

Lancashire County Council
Statement of Purpose
2019/20

Fostering



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1. Introduction

Lancashire County Council Fostering Service's Statement of Purpose is prepared in accordance with the Fostering Services England Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services. The regulations and guidance set out the requirement that each fostering agency produces a Statement of Purpose, which includes its aims and objectives, a description of the service it delivers and the facilities that are offered and provided.

This Statement of Purpose also gives an outline of how the service is managed and its fitness to provide fostering services. It shows the policy and performance framework that underpins our work and shows how the welfare of children will be met and good outcomes achieved for all children in its care. It also demonstrates the systems which we have set in place to recruit, train, supervise and support foster carers.

The Statement of Purpose also links with the Children's Guide which is provided to all children, subject to the child's age and understanding at the point of placement.

This statement is available to all members of staff, foster carers, children and birth parents and is publicly available on our fostering website. A copy of this statement is also lodged with Ofsted. The statement is updated and amended annually.

This Statement of Purpose is approved by the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools.

The Statement of Purpose, Children and Parent's Guides are available on Lancashire County Council's website and can be made available in a range of languages and formats.

For more information, contact:

Karen Barker/Heidi Fliegau
Senior Manager Fostering and Adoption
Children's Services
Lancashire County Council
County Hall, Preston PR18RJ
01772 5 30595

2. Welcome by Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools.

As the Cabinet Member for Children and young people, it is my privilege to provide a welcome to the Statement of Purpose for the Fostering Service.

The Fostering Service continues to remain committed to offering a consistent approach to meeting the needs of children who require a foster placement. The

Service has continued to recruit foster carers in a timely manner, whilst retention of carers is supported by offering quality support and training to all its foster carers. Though demand for fostering placements remains high, we are committed to improving outcomes for the children and young people in our foster placements.

The majority of Lancashire's children who are looked after are placed in foster care with more than a third living in Lancashire's own foster placements. We have increased in-house capacity year by year in order to provide services to even more children who require foster placements, alongside providing increased support to our foster carers.

For children who cannot live with their birth parents both adoption and fostering are critical services. Research indicates that for children who cannot live with their family of origin the best outcomes are achieved by them living in substitute families. The decisions taken by staff in the Fostering Service will influence the child for the rest of their lives it is important to get it right.

The Fostering Service is fully integrated with the Adoption Service. In line with legislation, Lancashire is developing a Regional Adoption Agency with Blackpool Borough Council. Over the last year work has been undertaken to prepare for this and over the next few months staff will prepare for the separation of Fostering and Adoption Services in Lancashire. It is imperative that staff within the fostering service work closely with colleagues both in the locality based social work teams and with staff within the Regional Adoption Agency.

I and other colleagues in the council wish the Fostering Service every success. We will be watching the development of the service with great interest during the forthcoming year.

County Councillor Philippa Williamson
Cabinet member for Children, Young People and Schools

3. Legislative and National Policy

Lancashire County Council's Fostering Service is run in accordance with the principles outlined in the:

- Children Act 1989
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering
- Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2010
- Care Planning and Fostering Regulations (Amendments) 2015
- Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4 – Fostering Services
- The Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010
- The Disability and Equality Act 2010
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

- Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Cares published 2012.

4. Lancashire children, young people and families partnership vision

Our vision says Children, young people and families in need of help are safe, healthy and supported to achieve.

Five outcomes

- Vulnerable children and young people are safe from harm and build resilience.
- Children and young people achieve their full potential in education, learning and future employment.
- Children and young people enjoy healthy lifestyles and know how to help others.
- Children, young people and families have a voice in shaping the support they receive.
- Children and young people live in Lancashire where they can enjoy a good quality of life, be happy and want to stay.

Five partnership priorities

- Improve the environment in which children and young people live, learn and work.
- Support children, young people and their parents/carers to make healthy lifestyle choices and to build strong families, friendships and healthy relationships.
- Provide children and young people with a good quality education and learning opportunity which matches their talents, ambitions and aims and enables a positive transition to adulthood.
- Prevent the need for children to become looked after, and with compassion, and step in when necessary to keep children and young people safe from harm.
- Support children and young people to influence decision making and bring about positive change for themselves and others.

Five partnership ways of working

- We will focus on the children, young people and families who need our support.
- We will focus on strategic priorities which raise aspirations and enable people to work locally to build on the strengths of people and their communities.
- We will build on what works well.
- We will collaborate and share information.
- We will provide critical challenge to improve practice and outcomes.

Five partnership measures of impact against our greatest challenges.

- Improve the healthy life expectancy for children and young people.
- Increase the number of children who achieve a good level of development at the end of the reception year.
- Increase the number of 16-17 year olds in education, employment or training.
- Show clear evidence of improved outcomes as a result of family participation.
- Ensure the right number of children are in the care of the Council.

5. Principle aims and objectives

Aims

Lancashire County Council are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children within Lancashire. The Fostering service is committed to achieving continuous improvements and delivering the best possible outcomes for our looked after children by providing a range of high quality foster placements for the children to help them achieve and meet their potential within a safe and secure environment.

Lancashire's Fostering Service has developed a comprehensive service plan that incorporates priorities and objectives for the coming year.

