

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

Children and Young People's Services

Fostering Service Statement of Purpose



April 2013

Service Manager Lead:	Gillian Ackerley
Agreed by:	SCPMT
Date agreed:	19 th March 2013
Date implemented:	1 st April 2013
Replaces:	1 st April 2012

Forward by Councillor Lakin

“As Corporate Parents, all Councillors are part of the team around the child in Rotherham and it is vital that we listen to the views of young people. They know the issues they face and how services can support them, so young people’s input continues to be at the heart of how we shape our work to meet their needs.”

Contents

1. **Introduction**
2. **Principles and Values**
3. **Aims and Objectives**
4. **Services Provided**
5. **Recruitment, Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers**
6. **Supervision of Foster Carers**
7. **Family and Friends Carers**
8. **Training**
9. **Support to Foster Carers**
10. **Structure of Fostering Service**
11. **Staffing**
12. **Monitoring/Evaluation/Management of the Service**
13. **Records**
14. **Allegations**
15. **Complaints**
16. **Fostering Service Details**

Rotherham Fostering Service

Introduction

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (Standard 16) and the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (Regulation 3(1)) state that the Fostering Service Provider must compile a written statement in relation to the Fostering Service, a 'Statement of Purpose', which details the aims and objectives of the Fostering Service and the services and facilities provided by the Fostering Service. The National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Service Regulations govern the work of the Fostering Service Providers throughout England and will be used in inspecting and registering Fostering Agencies. The work of the Fostering Service is underpinned and guided by legislation and by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's policies and procedures.

This Fostering Statement of Purpose has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the standards and regulations and will be a useful source of information to Members of the Council, staff, foster carers and prospective foster carers and children and young people who are placed with Rotherham carers. It will also provide a comparator benchmark for Rotherham children placed with Independent Fostering Agencies.

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis, at least annually, and modified as necessary. In accordance with Fostering Regulation 4b, the Fostering Service will notify the Chief Inspector of any revision within twenty-eight days, for the purposes of this Statement the twenty-eight days will be taken from the point of ratification by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (or Lead Member for Children and Young People's Services)

Principles and Values

Rotherham Fostering Service will work towards the five outcomes for children set out by the Government in 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' and given legal force in the Children Act, 2004:-

- Be healthy;
- Stay safe;
- Enjoy and achieve;
- Make a positive contribution;
- Achieve economic well-being.

The Fostering Service will contribute to the 'Four Big Things', as identified in the Children and Young People's Plan 2010-2013:-

- Keeping Children and Young People Safe;
- Prevention and Early Intervention;
- Tackling Inequality;
- Transforming Rotherham Learning.

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's Looked After Children Statement sets out a number of principles and these principles underpin and inform the Fostering Service:-

- A child or young person should only become Looked After by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council if it is clearly in their best interest and there are no other suitable options;
- As a general principle, the provision of accommodation for a child/young person is on the assumption that the arrangements are short-term and aimed at uniting the child/young person with their parents or other person with parental responsibility within a short timescale, unless contrary to safeguarding their health and well-being;
- The Authority is committed to meeting the needs of vulnerable children and families through the use of resources, according to agreed protocols and procedures;
- No child or young person will become Looked After if it is considered to be contrary to their longer term needs or best interests;
- No child or young person will become Looked After solely because a cost-effective material resource has not been made available;
- No child or young person will become Looked After solely for reasons of family homelessness, inadequate housing or educational problems;

In addition, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and the Fostering Service:-

- Recognise that the needs of Looked After Children are paramount;
- Recognise the value, skill and commitment required of foster carers and treat them, their families and homes with respect;
- Aim to provide a range of quality placements to meet the identified needs of children who require substitute care;
- Are committed to maintaining siblings together wherever possible and promoting positive contact with family members;
- Are committed to engaging other agencies in the assessment of the needs of children and working together to clarify roles and ensuring that their needs are understood and prioritised;
- Recognise that many children will have had damaging experiences prior to placement in substitute care, as well as the effects of separation and loss;
- Recognise their mental health needs may be complex and their need for understanding of their past and access to therapeutic input is essential;
- Recognise that foster carers caring for damaged young people will encounter unknown situations on a daily basis and their own support needs need to be assessed and appropriate support systems deployed;

