Social Care Customer Services Gateshead Council or available online
- Children's Services Complaints FAQ (available online)
- Complaints and compliments form (available online)
- Got a problem, issue or complaint (leaflet for children with disabilities, available from Gateshead Council)
- Got a problem, issue or complaint? Get it sorted! (Leaflet available from Looked After Team Gateshead Council).
INTRODUCTION

This policy is based on the acceptance that Carers have the absolute right to freedom of movement between approving Fostering Services. It is also based on the principle that, in all circumstances, the welfare of any child or young person in placement must be paramount.

With this regard Gateshead Council will adopt the principals and protocols set out by the Fostering Network – Transfer of Foster Carers Protocol - along with all other good practice advice.

KEY PRINCIPLES INCLUDING AIMS

The following key principles will guide the work of the Fostering Service;

1. Gateshead Council will not make specific approaches to people whom it knows or believes to be Foster Carers for another Agency.

2. Foster Carers have the right to freedom of movement between Fostering Services.

3. The welfare of any child in placement including their safeguard is paramount when a transfer to another Agency is being considered. Children’s views will be closely listened to and taken into account in planning processes.

4. When a transfer of Agency is being considered, children must be guarded against unplanned moves and/or moves which are not in their best interests.

5. Statutory guidance, regulations and standards will always be complied with by Gateshead Council.

6. High standards of practice will always be aimed for when a transfer to or from an Agency is being considered.

7. Timescales will be adhered to during the transfer process.
Section 1.12

8. There will be no pressure on Foster Carers who are placed with an Independent or Voluntary Agency to transfer Agency where permanence is the plan.

9. Gateshead Council staff will cooperate fully with all external fostering Agencies and Carers who wish to change agencies and will at all times behave in a professional and helpful manner.

**BRIEF PROCEDURAL OUTLINE FOR GATESHEAD FOSTER CARER/S WISHING TO CHANGE AGENCY**

10. Gateshead Council recognises that there may be times when a Carer may wish to approach an alternative Agency for further information before taking this further in terms of submitting an application. In such circumstances, where applicable, Gateshead would wish the opportunity to discuss any areas of dissatisfaction with a Carer before any application is made in order to aim, wherever possible for a resolution. For instance, If the Foster Carer is expressing difficulties or dissatisfaction with any element of the Service, a period of up to 28 days would allow the Fostering Service time to address the issues raised. This may enable the Foster Carer/s to be retained or be an opportunity to learn lessons for the future management of the service. The Team Manager will have direct contact and discussion with the Foster Carer/s to ensure all areas have been explored.

11. Where a Carer makes a decision to change to a differing Fostering Agency, Gateshead will provide a written reference to the proposed new Fostering Agency. This will follow an information request from the new Agency, with information supplied in line with timescales identified below, however, before this can happen signed written permission by the Carers must be given to the Agency and forwarded to Gateshead Council.

12. Once the written permission has been granted Gateshead will agree for the new Fostering Agency to access the Carer/s records.

13. It is important that Carer’s are aware that the following information will be shared with any proposed new Agency, in line with statutory guidance;

   ▪ the report of the original assessment of the person’s suitability to foster or adopt.

   ▪ a copy of the report of the last review of the individual’s continuing suitability to foster or adopt and any other review report considered useful to understanding the person’s current suitability to foster or adopt.

   ▪ details of any concerns about standards of practice and what if anything is being done/has been done to address them.

   ▪ details of allegations made against the Foster Carer/Adopter or their household members (taking into account guidance at paragraph 3.79 of the Children Act 1989 Guidance. Volume 4;Fostering Services), and

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Section 1.12

- any other information considered to be relevant to the assessment of the person’s suitability to foster/adopt.

14. It must be noted that any reference provided by Gateshead Council will be provided in conjunction with the Social Worker responsible for the children or young people in placement. As referenced in 9, references must highlight any concerns including Standards of Care meetings, and any complaints or allegations.

15. Transfer will only be completed following a full assessment of the Carer’s by the new Fostering Service. This will include both Stages 1 and 2 of the assessment process, Stage 2 being a home study of the Foster Carer’s capabilities and suitability to foster. A report will be presented to Panel and the Carer’s approval will be terminated with Gateshead Council from the agreed date of transfer. When doing so the Fostering Service will record in writing whether this is solely at the request of the Foster Carer’s or whether there have been concerns and confirm this in writing to the Carers.

