

Sunderland City Council Looked After Children Service

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE Revised April 2016



Looked After Children's Strategy 2016 - 18

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The Sunderland Fostering Service will provide a range of foster placements for those children looked after by Sunderland City Council requiring a family placement. The Fostering Service will ensure that foster carers are provided with the skills, knowledge and support to enable them to meet the assessed needs of children placed and provide a safe and secure home environment.

AIMS

The Fostering Service will:

- recruit a range of foster carers to provide placements for children of different ages, abilities, backgrounds and assessed needs
- prepare, assess, train, supervise and support a range of foster carers to look after those children and young people who are cared for in a family placement setting
- treat all those who are users of the Fostering Service with dignity and respect regardless of their ethnicity, gender, religion, disability, culture, marital status, sexual orientation, income or accommodation
- Provide services that are integrated with the other services provided by the council and developed in partnership with; service users, other services provided in the community, the region and nationally by other agencies. Including other fostering agencies

OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of the fostering service is to fulfill the council's duties and responsibilities in respect of fostering services in accordance with all relevant legislation and standards, and:

The overall objective of the fostering service is to fulfill the City Council's duties and responsibilities in respect of fostering services in accordance with all relevant legislation and standards, and:

- To plan and implement effective recruitment campaigns and strategies in order to attract the range of carers identified to meet the needs of the looked after population

- To undertake effective assessments of prospective carers within specified timescales.
- To establish and support a Fostering Panel and to consider assessments and make recommendations for approval to the agency decision maker.
- To provide pre and post approval training for applicants and carers, equipping them to meet the needs of this group of children and young people.
- To provide regular recorded supervision and support contacts with carers by suitably qualified and experienced staff.
- To ensure that additional support is available to carers to underpin placement stability and improve outcomes for children in placement.
- To protect children and young people from abuse and neglect.
- To create stability for children and young people in foster care.
- To achieve better life chances for looked after children particularly in relation to health, education and employment and leisure activities.
- To maintain and promote contact with family members where appropriate.
- To prepare young people adequately for when they eventually leave their foster placement.
- To create lifelong attachments with carers in order that children and young people continue to be supported into adulthood.
- To work in partnership with children and young people, their parents and carers and social workers.

To provide an environment where each child and young person is helped to make the best of his or her abilities emotionally, physically, educationally and socially.

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

A range of legislation and guidance governs the way in which the Fostering Service is provided and managed. The Children Act 1989 underpins the detailed framework for the provision of the service found in the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011, and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (England) 2010. Additional relevant guidance and procedures are found within:

- Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4 Fostering Services (2011)
- Children's Services Procedures
- Fostering Service Procedures and Guidance
- Foster Carers Handbook
- Sunderland Safeguarding Board Procedures
- Health and Safety Policy
- Complaints Procedure

VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

It is the expectation of Sunderland City Council Fostering Service that all staff and partner agencies and approved foster carers will actively endorse and support the following principles:

- The welfare of children will be paramount in all considerations in the work of the fostering service.
- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.

- Wherever possible, children should be brought up in their birth families, but where this is not possible, it is essential to ensure that children are securely attached to alternative carers capable of providing safe and effective care for the duration of their childhood.
- The Fostering Service values working in partnership with the child, birth family members and significant others and with all other agencies involved with the child as far as is appropriate to the safety and welfare needs of the child.
- Children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be fully recognised, positively valued, promoted and fully taken into account when decisions are made.
- All children will have the same opportunities in the Fostering Service, regardless of gender, age, religion, race, culture, disability and language as far as is humanly possible to provide them.
- Delays in achieving permanency for children can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and are to be avoided as far as possible.
- The particular needs of disabled children, those with complex needs and older children who have existing attachments to birth family and other significant people will be fully taken into account when decisions are made.
- The wishes and feelings of children for whom there is a permanence plan will be carefully considered, but they will be helped to understand that the adults concerned will have the final responsibility for decisions made
- Children have the right to full information about what is happening to them and why and to be given explanations commensurate with their age and understanding.
- Children have a right to make representations and complaints and will be helped to do so when assistance is required.
- The role of birth family members who are willing and able to contribute to planning for children will be valued and respected.
- Services provided will value difference, be anti-discriminatory and respect confidentiality as far as is appropriate to the safety and welfare of the child.
- A policy of delegated authority is implemented to ensure children looked after have as normal lives as possible with the same opportunities as other children