Objectives

The key objectives for the Fostering Service for 2019/20 are:

Recruitment and assessment

- To provide a skilled and flexible fostering service that is able to meet the wide range of assessed needs of children and young people requiring foster placements.
- To recruit a minimum of 76 new foster carers during the year with a stretch target of 86 new foster carers.
- To ensure that all prospective foster carers are given all the information they require in order to make an informed decision on whether or not to submit an application to foster.
- To ensure, once an application to foster is received that the assessment is completed and submitted to panel within 4 months unless there are exceptional circumstances.
- To, continue to embed the early permanence model so that more foster carers will be approved both as foster carers and adopters through concurrency and other adopters will consider fostering for adoption placements.
- To ensure that prospective “connected persons” applications to foster are considered quickly and rigorously and, if the application is to proceed, to complete the assessment within statutory timescales.

Supporting foster carers and children/young people in placement

- To have no more than 13% of current mainstream foster carers resign.
- To provide stability and permanence for Lancashire's looked after children including availability of the placement to the young person after they reach the age of 18 years where appropriate
- To work in close partnership with Lancashire County Council's Leaving Care Service to ensure that foster carers are able to fully support the young people in their care, as they make the transition to further or higher education or employment and independent living where appropriate
- To minimise the number of children who leave foster care in an unplanned way
- To maximise the flexibility of foster carers supporting them to foster to their maximum potential
- Where possible siblings will be placed together (unless there are safeguarding reasons) and where this is not possible, determined efforts will be made to reunite them as soon as is possible and appropriate
- Race, language, culture, religion, gender, gender orientation and ability will be taken into account when considering matching carers to the needs of children
- In consultation with foster carers, young people and other key individuals the service will maximise placement stability.
- Peer group support which foster carers have told us is highly valued by them.
- To provide fostering allowances in line with government recommended rates. In addition to the allowance, carers can receive a fee in line with Lancashire's Tier Alignment Scheme.

Policy and service development

- To ensure that the Fostering Service fully implements and adhere to National Minimum standards.
- To ensure that all foster carers complete the Training Support and Development Standards training pack for foster carers.
- To work with colleagues in district teams developing effective practices and policies which contribute to better outcomes for children.
- To consult with foster carers on a regular basis on ways to improve the service.
- To ensure that foster carers are supported both professionally and by offering timely, good quality support and advice to foster carers.
- To investigate complaints speedily, thoroughly and fairly.

In order to meet these key objectives:

Recruitment and Assessment

We will continue to focus on recruitment; the local advertising campaigns are effective and the correct areas are considered in line with mosaic profiling so that prospective foster carers in Lancashire are recruited to foster for the local authority.

We will ensure that information sent to prospective foster carers is accurate, informative and sent in a timely manner.

We will ensure that there are sufficient preparation sessions across the county to meet the needs of prospective foster carers.

We will respond to the increased requests for “connected” people to be approved as foster carers. In order to ensure a speedy response to such requests the service will continue to review the number of fostering panels available throughout the month.

Supporting foster carers and children/young people in placement

We will maximise the flexibility of foster carers by approving them as foster carers rather than build in artificial barriers to providing a service.

We will identify gaps in skills of foster carers and use the Personal Development plans and supervision sessions to ensure that we are building on the confidence and skill sets of foster carers to enable them to care for a wide range of children.

We will review and promote the parent and child scheme and high risk carer's scheme.

We will promote the LIFT service within Children's Social Care to ensure that this scheme is reaching a wide range of children.

We will continue to provide training and support to enable foster carers to complete the Children's Workforce Development Workbook in a timely manner.

Policy and service development

We will continue to rigorously scrutinise the efficiency and effectiveness of the services we provide and commission in order to achieve good value for money; we will endeavour to maximise the total resources available for the improvement of outcomes for children.

We will be proactive in anticipating likely developments in the internal and external environment surrounding our service and be prepared for any consequent threats and opportunities.

We will work closely with colleagues in North West Fostering Services to promote regional marketing strategies and campaigns to address the regional and national shortage of foster carers.

We will review the customer journey, involving newly approved foster carers to ensure that the process is efficient, speedy and takes into consideration the needs of prospective foster carers, whilst ensuring the forms used are user friendly **and** they meet legislative requirements.

We will monitor the timescales for each stage of the approval process both at an individual and team level and openly report the outcomes to Senior Managers in the service.

We will continue to develop the role of the Fostering Panel so that individuals with direct experience of the fostering process can comment on prospective foster carers.

We will seek the views of Lancashire's approved foster carers to inform service development and delivery.

Managers in the service will continue to work closely with colleagues in district teams to identify changing priorities and develop policies and procedures that maximise the use of foster care.

The Fostering Service will work closely with staff and managers in the Residential Service to ensure that if a child is placed in residential care and their needs would best be met by placement in foster care that such a placement is made available if possible.

We will continue to promote and develop the skills of foster carers by:

- Working with colleagues in training and development to ensure high quality training for foster carers
- Ensuring that training available to staff in children's services is also made available to foster carers where relevant
- Implementing a payments scheme to reward foster carers for their increasing skills and knowledge
- Actively reviewing individual training needs during the annual review of foster carers within personal development plans and supervisions.
- Support groups
- Personal Development Action plans
- Foster Carer reviews
- Buddy arrangements

6. Fostering Activity 2018/19

Lancashire's Fostering Service has a robust performance monitoring system in place and is committed to continuous improvement. The Fostering Service Plan identifies annual performance targets, which performance is measured against. Clear targets have been identified and our performance is reported against the targets monthly.