TIMESCALES

16. Once the new Fostering Agency has made a request from Gateshead Council which includes signed consents, Gateshead Council has a duty to make available the records within 15 working days in line with statutory guidance. The request to view the records should be acknowledged by the Fostering Agency within 2 working days. The 15 day timescale is to allow time to seek consent from relevant others to be obtained where this is needful (which should be undertaken within the timescale of 5 working days), and following this to allow for any redaction to be undertaken.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Recruitment Policy - Section 2 Supervising Social Worker Handbook
FAMILY AND FRIENDS AND CONNECTED PERSONS FOSTERING POLICY

OVERVIEW

- In line with statutory requirements Gateshead Council has a comprehensive policy concerning Family, Friends and Connected Persons which is applicable to all circumstances where children reside with their relatives or friends. This will include circumstances where the living arrangements may be informal, or it may relate to Private Fostering or be as part of a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order or Adoption Order which has been made by the Court. Alternatively it may be where children have been made the subject of a Care Order following a direction from the Court. Gateshead’s policy sets out services and support services available for Family and Friend Carers including eligibility criteria and is openly accessible and available upon request. The Family, Friends and Connected Persons Policy is an Appendix to this overview.

- The basis of this overview complements the Family and Friends and Connected Persons Policy, sections of which, relating to Looked After children, must be read in conjunction with this policy. (Appendix 1) This overview concerns circumstances whereby care is provided under Section 20 of the Children’s Act 1989, or a legal order has been made to the Local Authority, this being either an Interim or a full Care Order. In such circumstances when an order has been made and the child is placed with a relative or friend, the legal term being “connected person”, the “connected person” must become an approved Foster Carer and the child will become a Looked After child.

- Gateshead Council welcomes Family and Friend and Connected Persons as Foster Carers, recognising the contribution that they make in that they play a very significant role in the life of a child with whom they are connected. They also provide important continuity for the child in allowing them to continue to identify with their heritage as well as the child being nurtured in an environment where they are both loved and cared for. A non discriminatory approach is always adopted towards Family and Friend and Connected Persons Carers which is highlighted within the full policy.
Section 1.13

- This overview and practice within the Fostering Service is also based upon the foundation guidance contained within the 2011 statutory guidance as well as the statutory guidance relating to Family and Friends and Connected Persons Carers from the Assessment and approval of foster carers amended guidance in 2013.

- It is recognised that in accordance with planning processes, in order to secure the best outcomes for children placed with “connected persons”, there is a recognition that it may be best for the child on a Care Order not to be subject of a Care Order indefinitely. As such, many children will only be Looked After in line with timescales within Care proceedings when there may be an exit route. For instance there may be a rehabilitation plan in terms of return to the birth family, or in the event that this is not the case the plan may be for the Foster Carers to gain a Special Guardianship Order or a Residence Order, or occasionally an Adoption Order. In many circumstances this may be in the child’s best long term interests, however, there will be certain circumstances where it is in the child’s longer term interests to remain Looked After, or at least for a period when an Order can be applied for at a later date in line with planning processes. Examples may include levels of complexity of the child where there may be concerns about stability of placement factors which require additional planning and support, or alternatively significant complexities concerning managing contact which may not be easy to resolve.

- Gateshead Foster Carers who are Family and Friends and Connected Persons Carers will receive the same support as mainstream Carers. This relates to support concerning support visits from their Supervising Social Worker and Social Worker, also financial support, training and any support required concerning contact. Carers are also eligible for emergency out of hours support and access to support groups. Supervising Social Workers, along with Social Workers will work together also to consider support in areas such as support for housing etc. The same Care planning processes will apply and Carers will hold the same Care planning documentation as mainstream Carers.

- In relation to financial support, Foster Carers will have access to the full range of financial support including fostering allowances for the child, equipment and payments of Foster Carer fees. Eligibility for the level of fee will be applied in the same manner as for other mainstream Foster Carers, whereby the level of skill and competence must be able to be demonstrated as well as attendance at levels of training and support groups relevant to the Skill Level. The Skills Level Documents and Guidance gives full details of the Eligibility Criteria including Care Objectives as well as setting out broader guidance and these documents are applicable to Family and Friend and Connected Persons caring situations.