- Recognise that foster carers who are caring for the majority of Rotherham's Looked After Children are very valuable assets and that their time and commitment is worthy of a reasonable remuneration system;
- Recognise that all staff and carers involved in meeting the needs of children with complex needs require a robust commitment to training and learning opportunities;
- Recognise that foster carers are an integral part in supporting Looked After Children in reaching their educational potential;
- Recognise children with disabilities as children first. The same principles of service apply, while accepting that additional support services will be required to meet all their needs;
- Recognise the transition into adulthood is a major step requiring positive daily living support and enhanced connections with the adult world of opportunity and responsibility;
- Are committed to facilitating young people remaining in the foster placement into early adulthood wherever possible and that a flexible range of accommodation and support options to meet different levels of need will be a factor in the services for young people leaving care;
- Are committed to implementing the Children's Workforce Development Council's standards for foster carers and will support carers in achieving the standards.

Aims and Objectives

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and the Fostering Service are committed to working with service users, carers, the wider community and partner agencies to promote the welfare of the Looked After Children and improve their life chances by providing services which:-

- Support families;
- Provide stable, safe effective alternative care at the right time and for the right length of time and which are responsive to individual needs, circumstances and choice;
- Maintain wherever possible continuity of educational provision.

In meeting these aims and objectives Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council will work to secure 'sufficient accommodation' as required by Section 22G of the Children Act, 1989 (as inserted by the Children and Young People Act, 2008) which places a general duty on Local Authorities to secure sufficient accommodation within their boundaries to meet the needs of Looked After Children. Accommodation should be sufficient, not only in number of beds provided but also in respect of diversity and quality of provision available. Local Authorities need to demonstrate that they are taking steps at a strategic level to secure accommodation as is 'reasonably practicable'.

Reasonably practicable is defined as:-

- Appropriate;
- Near the child's home;
- Does not disrupt the child's education or training ;
- Enables the child to live with accommodated siblings;
- Within the area and suitable.

The key objectives in providing quality placements are underpinned by the Foster Carer Charter 2011 and are:-

- To provide placement choice and positive matching of a child with a placement through identification of child's needs and taking account of any wishes and feelings of the child. (NMS 1, 10);
- Where possible and appropriate provide a placement that is in reasonable proximity to a child's home and addresses the child's culture and heritage. (NMS 2);
- Where possible provide and support a placement within the child's extended family network. (NMS 2, 9);
- Promote an environment that ensures adequate safeguarding measures are in place for the child and the culture within the foster home promotes models and supports positive behaviour through adherence to policies and the skills of the foster carer. (NMS 3, 4, 5);
- Where possible and in the best interests of the individual children, as identified within assessed needs, siblings should be placed together. (NMS 2, 9);
- To allow the promotion of proactive, positive health care and well-being through Safer Care policies, promotion of child interests and aptitudes, access to relevant leisure opportunities and Health professionals. (NMS 6,7);
- To promote the maximisation of educational opportunities and achievements for children through access to relevant support and professionals. (NMS 8);
- Ensure placements wherever possible have planned beginnings and endings. (NMS 11);
- Promotion of positive contact with family and friends through effective care planning. (NMS 9);
- Listening to the child and involvement in decision making. (NMS 1);
- Partnership with parents. (NMS 8);
- Stability of placement - a minimum number of moves for each child. (NMS 11);

- Minimising the length of time between becoming a Looked After Child and moving to a permanent placement, if this is required. (NMS 11);
- Preparation for independence and smooth transition into adulthood. (NMS 12);
- Standards of care for effective planning for the transition of care to independence. (NMS 12).

Services Provided

The Fostering Service is an integral section of Children and Young People's Services and offers a comprehensive service to Looked After Children and Young People, operational teams, approved and prospective mainstream and family and friends foster carers.

The Fostering Service aims to provide suitable placements for all children and young people who are Looked After in Rotherham and offers a range of foster placements:-

- Task centred foster placements for children of all ages needing emergency and short term placements;
- Families Together Scheme, short breaks, providing regular planned breaks for disabled children of all ages;
- Respite care, offering time-limited breaks to families;
- Day care for foster carers who need to attend meetings or training events;
- Long term placements for children and young people who cannot return to birth family when adoption is not the plan;
- Family and friends care to enable children and young people, who are unable to live with their parents, are being brought up by members of their extended families, friends or other people who are connected with them;
- Specialist Remand Fostering – for children and young people on remand, also incorporates a PACE facility.

