**DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Children’s Services**

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| Fostering and Supported Lodgings Team **FOSTERING STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2021-2022** |



1. **INTRODUCTION**

This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirements of Standard 16 of the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011 and Chapter 4 of the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4.

There is a requirement that all Fostering Services provide a written Statement of Purpose setting out the aims, objectives and details of the service and facilities provided. The Statement of Purpose is reviewed and updated every year. This Statement of Purpose is endorsed by the Corporate Parenting Panel.

The statement is intended to provide a clear description of the service for the information of foster carers, service users, Darlington Borough Council staff, elected members, professionals in other agencies and members of the public.

Copies of the Statement of Purpose will be provided to:

* Children’s Services staff who are involved in providing services to Looked After children and young people
* Foster carers and people who are being assessed as foster carers
* Darlington Borough Council Children in Care Council (Darlo Care Crew)
* Darlington Foster Care Association (DFCA)
* Members of Darlington Borough Council’s Fostering Panel

1. **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

Darlington Borough Council’s Fostering and Supported Lodgings team will provide an excellent service to all children in foster care and a standard of care that fully meets their needs.

The team recognises the importance of foster care in transforming the lives of looked after children. Foster carers are regarded as making a hugely valuable contribution and should be provided with high quality preparation, training and support to carry out their role.

The Fostering and Supported Lodgings team will work in effective partnership with children, families, foster carers, colleagues within Darlington Borough Council and other agencies to help deliver the best possible care and support to Looked After children and young people.

* 1. **Aims and objectives of the Fostering and Supported Lodgings Team**
* To provide well planned, stable, and high-quality foster placements to meet children’s needs and improve their life chances.
* The team will be responsive to the needs of children who require a foster placement, by working to recruit enough carers to offer placement choice.
* We will endeavour to provide local foster placements where possible to support children to maintain contact with their families and networks.
* To provide excellent support to foster carers, by suitably qualified, skilled and experienced staff, managers and business support staff.
* To provide a clear progression pathway for foster carers to enable their professional development and to support them with the care of children with more complex needs and challenging behaviours.
* Children should be placed with foster carers where they can enjoy their childhood, benefiting from excellent parenting and education, with access to a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
* Foster carers are supported in meeting all the needs of children, so that they reach their full potential.
* Placement stability and consistency of care is promoted in every possible way to give all children /young people a settled experience in fostering. We promote permanence where possible and any placement move should be carefully panned.
* A child/young person’s wishes and feelings will be considered, and children/young people will be encouraged to participate in decisions about their care. Children and young people will contribute towards the foster carers annual review and any concerns raised at any time will be addressed.
* Each child is valued as an individual and given personalised support in line with their individual needs and background to develop their identity, self-confidence and self-worth.
* Contact with family and friends is promoted to support children’s sense of identity.
* Each placement will meet the requirements of the child’s care plan and wherever possible reflect the child’s racial, cultural, religious, and linguistic background.
* Siblings will be placed together wherever possible, consistent with their needs and in line with their care plan.
* Disabled children’s complex needs will be fully recognised and considered when identifying placements and appropriate support.
* Children in foster care will have the opportunity for a positive experience of family life with the appropriate application of delegated authority.
* Young people are enabled to ‘stay put’ in their foster families beyond their 18th birthday up to age 21years, subject to this being in the best interests of the young person and with the full agreement of the young person and the foster carers.
* The educational achievements of Looked After Children and young people are promoted and the Virtual School will provide advice and support to foster carers to help maximise the educational achievement of young people.
* The preparation and post approval training of foster carers will be of a high standard, and each carer will have an annual personal development plan to support their professional development which will help shape the commissioning of relevant bespoke training.
* To support foster carers to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS) within the appropriate timescales.
* Foster carers will contribute fully to their own fostering annual review, which will take place in accordance with the requirements of the Fostering Regulations 2011
* Have a “duty worker” available in the Fostering and Supported Lodgings team during office hours. The Emergency Duty Team will offer support and assistance at weekends and in the evenings.
* Include the views of carers in the development of the service, using a variety of consultation methods.
* Employ appropriately qualified and experienced, well-motivated staff who are dedicated to the recruitment, training, assessment and support of foster carers focusing on the needs of children looked after in foster placements.
* Provide membership of “The Fostering Network” to our foster carers, to provide useful information and advice as required, and provide independent support to foster carers when required.

**2.2 The recruitment and assessment of foster carers**

* A marketing and recruitment strategy is in place to support the recruitment of a sufficient number and range of foster carers to meet the needs of Darlington’s Looked After Children. A prompt, professional and respectful response is provided to anyone enquiring about becoming a Darlington foster carer.
* Carers are well prepared for their fostering task by a thorough assessment which focuses on their ability to meet the needs of Looked After Children.
* The Fostering Panel will be maintained and supported in accordance with the Regulations and will consist of the right mix of qualified, experienced, and knowledgeable individuals, chaired by a suitably experienced independent person.