- Children’s views and wishes will be regularly sought in line with mainstream placements and their views taken into account in all decisions made concerning their future and care including day to day issues.
Section 1.13

- There will be an expectation that Foster Carers will be able to provide a good standard of care which is in line with the 2011 Fostering Standards. Clearly increased support will be given to Foster Carers to adhere to the standards, where needed, however, where there may be concerns over standards which continue or where there may be safeguarding issues, there will be recourse to deregistration in the same way as mainstream Foster Carers.

- Family and Friend and Connected Persons Foster Carers will have access to the same complaints systems as other Carers and have recourse to the Independent Review Mechanism in the same way.

- Family and Friend and Connected Persons Carers must undertake the TSD standards in the same way as other Carers do, however, they will be supported to do so by Supervising Social Workers and the time framework is extended to 18 months to allow extra time for this.

- There is a duty placed upon the Fostering service to recognise the needs of Family and Friends and Connected Persons Carers within the Fostering Standards of 2011. As such the Fostering Service will ensure that Supervising Social Workers who are supervising the family have the necessary skills and training to do so, will ensure that training is suited to the needs of Family and Friends and will develop support groups suitable to the needs of Family and Friends Carers.

See Appendix 1 - Gateshead Council’s Family and Friends and Connected Person’s Policy.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Skills Level Documents - Section 2 Handbook
- Skills Level Guidance - Section 2 Handbook
- Fostering Service Regulations, Standards and Guidance 2011 and further Guidance 2013
- Statutory Guidance for Family and Friends, Department for Education 2011
- Section 2 Payment for Skills/Financial support and information Foster Carer Handbook
APPENDIX 1

FAMILY AND FRIENDS AND CONNECTED PERSONS CARERS POLICY

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   5.2 Private fostering
   5.3 Immediate placement with a connected person
   5.4 Immediate placement with a local authority or independent fostering Agency Carer whilst a connected person is identified or assessed
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   6.1 Criteria for making a Regulation 24 placement
   6.2 Pre placement assessment (Schedule 4 report)
   6.3 Approval of a placement with a connected person
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   7.3 Visits to the Placement
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8.1 Assessment of connected person following approval

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Appendix 1 – A to Z of Local Services

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1. Introduction

Who this policy applies to

This policy relates to all situations where a child / young person needs to live away from their family of origin and arrangements are being considered or have been made for a child or young person to be cared for by family and friends.

This policy is relevant to:

- Lead Members for Children’s Services in Gateshead Council.
- Directors of Children’s Services
- Managers of services for referral, safeguarding and planning and looked after services.
- Social Workers and other social care staff working with children in need and looked after children.
- Gateshead Council’s relevant partners.
- Other providers of services to children in need and looked after children including private and voluntary sector providers.
- Family and friends Carers.
- Children/young people living with family and friends Carers and their parents.

The policy explains how Gateshead Council Children and Families Service and its partner agencies exercise their duties and responsibilities to children and young people living in these types of arrangements.

The policy is issued in accordance with the Statutory Guidance for Family and Friends, Department of Education, 2011 and also has regard to the statutory framework including:

- The Children Act 1989
- The Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2011 and 2013
- Replacement Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations on Private Fostering, DfES 2005
- Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and 2013
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- National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011
- Assessment and approval of foster carers amended guidance 2013
- Special Guardianship Guidance DfES 2005
- Adoption and Children Act 2002
- Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005
- Adoption Regulations amended 2011
- Adoption Statutory Guidance 2011
- Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005
- Equality Act 2010

Due regard has been given to any relevant case law at the time of writing.

For the purposes of this policy the definition of a family and friends Carer is:

‘A relative, friend or other person with a prior connection with somebody else’s child who is caring for that child full time. An individual who is a ‘connected person’ to a looked after child may also be a family and friend Carer. A child who is cared for by a family and friends Carers may or may not be looked after by the local authority’

Relevant service users and stakeholders have been consulted about this policy and will be consulted with when the policy is reviewed.