The needs, wishes, welfare and safety of Looked After Children are at the centre of the Rotherham Fostering Service. We believe that all children and young people needing substitute care have the right to live within a safe and nurturing family environment which meets their needs throughout childhood and which enables them to realise their full potential.

The Fostering Service is designed to operate within the corporate vision and values of the Council, which encompasses the five main outcomes for children and young people within the Every Child Matters agenda.

A person may not foster more than three children in each foster home, except where all children are siblings. Applications for exemptions will usually be made because of the following exceptional circumstances:-

- The child concerned was previously placed with the foster carers and his or her placement elsewhere has disrupted;
- The foster carers have special skills to meet the child's needs which are not available elsewhere;
- The placement of the child over the limit is the most appropriate way of meeting the child's needs arising from disability, race, religion, language and/or culture;
- The placement is required to keep the siblings together.

The application can only be made with the agreement of the foster carers and the application is made to and agreed by the Agency Decision Maker. All exemptions will be reported to the next available Fostering Panel for ratification. The Fostering Panel will have responsibility for the ongoing monitoring of the exemptions.

Recruitment, Approval and Assessment of Foster Carers

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's Fostering Service has a recruitment and retention strategy which is based upon the needs of Looked After Children.

The aim is to have a choice of placements to meet the individual needs of every child; recruitment of foster carers is a major priority for the service and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council.

The recruitment and retention strategy is reviewed annually.

Foster carers are recruited by a variety of methods, including personal recommendation or media campaigns highlighting a particular area of need. Adverts or articles placed in newspapers, on T.V. or radio, use of posters, distribution of information leaflets, attendance at local shows, fetes and other public access centres.

Stage 1 - Registration of Interest/Referral

Enquiries and notifications of interest are received and responded to by the Fostering Recruitment Team.

The Fostering Recruitment Team will post information about fostering to the enquirer within forty-eight hours of the enquiry and within five working days of them receiving the information, they will follow this up with a telephone call to discuss fostering further with the enquirer and take more details about the enquirer and their family.

Stage 2 - Initial Visit

If, following the telephone contact, the parties (prospective foster carer and Fostering Social Worker) feel that matters should progress, an initial visit is arranged. This meeting takes place at the prospective foster carers' home. The visit is undertaken by a suitably qualified and experienced worker who will undertake an Initial Viability Assessment in order to determine whether the enquirer meets the eligibility criteria and that there is nothing that would prevent them from becoming a foster carer. The worker also explains the agency's expectations in relation to foster families,

determines their motivation to foster, answers any questions concerning their interest in fostering and addresses any specific issues.

Stage 3 - Pre-Approval Foster Training

Prospective foster carers will be required to attend the Skills to Foster Pre-Approval Training Course. In the case of couples, both must attend this training and undergo assessment and checks. This is an opportunity to learn much more about fostering on a course run by our Fostering Recruitment Team and approved foster carers. The Fostering Service recognises and values the contribution of existing foster carers to the recruitment process and actively supports their involvement in recruitment activity. The course runs over three days and is an integral element of the assessment process.

The course comprises of six sessions covering the following areas:-

- Session 1: What Do Foster Carers Do?
- Session 2: Who Are The Children and Young People?
- Session 3: Working Together;
- Session 4: Safer Caring;
- Session 5: Understanding Behaviour;
- Session 6: Moving On.

The course will introduce individuals to the challenges of foster care, the kinds of experiences children may have gone through and why they may behave in certain ways. The course will provide individuals with information about professionals they will be working with and set out expectations of being a foster carer.

Stage 4 - The Application

Prospective carers who meet the eligibility criteria and are considered to be suitable are invited to submit an application for assessment, on completion of the previous stages. Until this application form is returned (and in the case of a couple both need to complete the form) the service cannot proceed with the process.

