



Fostering Service Statement of Purpose

October 2019

Contents

1. Introduction
2. National legislative and policy framework
3. Policy Statement
4. Aims
5. Objectives
6. Confidentiality and Conflicts of interest
7. Principles and standards of care
8. Children's Guide
9. Services provided
10. Complex Needs service for Children with Disabilities
11. Management of the service
12. Staffing
13. Protecting children from harm
14. Provision of therapeutic services
15. Provision of health Promotion Support services
16. Provision of Educational Support services
17. Provision of Leisure, Sport, Cultural and Religious Activity
18. Care Leavers Provision
19. Recruitment of foster carers
20. Approval and assessment process
21. Support, supervision and Training of foster carers

22. Foster carer handbook (fact file) and diary

23. Training

24. Complaints procedure

25. Allegations

26. Monitoring performance

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 its 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, how the service is managed and its fitness to provide fostering services. It shows the policy and performance framework that underpins our work and shows how the welfare of children will be met and good outcomes achieved for all children in its care. It also demonstrates the systems which we have set in place to recruit, train, supervise and support foster carers.

The Statement of Purpose also links with the Children's Guide which is provided to all children, subject to the child's age and understanding at the point of placement.

This statement is available to all members of staff, foster carers, children and birth parents and is publicly available on our fostering website. A copy of this statement is also lodged with Ofsted. The statement is updated and amended annually.

2. National Legislative and Policy framework

Leeds Fostering Service is run in accordance with the principles outlined in the:

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

3. Policy Statement

Leeds Fostering Service believes that every child Looked After should be able to enjoy the same quality of life and opportunities as all children. The Fostering Service works to the vision set out in the Leeds Children and Young People's Plan. The vision states: "We want all the children of Leeds to be happy, healthy, safe, successful and free from the effects of poverty. We will make sure that every child and young person has the opportunity to achieve their potential because every child matters. We will work to narrow the gap so that every child has the chance to succeed regardless of their background and the barriers they face. We want to make sure that every young person has the highest hopes for their future and the support to fulfill them"

Leeds Fostering Service recognises that a child's needs are best met by a nurturing family and is committed to placing children who are not able to remain in their own family in an appropriate alternative family placement wherever possible. The first priority will be for children to be placed with family or friends (known as kinship carers) and supported under regulation 24 of the Care Planning Regulations where this placement is deemed suitable and the child is looked after. A separate policy is available that considers more widely the Children's & Families service commitment to family and friends caring for children. Other placements may include a child and parent/s being placed together in a foster home.

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

We are also committed to placing children and young people with Leeds area based foster carers in order for them to maintain contact with families and friends, to continue at the same school and thrive within their community wherever possible.

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

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

Children's safety and welfare are actively promoted in all fostering placement together with protection from abuse and other forms of significant harm.

4. Aims

The main aim of Leeds Fostering Service is to provide safe, high quality foster care placements for children and young people that value, support and encourage them to grow and develop as individuals. As well as promoting their health and general well-being, the service is committed to:

- ensuring that foster carers are encouraged to help children and young people to reach their maximum educational ability.
- ensuring foster carers provide good parenting for all children who are looked after and that children will be consulted and encouraged to actively participate in their care and family life.
- ensuring that the service offered is based on statutory requirements, sound principles and good practice and works within the principles of value for money for the council
- multi- agency working and developing partnerships and protocols with organisations which can progress the needs of our looked after children
- working at all levels in partnership with Education and Health to promote the well - being of children in public care in Leeds
- respecting the rights and responsibilities of Looked After children and their carers and involve them in all aspects of service delivery.

The fostering service also aims to provide a high quality responsive child-centred service in relation to its core functions and to recruit new foster carers from within our diverse community and from the kinship networks of looked after children wherever this best meets their needs. We prepare applicants through training to be able to deal with the range of issues that foster carers face when looking after children.

The service assesses each applicant comprehensively to ensure that they are suitable and able to carry out their role and to supervise and support carers in order they promote and achieve the highest standards of welfare, safeguarding and outcomes for looked after children.