The service has demonstrated increased capacity and placement choice over the last 12 month period.

On the 31 March 2019 there was a total of 727 Children Looked After placed with Lancashire Foster Carers, with 858 children/young people in placements over the year. This is an increase on 656 children/young people were looked after by Lancashire Fostering Service in March 2018.

Lancashire's Fostering Service missed its target to recruit 76 new fostering households between April 2018 and April 2019; we recruited 66 mainstream foster

carers and approved 83 connected carers, which was an increase of 39 connected carer

The service has a target to ensure the resignation rate of existing foster carers is no more than 13%. The resignation rate for Lancashire was 14% for 2018/19. This figure includes Connected Person Carers. The missed target relates to the increasing number of Connected Carers in the cohort and because some of these carers were approved though they never had a placement.

Within the 2018/19 period, we approved 66 mainstream foster carers although 49 of Lancashire's foster carers resigned within that same period. This gives us an increase of 17 foster carers.

7. Organisational structure

Head of Youth Justice, Fostering & Adoption, Residential Services x 1

Fostering & Adoption Senior Manager (G13) 37 – Planning For Permanence (P4P) x 1

F & A Agency Advisor (G10) x 1

Recruitment & Assessment & Children Awaiting Adoption
Team Manager (G11) x 1

Placement with Family & Friends Team
Manager (G11) x 1

Recruitment & Assessment 1
Practice Manager (G10) x 1
Senior Social Worker Practitioner (G9) x 0.5
Social Workers (G8) x 6
Support Workers (G6) x 1.5

Recruitment & Assessment 2
Practice Manager (G10) x 1
Senior Social Worker Practitioner (G9) x 1
Social Workers (G8) x 5.5
Support Workers (G6) x 2.5

Recruitment & Assessment 3
Practice Manager (G10) x 1
Senior Social Worker Practitioner (G9) x 1.5
Social Worker (G8) x 4.5

Children Awaiting Adoption 1
Practice Manager (G10) x 1
Senior Social Worker Practitioner (G9) x 1
Social Workers (G8) x 4
Support Workers (G6) 1.5

Children Awaiting Adoption 2
Practice Manager (G10) x 1
Senior Social Worker Practitioner (G9) x 1
Social Workers (G8) x 4.5
Support Workers (G6) x 0.5

Case Progression Manager (G10) x 1
Family Finders (G6) x 2

Placement with Family & Friends
Practice Managers (G10) x 2
Senior Social Worker Practitioners (G9) x 2
Social Workers (G8) x 10
Support Workers (G6) x 2

Fostering & Adoption Senior Manager (G13) 37 – Support to Permanence (S2P) x 1

Support to Permanence
Team Manager (G11) 37 x 1

Support to Permanence
Lancaster, Wyre & North Fylde
Practice Manager (G10) x 1
Social Workers (G9) x 2
Social Workers (G8) x 5
Support Workers (G6) x 2

Support to Permanence
Central Lancashire
Practice Manager (G10) x 1
Social Workers (G9) x 2
Social Workers (G8) x 5.5
Support Workers (G6) x 3

Support to Permanence
Chorley & West Lancashire
Unit D Clayton Green Chorley
Practice Manager (G10) x 1
Social Workers (G9) x 2
Social Workers (G8) x 4.8
Support Workers (G6) x 3

Support to Permanence
Hyndburn, Rossendale & Ribble Valley,
Rising Bridge Accrington
Practice Manager (G10) x 1
Social Workers (G9) x 2
Social Workers (G8) x 4.2
Support Workers (G6) x 2

Support to Permanence
Burnley & Pendle
Chaddesley House Burnley
Practice Manager (G10) x 1
Social Workers (G9) x 2
Social Workers (G8) x 4
Support Workers (G6) x 2

SCAYT+
Practice Manager (G10) x 1
Emotional Health Practitioners (G8) x 9.41

8. Structure of the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service is managed by the Head of Service for Fostering and Adoption, Residential and Youth Offending services for Lancashire and consists of two Fostering Senior Managers, one who is responsible for planning for permanence and one who is responsible for support to permanence. Each of the two services, then has a team manager(s) and practice managers.

The Fostering Service Management Team, consisting of Team Manager and Practice Managers, meet regularly to develop, plan and monitor the service. These meetings consider the following priority areas:

- Business planning
- Overall service review and performance management information
- Targeted recruitment and retention strategies
- Quality assurance – development and monitoring
- Safer caring practice and safeguarding issues
- Numbers and distribution of carers and staff based on commissioning needs identified
- Support services for carers
- Workforce development
- Continuous improvement including customer feedback

Planning for Permanence

The Planning for Permanence Service is made up of the Children Awaiting Adoption Team and the Recruitment and Assessment Team. Currently within the Planning for Permanence service, there is also a Placement With Family and Friends Team who undertake all standard and full assessments relating to family and friends, both fostering connected carers and special guardianship assessments. The team consists of 1 team manager, 2 practice managers, 12 social workers and 2 support workers.

The Recruitment and Assessment Team is responsible for the recruitment and assessment of all new mainstream foster carers.

The structure of the service increases our capacity to undertake assessments of new carers with a view to improving placement choice and increasing the size of the in-house service. The fostering service ensures that recruitment, retention and assessment remain a strategic County wide function.

The team consists of 19 social workers and 4 support workers managed by 3 practice managers.

