



Fostering Service Statement of Purpose

May 2012

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. The Family Placement Scheme 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. Pathway Planning Service
19. Recruitment of foster carers
20. Approval and assessment process
21. Support, supervision and Training of foster carers

22. Foster carer handbook (Factfile)

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 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 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 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

Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011

Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011)

Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)

Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010

The Disability and Equality Act 2010

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 2009-2014 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. First priority will be for children to be placed with family or friends under regulation 24 of the Care Planning Regulations where this placement is deemed suitable. A separate policy is available that considers more widely the Children's services 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 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 service which recognise 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 ethnic origin, religion, culture and language of the foster carer.

Children's safety and welfare will be actively promoted in all fostering placements and protected 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.

Foster carers will provide good parenting for all children who are looked after and children will be consulted and encouraged to actively participate in their care and family life.

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 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 carers in a constructive manner that promotes the welfare of and protects and safeguards 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 qualified social worker (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. All children should have equal access to local family based care
- 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 comments, complaints and advocacy process by passing on 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 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
- 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
- Consult regularly with children who are fostered, using a variety of methods to ensure their voice is heard
- 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 (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 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. 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 most of the foster carers are part of. PFS placements are financed by making maintenance payments to Carers and by paying a fee. 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 practice requirements, 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:-

Short term fostering –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.

Long term –across the levels. Level 4 carers would be expected to provide permanent placements for children with significantly complex needs or challenging behaviour.

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.

Short breaks – as part of a package of support to maintain children with their families and prevent children coming into care.

Family Placement – short breaks, including sitting and overnight stays; also permanent carers specifically for disabled children.

Kinship Carer - providing placement placements for children and young people known to the carer.

10. Family Placement – Caring for Children with Disabilities

The Leeds Family Placement team 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 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 and long term/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 the fostering panel for approval. The carers are registered foster carers subject to National Minimum Standards. As part of this service sitters provide a home based service for families in order to support parents and families .

11. Management of the Service

Structure as at April 2011

Director of Children's Services				
Nigel Richardson				
Deputy Director Safeguarding and Specialist Services				
Steve Walker				
Head of Children's Social work				
Saleem Tariq				
Head Of Looked After Children				
Sue May				
Service Delivery Manager and Registered Manager of the Fostering Agency				
Sarah Johal				
Deputy Service Delivery Manager (Temporary)				
Val Hales				
Team Manager	Team Manager	Team Manager	Team Manager	Team Manager
Kinship Care	Recruitment	Family Placement	Support Team	Support Team
Brenda Dring(acting)	Ben Whitehead	Kay Beach	Deb Schofield	Anne-Marie Stokes
Placements Team Manager				
Graham Puckering				
Business Support Manager				

A Service Delivery Manager (Children) holds responsibility for the service, Sarah Johal is the registered manager. Val Hales provides a temporary deputising role for the Service Delivery Manager. There are six team managers who manage differing teams. These teams comprise of two geographically focussed teams managed by Anne-Marie Stokes and Deb Schofield; a recruitment team managed by Ben Whitehead; Kinship Care Team currently managed by Brenda Dring; the Family Placement service, which provides for children with disabilities, currently managed by Kay Beach and the placements team currently managed by Graham Puckering. The team managers are responsible to the Service Delivery Manager. All the managers are qualified social workers. The placements service is in the process of further development and will move to the commissioning service within the coming year as part of a multi disciplinary team to address the complex area of securing placements for all children's services.

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's Social Work Services and delegates certain responsibilities to the Deputy Director, safeguarding and specialist services, who is the responsible individual and he has overall responsibility for the financial management, proper management systems and the safe care of children. The Registered Manager is managed by the Head of Service for Looked After Children, Sue May, who is the current Agency Decision Maker for fostering.

12. Staffing

There are 36.25 full time equivalent qualified social workers within the service. They hold differing responsibilities within the teams including family placement, the

development of specialist placements, placement co-ordination and the recruitment and support of carers.

All workers hold a social work qualification apart from two unqualified workers currently based in the recruitment team to undertake initial visits to potential foster carers on a temporary basis to trial a more effective and efficient way of operating. There is a range of experience among the staff and all fostering officers must have had at least one year's experience in fieldwork, before joining the section.

In addition, there is a Business support team who provide administrative support to the fostering and adoption service as a whole. These staff are managed by the Service Delivery Manager, Fostering, Adoption and Family Placement.

Member of staff of Leeds Children's Social Work 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. 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 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 any concern is addressed and monitored by the management team 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 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 the multi-agency prioritisation panel which meets monthly.

In addition the therapeutic team hold a weekly Fostering Surgery for 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

There are 2 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.

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 the Looked After Children's Nurse 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 Looked After Children to look at improving the attainment attendance and exclusion issues and to improve partnerships with schools in Leeds. There is a qualified teacher who is based in the fostering section and provides training, support and personal advice to foster carers.

Leeds fostering service recognises the need to improve Looked After Children attendance at school. The Fostering 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. Within Children's Services 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 the young people and, where appropriate, the supervising worker 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 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 and also offer support to key stage 4 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.

Looked After Children and their foster carer families in Leeds are able to access the MAX card which gives free access 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 Rugby Club who have provided opportunities for Leeds Looked After Children and more recently with foster carer households.

Information on community play schemes, clubs and holiday activities are provided to our 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.

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. We have supervising fostering officers to help carers with issues with trans racial placements.

18. Leaving care provision

The over 13's Looked After Children's teams works closely with other professionals 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 in order to experience normal family life if this supports them more effectively.

19. Recruitment of Foster Carers

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

There is an ongoing recruitment strategy and a new website has recently been launched with the aim of attracting more local carers. A radio campaign is currently underway paving the way for a new re- brand of marketing material. The launch of the website “ Foster for Leeds” is crucial for the service in aiming to recruit more carers for children requiring local placements. 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 and this is reflected in our current advertising strategy. There is 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 the website is clear for potential carers to register interest in becoming a foster carer.

Features on radio, newspaper articles, community meetings and briefings are all undertaken regularly.

The appointment of an additional manager to head up the dedicated recruitment team is instrumental in creating additional in house resources.

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.

There is immediate exclusion of any applicant who has been convicted of any serious offence against a child or adult.

Applicants are welcomed from all members of the community, regardless of relationship status, employment situation, class, gender, sexuality, culture, ethnicity or religion.

Many of our initial enquiries about fostering are via the Council's website and the fostering page is regularly renewed to ensure its information is up to date and accessible.

When a person contacts 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 and take some initial information about them and offer a visit if this is appropriate.

At the home 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 8 sessions a year and these 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 the requirements laid down in Schedule 3 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards in Foster Care (2011) 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.

- 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
- 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 British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) 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). They are not 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 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 the 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 and may either make further representation to the 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 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, significant changes to the carer's registration or cases of concern.

21. Support, Supervision and Training of Foster Carers

All foster carers are linked with a qualified social worker (supervising fostering officer). The supervising fostering officer provides support and supervision:

The supervising fostering officer 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. All visits and communications with the foster carer are recorded and shared with the social worker.

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 the 365 help line – a service that operates 24 hours a day for carers by carers.

Leeds fostering service provides an Independent Support Service to foster carers (currently provided by Foster Talk) for carers where this is required for mediation purposes or to provide advocacy support for the carer during allegations.

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 Payment for Skills model.

At times, all children can have accidents that cause damage. When such damage occurs, carers are initially asked to claim on their own household insurance. Any excess payments or increase in premiums that results from this can be reclaimed from the department. In the event of the carer's insurance not covering the loss or damage, a claim can be submitted for consideration by the Fostering Service's insurance agents.

The Fostering Service supports several groups that have been established as foster carers' support groups. These meetings generally involve small numbers of geographically based carers 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 is available on line and also provided as a hard copy. Annual changes to the financial payments to foster carers are given to all foster carers who are required to sign to acknowledge their receipt of the document.

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. A comprehensive rolling programme of training is available; this training meets the on-going professional development of foster carers throughout their fostering career.

Kinship foster carers are provided with more targeted training opportunities more suited to the fostering task of caring for family members or friends' children. This is a relatively new service for Kinship Carers but the training has been welcomed by carers and is viewed positively and will continue to be promoted for all Kinship Carers.

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. Foster carers access specialist training courses..for example around caring for disabled children, and the Organisational Development Unit Training Programme for foster carers which 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.

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

There are regular support groups for foster carers which usually has a training component. The programme for support groups over the last few years has included sexual health, general health, welfare benefits, food hygiene, the role of the Therapeutic Team and CAMHS service, legal briefing, role of key workers, tax

information, parent partnership (education focus), lifestory work, Special Guardianship Orders, amongst others.

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 a Complaints and Compliments 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 Compliments 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. 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 supervisory fostering officer.

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 Fostering Service complies with legislation and standards (this may be annually or every 3 years dependant on compliance).
- Annually to the council's 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 Performance and Quality Assurance Team will develop the ability to improve the monitoring of performance and quality assurance processes of all the Fostering Service key requirements.

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 teams will recruit new foster carers and increase the number of carers for children (targets as agreed)
- Further development of Fostering Services for hard to place children
- Successful Ofsted inspection resulting in scores of no less than 3
- All assessments will be completed within 5 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 2010 and is due for review this summer.