**Statement of principles underpinning this policy**

Children have the right to be brought up by their own families, so far as this is consistent with their welfare. This is one of the most fundamental rights in a democratic and civilised society.

Gateshead Council recognises the important contribution family and friends make in providing care for children who for a number of reasons cannot remain with their family of origin and supports the principle of placing children with family and friends Carers as first choice, where it is safe to do so and is in the interests of the child’s welfare.

If children and young people have to live apart from their family of origin, both they and their parents should be given adequate information to help them to consider alternatives and contribute to making of an informed choice about the appropriate forms of care. Parents should continue to play as full a part in their lives as possible so far as this is consistent with their welfare.
Intervention by the Local Authority against the will of the parent or child should be avoided where possible and when required should be the minimum needed to safeguard the welfare of the child. Parents and family and friends Carers require information and support at different stages of the child’s life. These needs may arise regardless of their legal status and not everyone’s needs are the same; some need extra support during difficult or uncertain times in their own lives whilst others may need more intensive help over a longer period of time. Children who live with family and friends need a range of services that support children and families according to their individual and changing needs.

Support to children living with family and friends Carers is underpinned by the principles that a child’s welfare is paramount, and respect should be given to individual, cultural, family and community diversity. Children and families should be active participants in services provided for them. Services will work in partnership with professionals, children, parents and extended family. Evidence based practice will be used to inform decision-making and practice intervention.

Gateshead Council is committed to anti discriminatory practice and will not discriminate against anyone on the basis of their age, disability (which includes mental health and people diagnosed as clinically obese), race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment (people who are having or who have had a sex change, transvestites and transgender people), marriage and civil partnership.

Children may be cared for by members of their extended families, friends or other people who are connected with them for a wide range of reasons and in a variety of different arrangements:

- In informal arrangements with a relative
- In informal arrangements with friends or other family members which last for a period of less than 28 days.
- As a Private Fostering arrangement (see also Private Fostering Procedure).
- As a Looked After child placed with relatives approved as Foster Carers (see also Placements with Connected Person Procedure)
- Under a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order (see also Applications for Special Guardianship Orders Procedure)
- In arrangements which may lead to an Adoption Order

Local Authority responsibilities will vary depending on the legal status of the child and the arrangement.

Whether or not a child who is cared for by a family and friends Carer should be Looked After, or whether that child’s needs should be met by providing support under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, will be a matter to be decided by the Local Authority on a case by case basis.
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2. Principles underlying the policy

Gateshead Council aims to improve outcomes for children and young people who are unable to live with their parents, and are cared for by immediate or extended family, friends or others who are known to them.

Children who are unable to live with their parents and who are being brought up by people who know them, should receive support to safeguard and promote their welfare irrespective of their legal status.

This policy sets out the range of arrangements that enable children and young people to be cared for by people they know, if they are unable to remain in the care of their parents.

The policy outlines the assessment, planning and decision making process as well as the support services, which may be available from the Local Authority (LA), partner agencies, such as health and housing, and voluntary agencies.

The policy is available to family, friends and connected persons who are caring, or wish to apply to care, for a child or children who are known to them and are unable to live with their parents. A connected person is a relative, friend or other person who is ‘connected’ with a child. This could include a person who is known to the child in a professional capacity, such as a childminder or teacher.

The policy should be read in conjunction with the Information Booklet for Family, Friend and Connected Person Carers, which is available on the website or as a hard copy.

All decisions made in relation to children will have their best interests as the paramount consideration. The primary aim of the LA is to ensure that children and young people are safeguarded and their welfare promoted so that they can achieve their full potential.

Children and young people will be encouraged to express their wishes and views about any decisions that will affect them. Their views will be taken into account and where they cannot be acted on, a clear and honest explanation will be given. Children and young people will be supported and assisted to become independent, to reach their full potential and play an active part in their community and society as a whole. Where a decision is made that a child or young person cannot safely return to the care of their birth parents the Local Authority will make plans for permanence in a time-scale appropriate to the child’s needs.

Contact between children and young people and those important to them, including immediate and extended family, friends and community links, will be actively promoted as long as it is in the best interests of the child.
Family, friends or connected persons will be supported to enable them to care for a child to the best of their ability. Advice and information will be given regarding partner or voluntary agencies that can also provide the services and support required. Services to children and young people, family, friends and connected persons will respect their race, culture, language, disability, sexuality and faith.

