



# Statement of Purpose

April 2010



**Fostering Service**

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## **1. Introduction**

It is a requirement of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 (amended 2009) 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 and also 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. It also demonstrates the systems which we have set in place to recruit, train, supervise and support foster carers.

This statement is available to all members of staff, foster carers, children and birth parents and is available on our fostering website. A copy of this statement is also lodged with OFSTED. The information contained is regularly up dated, and will be amended annually.

## **2. National Legislative and Policy framework**

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

Children Act 1989

Arrangements for the placement of Children (General) Regulations 1991

The Care Standards Act Regulations 2002 and accompanying National Minimum Standards for fostering services

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995

The Human Rights Act 1998

The Children( Leaving care )Act 2000

The Children's Workforce Development Council - Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care (2007)

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

### **3. 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 2009-2014. 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 (Children Leeds 2009-2114 Children's Plan)."

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.

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 local 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 a service which recognises and address 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 carer.

## **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.

We are committed to ensuring that the service offered is based on statutory requirements, sound principles and good practice and works within the principles of Best Value for the council.

Our service is committed to multi- agency working and develops partnerships and protocols with organisations which can progress the needs of our looked after children. We work at all levels in partnership with the Education and Health to promote the well being of children in public care in Leeds.

Our service has respect for the rights and responsibilities of Looked After children and their carers and aims to involve them in all aspects of service delivery.

The fostering service aims to provide a high quality responsive child-centred service in relation to its core functions: 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; to prepare applicants through training to be able to deal with the range of issues that foster carers face when looking after children; to assess each applicant comprehensively to ensure that they are suitable and able to carry out this role and supervise and support carers in a constructive manner that promotes the welfare of and protects 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 carer will have a supervising fostering officer and areas

of particular skills and experiences will be developed and training needs identified and addressed;

- To promote a safe and 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 to 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.
- The individual child's needs/ wishes and feelings are paramount and taken into consideration in relation to 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, complaints and advocacy process by passing on and sharing 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, outlined in their terms and conditions and foster carer agreement.
- The Payment For Skills framework ensures quality, by giving a competency framework with clear expectations for foster carers, and a training and development programme.
- Ensure that all practice promotes equal opportunities for all and values 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.

- Promoting 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 with foster carers, senior managers and elected members.
- Commitment to continuous improvement through the provision of wider placement choices for children by continuing pioneering a more innovative approach to foster care that is needs led to deliver packages of care 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 Regulations 2002 (amended 2009) and the principles outlined in the National Minimum Standards. 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.
- Every child who is looked after will have a 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, this will encourage 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 (factfile) which guides their practice and clarifies expectations and standards.

## **8. 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 most of the foster carers are part of. Payment for Skills has four levels linked to a Task, Skills and Competency (TSC) Framework, and 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 training and support group attendance requirements at each level. Each level adds more to the previous level, so that Level 4 Carers develop higher level 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 carers skills and abilities and interests.

*The differing types of approval:-*

**Temporary** –across the levels, however level 4 carers would be expected to undertake assessments on children and young people in their care or undertake a specified task.

**Respite** –across the levels.

**Permanent** –across the levels, however level 4 carers would be expected to provide permanent placements for children with complex needs or challenging behaviour.

**Family Resource Centre Carers** -Level 4 carers would provide regular respite to relieve stress in families and prevent children coming into care.

**Parent/Child Carer**- level 4 carer would provide assessments of parents ability to care for their child as part of a plan– residential and non residential placements available.

**Planned short breaks** – as part of a package under section 17 to maintain children with their families and prevent children coming into care.

**Family Placement** – offer any type of foster placement for disabled children.

**Kinship Carers**- known as Family and Friends carers providing placement placements for children and young people known to the carer. Level 1 of the PFS model.

Foster Carers can usually be approved for three children at any one time (dependent on registration).

## **9. The Family Placement Service for Disabled Children**

The Leeds Family Placement Service for Disabled Children provides a range of high quality inclusive services for disabled children 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 preventative short breaks and sitting services offers support to children and families, consistent with Governmental priorities outlined in “Aiming High for Disabled Children: Better Support for Families” (HM Treasury, DFES May 2007).