5. Objectives

- To ensure that there is a choice of high quality foster care placements available to meet the complex and diverse needs of individual children and young people.
- Each foster carer will have a qualified social worker (supervising social worker) for supervision and support and to assist with identifying and reviewing carer training and development needs as part of a Personal Development Plan
- To promote a safe, stable and enabling environment ensuring that children and young people are listened to and protected from abuse and neglect
- To promote the child's physical, social, emotional and intellectual development by providing each child with the opportunity of developing their full potential, through health care, education and leisure activities that will enhance their life chances
- To have a positive regard to for the child or young person's racial, religious and cultural needs. All children should have equal access to local family based care
- The individual child's needs/ wishes and feelings are paramount and are taken into consideration in relation to their placements
- Siblings will be accommodated together wherever possible and appropriate
- To promote contact for the child or young person and his/her birth family throughout their placement, and to encourage and facilitate this as appropriate

- To ensure foster carers make children and young people aware of their rights and the complaints, compliments and advocacy process by providing the relevant information
- To ensure that approved foster carers are clear about their role and that they are supported in their tasks, duties and responsibilities by having adequate support mechanisms in place and as outlined in their terms and conditions, tasks, skills and competencies framework and the foster carer agreement
- The Payment For Skills (PFS) model ensures quality by providing a competency and skills framework with clear expectations for foster carers, together with a training and personal development programme
- Ensure that all practice promotes equal opportunities for all and value diversity of both foster children and carers regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, age, religious beliefs, disability or marital status
- To ensure that any decisions are transparent and fair and that any concerns are addressed and information about the complaints procedure is made available to all
- Ensure that service performance is monitored, assessed with outcomes measured via a Quality Assurance Framework
- To promote team and personal development and training for both staff and foster carers
- Consult regularly and learn from those that are in receipt of services through comments, compliments or complaints and have regular meetings and consultation with foster carers, senior managers and elected members
- Consult regularly with children who are fostered, using a variety of methods to ensure their voice is heard

- A commitment to continuous improvement through the provision of wider placement choices for children by pioneering more innovative approaches to foster care that are needs led, delivering flexible packages of support to children in public care

6. Confidentiality and Conflicts of interest

Foster carers are provided with full information about the children placed with them and are expected to observe high standards of confidentiality. As an agency we maintain records on carers and looked after children who are subject to National Standards and Data protection legislation. Staff and foster carers are expected to declare any potential conflicts of interest.

7. Principles and Standards of Care

Leeds Fostering Service is committed to achieving and maintaining the highest standards and offering quality provision. It has been developed and is managed in accordance with the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 and the principles outlined in the National Minimum Standards 2011. These standards apply equally to our kinship carers.

- The welfare of the child is paramount
- Children who are looked after are consulted regarding their wishes and feelings in regard to all aspects of their care. They will be provided with a Children's Guide to Fostering (see section 8 below)
- Every child who is looked after will have a safe care plan, health plan and a personal education plan
- Every child looked after will be encouraged to participate appropriately in religious and cultural beliefs in accordance with their wishes and feelings and developmental understanding
- Every child looked after will be cared for in an environment free from oppression, discrimination and prejudice, encouraging them to develop a positive sense of their own identity

- The fostering service will support the identified aims and objectives of the child or young person's care plan and work alongside other professionals in the implementation of this
- The fostering service will work in partnership with other professionals to promote contact between looked after children and their family and other significant persons
- Foster carers have a handbook (fact file) which guides their practice and clarifies expectations, responsibilities and standards

8. Children's Guide

Subject to the child's age and understanding, the fostering service ensures the child receives the Children's Guide at the point of placement and that the foster carer explains the contents of the Children's Guide in a way that is accessible. The Children's Guide includes a summary of what the fostering service sets out to do for children, how they can find out their rights, how a child can contact their Independent Reviewing Officer, the Children's Rights Director and Ofsted if they wish to raise a concern.

9. Services provided

The fostering service approves foster carers to look after children aged 0-18 years. Many of the children placed have experienced difficulties including abuse or neglect before being fostered. Some children and young people present with very challenging behaviour, special needs or complex health conditions. It does this by assessing, registering, supervising, supporting and training a wide range of carers.

Leeds operates a fostering scheme called 'Payment for Skills' (PFS) which incorporates the majority of approved foster carers. All Foster Carers are financially supported via weekly allowance payments (child age related). The PFS scheme has four levels linked to a Task, Skills and Competency (TSC) Framework and weekly fees are paid to carers on levels 2, 3 and 4. The TSC framework sets out a list of competencies that foster carers must be able to demonstrate at each PFS level.