**2.3 High quality support to foster carers**

* The importance of the child’s relationship with their foster carer is acknowledged and foster carers are recognised as core members of the team working with the child.
* Foster carers should be provided with full information about the child in their care.
* The approach of the Fostering Service will be open and accessible, treating all foster carers with fairness and respect and as fellow professionals.
* Effective two-way communication is recognised as essential to good working relationships.
* The Fostering Service work with multi-disciplinary colleagues to ensure that appropriate support is provided to the foster carer to assist them in meeting the needs of the child.
* All foster carers are valued. They are provided with a high standard of supervision, support and guidance from their supervising social worker and other members of the team and managers.
* A wide range of training courses are accessible to foster carers. Foster carers are supported to develop their knowledge and skills and keep their practice up to date in line with current issues impacting upon Looked After Children.
* Regular liaison meetings take place with the Darlington Foster Care Association who provide an effective role in supporting foster carers and in contributing to the development of the Fostering Service
* All foster carers will be made aware of Darlington Borough Council’s complaints procedures and are supported in using the complaints procedures when necessary.

1. **MANAGEMENT AND STAFFING OF THE FOSTERING AND SUPPORTED LODGINGS TEAM**

The Fostering and Supported Lodgings team is part of Children’s Services under the overall leadership of the Group Director, People. The Assistant Director of Children’s Services is the Agency Decision maker. The Head of Service is Agency Decision Maker for the Fostering Panel if the Assistant Director is unavailable.

* 1. **Fostering and Supported Lodgings Team staffing details**

The team consists of the Head of Service, Service Manager, Team Manager, Advanced Practitioner and 7.8 whole time equivalent Social Workers. There is a half time Supported Lodgings and Staying Put Co-Ordinator.

There is one whole time equivalent Placement Officer who is responsible for sourcing all external fostering placements and all residential placements

The team are supported by their Business Support Team, who are fundamental to the smooth running of the service

The team are responsible for the assessment, recruitment, and support of all mainstream and connected foster carers. The supported lodgings/staying put coordinator recruits and supports supported lodgings providers and oversees all staying put arrangements. The team are also responsible for post Special Guardianship Order support.

**Chris Bell – Responsible Individual and Agency Decision Maker**

**Assistant Director, Children’s Services**

**Qualifications**:

* 2006 – MSW – Master of Social Work
* 2007 – Post Qualifying Award in Social Work
* 2016 – Level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management
* 2018 – Signs of Safety Practice Leadership
* 2019 – Relational Practice Leadership

**Relevant Experience**:

* Qualified Social Worker for 15 years
* Experience in all areas of statutory social work including s17 and s47 Assessment work, Fostering, Adoption, Residential Services, Independent Reviewing Officer and management of Therapeutic Services for Children Looked After.
* Managerial experience as a Team Manager for Child Protection, Operations Manager for Fostering, Adoption, Residential and Therapeutic Services, Head of Service for Early Help, YOS and Front Door Services, Assistant Director for Childrens Services .
* Over 25 years experience as a fostering family member

**Bronwen Smith – Responsible Manager**

**Head of Service- Children’s Placement Service**

**Qualifications:**

* BSc (hons) Sociology and Applied Social Studies and Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (1987)
* MA Socio-Legal Studies (1989)
* Diploma in Management Studies and NVQ 4 management
* Post Qualifying Award in mental health Social Work and Approved Social Worker
* Post Qualifying consolidation Award in childcare

**Relevant Experience:**

* children’s residential worker, child protection assessment centre residential worker
* Social Worker for children in need, child protection and disabled children,
* Social Worker mental health
* Staff Development Officer – Child protection
* Emergency Duty Team Social Worker, Senior Practitioner and Team Manager.
* Fostering Team Manager and Operations Manager, Fostering and Adoption
* Head of Service, Children’s Placement Service

**Joseph Robb – Service Manager Looked After Children Resources**

**Qualifications:**

* BA (hons) Social Work (2013)
* Post Qualifying Award – Practice Education Stage 1 (2015)
* Post Qualifying Award – Contemporary Social Work Practice (2015)
* Post Qualifying Award – Practice Education Stage 2 (2016)
* Post Qualifying Award Preparing to Teach on Social Work Programmes (2018)
* Post Qualifying Award – NAAS accredited Child and Family Practice Supervisor award (2019)

**Relevant Experience:**

* Social Worker – Assessment and Safeguarding (Darlington Borough Council)
* Social Worker – Family Interventions Team (Darlington Borough Council)
* Social Worker - Assessment and Safeguarding (Hartlepool Council)
* Social Worker – Early Help Team (Darlington Borough Council)
* Advanced Practitioner - Keeping Families Together & Family Group Conference Team (Darlington Borough Council)
* Team Manager - Keeping Families Together & Family Group Conference (Darlington Borough Council)
* Interim Service Manager Keeping Families Together, Family Group Conference and Supporting Families programme. (Darlington Borough Council)
* Service Manager - Looked After Children Resources (Darlington Borough Council)