The Children Awaiting Adoption Team works with Children's Social Care to identify adopters for children with a plan of adoption and they retain full responsibility for the case once the Placement Order is granted until the child is adopted. The team consists of 10.5 social workers, 5 support workers (2 of which are family finders) and are managed by 2 practice managers.

Support to Permanence

The fostering teams within the localities focus on the task of support and supervision of existing carers and in developing even better working relationships with colleagues in commissioning and fieldwork teams. They are also responsible for the post adoption cases.

There are 5 Fostering Support Teams across the county, sited in locality areas:

- Lancaster, Fylde and South Wyre
- Preston and North Wyre
- Chorley, South Ribble, Chorley and West Lancs
- Burnley and Pendle
- Hyndburn, Rossendale and Ribble Valley

Each team has a Practice manager supported by a team of supervising social workers and support workers.

All social workers in Fostering and Adoption are suitably qualified and registered with the Health and Care Professions Council.

There is Business Support to all of the fostering teams based in localities and centrally in County Hall.

It should be noted that with the implementation of the Regional Adoption Agency in late 2019, which will separate Adoption from Fostering, it is not clear if the current Fostering structure will need to be amended.

9. Services provided

Recruitment and Assessment

We offer a recruitment and assessment service for new applicants (and existing carers). This is a systematic process, which is standardised across the county.

Connected Persons Placements

We undertake assessments of connected persons, under Regulation 24 and planned assessments.

Placement/Matching

We provide matching and placement information to commissioning social workers within both duty and consultation systems. Wherever possible, matching information is followed by introductory visits and pre-placement meetings.

Task-Centred Placements

We provide task-centred placements. Such placements will vary in length of time dependent on the child/young person's needs.

Long-Term, Permanent Placements

We provide (long-term and/or) permanent foster placements where this is identified within a child/young person's care plan.

Concurrent and fostering for adoption placements

For children whose likely care plan is one of adoption, we provide approved adopters who are also approved foster carers (concurrency) or who are granted temporary approval as a foster carer (Fostering for Adoption) to enable children to move to their potential adoptive placement without delay.

Carer support

We offer regular and good quality support to carers, tailored to their needs. .

Allowances

We operate a payment structure which is fair and transparent and has recently been reviewed. The payment structure is available to all carers and commissioners of services. All foster carers will receive the Minimum Government Recommended Allowance. Additional fees may be paid for skill and services provided. Birthday, Christmas and holiday allowances are paid to all foster carers. Any discretionary payments are for exceptional cases only and by means of approval by the Fostering Senior Manager.

LIFT (Lancashire Intervention for Families Team)

The aim of the scheme is to facilitate a mentoring scheme whereby foster carers work with a range of families to prevent either the breakdown of a family unit or to support the rehabilitation of children, where there is a care plan of return home to birth parents following a period of time in care.

Recruitment and Assessment Team

The primary functions of the recruitment and assessment teams are to:

- Recruit and assess potential carers as to their suitability to become foster carers.
- Schedule and provide good quality pre approval training to prepare potential carers for the fostering task.
- Promote high quality child-centred fostering practice.
- Undertake an annual needs analysis and make recommendations to meet identified need by targeted recruitment campaigns.
- Develop marketing strategies using the variety of media opportunities that are available.
- Work effectively with other fostering colleagues offering post approval support.

The teams recruit foster carers who provide respite, task centred and permanent foster placements: caring for children and young people whose parents need some short term support, or for children who have been removed from their families. The latter may be for the duration of any care proceedings until it is clear what the child's long term plan is.

Support to Permanence Fostering Teams

The primary functions of the locality fostering teams are to:

- Supervise and support carers who provide fostering placements for children and young people.
- Support carers to expand their skill sets to enable them to provide a wide range of placements.
- Match children/young people to suitable carers to provide the best placement choice for each child/young person.
- Provide stable placements for as long as children/young people need them.
- Promote high quality child centred fostering practice.

All of the fostering teams comprise of social workers and support staff (who undertake duties under the supervision of qualified staff and have relevant experience and/or qualifications). Lancashire has introduced a career grade for experienced and suitably qualified social workers to recognise the skills and abilities that workers have developed, and to aid retention of staff. The staff who hold Grade 9 on the Lancashire pay spine take on some additional supervisory and managerial tasks within the fostering team. This is in line with the social work taskforce.

Placement With Family and Friends Team

The Placements With Family and Friends Team was established as a pilot team following the 2015 Ofsted inspection and sited within Fostering and Adoption services. Previously Special Guardianship Order assessments had been completed by Children's Social Care, whilst connected carer assessments were completed by the fostering service. In bringing together the work for SGO and Connected carer into one team, a joint SGO/ Connected carer assessment tool has been developed, which allows for one assessment to be completed with the recommendation of either order at disposal. The one assessment principal also reduces the potential for conflicting recommendations being made within court.

Access to Resources Team (ART)

Until 2017 the fostering service managed the placement duty team for both in house and agency placements but it was recognised that this was not the most appropriate way to manage this process.

This led to the establishment of ART by bringing together existing placement finding, contract monitoring and commissioning resources. This has resulted in significantly improved placement finding processes and intelligence on demand and gaps in provision. The Fostering service has a support worker within the ART team who continues to identify in house foster placements for the children and young people who are requiring a placement wherever possible.