The professional fostering, permanency and adoption service recruits, trains, approves and supports high quality specialist foster carers (including those with nursing experience) to offer a range of placements to disabled children including: Short term (including pre-adoptive, emergency, working to rehabilitation, assessment, duration of proceedings, bridging, etc); Shared care (sharing the care with parents in a plan tailored to the child’s needs and their family’s needs for over 120 days a year);Permanent foster care placements.

The short breaks service recruits, trains, approves and supports short breaks carers reflecting the diverse communities of Leeds, to offer a range of short break placements to disabled children and their families. These carers are subject to the same checks as foster carers, have a competency based assessment, which go to foster panel for approval. The carers are registered foster carers subject to National Minimum Standards. As most of the carers are volunteers and the children live primarily with their parents who are responsible for their health and welfare we would expect the application of NMS to be proportionate and sensitive to the service offered.

## **10. Statistics**

The mainstream fostering service currently has 567 Foster Carer households registered. There are currently 299 children placed in Short Stay / Temporary foster placements (including Respite and Emergency), 320 children placed with Long Stay Carers, in addition there are currently 162 children placed with Family and Friends Carers (Family Network Carers). 145 children and young people are placed with Independent Fostering Agencies. There are 138 registered foster carers within the family placement team for disabled children. In 2008-9 74 children /young people had foster placements on the service. In 2009-10 59 approved Short Breaks foster carers and 28 carers from the Professional Fostering and Adoption Service provided 5,782 days of care to disabled children.

## **11. Management of the Service**

A Service Delivery Manager (Children) holds responsibility for the service, Sarah Johal. There are four team managers who manage differing teams. These teams comprise of two geographically focussed teams managed by Anne-Marie Stokes and Deb Schofield; a Kinship Care Team managed by Val Hales and the Family Placement service, which provides for children with disabilities, managed by Kay Beach. The team managers are responsible to the Service Delivery Manager, the registered manager of the service. All the managers are qualified social workers.

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 oversee the work of the Children and Young People's Social Care and delegates certain responsibilities to the Chief Officer of Children and Young People's Social Care. The Chief Officer, Jackie Wilson, has overall responsibility for the financial management, proper management systems and the safe care of children. Jackie Wilson is currently the Responsible Individual of the service. The Head of Service for Looked After Children, Sue May, is due to take up her appointment in July 2010.

## **12. Staffing**

There are 27.5 qualified social workers within the three fostering teams. They hold differing responsibilities within the teams including the development of specialist placements, placement co-ordination and the development of the service. The Family Placement service has 3FTE posts for fostering and permanency, 3FTE workers for Short Breaks and 1.25 posts for the Sitting Service plus a temporary post on this latter scheme.

In addition over the next year we are increasing staffing in the establishment by 4 workers and 1 team manager to develop more in house provision of foster care and specialist family placements for children with complex health needs.

All workers hold a social work qualification. There is a range of experience among the staff and all fostering officers must have had at least one year's post qualifying experience in children's social work, before joining the section.

In addition there are is a Business support team who provide administrative support to the fostering and adoption service as a whole.

No member of staff of Leeds Children and Young People's Social Care is able to become a foster carer registered with this service.

## **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 CRB checks are repeated every 3 years for all carers and staff. Leeds fostering service has policy and guidance

underpinning our service on Safe caring; health and safety ; bullying policy; management of behaviour and foster carer agreements.

Our processes and procedures will ensure that concerns are addressed and monitored by the management team and the Registered Manager, and will inform service developments, 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 will know about these procedures through their social worker and the children's guide. They also have access to a Children's rights advocacy 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 the multi-agency prioritisation panel which meets monthly.

In addition the therapeutic team hold a weekly Fostering Surgery for most carers to access directly . The key objectives 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**

The Fostering Service is committed to ensuring the health outcomes for young people looked after continually improve. The health team for looked after children comprise of team of qualified health professionals and administrative staff.

This includes: Designated Doctor for Looked After children and young people; Designated Nurse for Looked After children and young people; Nurse specialists for looked after children; Clerical, IT and secretarial support staff.