**Jane Shade – Team Manager, Fostering and Supported Lodgings Team**

**Qualifications:**

* MA Social Work, CQSW (1990)
* BSc (Hons) Psychology (1987)
* Child Protection, Memorandum of Good Practice training
* Practice Educator – Level 1 and Level 2
* Specialist Social Work with Children Young People their Families and Carers (PQ2) 2014
* Darlington Borough Council Management Programme 2016
* ILM Level 5 Diploma for Leaders and Managers ILM and City and Guilds Collaboration (2021)

**Relevant Experience:**

* Field Social Worker (Children and Families) Darlington, 2002-2005
* Fostering Social Worker/ Senior Practitioner Darlington, 2005 – 2015
* Practice Supervisor 2015 - 2018
* Child Protection Social Worker (Referral and Assessment Service) London Borough of Sutton 1997-2002
* Residential Social Worker – Family Assessment Unit 1989-1997
* Team Manager – Fostering and Supported Lodgings Team 2018 - current

**Louise Taylor – Advanced Practitioner, Fostering and Supported Lodgings Team**

**Qualification:**

* HEFC's in Social Sciences
* certificate in basic counselling
* Diploma in Social Work (DipSW)
* Post Qualification Level 1 - adults
* Degree in Specialising in working with Children and Families
* Theraplay level one and two
* Leadership and management qualification
* Practice Educator level one and two

**Relevant Experience:**

* Social worker in Community Care team, Duty Team and Family Placement Team
* Experience of Acting Senior Practitioner – Adoption – Family Placement Service
* Facilitator for adoption and fostering training

**Liz Chambers – Fostering Supervising Social Worker**

**Qualifications:**

* Childhood Studies BA (HONS) in July 2012, Leeds Metropolitan University
* Master of Social Work (MSW) in July, 2014, Durham University
* Contemporary Social Work Practice in June 2016, University of Teesside

**Relevant Experience**:

* Assessment and Safeguarding Team
* Social Worker (Darlington Borough Council, September 2014-March 2017)
* Fostering Supervising Social Worker (Darlington Borough Council, March 2017-Present)

**Silvie Hertelova – Fostering Supervising Social Worker**

**Qualifications**:

* Bachelor of Arts Specialist Social Work with children and young people, their families and carers
* Practice Educator level one and two
* Theraplay level one and two
* Diploma in Social Work (DipSW)
* College of Commerce, Services and Business (A-level) consolidation Unit.

**Relevant Experience**:

* 2006 Family Support Worker Children with Disabilities of Norfolk County Council
* 2006 – 2009 Social Work Practitioner, Norfolk County Council, Children and Families Assessment Team
* 2009 Social Work Practitioner, Cleveland County Council, Children and Families Assessment Team
* 2009 to present Fostering Supervising Social worker

**Rebecca Nunn – Supported Lodgings/Staying Put Co-ordinator**

**Qualifications:**

* Degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice (BA) HONS
* Children and adolescent mental health certificate (30 credits)

**Relevant experience:**

* 2003-2013 Children’s Social Care The Leaving Care/Looked After Through Care Team, Darlington Borough Council
* 2013 ongoing Children’s Social Care Fostering and Supported Lodgings Team, Darlington Borough Council

**Hannah Ions-Cole – Fostering Supervising Social Worker**

**Qualifications**:

* Consolidation of Social Work Practice (Northumbria University), Masters in Social Work (MA), Degree in Sociology (BA). (2011)
* Management and Leadership (postgraduate course, Teesside University)

**Relevant Experience**:

* 2007-2009 Year Leader (Welfare), Newcastle City Council
* 2010 - 2011 Children's Social Care Referral and Assessment Service, South Tyneside Council
* 2011 - 2013 Children's Social Care planning team, South Tyneside Council
* 2013 ongoing Children's Social Care Fostering and Supported Lodgings Team, Darlington Borough Council

**Samantha Stabler- Fostering Supervising Social Worker**

**Qualifications**:

* Qualified in 2014 with a BA (HONS) in Social Work

**Relevant Experience**:

* Experience in public law, working in teams such as: Safeguarding and Assessment, Child Protection, Looked After Children, Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, Fostering and Supported Lodgings Team and in private law, as a Family Court Advisor for CAFCASS.

**Liz Tate – Fostering Supervising Social Worker**

**Qualifications:**

* Advanced Diploma in Social Work2003.

**Relevant Experience:**

* Field Team- Darlington. 2005-2009. Child Protection and Looked After Children
* 2009-2014. Fostering Social Worker for Independent Fostering Agency
* 2015-2016- Fostering Social Worker for Action for Children
* 2016-2017- Agency Worker- Stockton Council- Permanence Team
* 2017-2018- Independent assessing social worker for Action for Children
* 2018- current. Fostering Social Worker. Darlington Council.