Children and young people, family, friends and connected persons who are dissatisfied with the service or support they have received will be provided with information on the complaints procedure of the Local Authority.

3. Accountability

The Senior Manager with overall responsibility for the family and friends policy is the Children and Families Director. Management information is provided to the senior management team and operational management team. This includes the number of children subject to Special Guardianship support arrangements, adoption support, the number of children in formal family and friends arrangements and data about private fostering arrangements.

4. Family Group Conferences

A family group conference should be held:

If a parent or other person with Parental Responsibility asks the LA to provide accommodation for a child, or When a decision is made to start Care Proceedings

If there are serious concerns regarding a child’s safety or welfare the Local Authority may take immediate action to remove a child from their parents, or those who have parental responsibility. In such situations a family group conference should be held once the child is safeguarded.

Parental responsibility may be held by a child’s parent or parents, or someone who has been given Parental Responsibility through an order made in court, for example, a Residence or Special Guardianship Order. (Definition: Parental responsibility means all the rights, responsibilities, duties and powers which a parent of a child has which enables them, by law, to make decisions about a child and their property).

A Family Group Conference is organised by a co-coordinator and will bring together all those who are involved with a child to discuss and plan for the child’s future. The co-ordinator helps those attending to formulate a plan, within their own resources, to support the child and, where appropriate, their current Carers. The plan is recorded and regularly reviewed.
5. Range of outcomes for children and young people who are not able to live with their birth parent(s)

5.1 Informal placement with a family member

Birth parents or those with parental responsibility may ask a relative to care for their child, either temporarily, or on a more permanent basis. The legal definition of a relative is:

A grandparent, aunt or uncle, brother or sister (whether full blood or half blood or by marriage or civil partnership) or step-parent. If there are no concerns for the child’s safety or welfare the LA will have no involvement in the arrangement, but relatives who need help or advice could request assistance and can contact the Local Authority for support under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

Following an assessment the Local Authority will determine what support is required. This depends on the needs of the child in placement and those who are caring for them. The child or young person does not become a Looked After Child because the Local Authority is not involved in making the placement.

5.2 Private fostering

If a parent places a child with someone who is not closely related to him or her for more than 28 days, either continuously or over the course of a year, the placement becomes a private fostering arrangement. It is a legal requirement for either the parent, or the person having parental responsibility, and the person providing the care, to contact the Local Authority and inform them of the arrangement.

The financial arrangements for caring for the child are made between the parent and the person caring for the child, but the child and their Carers have the right to be assessed for advice and support. This right is outlined in Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. Once a Local Authority is made aware of a private fostering arrangement there is a duty to make sure that the child is safe and that their needs are being met. A visit will be made to the placement to assess that it is satisfactory. Statutory checks, including Disclosure and Barring Service record checks, will be carried out on all adult members of the household. Contact will be made with the person who placed the child and regular reviews and visits will be carried out. If the Local Authority was involved in making the placement it is not private fostering.

The Local Authority following an assessment may form the view that the placement is not in the best interest of the child and in those circumstances the child will need to return to the person with parental responsibility and they, or the Local Authority if requested, will make other arrangements for the child.
5.3. Immediate or Emergency Placement by the Local Authority with a Connected Person

A child who is placed by the Local Authority with a family member, friend or connected person, will be a Looked After Child. A Looked After Child is a child or young person up to age of 18 years who:

Birth parent(s), or anyone having Parental Responsibility, has asked the Local Authority to care for them on their behalf. The child is 'accommodated' under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, or is subject to a Care Order, including an Interim Care Order, under Section 31 of the Children Act 1989.

A Looked After Child can only be cared for by an approved Foster Carer. If a family member, friend or connected person has been asked to care for a Looked After Child they will have to be assessed to become a Family and Friends Foster Carer. An immediate or emergency placement with a connected person can be made under Regulation 24 of the Case Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010. The Local Authority will ensure that family, friend and connected person Carers, regardless of whether they have temporary or full approval, will be fully supported in the care of any child placed with them. This will include assistance in making and supervising contact between a child and other members of their immediate or extended family.