The team has an holistic approach to health and aims to help Looked After children and young people achieve the five outcomes described in Every Child Matters. They work closely with both voluntary and statutory agencies, particularly social care and education. As a team they offer all aspects of health advice and support including sexual health, immunisations, health promotion, emotional well being, and substance misuse advice to young people and their carers. The nurse specialists are also part of the 4 city wide foster panels offering health related advice and opinion.

The team works with our foster carers and family and friends carers to promote healthy living and eating and assists in the tracking of children's dental health and annual health assessments.

## **16. Provision of Educational Support Services**

Specialist educational support is available to foster carers in the fostering service. There is a head teacher for the Leeds Extended School for Looked After Children (LEXS) and a team of four people to support him. The team looks at improving the attendance, academic outcomes, addresses exclusion issues and aims to improve partnerships with schools in Leeds and those out of Authority. There is a qualified teacher who is based in the fostering section and provides training, support and personal advice to foster carers.

The Personal Education Allowance Scheme has enabled more children to benefit from additional tutoring and also enables young people to participate in activities they may not otherwise be able to access. This is positively promoted through the Fostering Service and is enhancing many children's educational achievements, confidence and academic outcomes.

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 the young people and, where appropriate, the supervising officer will also attend.

Information and developments are promoted by the qualified teacher within fostering team through mail shots and supervisory visits to carers. Training, resources and materials are available to foster carers.

Training on literacy, numeracy and negotiating through the educational pathway for Children and Young People is provided. In 2009 the virtual head rolled out the letter box scheme to improve the literacy of our young children at Key stages 1 and 2.

There are various homework clubs, specifically for Looked After students in high schools, throughout the city. These are supported by undergraduates from the Leeds Universities and Leeds Aim Higher.

There are 3 Connexions advisors who work specifically with our Looked After students and their carers. They are more than willing to make home visits and continue working with the students post 16. A celebration event is held each year to celebrate the educational achievements of looked after children. As a result of these services the number of children achieving GCSE's has increased as has the number of children going to University.

## **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, and the expectation that carers will seek out and support new experiences and activities to enhance children's self-worth, social development and independence.

School aged Looked After Children are able to access the MAX card which gives free access for the child, a friend and two adults to a range of leisure activities throughout the Leeds area. Swimming at Leeds Leisure centre's is free for all children in Leeds and foster carers are encouraged to ensure children are taught to swim. There are good links with Leeds Rhinos who have provided opportunities for Leeds Looked After Children.

Information on community play schemes, clubs and holiday activities are provided to foster carers on a regular basis through newsletters.

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 and ensure that

all people are treated equally, regardless of age, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, disability or religion. We have supervising fostering officers to help carers with issues regarding trans racial placements.

## **18. Pathway Planning Service**

The Pathway Planning Service works closely with other professional to provide a holistic approach to meeting young peoples needs. Leeds is committed to supporting care leavers and will support young people to remain in their foster placement beyond 18 years of age if this supports them more effectively.

## **19. Recruitment of Foster Carers**

The Fostering Service has a recruitment strategy which utilises current data, regarding the gaps in resource provision. More places are needed for teenagers, long-term care for Children and young people, children with disabilities and younger sibling groups and black and minority ethnic children.

Recruitment work is targeted, with specific carers recruited at different times. Most recently a “career fostering” campaign was launched and will be ongoing until June 2010. It is likely that the next campaign will focus on recruiting carers who can take younger children and sibling groups given the latest analysis of gaps in provision.

The Fostering Service uses a variety of mediums to recruit local carers, and information that has been collated over the past 10 years on the most successful advertising forms, is reflected in our current advertising strategy. We have a clear “brand” displayed in adverts, publicity material, leaflets, posters, etc. We have access to the Leeds City Council Press Office who are able to help us promote the service to the Leeds press and we have a page on Leeds City Council website where potential carers can register interest in becoming a foster carer. Features on radio, newspaper articles, community meetings and briefings are all undertaken regularly.