10. Safeguarding children and young people

Lancashire's Fostering Service operates a safe recruitment process for all staff employed by the organisation. In addition, there is a rigorous vetting and assessment process undertaken with all potential carers. Enhanced Disclosure and Barring (DBS) checks are repeated every 3 years for all carers.

Policy and guidance underpins expectations and requirements of foster carer practice linked to carer training and development. Policy and guidance includes: safe care & safeguarding; health and safety; bullying, management of behaviour; managing allegations; recording and record keeping, confidentiality, 'e-safety' (safe use of internet and social networking).

Our processes and procedures will ensure that any concern is addressed and monitored by the management team and will inform service development and best practice, for example: poor quality of care/breach of foster care agreement; child protection procedures which deal with allegations of abuse against foster carers and through the complaints procedures.

Children are made aware about these procedures through their social worker, fostering supervising social worker and the Children's Guide. They also have access to a Children's rights advocacy service independent of the service.

11. Provision of therapeutic services

For many years, Lancashire has developed a team (SCAYT+ - supporting carers and young people together) to work with children looked after and adopted children and their carers providing therapeutic support to improve their emotional health and wellbeing to enable them to thrive. Support utilises and builds upon the assets and strengths of the carers and the community that surrounds them.

Within the team are a range of emotional health practitioners (10 staff) with varied backgrounds and skills. The preferred approaches enhance the therapeutic value of everyday care and include Theraplay® ideas and practices, parenting with PACE, attachment-informed approaches and systemic work. The service is strongly systemic in that we do not usually see psychological therapy for children as an appropriate first course of action- and never in isolation from other necessary actions in the professional and family networks.

The team supports all colleagues in developing their understanding of the emotional needs of children- so this can inform care-planning and future decision making and provide training to foster carers, adoptive parents and LCC staff. The SCAYT+ staff are keen to strengthen relationships with professionals working with children across LCC, education, CAMHS teams and child clinical psychology teams.

Whilst the team provides training specifically aimed at foster carers, to enhance carers understanding, to help support better outcomes for the children/young people for whom they care.

The team operates over the county from two sites, one in Burnley and the other in Preston.

Lancashire's Children's Services also have access to the child and adolescent health service.

12. Provision of health support services

The Fostering Service is committed to ensuring the health outcomes for young people looked after continually improves.

There are a number of Designated Nurses for Looked after Children and Young People who in conjunction with other nurses within the team oversee Children's Annual Health Assessments and have input into the health promotion of Young People. A dedicated medical advisor advises the fostering panels on medical issues for applications to foster when necessary.

13. Provision of education support services

Lancashire's fostering service recognises the need to improve the educational attainment for the Children Looked After. The service works closely with the carers in addressing this issue. To support this foster cares are able to access the online version of the Encyclopaedia Britannia.

Lancashire has a dedicated virtual head teacher and team and educational support is available from this team to foster carers in the fostering service.

The Virtual Head Teacher for Vulnerable and Challenging Groups, Education, Quality and Performance is committed to improving attainment attendance, reducing exclusion and developing partnerships with schools in Lancashire.

Carers are expected to attend Personal Education Planning Meetings with children and young people and, where appropriate, the supervising social worker will also attend.

14. Provisions for care leavers

Lancashire is committed to supporting young people to remain in their foster placement beyond 18 years of age in order to experience normal family life and preparation for independence if this supports them more effectively. The 'Staying Put' policy provides financial and other support for former foster carers making commitments to young people age 18 -24years.

15. Recruitment and assessment of prospective foster carers

Lancashire's Fostering Service is committed to recruiting more foster carers. Following a decline in the quality of enquiries and fostering approvals in 2016, Lancashire has revised its recruitment and marketing strategy. The strategy utilises current data regarding the gaps in resource provision. The use of mosaic profiling has led to a more targeted approach focusing on potential applicants from within certain catchment areas. Currently, more placements are needed for teenagers; long-term care for children and young people; children with disabilities; sibling groups and black and minority ethnic children.

Lancashire Fostering Service works closely with the communications team reviewing all localised advertising campaigns. This last year has seen an increase in the use of web based and social media advertising which is believed to have assisted in the increase in the quality of referrals received.

16. Referral process

Any person over the age of 21 may apply to become a Foster Carer with Lancashire County Council. Referrals are made either via email, via the website or via telephone. Details of people who make enquiries about fostering at any of our marketing events are also taken and the potential applicants are contacted by the duty worker to progress the referral.

Initial responses and advice to enquirers from the recruitment team are welcoming and we aim to make contact within one working day of receiving the enquiry. Applicants who have been convicted of any serious offence against a child or adult are ruled out at that initial enquiry stage. Interest from all members of the community, regardless of relationship status, employment status, class, gender, sexuality, culture, ethnicity or religion are welcomed.

If the initial enquiry is positive, an initial visit is arranged to take place at the applicant's earliest convenience and we aim to undertake this visit within 5 working days wherever possible. The purpose of this visit is to discuss the role of a foster carer and the assessment process, check the home conditions are safe, warm and clean and that there is space for a foster child to sleep, do homework and play and participate as a full family member. If all parties agree that fostering could be suitable for the family, a formal application is made and statutory checks are completed.

Once these are completed satisfactorily an invitation to a training and preparation group ('Skills to Foster') is then made. The preparation training undertaken utilises the Fostering Network 'Skills to Foster' course which includes the following subject areas:

- Child Development
- Separation and Loss
- Working Together
- Safe Care

- Moving On

The service runs two Skills to Foster courses each month. The training is run by an experienced foster care and experienced support workers.

