Foster Sheffield's Future

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

People Services

Children & Families

Fostering Service

Statement of Purpose 2018-19

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Foster Sheffield's Future

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Sheffield's Vision

Children and Families Services leads on behalf of Children, Young People and Families and its partners, in relation to safeguarding, learning difficulties/disabilities, early intervention and prevention and the city's health strategy for children/young people. It is responsible for the delivery of multi-agency support services for children with additional needs and for social care services for Children in Need (CIN), including those at risk of harm, those in need of protection and children in care.

Our Vision

Children and young people are safe and supported to achieve their full potential:

- Children are at the center of our practice
- We intervene at the earliest opportunity
- Our workforce are skilled and supported to do the work that they need to
- Children and families benefit from high performing and high quality services

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Introduction

The statement of purpose is produced in accordance with the Fostering Minimum Standards and Regulations 2011, the Care Standards Act 2000 and Fostering Regulations (England 2011: Wales 2013).

The statement of purpose outlines Sheffield City Council Fostering Service aims and objectives. It details the service it provides to children, birth parents, prospective and registered foster carers. It also includes details of the organisational structure of the service, management arrangements and details of staff and Sheffield City Council complaints procedure.

The statement of purpose can be viewed and downloaded from Sheffield City Council website www.sheffield.gov.uk and is available to all members of staff, foster carers, children and birth parents and the general public.

The statement of purpose and its contents are updated annually to reflect current practice, personnel and legislative changes. The statement of purpose links to the Children's Guide which is made available to all children, subject to their age and understanding, at the point of placement.

Our Pledge

The fostering service supports the department's policy to enable children to continue living within their families and communities wherever possible and where they cannot, to place them without delay with alternative carers.

The Sheffield Pledge to children in care is a promise that social workers, their managers and other professionals make to children in care. The full pledge can be found at: www.sheffield.gov.uk

We promise to:

- Help you remember your history
- Keep you safe
- Keep you healthy
- Help you enjoy life and achieve goals
- Help you get ready for your future
- Give you a voice

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Aims & Objectives

Aims:

The aim of Sheffield's Fostering Service is to provide high quality foster care as part of a full range of accommodation provision for children in care and provide the best possible standards of care, safety and protection for children who cannot live with their own families. The service aims to:

- Provide a service that is welcoming, accessible and inclusive
- Provide a choice of high quality local foster placements to meet the individual needs of children and young people
- Ensure foster carers provide an excellent level of parenting to all children in foster care and assist children and young people to engage in their care and placement planning
- Work together with partner agencies to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people, to enhance and develop health, education & well-being
- Support foster carers to provide on-going accommodation and support for young people aged 18 to 21 through the provision of 'Staying Put' foster care
- Provide high quality assessment, support and supervision for family and friends foster carers
- The service offers support for families with a Special Guardianship Order and assesses Private Fostering Arrangements

Objectives:

- To recruit a range of foster carers to meet the complex and diverse needs of children in care

- To consider matching criteria to ensure the best possible placement stability available to meet the individual needs of children and young people

- To ensure effective information sharing with foster carers regarding the needs of children and young people

- To promote, where appropriate, contact between children and young people and their family and friends.

- To place, wherever possible, siblings together and where appropriate a together and apart assessment will be completed.

- To provide timely permanence fostering placements for children who need them

- The child's plan will be based on their individual needs and will be reviewed at every Looked after Child's Review. It will consider how permanence can be achieved through a range of options including: return to birth parents, placement with family or friends, long term fostering, Special Guardianship, Child Arrangement Order or adoption.