It also sets out practice requirements, training and development expectations and support group attendance requirements at each level. Each level adds more to the previous level, so that Level 4 Carers have the highest level of skills and competencies and have a more demanding range of tasks that they must undertake. In return they are paid the highest level of fee. Within the levels there are differing areas of specialism depending on carer's skills, abilities and interests. Carers are able to progress up through the PFS levels if evidencing required competencies and skills. The differing types of foster carer approval are:

Short Term:

Time limited placements across PFS levels. However, level 4 carers would be expected to undertake assessments on children and young people in their care or undertake specified tasks.

Long Term:

Planned, permanent placements across PFS levels. However, Level 4 carers would be expected to provide permanent placements for children with significantly complex needs or challenging behaviours.

Respite:

Planned, child needs led support for placements and agreed support for carers across PFS levels.

Parent / Child:

Level 4 carers provide assessments of parent's ability to care for their child as part of an agreed plan. Residential and non- residential placements are available as part of the scheme.

Support Care:

Part of a package of support (including day care and child minding) where carers provide planned time limited support to maintain children with their families and prevent children coming into care.

Children with Disabilities:

Short Term / Short Breaks provision and Long Term (Permanent) placements for disabled children.

Kinship Care & Connected Persons:

Providing placements for children and young people known to the carer.

10. Children with Disabilities

The Fostering Children with Disabilities team provides a range of inclusive services for disabled children, children with complex needs and their families. The service promotes the social model of disability and the inclusion of disabled children in all aspects of family and community life.

The service recruits, trains and supports specialist foster carers (including those with nursing experience) to offer a range of placements to disabled children including:

- Short term (including pre-adoptive)
- Short breaks
- Emergency
- Assessment (duration of proceedings, bridging, etc.)
- Long Term / Permanent foster care placements.

Within the team, the short breaks service recruits, trains and supports short breaks carers reflecting the diverse communities of Leeds offering a range of short break placements to disabled children and their families.

These carers are subject to the same checks as foster carers and have a competency based assessment which is presented to a fostering panel for approval. Short breaks carers are registered foster carers subject to National Minimum Standards.

11. Management of the Service: Structure as of October 2019

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|---|--|------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| <p>Director of Children & Families Service</p> <p>Steve Walker</p> | | | | | |
| <p>Deputy Director</p> <p>Saleem Tariq</p> | | | | | |
| <p>Head Of Service</p> <p>Joel Hanna</p> | | | | | |
| <p>Service Delivery Managers</p> <p>Stephen Maw</p> <p>Lucy Crowley Anne – Marie Stokes (Interim)</p> | | | | | |
| <p>Registered Manager</p> <p>Stephen Maw</p> | | | | | |
| <p>Teams & Managers:</p> | | | | | |
| Kinship Care | Kinship Care | Kinship Care | Support Team | Support Team | Recruitment |
| Brenda Dring | Wendy Sanderson | Kevin Harley - Roberts | Ceri Orton | Jane Smith | Ben Whitehead |
| Teenage Fostering | Placements & Placements Support | | Disabilities & Assessments | Disabilities | |
| Mark Mitchell | Cairine Doyle - Morrill | | Nicola Greenwood | Kay Beach | |
| <p>Fostering Panels Management</p> <p>Wendy Sanderson / Stuart Wilson</p> | | | | | |
| <p>Business Support Manager</p> <p>Angela McAuliffe</p> | | | | | |

There are currently nine teams in the fostering service. The teams are: two geographically focussed Foster Carer Support Teams (managed by Jane Smith and Ceri Orton); a Recruitment and Enrichment (Retention) team (managed by Ben Whitehead); a team supporting and supervising foster carers with commitments to teenagers (managed by Mark Mitchell); two Kinship Care Teams (managed by Brenda Dring and Wendy Sanderson with some manager support for kinship assessments by Kevin Harley – Roberts) and the Children with Disabilities Team (managed by Kay Beach). A Team Manager post has recently been established to oversee new foster carer assessments and will share some responsibility with Kay Beach for children with Disabilities provision. A Supported Lodgings service for young people age 16yrs+ is part of the Teenage Fostering team. The Placements Team (now termed the 'Placements Support Team') has been integrated with the Fostering Service and provides a placement finding and matching function together with placement support services via experienced social workers utilising restorative and rethink formulation models to assist carers with challenging placements to achieve improved placement stability.