## **20. Approval and Assessment Process**

Anyone over the age of 25 may apply to become a Foster Carer (exceptionally over 21 years), and a welcoming response is given and all initial enquires are responded to on the same day. Applicants are welcomed from all members of the community, regardless of relationship status, employment situation, class, gender, sexuality, culture, ethnicity or religion.

When a person contacts Leeds Fostering Service, to express an interest in fostering they will be able to have a discussion with a fostering worker who will explain the process and take some initial information about them. If the caller then wishes to proceed, they will be sent an Information Pack with a registration of interest form usually within 24 hours. There is immediate exclusion of any applicant who has been convicted of any serious offence against a child or adult.

Returning this form triggers an appointment to their home, to complete an Initial visit and assessment. At this visit we will discuss fostering with members of the family, check the home conditions are warm and clean and that there is space for a foster child to sleep, do homework, 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 (see below for details). Once these are completed satisfactorily an invitation to a training and preparation group is then given.

The preparation training undertaken uses the Fostering Networks Skills to foster programme including: Skills to Foster; Child Development; Separation and Loss; Working Together; Safer Care; Moving On. The service runs between 5 to 8 sessions a year and are generally undertaken on weekends, or occasionally weekdays, as demand dictates. The training is run by fostering workers, experienced foster carers and a care experienced young person.

When training is completed, the applicants begin an assessment that includes topics laid down in the Children Act 1989 and The National Minimum Standards in Foster Care (2002). All carers are subject to a number of statutory checks and references.

- Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau Check on all members of the household over the age of 16.

- Child Protection Checks
- Children Young People's Social Care ESCR check
- Department of Health Checks
- GP checks or medicals. (applicants for short breaks are asked to complete a medical questionnaire which is sent to their G.P. for verification / comments).
- 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
- 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 in certain circumstance.

Most foster carers are subject to a competency based assessment; family and friends carers assessment concentrates on the parenting strengths and ability to manage the complexity of family relationships in order to keep children safe and promote their well-being. 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 British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) Form F foster carer assessment format for the completion of its assessments. 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 of their past and present

experiences, the 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 encouraged 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.

The fostering panel is an independent panel and comprises people from a variety of backgrounds. They consider and recommend the approval, or not, of all foster carers. The recommendation then goes before the agency decision maker who makes a final decision. Any appeals can be made within 28 days to the Decision maker.

All foster carers are subjected to an annual review of their status as foster carers. This is a formal review of the work that they have undertaken during the year, and is an opportunity to reflect on achievements and learning. These are currently undertaken by their own supervising fostering officer but over the next year we hope to see the implementation of Independent Reviewing Officers to undertake this task and provide the independence required. A report is presented to the Fostering Panel in the case of all first reviews or cases of concern.

## **21. Support, Supervision and Training of Foster Carers**

All foster carers are linked with a supervising fostering officer. The supervising fostering officer provides support and supervision:

The supervisory social worker undertakes a minimum of four supervisory visits per year including a review of the foster carer. They also make an unannounced visit to the placement.

On the 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, at the time that they need it. During office hours each foster carer is allocated a Supervising Fostering Officer. This 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 at the Children and Families' Team office to deal with any urgent problems or issues.

If additional support is required outside of these times, foster carers can contact the Emergency Duty team or the 365 help line – a service that operates 24 hours a day for carers by carers.

Leeds fostering service provides a Support Service independent of the local authority to foster carers where this is appropriate. This can be for mediation purposes; to provide advocacy support for the carer during allegations or where there is a complaint concerning the fostering service. This ensures that no conflict of interest arises and that carers are well supported.

The fostering service believes that carers should be fully reimbursed for the costs of looking after a child, and provides allowances at the nationally recognised government recommended rates. An allowance and travel expenses are paid to carers and all necessary equipment for the task is provided. Additional payments in the form of fee are available to carers who meet specific requirements on the PFS model. Insurance schemes are in place to carers for personal injury and for damage that may occur through accidents in the home.

The Fostering Service runs foster carers' support groups. These meetings generally are geographically based and take place in the daytime at a variety of venues across the city.