- Where it is not in the child's best interests to return home to the care of birth family, the Service will assist and enable the child's permanency plan

- The ethnic origin, religious and cultural background of the children and young people who are looked after will be fully recognised and their identity positively promoted when placement decisions are made

- Consideration will be given in the care planning and reviewing process in regard to the need to access other specialist services for the child and their foster carers

- All children in care will have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) every 6 months whilst they are a child in care (this is not usually required if the young person is in receipt of a package of short breaks)

- All children in care will have a health plan and regular health reviews and will be registered with a dentist and be seen by an optician, if age appropriate

- Once children in care reach the age of 15 years they will have a Pathway Plan which will encompass their wishes and feeling and also begin to consider 'staying put' arrangements

- To enhance social and learning opportunities for children and young people with disabilities, and allow parents quality time with other siblings through the short breaks scheme

- To provide 24 hour support to Sheffield City Council foster carers, supporting them to provide the best possible care to children and young people

- To offer after care support to young people and support foster carers to continue placements after the young person reaches 18 years of age through 'staying put'

- To encourage foster carers where applicable, support a transition to suitable independent accommodation when young people leave care

- To ensure any decisions made are transparent and fair and address any concerns

- To ensure that information about the complaints procedure is made available to all

- To consult regularly with and learn from those that are in receipt of services through comments, compliments and complaints.

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Management Structure

Executive Director of People Services Portfolio
Jayne Ludlam

Director of Children & Families
Carly Speechley

Assistant Director Provider Services
Paul Dempsey

Fostering Service Manager
Anne-Marie Banks

Fostering Panel Advisor & Support Team Manager	Recruitment Team Manager	Fostering Supervision Team Manager	Fostering Supervision Team Manager	Connected Person Team Manager	Placement Team

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Our Staff

The fostering service is managed by the fostering service manager who is the Registered Manager. There are 5 full time equivalent team managers and a full time fostering panel advisor. The managers work as a team to provide strategic and operational management to the fostering service.

The Recruitment Team comprises of 1 team manager, 5 FTE social workers and 1 FTE Interviewing Officer. This team recruits and assesses prospective foster carers.

We have 2 Supervisory Teams. Each team has 1 team manager and 8.5 FTE social workers. Both teams have mixed caseloads and support and supervise carers approved for all types of placements including task, permanence, support care and short breaks.

The Connected Persons Team comprises of 1 FTE team manager, 3.5 FTE social workers and 1.5FTE support workers. This team assesses and supports connected persons, provides support to SGO carers and assesses private fostering arrangements.

The Placement Team comprises of 1 team manager, 2 FTE Placement Officers, 3.5 FTE assistant contract officers, an Information Monitoring Officer and a Business Support Officer.

The Support Workers are currently managed by the fostering agency panel advisor. There are 4.5 FTE support workers who work across the service. There is 1 FTE training and development officer.

All social workers in the teams have a Diploma in Social Work or equivalent and are registered with Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). All social workers are encouraged to attend training in relevant areas. The teams bring a variety of experience to the service, such as experience of working across other disciplines associated with social care fieldwork, residential, disabilities, youth justice and education.

The support workers and placement officers within the service are also working towards, or have achieved appropriate NVQ qualifications.

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Recruitment of Foster Carers

The Fostering Service has identified that the best way to recruit foster carers is to maintain a high profile within the community. To achieve this, the fostering service has a **Communications Strategy for Fostering**, which is updated on an annual basis to reflect requirements. The service works closely with the Communications Team and across the region to maximise the recruitment and marketing opportunities. Activities include city wide outside advertising, social media campaigns, local media campaigns and attendance at community events. We work closely with existing foster carers to recruit via positive word of mouth. The service is also part of regional recruitment campaigns to attract more people to become foster carers over a wider geographical area. In addition there is an annual Recruitment and Retention Strategy.

Enquiries from prospective foster carers are welcomed from all communities within Sheffield and the surrounding districts, to ensure the children placed are done so locally and can continue with education and local connections. We would also consider enquiries from further afield as we do require placements outside Sheffield. The fostering service recruits positively from the diverse communities in Sheffield and welcomes all applicants to contact the service and discuss fostering opportunities further.