Carers with temporary approval will have access to support groups and relevant training and the Local Authority will facilitate access to professional support, for example the Looked After Children; Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service psychologist, if it is assessed to be appropriate to meet the child's needs.

5.4. Immediate Placement with a Local Authority Whilst a Connected Person is Identified or Assessed.

In an emergency the Local Authority may place a Looked After Child in a foster placement whilst they make enquiries as to whether there are any relatives, friends or connected persons who could care for the child. This information can be gathered from the child’s parents or through a family group conference.

If there is a relative, friend or connected person who is a potential Carer the Local Authority may make a decision to undertake a viability assessment. This requires the family member, friend or connected person to work with the placing Social Worker to complete a report that considers their suitability to care for the child. If the outcome is positive the child may be placed immediately under Regulation 24 and the placing Social Worker will complete a report to be approved by their Service Manager. This approval is only for 16 weeks and if the child’s plan is for them to remain Looked After longer than 16 weeks a full assessment will be carried out by the Fostering Service whilst the child remains in an approved foster placement.
6. Placement of a Child or Young Person with a Connected Person

6.1. Criteria for Making a Regulation 24 Placement

When an immediate or emergency placement is required it can only be considered under Regulation 24. Although the determining factor in the placement being made is that it is assessed as being in the child’s best interests, the Local Authority must be satisfied that those who will be caring for the child will be able to prioritise and meet their needs, and will work in partnership. Therefore an assessment is carried out prior to the child being placed.

6.2 Pre-Placement Assessment (Schedule 4 report)

The proposed Carer(s) for the child have to be approved and an assessment is carried out using Schedule 4 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.

This schedule outlines the information and checks, including a local police check, required before a child can be placed. The Local Authority has a duty to safeguard and promote a child’s welfare and before a decision can be made it is important to have as much information as possible about the Carers and all those living in the household.

The assessment is carried out by the placing Social Worker in consultation with a worker from the fostering service. The assessment, which must be substantially completed before a child is placed, will determine if approval is given.

6.3. Approval of a Placement with a Connected Person

The assessment is considered by the Manager of the placing team in conjunction with the relevant Service Manager. If they are in agreement, the potential Carers will be granted approval as Foster Carers for 16 weeks only. Immediately the child is placed a further assessment will be carried out by a fostering Social Worker. If the assessment is not completed within 16 weeks, temporary approval can be extended for up to 8 weeks in line with the statutory guidance. Prior to an extension being considered the view of the Fostering Panel must be sought.

7. Responsibilities of the placing Social Worker

7.1. Notification of the Placement

The child’s Social Worker must notify all those involved with the child that the placement has been made and an initial Looked After Child review should be arranged to take place within 20 working days of the placement starting.
Prior to, or within 5 working days of making the placement a Placement Plan should be drawn up. The information to be recorded in the Placement Plan is specified in Schedule 2 of the 2010 Regulations. Carers need to have as much information as is available to support them in caring for the child.

7.2. Financial Support for the Placement

Arrangements for financial support must be made by the placing Social Worker once the child is placed. Payments will be made in line with the age related fostering allowances for the 16 weeks of approval and, if a further extension of approval is granted, until such time as the Carer receives full approval or the child is moved from the placement or alternative legal order is made.

If a Carer requires additional initial finance to enable them to care for a child, the Social Worker will submit a request to the Manager of the Fostering Team.

During the assessment and subsequent approval by the fostering panel the Carers skills, knowledge and experience will have been assessed and the Carers may be eligible for a Skill Level payment. They will be required to undertake training in order to receive a payment in addition to satisfying competence from their skills, knowledge and experience.

7.3. Visits to the Placement

If a child is placed under Regulation 24 a visit must be made at least weekly, until such time as the first Looked After Child review is held. Following this, visits must take place not less than once every 4 weeks until the Carer is granted full approval under Regulation 27 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, or the final hearing of the care proceedings has taken place.

8. Responsibilities of the Fostering Service

8.1 Assessment of Connected Person Following Temporary Approval

The assessment will comprise of a series of interviews with all members of the household. Checks and references will be required, which will include contact with the Disclosure and Barring Service, friends, family and employers. Confirmation of income and housing status will also be required. The assessment is the same as is carried out for any prospective Foster Carer regardless of whether or not they are related to the child.