Fostering Panel's management is currently being shared by a Fostering Team Manager and the lead for Quality Assurance and Service Development. Fostering Team Managers are responsible to the Service Delivery Managers.

The management group share responsibility for developing policy and procedure in line with national regulations and standards to ensure a safe and stimulating environment for Looked after children.

The City council appoints elected members to corporately oversee the work of the Children and Families Service and delegates certain responsibilities to the Deputy Director (Safeguarding and Specialist services) who is the responsible individual for financial management, management systems and the safe care of children.

The Head of Service is the Agency Decision Maker who currently delegates this function to two Senior Managers.

12. Staffing

There are currently 52 full time equivalent qualified social workers across the service (including Managers) with differing responsibilities for and within the fostering teams.

All workers hold a social work qualification apart from three fostering advisors based in the recruitment team who undertake carer recruitment enquiries, initial visits and some carer support tasks, a social work assistant who provides additional support for Teens Foster carers and five social work assistants based in Kinship Care providing carer support tasks.

As part of the Supported Lodgings service within the Teenage Team, three social work assistants provide support to Supported Lodgings providers and 'Staying Put only' former foster carers.

The Kinship Care teams have separate established functions, one for the assessment of carers, one for carer support and includes one senior supervising social worker with lead responsibility for Private Fostering.

There is a wide range of experience among staff across the fostering service and all fostering supervising social workers must have had at least one year's experience in field social work before joining the service.

In addition, there is a post with lead responsibility for Quality Assurance, Performance and Service Development and a Business Support team providing central and area team administrative support to the fostering service as a whole.

Members of staff of Leeds Children's & Families Service can be approved as foster carers within the service. However, this may not always be advisable because of the potential for a conflict of interest and cases will be looked at on an individual basis. There may be circumstances where it is appropriate to register a member of staff as a foster carer in cases where they are related to the child or for a known child.

13. Protecting children from harm

Leeds Fostering Service operates a safe recruitment process for all staff employed by the agency. In addition, there is a rigorous vetting and assessment process undertaken with all potential carers. Enhanced Disclosure and Barring (DBS) checks are repeated every 3 years for all carers and staff.

Leeds fostering service has policy and guidance underpinning our service on which includes: safe caring & safeguarding; health and safety; bullying, management of behaviour; managing allegations; recording and record keeping, confidentiality, 'e-safety' (safe use of internet and social networking) together with linked carer training and development.

Our processes and procedures will ensure that any concern is addressed and monitored by the management team and will inform service development and best practice, for example: poor quality of care/breach of foster care agreement; child protection procedures which deal with allegations of abuse against foster carers and through the complaints procedures.

Children are made aware about these procedures through their social worker, fostering supervising social worker and the Children's Guide. They also have access to a Children's rights advocacy service independent of the service.

14. Provision of Therapeutic Services

The Fostering Service has a referral route to the Therapeutic social work team and the Leeds Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), who provide therapeutic input to children and young people in foster placement, consultation to carers and other professionals. CAMHS comprises of clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, child and adolescent mental health practitioners and social workers with expertise in children's mental health. This is accessed through a multi-agency panel which meets monthly. In addition, the therapeutic team holds a weekly Fostering Surgery which carers can access directly. The key objective of the work is to provide a regular, easy to use guidance and support service to all Leeds foster carers and to improve placement stability for children in foster care. They also provide training to foster carers, social workers and other professionals.

15. Provision of Health Promotion Support Services

There are two Designated Nurses for Looked after Children and Young People who in conjunction with other nurses within the team oversee Children's Annual Health Assessments and have input into the health promotion of Young People. Dedicated paediatricians advise the fostering panels on medical issues for applications to foster.

The sexual health team offers training, advice, information and support to Young People and Carers in the field of sexual health and the Fostering Service works with others in children's services to ensure looked after children's needs are addressed.

The Fostering Service is committed to ensuring the health outcomes for young people looked after continually improve. The team works with our foster carers and children looked after to promote healthy living and assists in the tracking of children's dental health and annual health assessments. Designated nurses also provide panel member representation on Leeds Fostering Panels.