**Moira Colman-Lyons- Fostering Supervising Social Worker**

**Qualifications:**

* Qualified in 2003 with a Diploma in Social Work from Durham University.
* PQ in Childcare in 2004 from Northumbria University.
* Social work practice and teaching in  2005 from Durham University
* Joint Investigations Award in 2011 from Teesside University.
* Level 2 in Team Leading Knowledge. Team Leading. Support and Development of Self and Team Members in 2015 from NCFE.

**Relevant Experience:**

* Experience in Public and Private law, working in teams such as: Safeguarding and Assessment, Child Protection, Looked After Children, Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub, Fostering and Supported Lodgings Team and in Adoption Teams. Undertaking a range of assessments including Child and Families, S47, Parenting, Connected Care, Viability, Special Guardianship, Form F and Form C assessments.
* Undertaken ISW assessments within care proceedings as an expert witness and have done independent work  as a Family Court Advisor for CAFCASS.
* Undertook ISW investigations for several Fostering Services  throughout Local Authorities within the North East arena.
* Previously worked with IFA’s as a FSW and Assessing social worker for 12 years.
* Have experience of involvement with the IRM on several occasions.
* Have been a panel member for Durham County Council Fostering Service and also for Northumberland County Council Fostering Service.

**Jayne Donnelly- Fostering Supervising Social Worker**

**Qualifications**

* BA Hons Social Work degree in 2016, Sunderland University
* Theraplay level 1 & 2 trained

**Relevant Experience**

* Post Adoption Support Social Worker (After Adoption, Gateshead) 2016- 2018
* Fostering Supervising Social Worker (Darlington Borough Council) May 2019- present

**Tracy Stubbs Fostering Supervising Social Worker**

**Qualifications**:

* City & Guilds GNVQ Health and Social Care Level 3 (1997)
* Edexcel Caring Services (Social Care) Level 4  HNC  (2000)
* CACHE  Diploma in Pre-school Practice   Level 3 (2004)
* BSc Honours Degree in Social Work University of Northumbria at Newcastle (2012)
* Certificate in Professional Development- Contemporary Social Work Practice, Teesside University (2016)

**Relevant Experience**:

* 1997 – 2004 Nursery Nurse and Nursery Supervisor
* August 2004 to 31 March 2016:  Darlington Borough Council (Welfare Assistant, family support worker, child support officer, specialist child support officer) within the disabled children’s team and the child care duty team prior to secondment to university in 2009.
* Post qualifying:  Social Worker in the life stages service at DBC working with disabled children and young adults with a learning disability.
* July 2013 – Fostering and Adoption Social Worker The Family Placement Service, Darlington Borough Council
* April 2016 to October 2018 North Yorkshire County Council Fostering Social Worker
* October 2018 – October 2020 Fostering Social Worker for an Independent Fostering Agency
* October 2020- Present Supervising Social Worker Darlington Borough Council

**Karen Billinge – Fostering Supervising Social Worker**

**Qualifications:**

* BA (Hons) Degree in Politics, University of Hull, 1989
* Master of Arts Degree in Applied Social Studies and Diploma in Social Work, University of Durham, 1994
* Diploma in Mental Health Studies (incorporating Approved Social Worker training and PQ 2-5 of PQSW), University of Brighton, 2002

**Relevant Experience:**

* Fostering and Adoption Services- West Sussex County Council and Darlington Borough Council (4.5+ years)
* Family Support and Protection- Long-term Teams, North Tyneside Council and West Sussex County Council (8.5 years)
* Looked After Children (including UASC)- West Sussex County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council (2 years)
* Children’s Duty and Assessment- Brighton & Hove City Council (7 months)
* Adult Mental Services (age 18 to end of life- Adult Community Mental Health Teams, Assertive Outreach and Psychiatric Hospital Discharge)- North Tyneside Council, West Sussex County Council, Brighton & Hove City Council (5 years).

**Toni Mace – Placements Officer**

**Qualifications:**

* Ba Hons 2:1 in Working with Children and Young People
* Level 5  Diploma in Management
* Level 4 NVQ Management
* Level 4  NVQ Care
* Certificate in Higher Education- Care Services/Social Work
* Level 3 NVQ Children and Young People

**Relevant Experience**:

* Welfare Assistant -  Child Protection  - 1995-1997
* Residential Child Care Worker – 1997- 2001
* Senior Residential Child Care Worker 2001-2013
* Registered Manager 2013- 2021
* Placements Officer Secondment from January 2022

**Lisa Gorman – Team Leader – Business Support**

**Qualifications:**

* GCE: English Language, English Literature, Mathematics, Geography, History, Biology, Classical Studies; Biology, French
* Typing 80 wpm
* Shorthand 120 wpm
* Secretarial Certificate Distinction
* NVQ in Business Administration (Level 3)
* Safeguarding Children (Level 1 and 2)
* Front Line Managerial Training Course

