

Rotherham Council Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2021

Forward by Councillor Gordon Watson.

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.

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This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirements of Standard 1 of the Fostering Services Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act, 2000) and Regulations 3 and 4 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

1. 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 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 Ofsted Chief Inspector of any revision within 28 days, for the purposes of this Statement the 28 days will be taken from the point of ratification by Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (or Lead Member for Children and Young People's Services).

2. 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 'Rotherham's Looked After Children Strategy' 2017-2021 and 'Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy' 2017-2021:

- Children and young people are healthy and safe from harm
- Children and young people start school ready to learn for life
- Children, young people and their families are ready for the world of work
- This will mean our children, young people and families are proud to live and work in Rotherham

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 wellbeing;
- 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.

3. 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 National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 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);

- To, 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);
- To, where possible, provide and support a placement within the child's extended family network. (NMS 2, 9);
- To 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);
- That 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 thorough 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);
- To ensure placements wherever possible have planned beginnings and endings. (NMS 11);
- The promotion of positive contact with family and friends through effective care planning. (NMS 9);
- To listen to the children and young people and involve them in decision making. (NMS 1);
- To work in partnership with parents. (NMS 8);
- To provide stability of placement - a minimum number of moves for each child. (NMS 11);
- To minimise the length of time between a child becoming looked after and moving to a permanent placement, if this is required. (NMS 11);
- To prepare young people for independence and facilitate a smooth transition into adulthood (NMS12);
- Standards of care for effective planning for the transition of care to independence. (NMS 12).

4. 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;
- Respite care (also known as Second Home care), offering time-limited breaks to families;
- Day care for looked after children and young people when foster carers need to attend meetings or training events;
- Long term permanence placements for children and young people who cannot return to birth family and where adoption is not the plan;
- Family and friends foster care (also known as kinship care) to enable children and young people who are unable to live with their parents, to be cared for by extended family members, friends or other people who are connected with them;
- Transition foster care for children and young people who are currently placed in residential care but for whom their longer term care plan is foster care. These carers undergo an additional assessment to determine their suitability for the role. They then work alongside the residential care home to, with support from the Rotherham Therapeutic Team, gradually transition the child or young person from the residential home and into their fostering family. These carers receive a weekly fee, which accounts for the high level of commitment and skill required, as well as high levels of support from both the fostering service and the Therapeutic Team.

The fostering service utilises a payment for skills model to ensure that foster carers are paid a weekly fee determined based on their skills. The model ensures that foster carers can be assessed against a clear set of skills and paid accordingly. Foster carers can then work up the levels by evidencing the acquisition of the higher level skills within a progression assessment. Kinship carers enter the model within their own level but can then progress through the levels as with any other foster carer. New foster carers entering the service can also be assessed according to their prior experience and skills level upon entry to ensure that they are being paid according to their skills from the outset of their fostering career. A carers' skills level is kept under review to ensure that if a carer no longer meets the requirements of the skills level they are currently paid at, there is a process for reviewing and adjusting this if necessary.

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;

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.

Mockingbird Family Model

Some of our Rotherham fostering families are part of The Fostering Network's Mockingbird Family Model. This is an extended family model that provides respite care, peer support, regular joint planning and training, and social activities.

The programme improves the stability of fostering placements and strengthens the relationships between carers, children and young people, fostering services and birth families.



Expected benefits to both carers and looked after children and young people include:

- Improved placement stability and reduction in placement breakdown.
- Stronger relationships that support looked after children, young people and fostering families.
- The provision of a robust and resilient structure, which offers support through times of crisis and transition.
- Improved respite care.
- Increased skills, confidence and role satisfaction for foster carers.
- Higher levels of foster carer retention and recruitment.
- Improved experience of peer support.
- Better experience of birth family contact, including siblings.
- Costs saved and costs avoided.

Rotherham launched its first Mockingbird constellation in May 2018 and currently facilitates two constellations with plans for a third to be set up in 20/2021.

5. 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 television or radio, use of posters, distribution of information leaflets, attendance at local shows, fetes and other public access centres. From September 2019 the Fostering Service began a partnership with Brightsparks – a creative communications and business development agency. Brightsparks are working with the service to use social media marketing strategies in a targeted recruitment campaign. Brightsparks' strategy aims to increase numbers at all 6 marketing stages:

1. Awareness – significantly increasing social media impressions to drive traffic to the website
2. Interest – nurturing leads through emails, targeted content and newsletters
3. Consideration – initial enquiry calls/live chats/emails to provide specific information to leads using case studies, testimonials and literature that explain the options available
4. Intent – screening visits and scheduled calls which provide bespoke and tailored information and keep people engaged
5. Sign up – assessments initiated when application completed and retention strategies ensure applicants remain engaged
6. Approval – the increase in numbers in stages 1-5 results in an increase in newly approved foster carers

There are two stages to the assessment process and these can be run concurrently.