Information evenings are held every six weeks throughout the year. This has attendance of staff from across the service and approved Sheffield City Council foster carers. Other events also take place throughout the year such as attendance at city centre events and information stalls.

Preparation of Foster Carers

All enquiries will receive a response from the service within 24 hours (one working day). Interested applicants will be invited to attend one of the information evenings to share more details about fostering. In addition written literature will be provided.

All suitable applicants are offered an initial home visit. An assessing social worker undertakes an initial assessment in relation to the applicant's suitability to foster and if this is deemed positive then the applicants are invited to attend the 'Skills to Foster' preparation course. This 3 day course helps to prepare applicants to be able

to manage the variety of issues they will experience if they become foster carers. Attendance of this course contributes towards the overall fostering assessment.

Assessment of Foster Carers

Running alongside the preparation course, the applicant is subject to a formal assessment. On average assessments, pending statutory checks, take between 4 to 6 months from commencement to approval. The assessment is evidence and competency based. It includes specific verification checks that comply with the requirements of Schedule 3 of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011 and Regulation 26. These include an enhanced DBS, medical check and local authority check.

Once the assessment has been completed, the report is submitted to the fostering panel. Sheffield City Council holds two fostering panels each month. The fostering panel complies with the Fostering Service Regulations 2011. This independent panel is made up of people from a variety of backgrounds. The panel considers and recommends the approval, or not, of all potential foster carers. The recommendation from the fostering panel is then considered by the Agency Decision Maker who makes the final decision. This decision is made within 10 days of the panel meeting.

Applicants are encouraged to attend the fostering panel. All recommendations and decisions are communicated to the applicant both verbally and in writing.

Assessment of Connected Persons Foster Carers

The Fostering Service assesses carers for children placed with them under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010. The assessment should take place within 16 weeks of the placement starting and during this assessment period they will also be supervised by a social worker in the Fostering Service. In exceptional circumstances an additional 8 weeks can be given to complete the assessment (with agreement from the Agency Decision Maker). During the assessment period, connected persons carers can obtain support from their assessing social worker, can access the out of hours fostering helpline and will be invited to a one day training course. They will also be invited to a regular support group specifically for connected person's carers.

Assessment and Support for Special Guardians

Special Guardianship Order assessments are completed by children's fieldworkers. Once the order is made the Fostering Service's Connected Persons Team provides ongoing support and advice as required. This may include making applications to the Adoption Support Fund which provides financial packages of support to fund therapeutic intervention if it is assessed as required and necessary. The team offers a menu of support to Special Guardians, including: telephone advice, home visits, support groups, training, support with contact issues, and signposting to universal services, dependent on the needs of the Guardian and child. Carers with Special Guardianship Orders receive means tested payments via the Fostering Service.

Private Fostering

Initial Private Fostering notifications are received by the Safeguarding Hub and passed onto the appropriate fieldwork team to make an initial visit. Once the initial visit has assessed the likely status and initial suitability of the arrangements, the Private Fostering household is allocated to the Connected Persons Team for assessment of suitability. If the assessment is positive and it is decided that the Private Fostering arrangements are appropriate, the Connected Persons Team becomes responsible for ensuring that the welfare of the child is safeguarded and promoted by the Private Fostering Arrangement going forward. The team will make at least 6 weekly visits in the first year and then at least 12 weekly visits in following years. An annual review is conducted each year. When a Privately Fostered child is approaching 16 (unless they have a disability, then it would be when they are approaching 18) the Connected Persons Team will review the young person's circumstances and future plans.

The Connected Persons Team also promotes awareness of Private Fostering with the public and professionals working with children. This is achieved through a special campaign each year, utilising social media, placing posters, and through networking with local authority colleagues in health, education and social care, as well as in the independent education sector.

Connected Persons Helpline

The Connected Persons Team runs a helpline every weekday afternoon to offer advice and support to Reg 24 Carers, Special Guardians, and Private Foster Carers on 0114 273 6489.