**Relevant Experience:**

* Business Support Team Leader
* Family Placement Panel Administrator
* Fostering Team Administrator
* Clerical Officer (Customer Care)
* Clerical Support Officer (Directorate/SSD)

**Steven Gamble – Fostering and Supported lodgings team – Business Support Officer**

**Qualifications:**

* 10 GCSE’s A-C;
* NVQ in Business Administration (Level 2 & 3)
* Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) – Foundation (NVQ Level 2)
* AAT – Level 3 Diploma in Accounting (NVQ Level 3)
* Level 2 Key Skills – Communication
* Level 2 Key Skills – Application of Number
* Safeguarding Children (Level 1)
* Mental Health First Aider

**Relevant Experience:**

* Administration Assistant – Caravel Liner Agencies Ltd
* Clerical Assistant – DBC
* Finance Assistant – DBC
* Darlington Schools Forum Clerk
* Diary Co-ordinator - DBC

**Nicola Andrews – Fostering and Supported Lodging’s team- Business Support Officer**

**Qualifications:**

* 5 GCSE's A-C;
* BTEC National in Business and Finance
* ECDL – Information Technology
* Safeguarding Children (Level 1)

**Relevant Experience:**

* Administration Assistant – Durham County Council
* Administration Assistant – Hull City Council
* Clerical Assistant – East Riding of Yorkshire Council

**Jayne Johnson – Fostering and Supported Lodgings team – Business Support Officer**

**Qualifications:**

* GCE/CSE – English Language, English Literature, Mathematics, Sociology, Home Economics, Geography, French, Science and Religious Education

**Relevant Experience**

* Personal Assistant within an educational setting
* Management of Administration and Reception Teams
  1. **The Fostering and Supported Lodgings team works in partnership with:**
* **Social work assessment and care planning teams -** who work with children and their families
* **Looked after and through Care Team -** each looked after child has a social worker who is responsible for the child’s care plan**.** The team also provide the leaving care service to assist young people to move into independence
* **Therapeutic social workers -** located in the Looked after and Through care team
* **Life Stages 0-25 years Team -** who support children with disabilities including those who are looked after
* **Family Group Conference Team**
* **Keeping Families Together Team**
* **Education Professionals -** providing educational support to all Looked After Children.
* **Virtual School -** provides support to looked after children in their educational attainment, training and preparation for employment
* **Health Services** **-** ensuring the health needs of children are met and that medical, dental and optical checks are carried out as required
* **Designated Nurse for Looked After children -** provides oversight of the health needs of looked after children
* **Medical Adviser -** provides specialist medical advice in relation to foster carers to help inform the service and the Fostering Panel
* **The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) -** who provide specialist mental health services for children
* **Independent Visitors Scheme** **-** trained volunteers who will visit children at their request
* **Independent Advocacy Services -** contracted to advocate on children’s behalf
* **Independent Reviewing Officers -** chair the reviews of looked after children, confirming their care plans and overseeing that plans are implemented
* **Independent Reviewing Officer – Foster Carer Reviews -** one IRO leads on chairing an annual review for every foster carer
* **Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) -** The LADO ensures that allegations people working with children are progressed appropriately. The LADO is informed when an allegation is made about a foster carer, and provides advice in relation to management of the allegation

1. **Summary of the procedures for foster care recruitment including initial training, assessment, approval and review.**

## 4.1 Recruitment of foster carers

Darlington Borough Council’s Fostering and Supported Lodgings team has a commitment to equal opportunities and welcomes diversity by valuing applications to foster from all appropriate members of the community whatever their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation or ability. It seeks to provide a range of services for children and young people by recruiting foster carers from a wide range of backgrounds who can meet the needs of children and young people requiring foster care placements in the local community.

Darlington Borough Council will use a variety of methods in the recruitment of carers, which include:

* Darlington Borough Council’s website pages
* Use of social media
* Adverts in shopping centres and libraries
* Lamppost banners in town
* Other advertising media in local authority buildings
* Posters and leaflets distributed in the local area
* Word of mouth via existing foster carers, encouraging others to get involved
* Capitalising on national campaigns run by The Fostering Network
* Specific advertising campaigns in the local area, for example adverts on public transport and on billboards

##### 4.2 Application, Assessment and Approval of mainstream foster carers

* An initial enquiry about fostering from a member of the public can be taken by

E-mail, website links, letter, telephone, Facebook, online application form or in person. The Fostering and Supported Lodgings team aims to respond within one working day and an initial referral form can be completed by telephone. Where it is clear that the enquirer does not meet basic criteria, we will suggest they do not pursue fostering at this stage.