Stage 5 - Assessment

The assessment process is carried out in order to determine the applicant's capacity to meet the needs of any child/children likely to be placed with them. The assessment is completed using the Fostering Network template and guidance through the Social Worker undertaking a series of visits to the applicant's home. Applicants are encouraged to undertake self-assessment during the process and are given regular feedback throughout the process. The assessment is carried out in line with National Minimum Fostering Standards 2011 and Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

National Minimum Standards 2011 and Fostering Services Regulations 2011 require the Fostering Service to undertake statutory checks as part of the assessment process. These are:-

- A Disclosure and Barring Service check on all people in the household who are 18 years and over;

- Local Authority and other agency checks (e.g. Probation Service);
- Child Health and Education checks will be carried out on any school-age children in the household;
- Written current or most recent employer's references are needed for each applicant. Additional references from any previous employer where there was contact with children will be obtained;
- A G.P. reference;
- Two personal, non-family referees; in practice, the Fostering Service requests up to six personal references (two of whom can be family members) are requested who will provide written references for the applicants as part of the assessment process. Of these, three referees (one of whom should be a family member) will be interviewed - these references need to 'span the lifetime of the foster carer';
- Interviews will be carried out with any other adults in the household and previous partners, the latter wherever possible and appropriate;
- Interviews will be carried out with the carers' children, whether living in the household or elsewhere;

The Fostering Service aims to complete the assessments within six months from application unless there are extenuating circumstances. The National Minimum Standards 2011 states that the Foster Panel should make a decision of suitability within eight months from application.

Stage 6 - The Fostering Panel

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council has two Fostering Panels a month. The Panel is convened in accordance with the National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2011. The Panel considers all matters relating to fostering, family and friends care and matching children to long term placements. The Recruitment Social Worker completes a report and presents the report to the Fostering Panel, which will consider the application and make a recommendation about the prospective carer's suitability to foster. The Panel will make a recommendation to either approve or not approve as a foster carer.

The Panel recommendation is considered by the Agency Decision Maker. The Agency Decision Maker for Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council is the Director of Safeguarding, Children and Families. The National Minimum Standards 2011 (14.10) states that the agency decision must be conveyed orally within two working days of being made. The Assessing Social Worker will be responsible for conveying this decision. The Panel Co-ordinator will inform the prospective foster carers of the decision in writing within five working days.

On approval, a Supervising Social Worker will be allocated to the foster carer.

Stage 7 - Fostering

The fostering task begins.

Supervision of Foster Carers

The service recognises that supervision and support for carers is vital. It is important that the carers' work is recognised as providing the major component in meeting the needs of Looked After Children in Rotherham.

Carer satisfaction and retention is essential for a healthy Fostering Service.

All carers (including family and friends carers) have an identified Fostering Supervising Social Worker. The Supervising Social Workers visit carers regularly (NMS21) to monitor the standards of care provided, assist the carer to play their part in the child's care plan and identify any training and development needs.

Supervising Social Workers are responsible for ensuring that the care offered to children in foster care meets the required standards.

The Supervising Social Worker visits and telephones the carer regularly whilst the child is in placement. Visits to the foster carers take place at a minimum of six-weekly intervals. These can be increased as assessed need determines, for example, fostering households where there are exemptions, newly-approved foster carers who require a higher intensity of support.

As part of the monitoring of the work of foster carers, there will be at least one annual unannounced visit by the Supervising Social Worker to the foster carers' home (as stipulated in NMS 21:8).

Foster Carer Reviews

In accordance with Fostering Service Regulation 28, all approved carers undergo an annual review, which is Chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The first review following approval is always presented to the Fostering Panel (Regulation 25(5)). Subsequent annual reviews may also be presented to the Fostering Panel in situations where termination of approval is sought, when significant changes in the terms of approval are being considered, where there are major concerns about suitability of the carer or following the investigation of any allegations against the carer.

The main aim of the annual review is to determine whether the carers' approval continues to be suitable and whether there should be any changes in the terms of the registration.

The annual review is an opportunity to look at the progress the carer has made and to set targets and goals for the next year; within the Personal Development Plan, training, learning and development needs are also assessed and identified; a recommendation for future approval is made by the Supervising Social Worker and IRO.

Quarterly meetings take place between the Fostering Service and the Independent Reviewing Officers to identify any quality assurance issues and as a means to monitor and review.

Family and Friends Carers

A Social Worker is identified in the Recruitment Team to undertake Family and Friends Assessments, including those placed under Regulation 24 (Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010). Regulation 24 placements are approved by a nominated person (either a Service Manager or the Agency Decision Maker) at the point of placement.