16. Provision of Educational Support Services

Specialist educational support is available to foster carers in the fostering service. There is a virtual head teacher for Looked after Children to look at improving the attainment attendance and exclusion issues and to improve partnerships with schools in Leeds. There are qualified teachers available to the service from the Virtual School providing training, support and advice to foster carers and staff regarding fostered children's educational needs.

The Leeds fostering service recognises the need to improve Looked after Children attendance at school. The service works closely with the carers in addressing this issue and this has resulted in a significant improvement in attendance of children in foster care in recent years.

We have an expectation that holidays will not be taken in term time and that children are not routinely taken out of school. We work together with our colleagues to ensure that this only occurs in exceptional circumstances and not as a rule.

The Fostering Service works alongside and supports educational initiatives for looked after children by promoting children's educational needs to our Foster Carers. Carers are expected to attend Personal Education Planning Meetings with children and young people and, where appropriate, the supervising social worker will also attend.

Information and practice developments are promoted by the qualified teacher via regular communications, advice and visits to carers. A range of training, resources and materials are available to foster carers and social workers. Schools are also offered training around attachment difficulties and the impact of these.

Within the educational setting, young people in year 10 and 11 can access 1:1 tuition and personal advisors can also offer support to key stage 4 children.

As a result of these services the number of children achieving GCSE's is increasing as is the number of children going to further and higher education.

17. Provision of Leisure, Sport, Cultural and Religious Activity

Foster carer training and supervision promotes the importance of leisure provision for looked after children and young people with the expectation that carers will seek out and support new experiences and activities to enhance children's self-worth, social development and independence.

Looked after Children and their foster carer families in Leeds are able to access the 'MAX' card. This gives free access to certain leisure facilities. The council as a whole provides a 'corporate offer' to foster carers, their families and looked after children improving free access to a range of council services, including sports and leisure opportunities.

Links are established with local businesses and other organisations, securing a range of benefits, offers and activities for foster carers and their families. Information on community play schemes, events, clubs and activities during holidays are provided to carers on a regular basis.

We aim to support all young people in their religious and cultural beliefs and customs. We ensure that information is available to provide understanding of different cultures and religions. We will provide resources that may be needed to ensure young people are able to practice their beliefs and customs. We are committed to directly challenging racism and ensure that all young people who access our services are aware of our policies in relation to anti-oppressive practice and anti-racism.

We will ensure that all people are treated equally, regardless of age, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, disability or religion. Fostering supervising social workers assist and advise carers with issues such as appropriate placement matching and with transracial placements.

18. Care leavers provision

The Children's social work teams and Care Leavers Service work closely with the Fostering Service and other professionals to provide an integrated approach to meeting young peoples needs. Leeds is committed to supporting young people to remain in their foster placement beyond 18 years of age in order to experience normal family life and preparation for independence if this supports them more effectively. The Leeds 'Staying Put' policy provides financial and other support for former foster carers making commitments to young people age 18 -21years.

The service has established a supported lodgings scheme for care leavers and other relevant, qualifying young people age 16yrs and above.

19. Recruitment of Foster Carers

The Fostering Service has a recruitment sufficiency strategy which utilises current data regarding the gaps in resource provision. Currently, more places are needed for teenagers; children with disabilities and sibling groups.

There is an ongoing recruitment strategy and the "Foster4Leeds" website has been successful in attracting more localised carers. The Fostering Service uses a variety of media to recruit new carers. The strategy is informed by research and analysis on

the most successfully employed advertising methods and this is reflected in our current advertising strategy. A distinctive 'Foster for Leeds' brand has been established which is utilised in all advertising and publicity.

We work closely with the Communications team and the Leeds City Council Press / Media Office who help us promote the service to the Leeds public and beyond. Features on local radio and television, in print media and promotion via social media, community meetings and briefings are all undertaken regularly as part of the strategy. The service has continuing involvement in the regional 'You Can Foster' carer recruitment initiative which comprises local authorities from the North West and North East.

Links with the 'Child Friendly Leeds' initiative and the Enrichment Team have established relationships with local businesses who promote fostering in the Leeds area and offer a range of benefits and offers for foster families and their children looked after which assists with carer recruitment, retention and support.