* An information pack and introductory letter to the Fostering and Supported Lodgings Team is then sent to the prospective applicant within one working day.
* An applicant will be contacted after 10 days if they do not respond to the letter, to ascertain if they wish to continue the process.
* An applicant who is interested in proceeding will be offered a visit where questions can be answered, and further details gathered, and an initial visit report will be completed by the social worker. If social worker has any concerns about the suitability of the applicants at this early stage, the case will be discussed with the Advanced Practitioner and Team Manager and if a decision is made not to proceed, a letter will be sent explaining that the service is not progressing with their application and the reasons for this decision will be outlined.
* If the applicant and fostering agency wish to proceed the applicants are then then they will complete an application and enter Stage 1 of the assessment process. They will be invited to participate in a “Skills to Foster” training programme
* During Stage 1 a wide range of checks are undertaken, and if the checks are satisfactorily completed the applicants can then proceed to Stage 2.
* During Stage 2 additional training may be completed and alongside this an assessment of suitability as a foster carer will be completed and a report prepared using CoramBAAF’s Form F template
* On completion of the Form F Report applicants will be invited to attend the Fostering Panel where the recommendation for approval will be considered and a recommendation made.
* The recommendation made by the panel is shared with the applicant/s by the Chair of Panel immediately after the Panel have made their recommendation.
* The Agency Decision Maker will consider the recommendation made by Panel and make a decision regarding their approval within 10 days of the panel meeting The applicant will be contacted and advised of the ratification by telephone within 5 working days. Written notification of Agency Decision makers decision will be sent to the applicant along with a notice of their rights at this stage

**4.3 Assessment and approval of connected family and friends foster carers**

* If a child needs to become looked after and are being placed with a member of their family or wider network, a viability assessment is completed to ensure that the person is suitable to care for the child. Temporary approval as a connected foster carer will be granted if appropriate by a Head of Service. The Fostering and Supported lodgings team will then undertake a range of checks and a CoramBAAF form C fostering assessment

**4.4 Skills to Foster preparation training**

NB – This diagram illustrates how Stages 1 & 2 of the assessment process fit together. It is NOT intended to cover all actions a FS must undertake as part of the process – FS’s must refer to the regulations and statutory guidance for this information. It should be noted that at any point in the process applicant (1) can withdraw, in which case the process ends and (2) can complain to the FS (and must be informed of their right to do so if they are turned down in Stage 1.

NB – This diagram illustrates how Stages 1 & 2 of the assessment process fit together. It is NOT intended to cover all actions a FS must undertake as part of the process – FS’s must refer to the regulations and statutory guidance for this information. It should be noted that at any point in the process applicant (1) can withdraw, in which case the process ends and (2) can complain to the FS (and must be informed of their right to do so if they are turned down in Stage 1.

NB – This diagram illustrates how Stages 1 & 2 of the assessment process fit together. It is NOT intended to cover all actions a FS must undertake as part of the process – FS’s must refer to the regulations and statutory guidance for this information. It should be noted that at any point in the process applicant (1) can withdraw, in which case the process ends and (2) can complain to the FS (and must be informed of their right to do so if they are turned down in Stage 1.

* All prospective foster carer are required to attend the Skills to Foster preparation training. Mainstream foster carers must attend, and all connected family and friends’ carers are encouraged to attend. The course runs three times per year, on evenings and weekends to facilitate full attendance. If a session is missed, we require the carer to attend the next time the course runs.

**4.5 The Fostering Panel**

* There is one Fostering Panel which meets once per month, and additional extraordinary panel meetings are convened to manage workload and ensure a timely response when required.
* Panel is constituted to meet the requirements of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011. The Panel consists of a central list of members with a diverse range of personal and professional backgrounds. New panel members are provided with an induction, and every panel member has an annual appraisal. Regular training is provided. The Fostering Panel has an independent chairperson, which brings a level of objectivity to the Panel.
* The Panel provides a key quality assurance function in relation to the work of the Local Authority, and any suggestions from Panel members in relation to practice improvement is followed up by the Agency Advisor to panel.
* Panel make recommendations which are passed to the Agency Decision Maker, who is usually the Assistant Director, Children’s Services. The ADM makes the final decision in relation to the approval of foster carers. The Fostering Panel encourages all prospective foster carers and approved carers to attend Panel when their cases are being presented, as Panel feel this reinforces openness and partnership working. Applicants can feel apprehensive about attending, and Panel welcome applicants help them to feel at ease. Applicants will be asked questions about their motivation to foster, and where appropriate consideration will be given to their terms of approval.
* Foster carers’ first annual reviews are also presented to the Fostering Panel. Subsequent reviews are also considered where there are significant changes to a carer’s terms of approval, or where there have been standards of care or safeguarding concerns

**4.6 Termination of Approval**

* Occasionally the Fostering Service will feel that the standard of care provided by the foster carer does not meet the required minimum standard. Additional training and supervision may be recommended to manage less severe concerns. On occasions the service will undertake a foster carer review and present this to the Fostering Panel detailing concerns. The foster carer will be able to access independent support in these circumstances and will attend the Fostering Panel to express their views and consider the information presented. If the panel reaches a recommendation that the foster carer is no longer suitable to foster, and the ADM agrees, the foster carer will be sent a letter detailing the decision, which is a “qualifying determination”. The foster carer then has 28 days within which to make representation to the Agency Decision maker or the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for an independent review of the local authority’s decision

1. **Placement types**

**Short term and Emergency Fostering**

Short term and emergency foster carers look after a child or young person for a limited period of time while assessments are ongoing, and arrangements are made for the child to return to their birth family or to an alternative permanent placement.