The Fostering Panel is notified of all placements made and full assessments are returned to the Fostering Panel for a recommendation to be made.

Recommendations from the Panel are then considered by the Agency Decision Maker.

There is an identified Social Worker in the Supervising Team who supports and supervises carers approved under the Family and Friends category. Family and Friends carers access the Foster Carer Support Groups. In addition, there is a facility for a specific support group for Family and Friends carers as and when the need arises.

Training

The Fostering Service Regulations 2011 (17 (1)) states that the Fostering Service Provider must provide foster parents with such training, advice, information and support, including support outside office hours, as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with them.

Standard 20, 'Learning and Development of Foster Carers': Outcome and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 states that 'Foster carers receive the training and development they need to carry out their role effectively'.

A clear framework of training and development is in place and this is used as the basis for assessing foster carers' performance and identifying their training and development needs. Training, Learning and Development of foster carers are also key elements of the Foster Carers Charter 2011.

The role of foster carer is valued by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council; there is a strong commitment to ensure that foster carers have access to the right support and development opportunities. Training and development is an intrinsic part of fostering. Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council has a clear expectation that all foster carers will participate in training offered by the Authority as fully as possible. There is an expectation that foster carers will complete the CWDC Training, Support and Development Standards portfolio and this expectation is endorsed by Fostering Panel on approval.

These opportunities enable foster carers to meet the often complex needs of the children and young people for whom they care and to develop skills and knowledge to keep the foster family and the fostered children safe and protected.

It is also important that foster carers are able to document and evidence their skills and knowledge throughout their fostering career.

Learning and development within Rotherham Fostering Service is comprised of three tiers:-

- Pre-approval;
- Induction;
- Continual personal development.

The training policy details the elements contained in each of these tiers, the requirements of the Children's Workforce Development Council, the associated standards as well as outlining the variety of training methods employed.

Foster carers' training needs are constantly monitored by Supervising Social Workers and formally evaluated through annual reviews of the carers' terms of approval.

Each foster carer has a Personal Development Plan, as required within Section 7 of the CWDC standards, drawn up in conjunction between the Fostering Supervising Social Worker and foster carer.

The Personal Development Plan is reviewed annually at the Foster Carer Review by the Independent Reviewing Officer, the foster carer and the Fostering Supervising Social Worker.

All foster carers are provided with their own Continual Professional Development Portfolio. This is used to record evidence of training undertaken, record self-reflection on what has been learned from each developmental activity and how it affects the carer's care and practice.

The Portfolio includes the following:-

- Foster Care Training Policy and Agreement;
- Initial PDP;
- Subsequent Reviews of the PDP;
- Reflective learning logs;
- Certificates;
- Other relevant documents (e.g. questionnaires) ;

It is a requirement that foster carers access a minimum of three development activities annually.

A Payment for Skills Scheme is in operation and foster carers can progress through the Skills Levels 1 to 3 by developing a portfolio of evidence of skills, abilities and knowledge they have in meeting the required criteria. One element of the criteria is that carers must have completed specified training or development activities, such as CWDC training, support and development standards for foster carers.

Support to and Consultation with Foster Carers

Fostering Supervising Workers

Each foster carer is linked with a Fostering Supervising Social Worker, who visits regularly to provide support and supervision.

They monitor standards of care, encourage high standards and help the carer manage problems which arise. They are also available for telephone consultation and liaise with the Social Worker for the child.

Independent Support

Foster carers are eligible for individual membership of The Fostering Network. This allows them access to advice and support, including legal advice, independently of the service. In respect of support during serious allegations or complaints against foster carers, independent support may be provided via Foster Talk.

Support Groups for Foster Carers

Support groups are organised for carers providing expert speakers on matters of interest and an opportunity for carers to share and problem solve together. There is also a support group for the children of foster carers.

In addition, newly approved foster carers are supported by being linked up with an experienced foster carer as 'buddies'.

Websites

Information is available on Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's website about the fostering task. In addition, the Fostering Service has a separate dedicated fostering website (www.fosterinrotherham.co.uk)

Out of Hours Service

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council has an Out of Hours Team and foster carers can contact this team of Social Workers outside of office hours, should the need arise.