Review of Foster Carers

Sheffield City Council has a comprehensive procedure for completing reviews of foster carers that complies with Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards. Our review procedures focus on the core competencies for foster carers, including continued training and development and National Minimum Standards.

Foster carer reviews are carried out annually, as per requirements; however, additional reviews are also undertaken where necessary, such as following any serious allegations or significant changes of circumstances for foster carers.

First reviews are always presented to panel in line with fostering requirements. Foster carers, with the support of their supervising social workers, are expected to attend.

What we provide

At the time of this report Sheffield City Council has 234 approved foster families, who are providing 256 placements.

Every foster carer is allocated a qualified supervising social worker. The supervising social worker will offer support, advice, guidance and supervision regarding matters relating to fostering and the care of the child.

Foster carers can usually expect to be visited at a minimum of six weekly by a social worker, but visits may often be more frequent than this. This will include both announced and unannounced visits. Frequency of visits can increase as required. During the supervisory visit, discussions take place about all issues regarding any child in placement and any issues relevant to the fostering task. This will include, for example, support, learning and development opportunities and family dynamics. Discussions will particularly focus on how children's needs are being met within the placement, and how the child can be helped to achieve their maximum potential.

Foster carers can access their supervising social worker during office working hours. If the allocated worker is not available, the service has a duty worker who will be available. There is also a contact and liaison officer based with the fostering service who will make regular contact with foster carers to provide service updates and information on upcoming events. In addition they will support carers with any other queries.

All foster carers are provided with access to Sheffield City Council fostering service handbook. This is updated regularly and can be accessed via Sheffield foster forum website which is only accessible to Sheffield City Council approved foster carers.

All foster carers have access to the fostering service helpline to discuss issues with a suitably qualified duty worker. This is always a supervising social worker from the Fostering Service. In addition to this a foster carer can also access the social care out of hour's team emergency duty team.

Sheffield City Council holds a contract with Foster Talk which provides independent advice and support to our foster carers. Sheffield City Council also has a Research in Practice account and can access additional learning resources. Foster carers have a dedicated Training and Development Officer, who in addition to delivering core training, offer additional training opportunities and can support carers to access online training courses provided by the service.

There are 7 different support groups held frequently across the city. In addition there is The 'Voices' group, which is a group of foster carers whom represent the fostering community, they meet with senior managers on a regular basis and give feedback to the wider fostering community at Sheffield's quarterly fostering open forum meetings.

The fostering service will continue to meet the annual cost of subscribing all our foster carers to the Fostering Network membership scheme.

All newly approved foster carers have an identified mentor to support them during their first year of fostering. This is an experienced foster carer who has the necessary skills and qualities to undertake this role.

The fostering service has a team of support workers in the service. They offer a variety of assistance to foster carers including sessions with foster carers on specific issues and 1-1 direct work with children. They also facilitate various trips and activities for foster carers and children. Support workers also facilitate the various support groups that take place across the city.

There is also a contact and liaison officer (CLO) who's role is to keep in regular contact with foster carers, promoting events and training and ensuring they are having regular contact and updates with the service.

Foster carers have access to psychological support via the MAPS (service) Multi Agency Psychological Service and there is a psychologist allocated to the fostering service.

Foster care allowances and skills payments are reviewed annually. Full guidance on all foster care payments and allowances are provided to foster carers.

Training and Support

Sheffield City Council is a learning organisation; it provides foster carers with ongoing professional training which is delivered locally. Foster carers are expected to attend regular training to enable them to meet children's needs, in a way that is consistent with the National Minimum Standards. The fostering service produces an annual training programme that will include the core training elements that are considered essential for foster carers to undertake.

All foster carers will be supported to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards evidence workbook for foster carers within their first year post approval. A rolling programme of workshops covering the standards will take place throughout the year.