Many children will return home to the care of their parents or members of their extended family, while others may move to long term foster placements or achieve permanence via adoption, Special Guardianship Orders, or Child Arrangement Orders.

Short term foster carers play an important role in caring for children and young people who are going through a period of crisis and uncertainty.

On occasions, children need to be placed in emergency situations during the day or out of hours, and in these situations, carers need to be skilled in settling children who are likely to be distressed and afraid

**Short Break Fostering**

Short break foster carers provide regular, planned, short breaks for children and young people with disabilities. The regular breaks enable the child to build up a relationship with their foster carer and provides a break to the child and to their parents. Where the child has specific health needs, the foster carer will receive specific training to enable them to meet the needs of the child.

**Respite Fostering**

Respite fostering where a child joins a fostering household for a limited number of overnight stays, either as a “one off” or as part of a regular schedule of visits. There are two types of respite care:

1. Provided by foster carers for other carers if, for example they need a holiday, or a short time to “recharge their batteries”. Respite care can help sustain foster placements
2. Provided by foster carers for children and young people living with their birth families who need a break

Some respite foster carers have work commitments which do not enable them to consider full time fostering. Other respite placements are provided by full time foster carers who are also approved to provide respite and have the space and capacity to do so.

**Long Term Fostering**

Long term fostering is where a foster carer provides a permanent home to a child up to adulthood and beyond. Long term fostering provides a child with the security of a stable family life, whilst maintaining their ties to their birth family. When a child is going to be “matched” with a long-term foster carer, a matching report is presented to the Fostering Panel and one the formal match is approved, there is usually a celebration event for the child.

**Parent and Child Fostering**

Parent and Child foster carers provide a placement for both the parent and their child. In some cases, both the parent and child will be looked after, in other cases it may be just the child who is looked after

The role of the foster carer is to ensure the welfare and safety of the child. They will support the parent to help them develop their skills and confidence in parenting the child and will encourage them to bond with the child.

1. **Support for foster carers**

**6.1 Fostering Supervising Social Workers**

All approved foster carers have an allocated Fostering Supervising social worker whose duties include:

* Supervision on a monthly basis, or as identified by the service, and ensuring the foster carer understands our expectations of them
* Monitoring the foster carers progress in relation to caring for children and ensuring they are meeting the Fostering National Minimum Standards
* Making an unannounced visit at least once per year
* Providing any additional support and advice to the foster carer as necessary
* Assisting the carer to complete their induction or annual personal development plan, detailing training needs
* Ensure that the foster carer maintains and updates their Personal Development Portfolio, and keep the carer updated of local and national developments in fostering
* Organising the provision of any equipment needed to assist the carer in meeting the needs of the child
* Helping to ensure that any identified placement is a good match for the foster carer and their family
* Attendance at Placement Planning meeting and ensuring all necessary information and documentation is provided to the foster carer
* Ensuring all statutory checks are up to date including DBS and medical
* Where possible attendance at Looked After Reviews, child protection meetings, PEP meetings etc
* Supporting the foster carer at the Fostering Panel
* Undertaking the carers annual foster carer review
* Working closely with all members of the care team to ensure the foster carer is appropriately supported to meet the needs of the child
* Address any practice or standards of care issues, and ensure that any allegations are appropriately referred and followed up

**6.2 Darlington Foster Carer Association**

Mainstream foster carers are encouraged to be part of the Darlington Foster Carers Association [DFCA]. The DFCA provide peer support and social activities to foster carers. Monthly liaison meetings take place between the DFCA and the Team Manager of the Fostering and Supported Lodgings Team so that any issues of concern to foster carers can be addressed

**6.3 Mentoring from experienced foster carers**

Newly approved foster carers can receive mentoring or “buddying “from an experienced foster carer. They can be available to provide general advice and support from the foster carer’s perspective. More experiences carers may also benefit from support from another carer at difficult time.

**6.4 Emergency Duty Team and other out of hours support**

Foster carers can receive support from the out of hours Emergency Duty team when necessary. In addition, carers can seek advice from one of Darlington’s children’s homes who will provide advice and guidance.