STAFFING

See Appendix 1

STAFF SUPERVISION, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Each member of staff receives formal recorded supervision each month. The purpose of supervision is two-fold: to set, monitor and review individual tasks, and to monitor performance.

Supervision will include a review of assessments undertaken; carers' support issues, other work areas and a file review. The individual targets identified in the annual appraisal will also be reviewed in supervision.

There is an annual appraisal for each member of staff that focuses on staff performance in relation to individual agreed criteria. Individual and team targets related to services aims and objectives are reviewed and new targets set for the next review period. The individual's training and development needs are reviewed and a development plan is established for the next period. The line manager of the member of staff undertaking the appraisal verifies each appraisal.

In addition, individual staff's development and training needs are considered when unplanned external training becomes available to decide upon the most appropriate nomination from the teams.

In addition to individual supervision and development systems regular team meetings are held. Within these meetings information is shared, consultation about whole service developments takes place, issues are discussed and solutions sought.

Regular team development events are held to review service objectives and team tasks and to draw up the teamwork plan for the next period.

Monthly team briefing sessions are attended by staff of the team within which information about national, local and service developments are shared.

Independent practitioners (IPs) are allocated to a named Operational Manager. Supervision is arranged in respect of specific allocated work and on request. IPs are prepared for their task by an induction programme following normal recruitment processes and are invited to a specific training and team/panel training as appropriate and available.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE A SERVICE?

Fostering Services provided by Sunderland City Council are available to:

- Children who live in the City of Sunderland.
- Children looked after by the City of Sunderland.
- Prospective foster carers who live in the City of Sunderland.
- Foster carers and their family members who live in the City of Sunderland.
- Foster carers and their family members who have in placement a child from the City of Sunderland.
- Birth parents and other birth family members who live in the City of Sunderland who may be or have been in foster care.

SERVICES PROVIDED

The Fostering Service provides a range of family placements to cater for a variety of children and young people, these include:

Family Based Care:

- Mainstream Foster Carers – These are carers who have been approved by the Fostering Panel to care for children of varying ages and gender and for time limited periods.

A new fee Level A, B, C Fee paid structure was fully implemented in April 2012. This replaced all existing schemes with the exception of short breaks.

*A new fee paid scheme is currently being considered .

- Short Break Carers – Disabled Children. Family based short break care for those children with a physical or learning disability. This is managed within the permanency team.
- Short Break Carers – Non-Disability. Used as part of the support package for specific carers to improve the stability of placements.
- Fee-paid Short Break Carers – a professional fee based scheme that also attracts a fostering allowance for the children in placement.

- Permanent Foster Carers – these are carers who provide a permanent home to children who have been approved for permanency but for who foster care is the preferred family placement option to meet their particular needs. This group of carers may also have additional registrations.
- Relative/Friend (connected person) Carers – these are carers known to a specific child or children who have been assessed as foster carers for those children alone. They are paid a fostering allowance and are eligible to receive a fee. They also have access to the same level of supervision, support and training as mainstream carers.
- Fee-paid Permanent Foster Carers – these carers provide a home for children with particularly complex needs who require a permanent alternative family and where adoption is not possible or appropriate
- Foster Care Worker Plus (FCW+) Scheme – these fee paid carers provide placements for older young people with complex needs and challenging behaviour. They are provided with comprehensive wrap around support packages.
- Parent and child placements are made from within the Foster Worker Scheme or via the new fee scheme through a premium task centred placement

Fostering Service Tasks:

- The recruitment, assessment, training, support and review of carers.
- The provision of equipment, practical and financial support to placements.
- The coordination and management of all placements, including foster placements, is undertaken jointly with the commissioning team

SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

A comprehensive range of services are provided for children placed by the fostering service.