Stage 1:

- Provides the enquirer with sufficient information to decide if fostering is suitable for the family; it also provides the Fostering Service with sufficient information about an applicant's suitability to progress to a more detailed assessment without unnecessary bureaucracy or expenditure of time and resource for either the enquirer or the Fostering Service; this includes a medical assessment, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, Local Authority checks and two references.
- This should take no more than two months and commences when an enquirer's registration of interest in fostering is accepted.

Stage 2:

- This is a more detailed assessment of an applicant's suitability to foster. It determines 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 Skills to Foster template and guidance via a 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.
- Applicants are expected to attend the Skills to Foster Pre-Approval Training course; this provides the applicants with an opportunity to learn much more about fostering on a programme facilitated by fostering social workers 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. As such, foster carers co-facilitate the pre-approval training with Fostering Service social workers. The course runs over three days and is an integral element of the assessment process.
- The course introduces applicants to the challenges of foster care, the kinds of experiences children may have had and why they may behave in certain ways; it provides information about professionals that foster carers work with and sets out expectations of being a foster carer.
- This stage should take no longer than four months.

6. The Fostering Panel

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council has at least 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 and family and friends care. Matching of children to long term placements is considered in a separate Long Term Matching Panel. The assessing or supervising social worker completes a report and presents the report to the Fostering Panel, which will consider the application or review and make a recommendation about the applicant's suitability to foster. The Panel makes a recommendation to either approve or not approve as a foster carer.

The Panel's recommendation is considered by the Agency Decision Maker. The Agency Decision Maker for Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council is the Head of Service for Looked After Children, Fostering and Adoption. 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 or supervising social worker will be responsible for conveying this decision. The panel administrator will inform the applicants of the decision in writing within five working days.

On approval of new foster carers, a supervising social worker will be allocated to the foster carer.

Where an applicant or existing carer does not agree with the Agency Decision, the applicant may make representation to the Agency within 28 days of the decision or make representation to the Independent Review Mechanism for the Agency decision to be reviewed independently by an alternative independent panel. The independent review panel does not have the power to change the decision but can refer the matter back to the Local Authority Fostering Panel and Agency Decision Maker for reconsideration if the independent panel disagrees with the Agency decision.

The service benefits from a dedicated fostering panel advisor whose role it is to advise the panel chair, panel members and the Agency Decision Maker in an unbiased and impartial manner and to act as the liaison between the independent panel and the fostering service.

7. 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 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. Home 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, placements where more challenging and complex children and young people are placed, or placements where additional support, guidance, training or education is required by the carer.

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).

8. Foster Carer Reviews

In accordance with Fostering Service Regulation 28, all approved carers undergo an annual review, which is chaired by the Foster Carer Reviewing Officer. The Foster Carer Reviewing Officer is independent of the Fostering Service and is based and managed within the Safeguarding Team. 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. Rotherham's practice is to formally present a carers' annual review to panel at least once every three years in order to reinforce the safeguarding aspect of this process and the Fostering Panel's role in review and scrutiny. All reviews are quality assured by fostering managers.

The main aim of the 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 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. Following every review the Agency Decision Maker will agree the foster carer's terms of approval and written confirmation of this will be sent to the carer.

9. Family and Friends Foster Carers

Two social workers are identified in the Supervisory 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 (the Agency Decision Maker) at the point of placement.

The Fostering Panel is notified of all placements made and requests for extensions under regulation 25 as well as full family and friends 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.

Family and Friends foster carers are able access the foster carer support groups, as well as being entitle to the same levels of support and training as other RMBC foster carers.

10. Training

The Fostering Service Regulations 2011 (17 (1)) state that the Fostering Service must provide foster carers 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.

The role of all foster carers 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:

- 1. Pre-approval*
- 2. Induction*
- 3. Continual personal development*

Professional Development

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 (ex. questionnaires)

It is a requirement that foster carers access a minimum of three development activities annually, at least one of which should be a face-to-face training.

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.

A Payment for Skills Scheme is in operation and foster carers can progress through the Skills Levels 1 to 4 by developing a portfolio of evidence of skills, abilities and knowledge they have in meeting the required criteria with a clear expectation of what training must be completed in order to progress to the next level.

11. Support to Foster Carers

Fostering Supervising Social Workers

Each foster carer is linked with a 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 is provided via Foster Talk.

Support for Foster Carers and their families

There are four support groups facilitated across the borough, which are run at various times of the day to maximise foster carers opportunity to attend one of these.

Each provides expert speakers on matters of interest and an opportunity for carers to share and problem solve together.