**6.5 Training, Support and Development Standards**

The Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care have been developed to ensure that people working with children and young people have the best possible training, qualifications, support and advice. The Standards are designed to support carers and give them a framework for training

Newly approved foster carers are expected to complete the Standards within 12 months of approval, (or within 18 months for Connected carers). Fostering Supervising social workers can provide guidance, and other foster carers can also mentor. Support sessions can be arranged where necessary

Foster carer must meet the training requirements specific to their Band and can also access a wide range of additional courses.

**6.6 Training Programme**

All foster carers have access to an extensive training programme co-ordinated by the Workforce Development Team. This includes bespoke training specifically commissioned for foster carers, and e-learning opportunities via “The Training Hub”. Training is delivered locally and is schedules to include weekdays, and some evenings and weekends. On-going training is discussed regularly in supervision, and the identification of training needs helps to shape the training which is provided for foster carers.

**6.7 The Foster Carer Handbook**

The Foster Carer Handbook provides advice and guidance to foster carers in relation to the fostering task, and the legal and regulatory frameworks. It also provides details of the skills banding matrix, and information about finance. The handbook is updated twice per year, and contains a number of links to other websites and to other more detailed policies and procedures.

The handbook provides a useful general guide and should be read in conjunction with more detailed information, for example in relation to safeguarding children.

**6.8 Social Events for foster carers**

The Fostering and Supported Lodgings Team arrange an event during the summer and at Christmas for foster carers and children. A bi- annual foster carer awards event takes place in to celebrate foster carers length of service and valued contribution to the wellbeing of children in their care.

**6.9 Consultation events**

Foster carer consultation events take place twice per year, where foster carers can meet with managers within the service. There will be information sharing and discussion about key issues relevant to the fostering task**.** During the covid pandemic, meetings have not taken place, but will be re-instated from March 2022.

**6.10 Other support available to foster carers and children and young people**

* Support from children’s social workers, including Disabled Children and Young Adults Team where the child or young person is disabled and qualifies for specialist support
* Input from therapeutic social workers where appropriate
* Access to the Virtual School to support education
* Advice from Looked After Children’s Nurse, also specialist advice **such** as drug and alcohol counselling for young people
* Specialist advice re unaccompanied asylum-seeking children
* Individual membership of The Fostering Network
* Access to Independent advice and mediation
* Children and young people can participate in the Children in Care Council, the Darlo Care Crew, ensuring that their voice is communicated to decision makers

1. **COMPLAINTS**

Foster Carers can speak to their Fostering Supervising Social Worker, Team Manager, or Service Manager if they have an issue in relation to the service. They can also make a formal complaint, as detailed below:

**Complaints, Compliments and Comments**

If you are unhappy about one of our services we would like you to tell us so we can put things right. We will not provide you with a poorer service if you make a complaint.  We would also like you to tell us what you like about our services and to hear how you think we could make them better.

The Complaints and Information Governance Team handles all complaints, compliments and comments about Children's Social Care. You can contact us directly or speak to a member of staff you know**.  You can contact us by:**

* Email: [complaints@darlington.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@darlington.gov.uk)
* Use our [online complaints form](http://eforms2.darlington.gov.uk:8080/public/servlet/ep.app?st=CORP&type=228538)
* Call us on (01325) 406777
* Download our easily accessible [children and young person’s complaints leaflet](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/media/1500563/children-and-young-person’s-complaints-leaflet.pdf)
* Visit us at the [Town Hall](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/Generic/Contacts/visiting.htm), Darlington, DL1 5QT

Full details of our Children’s Social Care Complaints, Compliments and Comments Procedure is available on our [website](http://www.darlington.gov.uk/your-council/complaints-compliments-and-comments/childrens-social-care-complaints/) or on request.

1. **Systems for monitoring and evaluating the Fostering and Supported Lodgings Team**

**8.1 Children’s Social Care has systems in place to monitor and evaluate the work of the team**

* Foster carers, fostering supervising social workers and managers receive regular supervision to maintain the expected high standards
* Foster carers receive an annual review, where the voice of the child must be captured. The Fostering Service Manager acts as Agency Decision maker for foster carer reviews that are not presented to the Fostering Panel
* The Fostering Panel has an independent quality assurance function, and also seeks feedback from attendees. Panel provides feedback to the agency in respect of the quality of assessments
* Foster carers receive annual unannounced visits
* All assessments, reports and information for reviews are quality assured by the Team Manager or Advanced Practitioner
* Tracking systems are in place to monitor timescales from initial enquiry to approval
* Applicants are asked for feedback in relation to their experience of the fostering assessment to inform service improvement
* The Fostering and Supported Lodgings Team Manger and Service Manager participate in monthly performance and quality assurance clinics with the Assistant Director, Children’s Social Care
* Managers in the Team undertake audits and direct observations of practice to ensure that social workers are working to a high standard and within required timescales

**8.2 Ofsted**

Ofsted is responsible for the regulation and inspection of Children’s Social Care Services including local authority fostering services. The Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011 and the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 are provided to set minimum acceptable standards for the safe running of fostering services