LAACST Team

Therapeutic Services/advice/support can be provided by the Looked After and Adopted Children's Support and Therapeutic Team (LAACSTT) and by other CAMHS providers through a single point of access (SPA). Regular consultation is given to the Fostering Service by this team, who also provide training to staff and foster carers.

Get Real Team

Education is a key priority for Looked After Children in Rotherham. Improving educational outcomes for Looked After Children is actively supported by the Corporate Parenting Panel. Foster Carers are expected to support and encourage children in their education and develop good working relationships with the foster child's school. The Get Real Team (Rotherham Education and Learning) provides guidance and support to Look After Children and their carers in relation to education. This team provides training to foster carers on Personal Education Plans and the education of Looked After Children.

16 Years+ and Leaving Care Service

The Action for Children, Rotherham Bridges Project, is responsible for providing support and guidance to all Looked After Children post-16 years and those leaving care.

Action for Children also manages a Post-16 Accommodation Project, which includes a supported lodgings scheme for Looked After Children to enable foster carers to be supported in maintaining placements Post-18 and provision of additional placements to support their transition to independence.

Health

Rotherham has a named nurse to promote the health of Looked After Children. Carers are expected to actively promote the well-being of children in their care. The Looked After Nurse provides a link into a wider LAC Health Team to ensure effective co-ordination and delivery of Health Services to Looked After Children.

Child's Social Worker

Social Workers for children in placement have an important role to play in supporting foster carers. The dedicated Looked After Children Social Work Team ensures this support is consistent. They provide essential information about the child and family background, inform the foster carer about the plans for the child and involve them in the care planning process. It is an important part of their role to represent the wishes and feelings of the child, especially where the child is very young and less able to do this him/herself.

The child's Social Worker carries out statutory requirements in relation to the child, including statutory visits, ensuring reviews and medicals take place and that the plans for the child are progressed without delay.

Annual Events

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council has three annual events for foster carers. The first event is the Celebration Party for foster carers and children as part of Fostering Fortnight in May. The second event (generally in November) is the Foster Carer Celebration Dinner where ambassador awards are presented to carers for their contribution to children, the Fostering Service and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council. The third event is the Christmas Party for foster carers and children in December.

The purpose of these events is to thank carers for all their hard work and acknowledge their dedication to children and families. It is also an opportunity for carers to meet with one another, with Children and Young People's Services' staff and Elected Members in a pleasant and informal setting.

Consultation with Foster Carers

Consultation with foster carers takes place on a number of levels, at training events, at support groups and in surveys focusing on specific topics.

Right2Rights Service

Rotherham's Right to Rights Service (R2R) actively seeks to work directly with all Looked After Children; they provide an individual advocacy service, facilitate involvement in voice and influence opportunities and provide information in creative and imaginative ways. Their work includes supporting Young Rights Representatives, such as the Orchard Stars, which is a rights groups for children and young people who access Disability Short Break Services at the Orchard Centre.

Looked After Children entering the service receive a Promise Pack, which comprises of a school bag or baby bag, toiletries, educational materials, information booklet and a My Journey Book and disposable camera, which aids the capture of important information and experiences.

R2R encourage Looked After Children to contribute to their statutory review by supporting their attendance and the development of personal skills and understanding of the process. They have developed initiatives such as the Online Review Form, where each child receives a letter prior to their review encouraging them to fill in a consultation paper and the process to follow. Looked After Children can communicate with this service via telephone, text messaging, communication cards and e-mail links via the R2R website.

Structure of the Fostering Service

The Rotherham Fostering Service reports to the Members of the Council. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services is Councillor Paul Lakin. The Chief Officer responsible for the Service is Joyce Thacker, Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services.

Responsibility for Social Care is delegated to Clair Pyper, Interim Director of Safeguarding, Children and Families.

The Service Manager for Family Placements and Residential Services manages the Fostering Service and the LAACST Team.

There are two Fostering Team Managers, one for recruitment and the other managing the supervision and support of foster carers.

All Managers involved in the service hold a Social Work qualification and post-qualification experience in services for children.

Staff in the Fostering Service

The staff of the Fostering Service are recruited and managed following the principles of positive selection, supervision, induction and appraisal processes of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and incorporating practice outlined in the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards 2011.

The service has Social Workers and Administrators. A Training Officer based in the team leads on the training and the development of foster carers and completion of the CWDC training, support and development standards workbook. The service also has a Marketing Officer who is responsible for the Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy and Plan (as well as that of the Adoption Service).