However, there is greater flexibility in the assessment of family and friends and connected persons in respect of certain issues, such as accommodation. Looked After Children are expected to have their own room but if the child is a family member or a relative of a friend it may be appropriate for the child to share a bedroom with the Carer’s own child. This arrangement would be considered as part of the Regulation 24 Assessment.
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If a family member, friend or connected person is unable to take on the care of a child due to limited accommodation, the Local Authority will undertake to liaise on their behalf with relevant agencies.

8.2. Assessment of Prospective Family, Friend or Connected Person Where the Child is Not Placed Under Regulation 24

A full assessment will be undertaken by the Fostering Service where a child will not be placed with the relative, friend or connected person. This does not fall under Regulation 24 or 27 arrangements.

Preparation Training Group is available to all those who are caring or wish to care for children known to them and this will provide greater understanding of the expectations of the LA and the support and advice Carers can access.

All family and friends Carers are considered on their ability to meet the individual needs of the child related or known to them. However, following approval, Carers will be expected to meet the National Minimum Standards for Foster Care.

At any time during the assessment the Local Authority can make a decision not to proceed. A meeting will be held to explain why this decision has been made and applicants will be advised to seek independent legal advice.

8.3. Role of the Fostering Panel

On completion of the assessment a report will be presented to the Fostering Panel by the assessing Social Worker. Temporarily approved Carer and applicants will be given a copy of the report prior to the meeting. The recommendation of the assessing Social Worker will always be discussed with applicants or Carers before the Panel. Reg 24 approved Carers and applicants are encouraged to attend the Fostering Panel and may bring a friend or family member with them who will act as a supporter.

8.4. Role of the Decision Maker

The Panel will make a recommendation for the Regulation 24 Carer or applicants to be: Approved, or Not approved The Panel may also recommended that the case is deferred for further information. The Panel acts independently of the Fostering Service and can only make a recommendation.

This is forwarded to the decision maker. The decision maker must make a decision within 7 working days of receiving a final copy of the minutes and the Fostering Panel’s recommendation. The decision will be verbally communicated to applicants within 2 working days and a letter confirming the decision will be sent out within a further 5 working days (Standard 14.9, Fostering Services, National Minimum Standards).
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All applicants, including those who are currently caring for a child, can make a representation if they do not agree with the decision made by the decision maker. If the Carers have been given time limited approval this will be extended until such time as the appeal process is completed.

Representation must be made within 28 days of receiving the decision letter, which will give details on how to appeal. Applicants may appeal through the Local Authority’s own appeals process or use the Independent Review Mechanism. This is an independent body, which will be convened to review all of the information presented to the original panel. Details on how to contact the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) will be included in the letter from the Decision Maker.

8.5 **Support After Approval**

Following approval a Supervising Social Worker from the fostering team will be introduced to the Carers. Details will be given on the frequency of supervision visits, and the support groups and training available. Visits will be made not less than once every 4 weeks, or more frequently if it is felt that the Carer requires additional support. Following approval family and friends Carers will continue to be paid an allowance in line with the Fostering Network recommendations and are eligible to apply for a Skill Level payment on the basis of their Skill Level and knowledge which will include training.

9. **Responsibilities of Connected Person Carers**

Regardless of the existing relationship between the Carer and the child, Carers are expected to sign a Foster Carer agreement, which confirms that they will:

- Care for the child as a member of the family.
- Agree not to use any physical punishment.
- Inform the Local Authority of any serious injuries, accidents or illnesses the child may experience.
- Inform the Local Authority if a child is missing.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Advise the Local Authority of any change of circumstances affecting the child, the Carers or any member of the family.
- Allow the Local Authority access to the child at any time.
- Allow the Local Authority to remove the child at any time.
10. Support Services to Connected Person Carers

The Local Authority gives an undertaking that children in placement will have an allocated Social Worker and that all Foster Carers will have a named Supervising Social Worker. Training, support and advice will be made available to facilitate Carers in meeting the needs of the child placed with them. On approval Carers will also be joined as members of Fostering Network. Carers and Looked After Children (LAC) also have access to the services such as education support and the LAC nurse and Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

11. Housing Accommodation

Housing Authorities and registered social landlords are engaged to ensure that their policies recognise the importance of the role performed by family and friends Carers and that whenever possible, family and friends Carers living in social housing are given appropriate priority to move to more suitable accommodation if this will prevent the need for a child to become Looked After. Gateshead Council's Lettings policy incorporates measures to ensure that preventative actions can be taken to avoid the need for a child to become "looked after".