## **22. Foster Carers Handbook (Factfile)**

All Foster Carers have a handbook which gives factual information which they need to know about the service. This includes safe caring issues, the role of social workers, and procedures in a condensed format. The Handbook for foster carers was revised through the fostering service in 2008/9 and has been distributed to all relevant carers.

## **23. Training**

The Fostering Service believes that a comprehensive training programme, for its staff and Carers, is the key to their personal and professional development. Training provides people with the necessary skills and knowledge, necessary in providing a high quality service. It is also key to safeguarding children, Foster Carers and their families, by informing carers of how to care for children safely.

Training is an opportunity for, even experienced, Foster Carers to acquire new skills and an opportunity for group support and discussion. The Fostering Service has a clear training strategy, covering Pre-approval Training, to potential applicants, Induction Training for newly approved Carers which incorporates the Children's Workforce Development Standards (CWDC). A comprehensive rolling programme of training is available; this training meets the on-going professional development of foster carers throughout their fostering career. There is currently a great deal of support available in encouraging existing carers to complete the CWDC induction standards. There is a requirement that all existing carers complete this by April 2011 and family and friends carers by April 2012.

The training is linked to Payment for Skills Levels outlined in the tasks, skills and competency framework for foster carers. Professional foster carers are required to complete a core post approval training programme and thereafter a minimum of 3 training courses a year. A number of carers are currently undertaking NVQ 3 to

support foster carer progression, and all Level 4 carers will complete this over the next 2 years. The programme for foster carers is extensive and includes:

Separation and Loss; Managing Difficult Behaviour; Preserving Memories; Protecting Children / Safer Care; Education Issues for Looked After Children; Building Self-Esteem; Child Protection; Child Development; Therapeutic Crisis Intervention; Write Enough; Moving children on; contact. healthy lifestyles.

All training courses are evaluated with carers providing feedback. Feedback is collated and used to inform future practise.

## **24. Complaints Procedure**

Leeds City Council Children and Young People's Social Care operates a complaints service which is independent of the Fostering Service.

Foster Carers are given a Complaints and Complements Leaflet, detailing the process if they wish to make a complaint, when they sign the Foster Carer Agreement, which is kept with the carer's handbook.

Birth Parents are given a copy of the Complaints and Complements Leaflet in the Information Pack for Parents which is taken out by social workers of children in placements. It is the role of the child's social worker to give them the complaints leaflet for LAC 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. 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.

There have been 11 complaints this year within the fostering service. All complaints are responded to as quickly as possible and are regularly analysed to inform service development.

## **25. Allegations**

All allegations in relation to foster carers are investigated and actioned through Leeds Children and Young People Social Care (CYPSC) safeguarding and reviewing service, on behalf of the Leeds Safeguarding Children's Board under the procedures for Investigating Allegations against Adults Caring for Children. The CYPSC policies and procedures are followed. Foster carers are offered independent support during this process which can be accessed via the fostering service.

There were 10 allegations against foster carers over the year which led to child protection procedures. 2 of the carers have been de-registered as foster carers.

## **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 Leeds's Fostering Service complies with legislation and standards (this may be annually or every 3 years dependant on compliance). This report together with any action plan arising from it will be presented to the Executive Board.
- 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 the newly created performance and quality assurance team will develop the ability to improve the monitoring of performance and quality assurance processes over the coming year.

The following Key Performance Indicators will be used to monitor the Fostering Service:

- 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).
- fostering teams will recruit new foster carers and increase the number of carers for children (target as agreed)
- All Foster/ carer reviews will be held on time and letter sent to carer confirming outcome

- All initial packs to be sent to prospective carers within 3 working days
- Successful Ofsted inspection resulting in scores of no less than 3
- All assessments will be completed within 6 months from the point of completion of training
- All newly approved carers will carry out agreed induction training within first year of approval

Service Improvement plan – these processes will inform the Fostering Service 3 year Service Improvement plan which will be reviewed on an annual basis. It was last updated in July 2009.

## **27 Details of the Registration Authority**

### OFSTED CONTACT DETAILS

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Matters of concern about this fostering service can be referred to OFSTED who will decide what action to take.