The groups are:

- General carers evening group
- General carers daytime group
- 0-4 years carers group 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, with clear links to the recruitment sites. In addition, Rotherham Fostering also have active Facebook and Twitter account, which is used to share information about fostering and events, share success stories, and promote recruitment,

Facebook: Fostering Rotherham

Twitter: @fosterrotherham

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.

Rotherham Therapeutic Team

Therapeutic services, advice and support is provided by Rotherham's Therapeutic Team and by other Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) providers through a single point of access. Rotherham's Therapeutic Team is managed by a Clinical Psychologist.

The Virtual School

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 looked after child or young person's school. Rotherham has a 'Virtual School' which provides guidance and support to Looked After Children and their carers in relation to education. This team recognises that education is life-long learning, and thus provides training to foster carers on Personal Education Plans and the education of Looked After Children, including pre-school, primary, secondary education, and beyond.

Leaving Care Service

The Fostering Service works closely with the Local Authority Leaving Care Service, which is responsible for providing support and guidance to all Looked After Children post-16 years and those leaving care. The Leaving Care Service includes a designated Staying Put/Supported Lodgings Co-ordinator who also sits on the Long Term Matching Panel to support foster carers who are committing to long term foster care for a child to also consider offering staying put or supported lodgings arrangements once the child leaves care. The Local Authority is committed to providing Staying Put placements to as many care leavers as possible. In addition, the Local Authority also manages a Post-16 Accommodation Project, which includes two semi-independent homes for care leavers providing sixteen placements in total as well as several dispersed properties and an outreach service for care leavers in their own tenancies.

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.

In addition, Rotherham also has a named nurse specifically to meet the health needs of children subject to CSE who sits within the Evolve (CSE) team.

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's 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 fostering services works closely with foster carers to organise and host a variety of inclusive social events throughout the year. These include parties, picnics and an annual Pride of Rotherham Awards event that recognises the achievements of looked after children and young people. 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. The Foster Carer Forum is held quarterly and is an opportunity for foster carers to raise any concerns or questions that they have, directly with fostering management staff.

Rotherham Foster Carer's Association

In 2019 the service supported Rotherham's foster carers to set up the Rotherham Foster Carer's Association (RFCA). The RFCA is an charity independent from the Fostering Service (charity no. 1184570) which exists to be a voice of, provide support to and create a community for all Rotherham Foster Carers and all of our children. The RFCA holds termly events for our Fostering Families including parties, discos, weekly youth hub, fundraising and other events that may be raised with the committee. These events are run by RMBC Foster Carer's using local community resources i.e. local community centres.

Right2Rights Service

Rotherham's Right2Rights (R2R) supports young people who are or have been looked after by Rotherham Council. They provide an individual advocacy service, facilitate involvement in voice and influence opportunities and provide information in creative and imaginative ways.

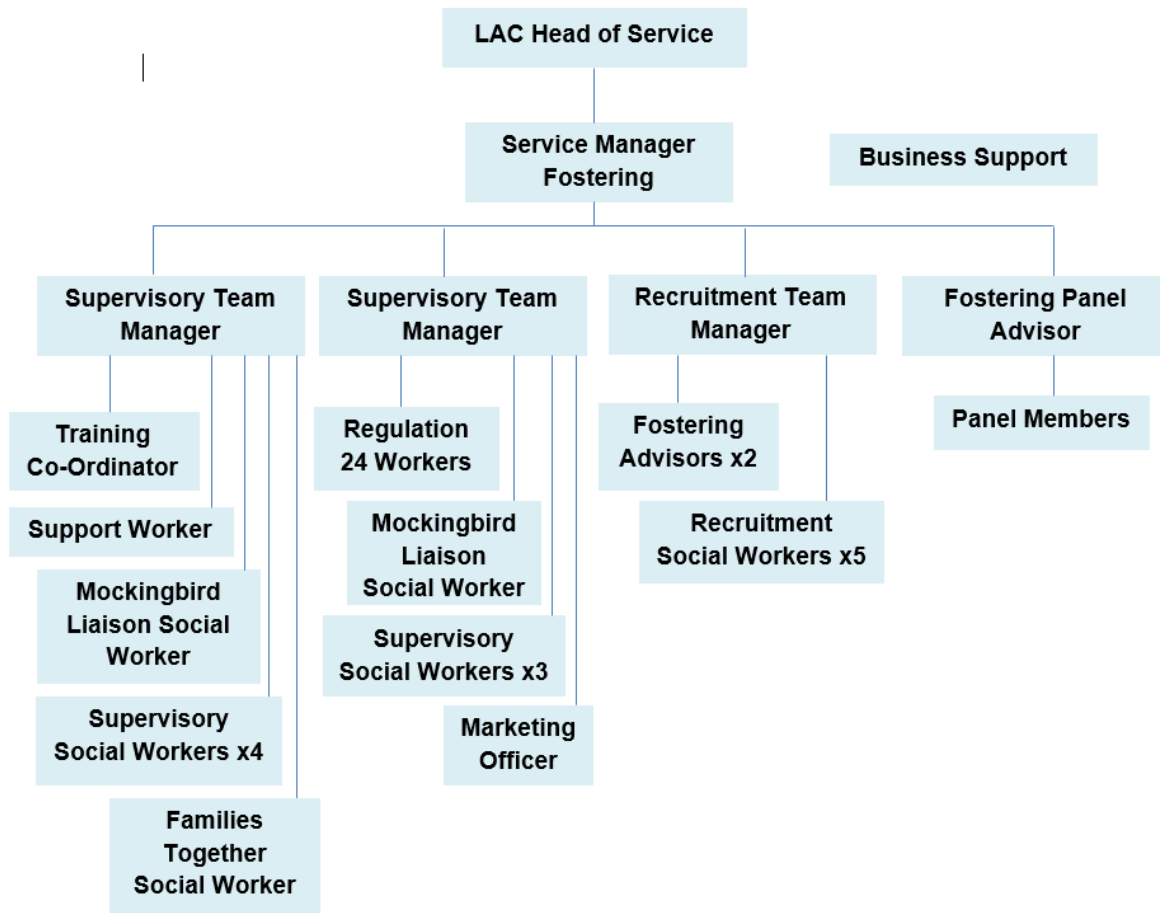
The Rights2Rights advocacy service helps children to talk about things that matter, ensures they are listened to and makes sure that the right people do something about what children and young people are saying.