20. Approval and Assessment Process

Persons over the age of 21 may apply to become a foster carer (but between the ages of 21 and 25yrs we will need to have evidence of relevant transferable skills and / or related experience). Initial responses and advice to enquirers from the recruitment team are welcoming and within set timescales, normally the same working day. There is immediate exclusion of any applicant who has been convicted of any serious offence against a child or adult. Interest is welcomed from all members of the community, regardless of relationship status, employment situation, class, gender, sexuality, culture, ethnicity or religion.

The majority of initial enquiries and registrations of interest about fostering with Leeds are received via the 'Foster4Leeds' website. The website is regularly renewed to ensure information is up to date, accessible and user friendly. When a person contacts the Leeds Fostering Service to express an interest in fostering they will be able to have a discussion with a fostering advisor who will explain the process, take some initial information and offer an initial home visit if appropriate.

At the home visit we will discuss fostering with the enquirers and members of the family, check the home conditions are safe, warm and clean and that there is space for a foster child to sleep, do homework and play and participate as a full family member.

If all parties agree that fostering could be suitable for the family, a formal application is made and statutory checks are completed. Once these are completed satisfactorily an invitation to a training and preparation group ('Skills to Foster') is then made.

The preparation training undertaken utilises the Fostering Network 'Skills to Foster' course which includes subject areas on Child Development; Separation and Loss; Working Together; Safe Care; Moving On.

The service runs eight Skills to Foster courses a year, normally at weekends and as demand dictates. The training is run by qualified fostering supervising social workers, experienced foster carers and includes contributions from care experienced young people.

When preparation training is completed, the applicants begin an assessment that includes the requirements laid down in Schedule 3 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards in Foster Care (2011), Assessment and approval of Foster Carers 2013 (amendments to Children Act 1989) and Schedule 4 of the Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (where children are fostered by relatives and friends). All carers are subject to a number of statutory checks and references:

- Disclosure and Barring Checks on all members of the household over the age of 18
- Child Protection Checks
- Children & Young People's Social Care records check
- Department of Health Checks
- Two personal references
- In addition, interviews are conducted with grown up children and children living in the household

Foster carers are additionally asked to undertake:

A full medical examination with their GP. (Applicants for short breaks are asked to complete a medical questionnaire which is sent to their G.P. for verification / comments)

- A work reference from present or previous employer
- To agree to the department making contact with any schools which their children attend to ascertain the school's view on their involvement / suitability
- To agree to the department making contact with ex partners regarding their application to foster

The majority of foster carers are subject to a competency based assessment. The depth of this assessment will depend on the role for which the carer is being assessed, with appropriateness and proportionality being the measure of this. All potential carers are invited to be fully involved in the assessment and to use self completion sheets as a tool to look at their competencies. The fostering service uses the CoramBAAF Form F foster carer assessment format for the completion of its assessments.

Kinship foster carers are subject to an alternative assessment taking into account the nature of the task and the requirements of Schedule 4 (Care Planning Regulations 2010). Kinship foster carers are not normally required to produce a portfolio or evidence of experience and skills.

The assessment of a foster carer would take place in the applicant's home over a period of six to eight visits, plus reference interviews and interviewing other relevant parties.

The assessing social worker would ensure that timelines, analysis of significant relationships, the family dynamics and characteristics of the foster carers underpin and inform the assessment. The assessment focuses on the individual or individuals applying to become foster carers and their family.

We make a detailed assessment and analysis of their past and present experiences, skills and competencies which they would bring to their new role and help them to think about their reasons for applying to become foster carers. The assessor will also use the process to assess the applicant's suitability to foster children with differing needs including disabled children and this is made transparent.

The assessments, together with a portfolio of evidence of experience and skills compiled by the foster carer are presented to a fostering panel. Applicants are expected to attend with the assessing social worker. All information gathered (except references) is shared with the applicant/s. The social worker's assessment is shared with them prior to the panel.

There are four fostering panels in Leeds. These are independently chaired and panel members comprise of people from a variety of backgrounds including social work and other experience. Panel membership currently includes members with Education, Youth work, foster care and care experience backgrounds. They consider and recommend the approval, or not, of all foster carers, foster carer annual reviews, long term matching of children with foster carers, foster carer de-registrations and matters of practice concern requiring a recommendation from Panel.

The recommendation then goes before the Agency Decision Maker who makes a final decision. Any appeals can be made within 28 days and may either make further representation to a fostering panel or have their assessment considered by the Independent Review Mechanism who in turn will make a recommendation back to the agency.