These children have access to a specialist health visitor and paediatrician. CYPS provides assessment, consultation and direct work; specialist clinical psychology and family therapy to provide a specific priority focus for children looked after .All disabled children have specialist support and access to wrap around services.

The Change Council, which is a children in care council as required by the Children and Young Persons Act 2008, is well established. Events for looked after children, which enable them to express their views in a child friendly way, are regularly held.

Children and young people in foster care are able to easily access support and advice from Drug and Alcohol Support Services. Young People's Services provide wraparound support for older young people including preparation for independence. There is a Young Parent Support Group with tailored support services developed by young people.

Each child in foster care has their own social worker who is responsible for their individual plan including collection of life history information and is provided with a child friendly guide to the Fostering Service Developed by the children and young people themselves.

Services and responsibilities for children who go missing are outlined in the young person's missing protocol.

NUMBERS OF FOSTER CARERS and CURRENT APPROVALS

Temporary	Temporary Foster Care Worker	34
Temporary	Temporary Foster Care Worker Support	8
Temporary	Temporary Foster Carer	124 Breakdown: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level A – 22 • Level B – 91 • Level C – 11
Temporary	Support Carer	0
Temporary	Temporary Foster Carer No Fee Paid	14 Breakdown: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level A – 4 • Level B – 10
Permanent	Fee Paid Permanent Carer	12
Permanent	Permanent Carer	24 Breakdown: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level A – 3 • Level B – 18 • Level C – 3
Permanent	Permanent Foster Carer Worker	5

Friend / Relative	Connected Carer	48 Breakdown: • Level A – 43 • Level B – 3
Friend / Relative	Reg 24 Carer	34 Breakdown: • Relative – 33 • Friend - 1
Friend / Relative	Approved Friend Carer Permanent	1
Short Break	Short Break – Disability Foster Carer	10
Short Break	Short Break – Non Disability Carer	1
Short Break	Short Break Disability Foster Carer Worker	2
Short Break	Short Break – Non Disability Level B	3
Total		322

There are 287 approved foster carers some of whom have dual approvals bringing the total number of approvals to 322.

Information correct as at 07/04/2016

NUMBERS OF CHILDREN PLACED IN FAMILY PLACEMENT

At 07/04/2016, a total of 435 children were looked after in foster placements provided by Sunderland Children's Services-Connected Carers-86, Mainstream Carers 281, Agency 68

COMPLAINTS

There have been 4 complaints March 2015 to April 2016 by or about foster carers.

Complaints and their outcomes are centrally held. A policy and procedure is in place to ensure that all complaints relating to the fostering service follow the complaints procedure. Complaints and their outcome are noted and monitored by the fostering service manager. Outside of the formal complaints procedure foster carers are able to discuss any issue, which affects their role and function as a foster carer for

Sunderland City Council, with a manager. Independent support for foster carers facing complaints and allegations is available from the advice and mediation service of Foster Talk. Research evidence has shown this support is crucial in retaining foster carers.

Complaints in respect of Children's Services can be made by Tel 0191 5617997 or emailing complaints.children@sunderland.gov.uk.

PROCEDURES AND PROCESSES

1. RECRUITMENT

- 1.1 There is a recruitment strategy in place that is based on established research findings that 'word of mouth' is the most effective form of recruitment of foster carers. This approach includes the provision of information through a wide range of means – posters, leaflets, Information meetings, events, press articles and stories. It is underpinned by specific advertising campaigns at key times in the year eg Fostering Fortnight.
- 1.2 The response of the service to initial inquiries is laid out in our Foster Carers Charter. The timescales are short in order to ensure that applicants understand that their interest is being taken seriously and that they are fully informed about the process they are about to embark upon.
- 1.3 Monthly information meetings are held jointly with the adoption service and these offer new enquirers or those who have already enquired a chance to meet staff, adopters and foster carers and learn more about the process and the children who need families.

2. ASSESSMENT

- 2.1 There is a two stage process for assessment leading to presentation to the Fostering Panel for approval is clearly laid down. Keeping applicants informed of the progress of statutory checks, health assessments etc, is considered vital and there are a series of standard letters to ensure enquirers/applicants are fully aware of their status in the process. All mainstream applicants are required to attend a preparation course – Skills to Foster and the Permanency course for permanent foster carers. This is a five-day course run at least 3 times a year, once at least at weekends to provide for those enquirers who cannot get time of during the week.
- 2.2 The worker allocated to undertake the home study makes an agreement with the applicants for the completion of the assessment including agreeing dates, times etc. of visits and the target for completion of the home study.

2.3 The applicants are able to review the assessment report and comment as appropriate prior to the Panel presentation.

3 APPROVAL

3.1 The applicants will be invited to attend the Fostering Panel. They are given time before entering the panel meeting to consider written questions that have been prepared by the panel and can then answer the questions put by the panel members with help from their worker if necessary and to add any additional comments they may wish to make. Applicants are informed of the Panel's recommendation immediately. The agency decision maker will accept or reject the panel recommendations within 7 days of receiving the panel minutes. The decision is confirmed with applicants verbally within 24 hours of the agency decision maker's decision and in writing within 7 days.

3.2 Applicants who are not approved will be given support to decide if they wish to access the internal review procedure including the independent review mechanism.

4. SUPPORT

4.1 All foster carers are allocated a fostering officer as their link with the fostering service. This person will visit the foster carers, provide formal supervision and provide directly, or facilitate access to, any practical, emotional or professional support required.

4.2 Foster carers are provided with equipment to enable them to care for a child in placement.

4.3 Foster carers are invited to attend monthly Support groups - Foster Care Worker (2 groups), that are facilitated by two members of staff from the team. The groups are an opportunity to build networks of support amongst other carers, exchange ideas about fostering and have the opportunity to hear guest speakers from time to time.

4.4 The Fostering Service operates a support line within office hours that is staffed by a fostering officer who will deal with immediate support issues.

4.5 The Fostering Service has an out of hours support line operated by experienced foster carers as well as having access to the out of hours service operated by social work staff.

4.6 All foster carers have access to the independent advice and mediation service from Fostering Talk.

5. TRAINING

- 5.1 All foster carers will attend the Skills to Foster or Permanency course during their preparation and assessment.
- 5.2 A comprehensive behaviour management programme has been developed and is available to all foster carers.
- 5.3 A rolling programme of Specialist Vocational Qualification training is in place and is open to any foster carer, although intake is targeted and aimed to provide a balance of carers in each group.
- 5.4 Foster carer training needs are identified in their annual review and both carers and their link fostering and adoption officer are responsible for ensuring that the training is taken up.
- 5.5 Foster carers are also required to complete Induction Training

6. REVIEW

- 6.1 The registration of all foster carers is reviewed annually. The views of the foster carer are sought, the end of placement reports are considered together with the link-fostering officer's observations.
- 6.2 The first annual review is presented to the Fostering Panel for consideration.
- 6.3 Panel will review the registration of foster carers at any time if changes of circumstances or events indicate that foster carers may no longer be suitable to care for children.

7. DE-REGISTRATION

- 7.1 Most foster carers voluntarily withdraw from the fostering task for a range of personal reasons. The details of their withdrawal are placed before the Fostering Panel and their de-registration is formally recorded.
- 7.2 There are occasions when the registration of a foster carer is reviewed with a view to considering the option available, i.e. changes to approval or de-registration. Foster carers are offered the opportunity to attend the Fostering Panel in these circumstances.

8. THE FOSTERING PANEL

- 8.1 The Fostering Agency is required by the Fostering Services Regulations to establish at least one Fostering Panel. The membership, role and functions of the panel are prescribed within the Regulations and set out in the Fostering Service Procedures & Guidance.
- 8.2 Sunderland's Fostering Panel meets twice monthly and considers assessments of prospective foster carers, annual reviews of carers, de-registrations and issues in relation to foster carers. The business of the Panel is formally recorded.
- 8.3 The Fostering Panel makes recommendations that are presented to the agency decision maker to endorse or reject. These decisions are recorded and notified in writing to the prospective/existing foster carer.
- 8.4 A training day for panel is held at least once a year

9 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

- 9.1 Formal performance monitoring reports are produced for senior managers monthly, to check the directorate's progress on relevant performance indicators.
- 9.2 These reports are shared with managers on a monthly basis in management meetings and disseminated to staff at team meetings.
- 9.3 Regular updates during the year on Children's Services performance are provided to City Councillors in the Corporate Parenting Board and other council committees.

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Name and Address of Registered Provider:

People Services, Sandhill Centre, Grindon Lane, Sunderland, SR3 4EN

The Responsible Individual:

Martin Birch, Head of Looked After Children

Registered Manager:
Steve Towers

Experience in Child Care:
Employment in Social Care since 1986
Post Graduate Diploma in Social Work
CMI Diploma in Management

Name and Address of Registration Authority:

OFSTED
National Business Unit
Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

Telephone: 0300 123 3153

Children's Commissioner For England
Anne Longfield
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P3BT
Tel Number: 0207783 8330

Any conditions currently in force in relation to the registration of the registered provider;

None

SUNDERLAND CITY COUNCIL FOSTERING AGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION:

Director of Children's Services:

Debra Patterson
Sunderland City Council
Civic Centre
Burdon Lane
SUNDERLAND
SR2 7DN

Agency Decision Maker:

Head of Looked After Children
Martin Birch
PEOPLE Services
Sunderland City Council
Civic Centre
Burdon Lane
SUNDERLAND
SR2 7DN

Head of Looked After Children

Martin Birch

Signed:

Date:

ATTACHMENTS

1 Staffing

APPENDIX 1: STAFFING

Sheila Lough	Senior Manager	1986, CQSW Diploma in Social Work PQ2 Level 5 in management
Stephen Towers	Operational Manager	1986, Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work (DipSW)
Elizabeth Brereton	Operational Manager	1979, Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW)
Julia Ruxton	Principal Fostering Officer	1988, Master of Arts (MA), CQSW
Edith Kirton	Principal Fostering Officer	2003, DipSW
Jen Cain	Principal Fostering Officer	1993, CSS
Catherine Franklin	Principal Fostering Officer	2001, DipSW
Ray Irving	Senior Fostering Officer	1996, SW Degree
Dawn Bell	Senior Fostering Officer	1993, CQSW
Kirpal Bassi	Principal Fostering Officer	1991, DipSW
Anne Welsh	Principal Fostering Officer	2008, BA Hons in Social Work
Tracy Taylor	Fostering Officer	2010, BA Hons in Social Work
Laura Forster	Principal Fostering Officer (part time)	2007, Master's in SW
Marion Potts	Principal Fostering Officer	2007, BA Hons in Social Work 2012, Bsc Working with Children and their Families Post Qualifying Award

Norma Donkin	Assistant Fostering Officer	
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All the above staff are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council as Social Workers with the exception of Norma Donkin who as a non-social worker member of staff is currently ineligible to register.

In addition there are a number of staff who are qualified social workers with extensive experience in family placement work, who work on a sessional basis, mainly assessing prospective carers. These are known as Independent Practitioners (IPs).