When preparation training is completed, the applicants begin an assessment which includes the requirements set out in Schedule 3 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards in Foster Care (2011), Assessment and approval of Foster Carers 2013 (amendments to Children Act 1989) and Schedule 4 of the Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (where children are fostered by relatives and friends).

All carers are subject to a number of statutory checks and references:

- A DBS for every member of the household 16yrs and over (except looked after children). Returned DBS's must have been seen by a member of the service. If any DBS is not clear it must have been approved by the nominated officer before it can be heard at panel. A Local Authority check for the area the applicants live in
- 2x personal referees interviewed and a written report from this must be submitted to panel along with the assessment
- Need to include references from adult children, partners in past 10 years and any partner where they have co parented
- They must have a medical report (AH1); although this should not be submitted to panel but any health issues should be made clear in the assessment and how they are being managed.
- A health and safety check must be done (stage 1)
- The assessment must address 'standard of living' this is usually done by providing details of outgoings and incomings, details of any debts or County Court Judgements and details of any bankruptcy.
- Address past and present employment (usually done with employment reference)
- Reference needed for any past employment that involves children or vulnerable adults
- A written reference from previous agency if they have fostered or adopted elsewhere within the last 12 months.
- Overseas checks if they have lived abroad
- Ascertain wishes and feelings of the child/ren to be placed or placed if they are old enough. This can be done by the Assessing Social Worker or taken from the Child Care Social Worker or the child's Independent Reviewing Officer as appropriate.

All foster carers are subject to a competency based assessment. The depth of this assessment will depend on the role for which the carer is being assessed, with appropriateness and proportionality being the measure of this. All potential carers are invited to be fully involved in the assessment and to use worksheets which they complete as 'homework' as a tool to look at their competencies. The fostering service uses the Fostering network mainstream foster carer assessment format for the completion of its assessments.

Kinship/connected foster carers are subject to an alternative assessment taking into account the nature of the task and the requirements of Schedule 4 (Care Planning Regulations 2010). The connected carer again is a fostering network form with the assessment being modular based.

The assessment of a foster carer would take place in the applicant's home over a period of six to eight visits, plus reference interviews and interviewing other relevant parties. The Assessing Social Worker would ensure that chronologies, analysis of significant relationships, the family dynamics and characteristics of the foster carers underpin and inform the assessment.

The assessment focuses on the individual or individuals applying to become foster carers and their family. We make a detailed assessment and analysis of their past and present experiences, the skills and competencies which they would bring to their new role and help them to think about their reasons for applying to become foster carers. The assessor will also use the process to assess the applicant's suitability to foster children with differing needs including disabled children and this is made transparent.

The assessment once completed, is presented to a fostering panel. Applicants are encouraged to attend with the Assessing Social Worker.

17. Fostering panels

Due to the increase in connected carers assessments, there are now five fostering panels a month (three of these are joint fostering and adoption panels). These panels are chaired by an independent chairperson and the panel is made up of panel members from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. The membership of the panel must be drawn from a Central List of persons with the appropriate qualifications and/or experiences, including one or more social workers who have at least three years' relevant post-qualifying experience. Lancashire also has a panel advisor whose primary role is to provide professional advice to the panels, ensures that arrangements for panel are coordinated in advance, run smoothly on the day, and that follow-up actions and reports happen as required. The panel advisor is also responsible for ensuring that appropriately experienced and qualified panel members are recruited, inducted and receive training and annual appraisals.

Lancashire also has access to a medical advisor who will, when necessary, provide reports which are made available to all panel members; health professionals sit on panel.

The Fostering Panels were established in May 2002 with the introduction of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 and reviewed in April 2011 following the introduction of Fostering Service Regulations 2011. The membership and processes of the panel meet National Minimum Standards. The appointment of the independent panel chair has resulted in a more robust monitoring and an enhanced quality assurance role.

The panel monitors the range of placements available for children and young people. The panel has clear policies and procedures to meet the Fostering Service National Minimum Standards and Fostering Service Regulations 2011.

All panel members attend annual training and have an annual appraisal. The Fostering Panel provides recommendations to the agency decision maker who makes the final decision following a recommendation by the Fostering Panel. Any appeals can be made within 28 days and may either make further representation to the fostering panel or have their assessment considered by the Independent Review Mechanism who in turn will make a recommendation back to the agency.

The matters which are dealt with at Fostering Panels include:

- Recommendations on the approval of foster carers.
- Recommendations on the terminations of foster carers.
- First review of foster carers or a review that proposes a significant change of status or approval.
- Updated assessments proposing a change of approval status or following allegations.
- The Fostering Service has access to legal advice.

Further information about Fostering Panels is available in the Fostering Handbook.

The Central Fostering Panel membership is as follows:

Chair

1 Independent Chair

Vice Chair

1 Independent Vice Chair

Social Workers

3 Independent Social Workers

1 Lancashire County Council Social Worker

Councillor

1 County Councillor

Young People

2 Independent Young People

Health

1 Independent

Education

3 Independent

Other

- 2 Independent Adopter
- 3 Independent Foster Carers
- 3 Independent Magistrates

Medical Advisor

- 2 Medical Advisors from health

Panel Advisor

- 1 Panel Advisor

Panel Administrator

- 4 Panel Administrators

Agency Decision Makers

- 2 Senior Managers
- 2 Head of Services

18. Support, supervision and training of foster carers

Foster carers are supported to ensure the children placed within their care are encouraged to achieve their maximum potential, feel safe, have stability and are provided with opportunities to learn and develop as individuals. Foster carers are supported to care for the children and young people they look after in a normal, positive family environment. Once applicants are approved as foster carers, they are allocated a supervising social worker who then provides ongoing supervision and support in line with regulations.

Foster carers have formalised and structured supervision sessions with their supervising social worker three times per year. The sessions are opportunities for carers to discuss their support, training and other needs and to make suggestions. The supervision sessions also cover the effectiveness of placements made with carers, check that carers have the correct documentation and understand various processes affecting the children they look after.

They also make at least one unannounced visit per year. All visits and contacts with the foster carer are recorded. When a child is newly in placement these visits increase. We endeavour to undertake an unannounced visit within one week of the child being placed with the foster carers and then monthly support visits are undertaken until the child is settled. Some of these visits are undertaken by the support workers within the team but all work is overseen by the supervising social worker. Increased support visits also take place if the foster carer is experiencing some difficulties or challenges within the placement.

The fostering service believes that it is important that foster carers are able to access support and at the time that they need it. During office hours if a foster carer is unable to contact their own supervising social worker they can contact a Duty supervising social worker for advice and support. Out of office hours, we have a fostering advice line that foster carers can ring and seek advice from qualified fostering social workers. They also have access to our Emergency Duty Team.

Carers are offered the support of a mentor/buddy for the first year following their approval. This support will be available from an experienced foster carer. Once they are approved, all carers will receive a "Welcome Pack", which contains a variety of useful information.

All carers receive a copy of the 'Foster Carer Handbook' as part of their Welcome Pack. The handbook is an easy-to-read manual covering a wide range of relevant topics. The handbook was originally developed by carers and has recently been updated within a loose-leaf format.

We communicate with carers in a variety of ways. Regular newsletters are sent out to provide specific information and carers' own newsletters are circulated by the Fostering Service.

Carers are encouraged to identify their own support needs and the service is responsive to their views.

Carers have been appointed to the Corporate Parenting Board.

Foster carers received a fostering allowance and Lancashire operated a tier payment scheme based on skills and experience. They also received an allowance for the child's birthday and festival celebrations and also for a holiday each year. They are reimbursed for extraordinary travel expenses and/or costs incurred and/or for costly equipment or activities to meet a specific need. If carers are the subject of allegations they are offered the opportunity to access independent support, which is financed by the Directorate. (Information about procedures to deal with investigations into allegations is contained within the Safer Caring booklet which is distributed to carers as part of the Welcome Pack.)

Children Looked after nurses work to coordinate and increase the access of children looked after to health services, including their statutory health assessments. Financial assistance can be made available to support hospital visits.

The foster carer's identification badge can be used as a Passport to Leisure, providing free or reduced cost admission to gyms, sports centres and other leisure activities.

Carers are able to access specific health information, including for example information relating to Hepatitis B, and they can receive financial assistance regarding appropriate immunisation against the virus.

There is an extensive learning and development programme and carers are offered training according to their experience and needs.

Fostering supervising social workers and support workers provide support, assistance and advice to foster carers compiling life story books for children and young people in their care.

Children who are looked after will have priority access to summer and holiday activities.

Carers are supported to attend specialist communication training (such as Makaton or British Sign Language).

Foster carers have been provided with diaries, loose leaf folders and lockable filing storage to enable confidential and safe record keeping.

19. Supporting Connected Person Carers

Connected persons are provided with information about the assessment process and the responsibilities involved in being an approved foster carer.

Existing relationships are given due account in the assessment and approval of connected persons as foster carers.

Connected carers are supported in managing contact issues between the child and family.

Connected persons have equal access to training. Bespoke training for connected persons can be arranged on an individual basis.

Support groups are available to connected persons and where appropriate they are linked to others with similar experiences.

Connected persons are not discriminated against financially.

20. Foster Carer Supervision and Reviews

There are clearly defined protocols and procedures in relation to the process of reviewing and monitoring foster homes. Reviews are chaired by independent reviewing officers and draw on contributions from the Foster Carer and Family, Supervising Social Worker, Child's Social Worker, Looked After Child / Young Person and other professionals involved with the placement. All foster carers are subject to an annual review of their status as foster carers. This is a formal review of the work that they have undertaken during the year and includes an opportunity to reflect on achievements and learning.

A report is presented to the fostering panel in the case of all first reviews, significant changes to the carer's registration or cases of concern. Subsequently, reports where there is a significant change or those following allegations are discussed at the Fostering Panel. Carers are encouraged to attend panel and many avail themselves of this opportunity.

The reviewing process enables carers, placing social workers for children and young people and fostering team staff to comment on placement quality and to discuss any difficulties. In this way support issues can be identified and addressed. A Health and Safety checklist is incorporated into the review, which also includes an appraisal of training and development.

21. Learning and Development

The Fostering Service is a learning organisation and is committed to continuing learning and development of both staff and foster carers.

Staff

Staff development is seen as essential to effective professional practice within the Directorate. All social workers and managers on the fostering teams hold the Certificate in Social Service, or the Certificate of Qualification in Social Work, or the Diploma in Social Work or equivalent.

All new staff receive a comprehensive induction and Lancashire has recently developed a social work academy for social workers new to the authority. There is also a supported programme for newly qualified social workers. There is a programme of mandatory courses which staff must attend.