All foster carers achieve an annual review of their status as approved foster carers. This is a formal review of the work that they have undertaken during the year and includes an opportunity to reflect on achievements, practice and learning.

Annual reviews are undertaken by Independent Fostering Reviewing Officers and draw on contributions from the Foster Carer and family, Supervising Social worker, Child's Social Worker, Child / Young Person placed and other professionals involved with the placement.

A report is presented to the fostering panel in the case of all first reviews following approval and for significant changes to the carer's registration following annual review.

21. Support, Supervision and Training of Foster Carers

Following approval, all foster carers are allocated a qualified social worker (fostering supervising social worker) who provides supervision and support.

The supervising social worker undertakes a minimum of four supervisory visits per year to approved carer(s) and additional visits as required. They also make at least one unannounced visit per year. All visits and contacts with the foster carer are recorded.

For the children with disabilities short breaks service, the supervisory social worker undertakes the same level of supervisory visits. However, this would be applied proportionately. For instance, if the family is matched to a child who visits twice a year it would be inappropriate for the supervisory social worker to visit more often than the child.

Unannounced visits are made to busy carers but aren't practical for some short breaks placements, which are typically at weekends and where carers frequently take the child out when they are in placement.

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

Additionally, every looked after child has an allocated social worker. This person will usually be the first point of contact for the foster carer for any information and advice on issues that relate to the child. If this worker is not available during office hours, a duty worker is always available to deal with any urgent problems or issues.

If additional support is required outside of these times, foster carers can contact the carer support line – a service that operates 24 hours a day providing advice for carers by experienced carers and if considered necessary, refer to the Emergency Duty Service.

Leeds fostering service provides an Independent Support Service to foster carers (currently commissioned through Foster Talk) where this is required for mediation purposes or to provide advocacy support for the carer during allegations. Carers are also offered free individual annual membership of the Fostering Network, providing a range of benefits, including independent advice and support.

The fostering service believes that carers should be fully reimbursed for the costs of looking after a child, and provides weekly allowances at Fostering Network recommended rates. In addition, travel and other additional payments are made available to carers together with essential equipment for the task. Payments in the form of a weekly fee are available to carers who meet specific requirements on the Payment for Skills (PFS) model.

The Service provides insurance cover via the Council's insurance agents for carers undertaking their fostering role, including policies which reimburse for accidental damage and or damage caused arising from a child's placement with them.

The Fostering Service provides a range of foster carer support groups, assisted by supervising social workers. The groups generally involve numbers of geographically based carers across Payment for Skills levels at a variety of venues across the city. There is also a support group for foster carers own children age 7 – 17 years.

A programme of the Mockingbird Family model has been achieved in Leeds establishing 9 hubs of geographically located satellite carers receiving 24/7 placement support and advice from an experienced Hub foster carer.

Enhanced support for foster carers and improved placement stability for the children young people they care for via this model has been assessed and will inform service delivery planning and a commitment to extending the model or key aspects of the model more widely across the service.

The Leeds Fostering Service has an established relationship with the Leeds Foster Carer Association (LFCA) which promotes the profile of the work of foster carers in Leeds and involves LFCA and other carer stakeholders in fostering service developments and practice improvement initiatives. Carer stakeholders contribute to a range of service developments which have included the introduction of the Payment for Skills model and fee paid foster carer terms and conditions.

22. Foster Carers Handbook (Fact file) and Diary

Foster Carers on approval are provided with a hard copy handbook (fact file) which gives factual information which they need to know about the service and to perform their role. This includes key information and guidance on safe care; allegations; education; medication; recording and record keeping; the role of social workers and key policies and procedures.

Policies and procedures are also available to carers online via the Departments children's procedures manual and key factfile and other information can be accessed on the Leeds fostering website via a carer portal.

All Foster Carers are provided with a Sherwood Foster Carer Diary which includes a logbook and a range of information and advice, including Tax and Benefits, Fostering Regulations and Law summaries.

23. Training and Development

The Fostering Service believes that a comprehensive training programme for both staff and foster carers is key to their personal and professional development.

Training provides people with the required skills and knowledge, necessary in providing a high quality service. It is also key to safeguarding children, foster carers and their families by informing them of how to care for children safely.

Training is an opportunity for all foster carers to acquire new skills, assist with personal and professional development and explore new ideas via peer support and group discussion.

The Fostering Service has a clear training strategy, covering pre-approval training to potential applicants, induction training for newly approved carers and post approval training via a Training Framework which incorporates the required Training and Development Standards (TSD) certification.

A comprehensive rolling programme of training is available and reviewed regularly, meeting the on-going professional development of foster carers throughout their fostering career. Kinship foster carers are also provided with targeted training opportunities more suited to the fostering task of caring for family members or friends' children.

Training is linked to the Payment for Skills levels requirements outlined in a Tasks Skills and Competency (TSC) framework for foster carers. Foster carers can also access specialist training courses, including those caring for disabled children.

The training framework for carers includes the following learning opportunities:

Separation and Loss; Managing Difficult Behaviour; Protecting Children / Safer Care; First Aid; Education Issues for Looked After Children; Building Self-Esteem; Child Protection; Child Development; Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI); Recording & Record Keeping; Moving children on; Contact; KEEP; Nurtured Heart.

Training courses are evaluated with carer stakeholders providing feedback via a training steering group. Feedback is collated and used to inform future practice and courses offered. Within the support groups there may be a training component at some sessions. The programme for support groups has variously included the following topics:

sexual health; welfare benefits; the role of the Therapeutic Team and CAMHS service; legal briefings; tax and benefits information; life story work; Special Guardianship Orders; Internet safety; Staying Put.

24 Complaints Procedure

Leeds City Council Children's Social Work Service operates a complaints service which is independent of the Fostering Service. Foster Carers are given Complaints and Compliments information detailing the process if they wish to make a complaint when they sign the Foster Carer Agreement. Birth Parents are given a copy of the Complaints and Compliments Leaflet in the Information Pack for Parents which is provided by social workers of children in placements.

It is the role of the child's social worker to give them the complaints leaflet for looked after children and to inform them of the role of the Children's Rights Service. The child can also make their views known through the review system and they are sent a consultation form about the placement prior to the foster carer review. Details of how to complain and how to contact Ofsted are available in the Children's Guide to Fostering.

It is acknowledged that many disabled children cannot access the complaints process in this form because of their learning and communication difficulties. An independent advocate can be appointed for the child where this is appropriate.

25. Allegations

All allegations in relation to foster carers are investigated and actioned through Leeds Integrated Safeguarding Unit, reporting to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) on behalf of the Leeds Safeguarding Children's Board under the procedures for Investigating Allegations against Adults Caring for Children.

The West Yorkshire Safeguarding policies and procedures are followed. Foster carers are offered independent support during this process which can be accessed via their supervising social worker or by self-referral. A Dealing with Allegations guide is provided for foster carers which includes advice on independent support if required.

26. Monitoring performance

The performance of Leeds Fostering Service will be monitored at a number of levels and in a number of ways:

- Ofsted will inspect regularly to ensure that the Leeds Fostering Service complies with legislation and standards
- Report annually to the council's Executive Board.
- Report quarterly and annually to Corporate level (Elected Members)
- Report periodically on service performance to Head of Service

Activity will be monitored at a strategic level against the objectives, performance indicators and tasks as contained in the Fostering Service Improvement Plan.

In addition to the above, a Quality Assurance and Performance framework monitors the Fostering Service key requirements which are regularly discussed at Service Management meetings. The following Key Performance Indicators will be used to monitor the Fostering Service:

Performance Indicators:

- PAF Indicator B7 percentage of children looked after in foster care and adoption.
- BVPI – A1 – Stability of Looked after Children (LAC) (3 or placements in a year).
- National PSA target – Placement Stability (% of children under 16 years looked after for 2.5 years or more in the same placement for at least 2 years)
- Fostering service will recruit new foster carers and increase the number of carers for children (targets as agreed)
- All assessments will be completed within 4 months from the point of completion of training.

- All newly approved carers will carry out agreed induction training within first year of approval
- Continuous auditing of foster carer case files to ensure statutory compliance and good practice standards

27. Contact details

The management of the Fostering Service is based at:

Kernel House

Killingbeck Drive

Leeds LS14 6UF

Tel: (0113) 378 3442

Information about our Fostering Services can be accessed via:

Fostering Advice Line: (0113) 378 3538

website: www.foster4leeds.co.uk

email: foster4leeds@leeds.gov.uk.

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