Right2Rights can also offer an Independent Visitor service. Independent Visitors are volunteer befrienders who will be matched with a child, particularly those children who have little or no contact with family/friends. They offer the child quality one to one time and organise activities and outings as well as providing advice and support.

Looked After Children can communicate with this service via telephone, text messaging and e mail.

12. 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 Gordon Watson.



All managers in the service hold a social work qualification, as well as management qualifications and post qualification experience in services for children.

13. Staff in the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service has four key teams:

Fostering Recruitment Team – Responsible for recruiting and assessing new foster carers.

Two Fostering Supervisory Teams – Responsible for assessing and supervising foster carers in our specialist categories: Regulation 24; Families Together; Private Fostering as well as for supervising general foster carers.

Business support – The service receives administrative and business support from a team of support staff.

In addition, the service has a marketing and communications officer, a training coordinator and a fostering support worker.

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.

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.

14. Monitoring, Evaluation and Management of the Service

Regular performance and statistical information is collected in relation to the work of the Fostering Service. Performance information about the Service is reported to the Fostering Panel and Agency Decision Maker, the Director of Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting and Elected Members via the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Rotherham has an increasingly high number of children in its care. There has been a consistent upward trend year on year in the numbers of children and young people looked after by the Local Authority. The LAC Placement Sufficiency Strategy has been created to address the council's approach to meeting the needs of it's looked after children and young people.

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 a Foster Carer Reviewing Officer and these are presented to Fostering Panel on a three yearly basis. This was a change in practice in 2020 where previously reviews were presented at panel biennially. The reduction ensures that the Fostering Panel retains a high level of scrutiny over the practice and compliance of the service but also allows for an increase in Panel capacity to account for the increasing numbers of Skills to Foster Assessments of prospective foster carers being presented to Panel. This frequency remains considerably higher than the requirement of the National Minimum Standards, which

is for reviews to be presented to panel following the first year of fostering, change in circumstances or following a safeguarding investigation.

- 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;
- All staff have regular supervision and annual Performance Development Reviews.

15. 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 minority 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.

The Service has succeeded in recent years in increasing the number of carers in the Service who are from different ethnic minority backgrounds and in recruiting same sex foster carer couples.

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.

16. Allegations against Foster Carers

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.

17. 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 advise 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.

Compliments: We need to know when we are performing to, and beyond your expectations. Please email fostering@rotherham.gov.uk with your positive feedback.

18. Fostering Service Details

The Fostering Service is based at: Riverside House Main Street Rotherham S60 1AE

Tel: 01709 382121

Email: fostering@rotherham.gov.uk Website: www.rotherham.gov.uk/fostering

19. Useful Contacts

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council's Fostering Services are regulated by Ofsted.

Ofsted Tel : 08456 404045

Email : commshelpdesk@ofsted.gov.uk

Website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted>

Childline

Tel: 0800 1111

Website: www.childline.org.uk

The Office of the Children's Commissioner

Tel: 020 7783 8330

Email: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

Website: www.childrenscommissioner.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 email: fostering@rotherham.gov.uk

www.rotherham.gov.uk/fostering

or call 01709 823976

F: Fostering in Rotherham

T: @fosterrotherham