The Lettings policy States:

Safeguarding Children

Applicants who meet this criterion must be re-housed to prevent a child being taken into care or to ensure the safety of children under the terms of current legislation.

Assessments become appropriate when a placement or a child’s welfare is at risk and is not covered by the lettings policy. An example of such a situation may be where a child cannot be discharged from Local Authority care due to the fact that their guardian/parent does not have a home for them to go to. In this case, their specific housing needs would not be covered within the general lettings policy, therefore Critical Need status would be granted under the “Safeguarding Children” category. In all cases there will be a recommendation from the appropriate body within the Council.

The above is intended to give priority for housing where children are at risk for reasons such as family breakdown, child abuse etc. It is anticipated that these cases will be within the remit of the “Child Protection Criteria.”

When such a case emerges the issue must be highlighted to the caseworker dealing with the application for housing.
12. Supporting Contact with Parents/Family

Where a child is Looked After, Gateshead council is required to promote contact between the child and his or her family ‘unless it is not practicable or consistent with the child’s welfare’. The overall objective of the contact arrangements will be included in the child’s Care Plan and the specific arrangements will be set out in the child’s Placement Plan. It may be identified that specific assistance is required to ensure that any such contact can be managed safely.

13. Long Term Options

13.1 Residence Order

A Residence Order (RO) determines where a child will live and a report has to be completed and presented to court. This should incorporate the views of all those involved, including the child. Carers cannot apply for a Residence Order until the child has been resident for a year. The Local Authority or the parent of the child does not have to be in agreement with an application for a Residence Order for it to be made.

The order lasts until a child reaches 18 and the Carer may receive child benefit and child tax credit. The Local Authority can agree to the payment of a Residence Order allowance but this is discretionary, means tested and subject to annual review.

The parent or those who had parental responsibility for the child prior to them being looked after, retains parental responsibility but the Carer is able to make day to day decisions.

13.2 Special Guardianship Order

A Special Guardianship Order (SGO) can be applied for, with or without the support of the LA or the parent of a child, after the child has been resident for a year. A report is completed by the Local Authority and presented to the court. Although parental responsibility continues to be shared by the Carers and the child’s parents the Carers are able to make a final decision. The order lasts until a child is 18 unless it is varied or discharged prior to that age. A parent must obtain leave of the court to apply for a SGO to be revoked.

As part of the report submitted to court the Local Authority must outline the support plan for the child and the Carers, both now and in the future. This may include financial assistance, which can be paid either as a one off payment or as regular payment. Any allowance is means tested and reviewed annually. The Carers may be eligible to apply for child benefit and child tax credit.

The Local Authority has discretion to provide services or support to the child or the family and, if the child was a looked after child prior to the making of an SGO, they may be entitled to leaving care services and support.
13.3 Adoption

Approved Foster Carers, including connected persons Carers, can apply to adopt if a child has been resident for a year.

Adoption transfers all of the parent’s parental responsibilities to the adoptive parents. The Local Authority, acting as an adoption Agency, assesses and approves potential adopters and the court makes the order. If the child is a looked after child the Carers must give the LA notice that they intend to apply for adoption.

Until such time as an adoption order is made, the Local Authority will continue to supervise the placement of the child with the Carers. Once the order is made the Local Authority withdraws, unless their on-going involvement is part of the support plan drawn up at the time the report was presented to court. Adoptive parents have an entitlement to be assessed for support and services and may receive either a one off payment or a regular allowance, which is means tested and reviewed annually. Adoptive parents can claim child benefit and child tax credit.

14. Complaints/Compliments

Gateshead Council fostering service has a clear complaints, compliments and comments policy. Formal complaints are dealt with through the complaints and representation procedure. These are monitored centrally and all complaints received should be responded to within 20 working days of receipt and recommendations are shared with senior Managers.

Please look on the council website www.gateshead.gov.uk.