All Social Workers within the team have a Social Work qualification and previous experience of working with children and families and are subject to Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's corporate standards for continuous professional development.

All staff are subject to the Council policy on recruitment, staffing, equal opportunities and discipline. All Social Workers are subject to enhanced D.B.S. checks; administrative staff have D.B.S. checks.

Administrative support is primarily delivered by the Fostering Team Clerks, who are managed within a small Administrative Team for the Family Placement Service.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Management of the Service

Performance and Statistical Information is collected in relation to the work of the Fostering Service. The Director of Safeguarding, Children and Families presents statistical and performance data to the Performance Meeting.

The Fostering Service has a recruitment and retention target of 185 foster carers over a three-year period, 2011-14; this target has been separated over the three years as follows:

Year	Target No of Carers
31/3/12	144
31/3/13	162
31/3/14	185

The **144** carer target was achieved as of 31/3/12.

It is anticipated that the **162** carer target by 31/3/13 will be achieved; as of 26/2/13, there are **159** carers (a net gain of **15** carers - 28 approvals minus 13 de-registrations). There are two Fostering Panels in March 2013; there are 6 fostering assessments and one de-registration being presented, resulting in a net gain of a further 5 carers. Thus, it is predicted that, by 31/3/13, there will be **164** foster carers (two carers over the 2013 target).

A number of quality assurance measures are in place to monitor the quality of the Fostering Services.

- Fostering Panels are Chaired by an Independent Person and regular liaison takes place between the Chair of the Panel and the Fostering Service to identify any quality assurance issues and training requirements;
- Reviews of foster carers are undertaken by an IRO and quarterly meetings with the IRO and the Fostering Service allows identification of any quality assurance issues and emerging trends;
- All papers presented to the Panel are quality assured by the relevant Team Manager and the Fostering Panel Advisor;
- Foster carers have access to the complaints procedure;

- File audits are undertaken by the Fostering Managers within a Quality Assurance Framework;
- A Supervision Performance Audit Tool has been devised and is placed on the front of each foster carer's file to ensure relevant checks are up-to-date and that actions from reviews have been completed;
- The Fostering Service has and will continue to undertake periodic satisfaction surveys of foster carers; in addition, the CYPS Performance Team undertakes satisfaction surveys of newly-approved foster carers and 'journey mapping' activity of both prospective and registered foster carers;
- All staff have regular supervision and annual Performance Development Reviews.

Equalities and Diversity Issues

The Rotherham Fostering Service is committed to promoting Equal Opportunities in every aspect of its service. Training on equality and diversity is strongly promoted during the preparation process for new foster carers and forms part of the assessment. Ongoing training on equality and diversity is provided to all approved foster carers.

The need to recruit foster carers who are representative of the general population is reflected in the recruitment and retention strategy for foster carers, with a particular emphasis on the developmental work with the black and ethnic communities of Rotherham. All promotional material makes it clear that foster carers from across the population are needed, including same sex carers, older carers and carers from the black and minority ethnic communities. Management information in the gender, race and disability of existing foster carers is analysed on a regular basis.

Specialised Fostering Services for children with disabilities are provided through the Families Together Scheme. Management information on race, gender and disability of the children requiring a fostering service are analysed on a regular basis.

Investigations into Allegations

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council and the Fostering Service:-

- Recognise the crucial role that foster carers play in looking after its most vulnerable children;
- Acknowledge that Looked After Children may exhibit behaviour that can be damaging, both to themselves and those around them;
- Acknowledge that dealing with Child Protection concerns, serious incidents and complaints is a stressful and difficult time for foster carers and their families;
- Will ensure that enquiries are progressed in a way that is fair and open to the carer and their family as well as to the child;
- Will ensure that decisions and actions are taken without delay and in line with legislative and Local Authority timescales;

- Ensure that foster carers have immediate access to information and advice from an independent support if there is an allegation against them or the Fostering Service has informed them that they have a serious concern about their practice or standards of care. (NMS 22);
- Ensure that foster carers are prepared, through pre-approval training and assessment, of the possibility that allegations could be made against them.

All allegations of abuse made by children against foster carers, or members of the foster carers' family, are thoroughly investigated in an unbiased way. Local procedures for handling Child Protection allegations are followed.