Key training course will be mandatory following a foster carer's approval. Foster carers will also have access to a range of other courses. These will be from a cross section of specialisms and included external agencies delivering courses.

Foster carers will have access to training that is delivered in various formats to allow for maximum participation. This will include website training, workshops and 1:1 learning.

All foster carers that are involved in the delivery of training to other foster carers will complete the 'Training for Trainers' course.

Supervising social workers will regularly discuss with the foster carer their individual learning and development needs. The foster carers Learning & Development Plan will be updated annually at the foster carers' annual review.

All foster carers are aware of the skill level criteria. Opportunities for a foster carer to progress through the skill levels will be discussed frequently with the foster carer

and the supervising social worker. Relevant opportunities will be made available for the foster carer should they wish to progress through the skill levels.

Compliments & Complaints

Sheffield City Council welcomes representations from anyone that has contact with the fostering service. We particularly enjoy receiving compliments rewarding our foster carers for their high level of service.

The complaints procedure in this authority can be initiated by anyone who is dissatisfied with the service they receive. All complaints are taken seriously and investigated.

All registered foster carers are members of Fostering Network and have access to legal representation and advice through this organisation. Sheffield City Council fostering service pays the registration fee. Foster carers are also offered independent advice and support via Foster Talk.

The fostering service works within Sheffield Council's complaints procedures. In the first instance, it is hoped that the fostering service would attempt to deal with any complaint or representation, however if this is felt inappropriate, all foster carers have complaints information and leaflets that show how to complain and how complaints are dealt with.

Sheffield City Council's Complaints Team can be contacted directly at:

Complaints Team
Floor 2
Howden House
Sheffield
S1 2SH

Telephone: 0114 273 4660
Email: complaints@sheffield.gov.uk

During 2017/18 the Fostering Service received 0 complaints.

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Monitoring & Evaluation of the Fostering Service

We promote a transparent culture of continuous improvement, paying careful attention to the feedback we receive about the service.

Arrangements are in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of the service to ensure that the fostering service is effective, efficient and that the quality of service is of an appropriate standard.

- All staff has regular supervision
- All attendees at the fostering service information evenings have the opportunity to complete an evaluation form
- All prospective foster carers complete an evaluation of the Skills to Foster training
- All assessment reports are quality assured and signed off by a team manager before being presented to fostering panel
- When a foster carer is approved, they are requested to complete an evaluation of the approval process and their experience of attending the fostering panel
- Children who are leaving their foster placement are requested to complete the 'end of placement' comments form
- Issues arising from any complaints are discussed, with any recommendations following a complaint being implemented
- Feedback is received from fostering panels via the panel advisor and the quarterly panel chairs meetings. Attendance at these meetings includes, panel chairs, vice chairs, panel advisor, agency decision maker and the fostering service manager
- Annual reports are submitted to senior managers via the scrutiny panel
- Contract meetings are held with partner agencies
- The fostering service complies with Fostering Service Regulation, Schedule 6

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Fostering Panel Chair's Report

This report is produced annually by the independent chairperson.
It details the volume and type of work at the panel and the quality of reports presented to panel. It details training undertaken throughout the year and identifies strengths and areas of further training needs.

Business Contingency Planning

The fostering service has a policy and set of procedures in the event of any kind of disaster occurring to ensure continuity of service. The business continuity plan is reviewed annually and updated when required.

Annual reports are submitted to senior managers via the scrutiny panel

External Inspection

The fostering service is inspected by Ofsted as part of the wider inspection of Children's Services under the new 'Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services' (ILACS) framework with reference to the Fostering Service National Minimum Standards & Regulations 2011. Inspection reports are public documents. A copy of the most recent inspection report is available from the website www.sheffield.gov.uk or at www.ofsted.gov.uk

The annual Fostering Data Set is submitted to Ofsted.

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Foster Sheffield's Future

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Further information can be obtained from:
https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/help-at-hand

Or ring: 0800 528 0731 or email: help.team@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk