

**Durham County
Council
Fostering Service**



Statement of Purpose

2015/16



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INTRODUCTION

This Statement of Purpose sets out the aims, values, principles and the objectives of Durham County Council Fostering Service and describes how these will be met in partnership with carers, children, young people, their families and other partner agencies. It also explains the facilities and services of the Fostering Service, which are delivered in accordance with relevant legislation and regulatory frameworks including:

- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services.
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: The Care Planning Placement and Case Review
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- The Fostering Services (England) Regulation 2011,
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011.
- Foster Carer Charter 2011.
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Permanence, long-term foster placements and ceasing to look after a child – Statutory Guidance March 2015

Durham County Council places great emphasis on working with children and their families/carers to promote and maintain stability, safety and security for children. Children have a right to a family life where they can form and maintain effective relationships, fulfil their potential and achieve best outcomes within a caring and positive environment.

Those children who need to be Looked After by the Local Authority are likely to be the most vulnerable and in need of help and support. They may have experienced neglect, abuse, trauma and disruption in their childhood and could have complex needs as a result of their experiences.

A primary consideration in meeting such a child's needs is, wherever possible, to maintain or rehabilitate them to their family of origin, including extended family. For some children in order to safeguard, secure and promote their current and future needs an alternative placement outside of their birth family will be considered to best meet their needs.

FOSTERING SERVICES

Values and Principles

Durham County Council Fostering Service is committed to the following values and principles which underpin and are set out in the Fostering Minimum Standards 2011:

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of their care.
- Children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefiting from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
- Children are entitled to grow up in a loving environment that can meet their developmental needs.
- Every child should have his or her wishes and feelings listened to and taken into account.
- Each child should be valued as an individual and given personalised support in line with their individual needs and background in order to develop their identity, self-confidence and self-worth.
- The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account
- The significance of contact for looked after children, and of maintaining relationships with birth parents and the wider family, including siblings, half-siblings and grandparents, is recognised, as is the foster carer's role in this.
- Children in foster care deserve to be treated as a good parent would treat their own children and to have the opportunity for as full an experience of family life and childhood as possible, without unnecessary restrictions.
- The central importance of the child's relationship with their foster carer should be acknowledged and foster carers should be recognised as core members of the team working with the child.
- Foster carers have a right to full information about the child
- It is essential that foster carers receive relevant support services and development opportunities in order to provide the best care for children.
- Genuine partnership between all those involved in fostering children is essential to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes the Government, local government, other statutory agencies, fostering service providers and foster carers.

Commitment to the Foster Carers' Charter

The Fostering Service is committed to reflecting the spirit and intentions of the Durham County Council Foster Carer Charter was developed in partnership with foster carers and can be found at <http://www.durham.gov.uk/media/5460/Foster-Carers-Charter/pdf/FosterCarersCharter1.pdf>

Aim

DCC Fostering Service is committed to the continual development and delivery of high quality services in partnership with other statutory, voluntary and independent agencies/providers in order to meet the diverse needs of children, their families and carers and achieve the best possible outcomes for them.

Objectives

The Fostering Service's key objectives reflect the Fostering Service Minimum Standards 2011:

- To provide safe and secure care for children which enables them to reach their potential, have a positive view of self, an understanding of their background and achieve the best outcomes
- To ensure that children benefit from stable placements, have sound relationships with their foster family and are cared for in accordance with their Care Plan/Placement Plan.
- To ensure that children live in a healthy environment where their physical, emotional and psychological health is promoted and where they are able to access the services to meet their health needs
- To ensure that children are able to enjoy their interests, develop confidence in their abilities and are supported and encouraged to engage in a wide range of opportunities/activities to develop their talents and skills to promote their development.
- To ensure that children, birth parents/guardians and families are valued and respected, also that children's contact with their families and friends is supported and promoted, where this is in their best interests
- To ensure that children are listened to, have their views respected and fully taken into
- To ensure that children's identity, ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language and sexuality are properly recognised, positively valued and promoted.

- To ensure that disabled children and children with complex needs have their needs fully recognised and taken into account.
- To ensure that children are prepared for, and supported into adulthood so that they can reach their potential and achieve economic wellbeing
- To recruit, train, assess and approve sufficient foster carers to meet the needs of those children requiring foster placements and who can provide children with a home where they feel loved, safe and secure
- To ensure that the education and achievement of children is actively promoted and valued as part of their preparation for adulthood. Children are supported to achieve their educational potential
- To provide high levels of advice, guidance and support to foster carers, including family and friends foster carers, and their families in order to ensure children are safeguarded and their needs are well met.
- To ensure that there is a clear framework of training and development in place for foster carers and that they receive the training and development they need to carry out their role effectively
- To ensure that the Fostering Panel and Agency Decision Maker make timely, quality and appropriate recommendations/decisions in line with the over-riding objectives to promote the welfare of children
- To assess and review foster carers skills and competencies. To ensure that the Fostering Service contributes to those children's and foster carer reviews.
- To ensure that the service is provided and managed effectively and efficiently by staff who are suitable to work with children and have the appropriate skills, experience, knowledge, competence and qualifications to deliver an efficient and effective service
- To ensure that foster carers understand the Fostering Service's payment structures and to ensure that payments to them are fair and are paid in a timely manner
- To ensure that allegations and suspicions of harm are handled in a way that provides effective protection and support of children, the person making the allegation, and at the same time support the person who is subject of the allegation.
- To ensure that significant events relating to the health and protection of children fostered by the Service are notified to appropriate people
- To ensure that records are clear, accurate, up to date and stored securely, and contribute to an understanding of a child's life.

- To ensure users of the Fostering Service have opportunities to inform future service delivery.

STRUCTURE AND SERVICES

The Service is based at The Fostering and Adoption Service Resource Centre which provides a good working environment. It also provides excellent training and support group facilities for all users of Fostering Services.

Organisation and management of the Service

The Fostering Service is managed by the Strategic Manager, Looked After Children and Permanence and the Operation Manager, Fostering and Adoption and Full Circle. The staff are organised and managed within 4 teams (see Appendix 1 for more detail).

The Permanence and Long Term Team

This Team provides support to foster carers providing long term and permanent placements for children and young people, foster carers. In addition the team are responsible for all family finding cases when a child's plan is permanence via fostering

The Recruitment Team

This Team delivers a targeted recruitment programme, supported by a Marketing and Recruitment Co-ordinator. The team takes a lead role on recruiting and retaining foster carers through advertising, information evenings, initial visits, preparation, training and assessments, as well as events for foster carers and young people.

The Short Term Team

The Short-Term Team provides support to foster carers offering placements for children and young people aged 0-18 and those offering Fostering Plus placements. These placements vary in length from overnight to more than a year until a permanence plan is implemented.

The Placement and Kinship Team

The Placement Management Team (now the Placement and Kinship Team) was set up in September 2010 and it co-ordinates all requests for placements within foster care and residential care.

Children who are placed in foster placements commissioned through Independent Fostering Providers are monitored closely by this service, which works closely with Contracting and Commissioning colleagues to ensure robust standards and quality of care whilst ensuring best value.

In addition this team are responsible for the assessment, approval and support of family and friends foster carers.

Fostering Services are provided to the following and are outlined below:

- Children who are looked after by the Local Authority.
- Birth Families of the children.
- Prospective and approved foster carers and their families.

Provision of Services to Children

Durham County Council Fostering Service provides services for children under four broad headings. These are:

- Selection of appropriately approved foster carers to meet the child's identified needs.
- Providing information about Fostering Services.
- Supporting Foster Carers with children in placement.
- Providing group support to children who foster and foster carers.

The Fostering Service provides a range of temporary and permanent placements with foster carers who have a range of skills and experience. These are:-

- Emergency placements.
- Short-term placements which provide support to families or facilitate the assessment of the needs of the child.
- Parent and child placements which are an arrangement to enable a parent and child to live together. It encompasses both parent and child being Looked After and therefore both will be in foster placement or it may be that either the parent or the child may be Looked After and therefore only one of them may be fostered. This may provide the opportunity to undertake a parental assessment.
- Respite care which supports children and families who need additional help or supports other foster carers to sustain placement stability.
- Family and Friends foster carers who are approved and supported to provide immediate or longer term care for children unable to live with their own birth parents.

- Permanent or long term placements which are provided where it is not appropriate or possible to place the child for adoption. These placements will support young people through transition to adulthood and beyond where appropriate.
- Placements for disabled children, both short term and permanent

The Fostering Service works closely with the child's social worker. The child's social worker provides support in placement to the child and co-ordinates the child's care plan. A care team will be in place and members of this will include other professionals directly involved or working with the child and family e.g. The Full Circle, Fostering Social Workers, Looked After Nurse, Looked After Children Education Services (LACES), CAMHS, Community Support or people with a significant relationship or contact with the child i.e. Birth Family members.

Education

Education provision is planned and provided in partnership with schools. Where a child has emotional or behavioural difficulties or special educational needs, the service of Special Education Needs (SEN) Officers and/or Educational Psychologist will be provided.

The Looked After Children Education Service (LACES) is dedicated to supporting the education of Looked After children in order to ensure they fulfil their potential. It is a multi disciplinary team of Education Key Workers, Education Support Workers, Inclusion Officers and Education Psychologist who work closely with schools, parents/carers and social workers to promote educational achievement and to address barriers to learning, including attendance and exclusion.

LACES provide a direct support Service to children and young people to ensure they have access to a wide range of educational opportunities, advice, and guidance. Each looked after child has an allocated Education Key Worker who facilitates their Personal Education Plan and subsequent reviews.

Pupil Premium is additional funding for schools in England to raise the attainment of eligible pupils and narrow the attainment gap between them and their peers. Looked After children are eligible to this funding and access to this is promoted.

Work experience is provided to older children in foster care through the 'Teenagers to Work' Programme, where appropriate.

Health

Health care, health assessment and health promotion are provided through partnerships with NHS Trusts who provide acute and primary care as well as community child health services. Specialist Looked After Children Nurses are employed to facilitate health assessments and to monitor the quality of health reviews and to promote positive health outcomes for looked after children. The Nurses work closely with foster carers offering consultation, advice and support.

The Full Circle Therapeutic Service provides access to advice and consultation regarding the emotional and psychological well being of children and young people. This includes access to a Consultant Clinical Child Psychologist, Therapeutic Workers and wider access to CAMHS Services when necessary.

The Full Circle Therapeutic Service provides dedicated support to Looked After Children and their carers. These services include provision of planned surgeries, training, attachment and therapeutic support groups, as well as individual therapeutic work.

The Children in Care Council and Investing in Children

The Fostering Service works with the Children in Care Council and Investing in Children. There is regular liaison and participation is promoted. Contact details are included in the Children's Guide to the Fostering Services

Independent Support for Children

Durham County Council has a service level contract with the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS), which is available to all children receiving a service.

NYAS is an independent organisation which can assist children and young people in a range of ways to ensure they are able to express their views and are listened to. NYAS information is included in the Children's Guide.

Services to Birth Families

The child's social worker works with birth families throughout the time the child is in foster care.

Responsibility for the supervision of direct contact between children looked after and a birth family member is the responsibility of the child's social worker. However, where appropriate, foster carers will actively support and supervise contact for any children placed with them.

Birth parents are invited to give feedback for foster carer's reviews.

When children are in a foster placement and the plan is confirmed as adoption, information, advice, counselling and support to birth parents is provided by members of the Adoption Service or PAC UK, an independent adoption support and counselling service.

Services to Adults who were Fostered

Durham County Council provides advice and assistance to adults seeking access to information about their time in foster care through a dedicated social work (Access to Records) post that provides information, support and counselling as required.

Services to Prospective and Approved Foster Carers

Services for prospective foster carers are under the following main headings:

- Information and advice about fostering.
- Information about the needs of children locally requiring foster care and recruitment priorities to meet those needs.
- Preparation via Group Training sessions and individual learning.
- Assessment and approval utilising BAAF assessment forms.
- Individual and/or Group support prior to and following approval, and placement and fostering of children.
- Annual Reviews of approval.
- A comprehensive annual training and development programme.

Payment for Skills

Payment for Skills offers foster carers a career pathway to be financially rewarded as they progress in developing skills and experience. If foster carers can demonstrate skills and competence, in accordance with the criteria and expectations of each skill band, a fee paid reward (in addition to the age related fostering allowance for the child) is payable depending on experience.

Foster Carers Annual Reviews

Every foster carer is required to have a formal annual review which evaluates progress over the last year and makes recommendations about continuing approval, terms of approval, future training, support needs and the level of banding for Payment for Skills.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's) undertake all foster carers annual reviews. IRO's are independent of the Fostering Service.

Foster carer reviews are presented to a Fostering Panel and the Agency Decision Maker at the end of the foster carers first year of fostering, subsequently every 3 years and also if there are issues of concern.

All other foster carer reviews are considered by the Agency Decision Maker for final decision making.

Foster Carer Training, Professional & Personal Development

Comprehensive training opportunities are provided throughout the year to meet foster carers training needs and to support them in achieving the Training, Support and Development (TSD) standards for foster carers which is a legal requirement for all foster carers to complete.

There is a comprehensive training programme which includes mandatory, core training and a wide range of supplementary training, including nationally recognised qualifications. In addition foster carers are encouraged to undertake further training when the opportunities present.

Group Support

A range of individual and group support services are available to foster carers throughout the year. These are provided with other professionals and agencies.

Services for foster carer's children

The Service invites all prospective foster carer's own children aged 8+ to attend Preparation for Fostering training. All children's needs are considered during the assessment process.

In addition, the Service has developed a Children who Foster group (M8's) to support foster carers' own children.

Out of Office Hours Support

Support is available to foster carers, children and families through the Emergency Duty Team out of working hours where it is required.

Advice and Mediation

Durham County Council has a Service Level Contract with the Fostering Network for the provision of advice and mediation for foster carers.

Regional Contract with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's)

The Fostering Service works with other Local Authorities within the North East Region to compliment in house resources and address the needs of children via a regional contract with IFA's.

RECRUITMENT, ASSESSMENT, TRAINING AND APPROVAL OF PROSPECTIVE FOSTER CARERS

Recruitment

Durham County Council's Fostering & Adoption Service has a dedicated Recruitment and Marketing Co-ordinator. This post leads the Recruitment Strategy for Fostering and Adoption and works between the Service and the County Wide Marketing and Communication Team. This enables The Fostering Service to maximise marketing opportunities to recruit foster carers.

The Fostering Service utilises management information on children, (numbers referred, gender, ages, sibling groups, children's needs etc.) to inform, prioritise and target recruitment to meet the needs of children requiring foster care. Durham County Council has its own website with information on Fostering Services, an on line registration of interest form and links to other relevant websites.

Information packs provide advice to enquirers on a full range of fostering issues from the initial enquiry to support services. Information is also available on DCC website or can be posted as required.

The Fostering Service recognises the value in attracting applicants from diverse backgrounds. Advertising material and written information is designed to highlight children's needs for safe and stable parenting and emphasises that enquiries and applications are encouraged from people from a wide variety of backgrounds.

The marketing approach to fostering recruitment seeks to raise public awareness of the needs of children and the rewards and challenges of becoming a foster carer. The timing of advertising is planned to facilitate a professional and speedy response to enquiries and is co-ordinated with planned preparation groups. Recruitment activity, preparation groups, assessments and the staffing requirements to facilitate a smooth transition for applicants through these processes are planned on annual basis.

Initial Enquiry

There is a dedicated recruitment line which responds immediately to all enquiries. These enquirers are informed of local priorities for children requiring fostering placements. This ensures that staff and enquirers retain a focus on making and accepting applications that are most likely to meet the needs of those children requiring fostering placements.

Information Sessions

Prospective carers who are interested, and are appropriate to progress, are invited to an Information session where they have the opportunity to learn more about the Service, talk to current foster carers and have an individual consultation session with a Fostering Social Worker.

Initial Visit

Initial visits are undertaken to prospective foster carers as soon as possible after the Information Session. This is an exploratory session to enable a two way sharing of information. The service will take into account the current children requiring placements and the prospective carer's information to decide whether they will be invited to make an application to foster and to attend a Preparation Training Course.

The assessment process is separated into Stage One and Stage Two, although these can run concurrently

Stage One

Preparation & Training Groups

All those applying for approval as foster carers are required to participate in a series of group preparation sessions. The course is run in a relaxed manner using the applicants own experience alongside guided teaching about fostering. Topics included in the Preparation to Foster training are as follows:

- Why children need to be Looked After in Foster Care.
- The Fostering Tasks.
- Attachment, loss and resilience.
- Communicating with children.
- The Assessment process.
- Role of the Fostering Panel & Applicants attendance.
- Medical and background issues affecting children's development/behaviour.
- Understanding and managing behaviour.
- What is abuse/neglect?
- Safer caring.
- Managing contact and record keeping.
- Fostering support services.
- Legal requirements.
- Working in partnership with families.

The preparation/training groups are intended to cover a range of issues relating to the fostering task and expectations of the Fostering Service. The groups provide an opportunity for those attending to increase their knowledge and to make an informed decision about whether to proceed with their application to foster.

The Groups are led by Fostering Social Workers with the assistance of social work colleagues, other professionals, experienced foster carers and young people. Additional opportunities for learning are available following attendance at Preparation Groups. These can be facilitated by meeting other foster carers, shadowing residential and social workers.

Checks, References and Medicals

The assessment of prospective foster carer's suitability will take account of a range of safeguarding and checking processes designed to protect children from harm or exploitation.

All foster care applicants are required to provide proof of identity and to give written consent to a comprehensive range of enquiries, checks, reports and references being obtained from other organisations or individuals. The requirement for Enhanced DBS checks applies to all residents in the prospective foster carers household who are 16 years or over. Applicants are required to consent to medical information being provided after a medical examination.

Stage Two

Assessment

Durham County Council Fostering Service uses the BAAF Assessment Form as a practical tool and guide in the completion of fostering assessments.

The Fostering Service endeavours to complete assessments of prospective carers within 6 months of the receipt of a completed application form.

Applicants are encouraged wherever possible to make their own written contribution to the assessment.

Self evaluation combined with professional evaluation and judgement is crucial to the assessment and decision making process.

All fostering assessments are undertaken or overseen by suitably qualified and experienced social workers.

Completed assessments are presented to one of the Fostering Panels for a recommendation prior to the Agency Decision Maker making a decision on the application. Applicants have the opportunity to attend the Fostering Panel and are informed verbally and in writing of the outcome of their application.

Those applicants assessed but who are not considered suitable to foster are fully informed of the processes to have this decision reviewed including through the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

Assessment, training and approval of family and friends foster carers.

The processes outlined above apply to the assessment and approval of family and friends foster carers in a slightly different way. These processes are summarised below:

- An initial screening discussion is held between a Fostering Social Worker and the Child's Social Worker
- A viability assessment is then conducted jointly by the Fostering Social Worker and the Child's Social Worker
- The viability assessment is presented to the Agency Decision Maker who makes a decision about whether temporary approval as foster carers is to be granted
- Stage One and Stage Two as outlined above would then follow for those granted temporary approval

FOSTERING PANELS

There are 3 Fostering Panels. These are constituted in accordance with Fostering Services (England) Regulations, Guidance and Standards 2011. The Panels make recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker who considers the information and reaches a decision. The Agency Decision Makers are the Strategic Manager, Looked After Children and Permanence and the Operation Manager, Fostering and Adoption and Full Circle.

The remit of the Fostering Panels is to:

- Consider the suitability of prospective foster carers and make recommendations about their terms of approval.
- Provide feedback on the quality of reports presented.
- Consider the first annual review of all foster carers approval and subsequently every 3 years, as well as any other review which the fostering service considers necessary.
- Periodically monitor the effectiveness of the review procedure.
- Recommend whether permanent fostering is in a child's interests, although this is currently under review
- Recommend suitability of matches between for children and carers for permanence
- Give advice and make recommendations on such other matters or cases as the Fostering Service may refer to it.
- Oversee the conduct of assessments

Specialist Advisors to the Fostering Panels

Legal Advisor

The Legal Adviser to The Fostering Panel's is not a member of the Panel's, but is available to provide written or verbal advice to the Fostering Panel's and the Agency Decision maker.

Legal advice is also available to agency staff and managers when required.

Medical Advisor

A Medical Advisor is available to provide advice to each of the Fostering Panels.

The Medical Advisor will evaluate prospective foster carers' medical information.

In relation to matches, the Medical Advisor will evaluate birth parent's and children's medical information. She may also offer further individual discussion or advice to prospective foster carers in relation to children, where appropriate.

Education Advisor

Educational advice is available to the Panel.

Training and Conduct of Panel

The Fostering Service has an Induction Pack, Process and training for new Fostering Panel members. In addition training events for all Panel members are arranged at least annually. Fostering Panel members contribute to identifying their individual training needs within their Annual Appraisal meetings.

The Fostering Panels Chairs, Fostering Panel members and Senior Managers meet at Business Meetings which are held twice a year to discuss any relevant fostering issues affecting the Panel and/or Service.

The Fostering Panel fulfil their responsibilities in relation to quality assurance and monitoring of fostering cases. Quality issues on cases presented are recorded in Panel minutes and are brought to the attention of the Agency Decision Maker for any action as required.

Information provided by Panel is considered by the Service in relation to the training and professional development needs of all staff involved with fostering cases.

The business of the Fostering Panels is reported within an Annual Report which is presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

NUMBERS OF FOSTER CARERS, NUMBER OF FOSTERED CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Durham County Council Fostering Service is committed to providing a range of foster carers who will meet the needs of the children and young people who require foster care placements. The Fostering Service is constantly in the process of recruiting new foster carers and has a dedicated Recruitment Team and a Recruitment Strategy to address this. As of 31st March 2015 there were:

- A total of 297 fostering households
- 436 children placed in foster care with DCC approved foster carers

Foster carers come from a wide variety of backgrounds and the Fostering Service aims to recruit carers from all cultural, religious, ethnic, racial, and linguistic backgrounds. This enables the Fostering Service to match foster carers with the specific identified needs of the children and young people.

MONITORING, QUALITY ASSURANCE AND COMPLAINTS

Durham County Council is committed to providing services that comply with Fostering Services Regulations, Guidance and Standards 2011. Monitoring and quality assurance is undertaken by the following methods:

- Staff are provided with monthly supervision and annual appraisal where the quality of work and practice is monitored, and training and professional development needs are identified.
- Weekly Fostering Placement Meetings take place to monitor placement activity.
- Fostering Team Meetings are held on a monthly basis and provide opportunities to evaluate the effectiveness of fostering systems, processes and practice issues
- Management information systems track children for whom fostering is planned, prospective foster carer's assessments and availability.
- Monthly Fostering Service Performance Reports are produced and shared with senior managers.
- Children's Services Performance Reports, including Fostering Performance are produced 4 times per year. These reports include information on key data including placement stability and foster carer reviews. This information is considered by managers and is presented to the Children's Service's Senior Management Team at Performance Monitoring Days held on a quarterly basis.
- Team Managers conduct regular case file audits.
- Safeguarding Meetings are held bi-monthly, accidents and incidents of violence and aggression.
- The Placement Stability/Permanence Review Group meets regularly weeks to monitor placement stability and progress on children's plans for permanence. Members of this group include the Operation Mangers

and Team Managers across the Looked After and Permanence Service and the IRO Operation Manager.

- Disruption Meetings in relation to the break down of a permanent placement are chaired by an Independent person and advice/recommendations are presented to the Service to inform both learning and future practice.
- Services which are provided by Service Level Agreements with partner Agencies are formally reviewed and address contractual requirements, objectives and quality issues.
- Regional monitoring arrangements are in place for the Independent Fostering Providers Contract.
- A Recruitment Report is produced to collate and analyse the effectiveness of the recruitment strategy and inform future recruitment processes.
- Fostering Panel/Service reports are produced on an annual basis which record and evaluate key activity and service developments. These are presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel who takes a role in the overall monitoring and review of Fostering Service.

The Fostering Service aims to obtain service users' feedback during different stages of the fostering process. The Fostering Panels also monitor feedback from all who attended. This information is analysed and reported in the Annual Fostering Service report.

Methods of gathering views include:

- Applicants' feedback on attendance at preparation to foster training courses.
- Feedback from those who attended Fostering Panels
- Feedback on written information at time of match and placement of a child
- Feedback from children who have been placed via placement feedbacks and Looked After Children Review process.
- Children's wishes and feelings are ascertained during various key stages of their fostering journey.
- The Children in Care Council feedback children's views
- The M8's group feedback the views of children who foster

Comments, Compliments and Complaints

Durham County Council has established procedures and information leaflets in relation to any representation from service users. Additionally information for the public on the Complaints procedure is available via the Durham County Council website:

<http://www.durham.gov.uk/media/1711/Childrens-Services---Compliments-Comments-Complaints/pdf/ComplimentsCommentsComplaintsChildrensServices.pdf>

Information on how to complain is also included in the Information Pack sent to all foster carer enquirers.

Durham County Council maintains centralised records and management information in relation to corporate complaints and their outcome. Children's Services maintains centralised records in relation to statutory (social care) complaints and their outcome.

In addition foster care applicants who are not satisfied with the recommendation of the Fostering Panel and the Agency Decision Maker's decision concerning their approval as foster carers are provided with a 28 day period to make representations and to provide any additional information in support of their application. Arrangements are then made for the case to be re-presented to a Fostering Panel. Such applicants also are informed of their rights regarding the Independent Review Mechanism.

Ofsted

Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. They inspect and regulate services that care for children and young people, and services providing education and skills for learners of all ages.

In late 2013, Ofsted introduced a new Single Inspection Framework (SIF) for Local Authority Children's Services which covers children in need of help and protection, services for looked after children (including Fostering Services), care leavers and the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB).

The SIF is different from previous Ofsted inspection frameworks; not only is it much broader but there is also much more focus on frontline practice and the journey and experiences of the children and young people.

Durham County Council Fostering Service was last inspected in March 2012 when it was judged to be an Outstanding Service.

Ofsted publish results of inspections on their website at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted

Address:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING STRUCTURE OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

Durham County Council Fostering Service Address is:

The Fostering and Adoption Service
Littleburn Business Centre
Mill Road
Langley Moor
Co. Durham
DH7 8ET
Telephone: 03000 269291

The Recruitment Telephone Line for Fostering Enquiries: 03000 269400

The management and staffing structure for the Fostering Service is set out in Appendix 1.

The Fostering Service Structure

Appendix 1