The investigation is evidenced based and takes a balanced view of the allegation; unfounded allegations are sometimes made. A decision as to how to proceed will be made which will be in the best interests of the child.

Where a complaint against a foster carer constitutes a safeguarding allegation, this is dealt with as a safeguarding enquiry under Section 47 of the Children Act, 1989, and is investigated under safeguarding procedures.

Complaints and Compliments

The Children Act, 1989, requires Local Authorities to have a robust procedure for investigating complaints made by young people receiving Social Care services or complaints made by adults on their behalf.

The complaints procedure is viewed as a useful tool for indicating where services may need adjusting. It is a positive aid to inform and influence service improvements, not a negative process to apportion blame.

The complaints procedure consists of three stages;

- Stage 1 is based on local resolution, where staff and the complainant discuss and attempt to address the complaint within ten working days with an additional ten working days for more complex issues or if an advocate is required.
- Stage 2 involves an investigation into the circumstances of the complaint. This is carried out by the Children's Complaint Investigating Officer who reports their findings and conclusions and makes recommendations to an Adjudicating Officer. In addition, an Independent Person is engaged to oversee the investigation to ensure that the process is open, transparent and fair. The Adjudicating Officer is responsible for deciding on the report recommendations. This process should take twenty-five working days with a permitted maximum of sixty-five working days.
- Stage 3 involves a Review Panel giving further consideration to the complaint. The Panel consists of three independent people. The Panel must be convened and operating within thirty working days, it has five working days to issue findings and the Local Authority must respond within fifteen working days.

Wherever possible, complaints are dealt with informally. Where appropriate, in the first instance, any complaint by or against a foster carer will be dealt with on a problem-solving basis. There is a written procedure given to all foster carers as part of the Fostering Handbook. The Council has both corporate and Children's Services Complaints Procedures that operate if no resolution can be achieved at the problem solving stage.

Where a complaint against a foster carer constitutes a safeguarding allegation, this is dealt with as a safeguarding enquiry under Section 47 of the Children Act, 1989, and is investigated under Safeguarding procedures.

Our children's guide is specifically designed for children and young people which advises them what to do if they have a complaint.

Regular monitoring reports on the numbers and outcomes are presented to Children and Young People's Services' Management Team and an annual report is received by the Rotherham Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Between 1st April, 2012 and 31st March, 2013, there were three complainants about the Fostering Service: 1 by a foster carer, 1 by a Looked After Child and one from other sources.

These are categorised in the following table (using Ofsted's criteria):-

	How many complainants?	How many complaints received?	How many upheld?	How many resolved within 28 days?
From:	Number:	Number:	Number:	Number:
Children/young people				
Foster carers	1	1	1	1
Other professionals				
Children/young people's parents	1	1	1	1
Others, e.g. members of the public, M.Ps.	1	1	1 Partially upheld	1
	3	3	3	3

All the complaints were resolved within 28 days (Ofsted criteria) and within 20 working days (RMBC criteria for Stage 1).

All complaints are followed up with a satisfaction letter. Further details can be obtained from the Complaints Service.

Fostering Service Details

The Fostering Service is based at:-

Riverside House
Main Street
Rotherham
S60 1AE

Tel 01709 382121

Email – Fostering@rotherham.gov.uk

Websites – www.fosterinrotherham.co.uk

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's Fostering Services are regulated by Ofsted. Their contact details are:-

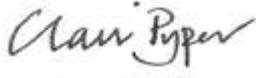
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester.
M2 7LA
Tel 08456 404045
Email - commshelpdesk@ofsted.gov.uk

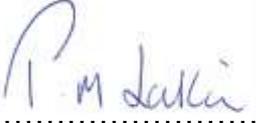
The Fostering Statement of Purpose is reviewed and updated annually by the Fostering Service and modified as necessary. If you have any comments or suggestions in relation to this document or the Fostering Service please contact:-

Gillian Ackerley
Service Manager
Family Placements and Residential Services
Riverside House
Main Street
Rotherham
S60 1AE

gillian.ackerley@rotherham.gov.uk

Signatures

Signed:  Date:
Clair Pyper, Interim Director of Safeguarding, Children and Families

Signed:  Date:
Councillor Lakin, Cabinet Member