All training for staff is identified through the Personal Development Planning process and is subject to ongoing evaluation and review. The Children's Social Care County Training Group commissions a programme of appropriate courses for fostering staff and this is negotiated annually with the training unit. Some training events are held jointly between the Fostering Service, Adoption Service and other fieldwork teams.

To promote retention of staff, training and regular supervision is provided. Supervision is within the Directorate's personal development appraisal framework.

An established career grade system is in place which allows suitably qualified and experienced staff to remain practising operationally but being financially rewarded for the expertise that they have developed.

All social workers within Lancashire County Council register with the HCPC meet the requirements of continuous professional development. The Directorate is a member of 'Research in Practice' and is able to access and circulate appropriate research information to staff.

Fostering team staff are also providers of training when specific needs are identified which can best be met by their input.

Staff, including non-qualified staff are able to undertake apprenticeship training, which is supported by the Fostering Service.

Learning and Development for Foster Carers

Lancashire is committed to training foster carers in the skills required to provide high quality care to meet the needs of each child or young person placed in their care. The foster carers' learning and development programme was devised in response to ongoing consultation with the fostering teams as well as the foster carers themselves. The programme aims to build on the initial Skills to Foster Training Programme which is delivered to all new foster carers as part of the foster carer recruitment strategy.

The learning and development needs of foster carers are also considered at each review and supervision session with the supervising social worker. Our training framework provides a flexible and tiered approach, based on the Children's Workforce Development Council standards for foster carers. All foster carers work towards achieving the standards within a tailored programme, with the support of their social workers.

The 4 levels of training move from pre-approval through to induction and more advanced level, including for some carers the achievement of an NVQ Level 3 Caring for Children and Young People award. Varied, interesting courses are provided flexibly including e-learning (online learning) opportunities, which are proving successful.

Courses held in local venues around the county are available and are provided at times which are convenient for foster carers who are caring for children of school age, including evenings and weekends. The courses are usually held at times sensitive to the needs of foster carers to maximise their attendance. All carers are expected to participate in learning and development and some training courses have been identified as mandatory training for all carers. It is expected that all carers should ensure that certain training, for example First Aid, is fully up-to-date.

Some of our experienced carers will offer formal support to other carers with these training requirements for which they will be paid. Similarly, some carers will help us

with our Skills to Foster training and will themselves be specifically trained in a "train the trainers" course. They will also be paid for undertaking this formal role.

Evaluation and quality assurance processes are incorporated into each stage of the commissioning and delivery of training. Attendance on courses has been much improved overall and foster carers and supervising social workers regularly give positive feedback about their training experiences. Feedback indicates that courses are useful and beneficial in enabling carers to carry out their roles more effectively and with good outcomes.

The current training programme for foster carers includes:

AC EDUCATION - Online Learning:

- Prevent,
- Information Governance
- Child Sex Exploitation
- Communicating with Children and Young People
- Equality and Diversity
- Understanding Child Development
- Child Protection Awareness
- Attachment and Loss
- Online Safety and Cyber Bullying
- Attachment and Loss
- Family, Friends and connected Persons Care
- Managing Allegations
- Men in Children's Services
- Resilience and Recovery
- Vulnerable Children Having Vulnerable Children
- Caring for a Child of a Different Ethnicity
- Fostering Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children
- Promoting Positive Contact
- Promoting the Achievements of CLA in Education
- Safer Foster Care
- The Role of a Foster Carer
- Bullying
- Children and Domestic Abuse
- Children and Parental Mental Health Issues
- Children and Parental Substance Misuse
- Self-Harming Behaviour
- Sexual Exploitation and Child Trafficking

- Sexualised Behaviour
- The Impact of Trauma on Sensory Processing
- ADHD and Conduct Disorder
- Autism
- Communicating with Children and Young People
- Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
- Physical and Learning Disabilities
- Understanding Dyslexia and Dyspraxia
- Working with Disabled Children and Young People
- Cyber Bullying
- Pornography and
- Social Media, Selfies and Sexting

Face to Face Training

- Child Development Attachment and Promoting Resilience
- Conference – Working Together to ensure Educational success for Children and Young People Looked After
- Dealing with Allegations
- Effective Communication and Keeping Written Records
- First Aid for Foster Carers
- Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)
- Healthy Living Issues
- Helping Children Stay in Touch
- Introduction to Safeguarding Child Protection
- Level 2 Safeguarding-Religion and Culture
- Keeping Children Safe Online
- Foster Carers Role in Life Story and Creating Memories
- Nurturing Attachment Programme (14 weeks)
- Men in Fostering
- Parents Protect
- Preparation for Leaving Care
- Promoting Positive Behaviour and Relationships
- Record and Resource Book Route Workshop
- Recognising and Respecting Differences, Equality and Diversity
- Risk Assessment for Foster Carers
- Staying Put
- DAY 1 Therapeutic Caring SCAYT Training
- Day 2 Therapeutic Caring SCAYT Training
- QCF level 3 Health and Social Care Pathway
- Conflict Awareness
- Substance Misuse Awareness

- Parent and Child Placements
- Autism Awareness
- ADHD Training
- TSD workshops

SCAYT also facilitate a 'nurturing and attachment' course for foster carers.

22. Services provided for children placed with the Fostering Service

Participation and Consultation

All children placed by Lancashire County Council receive, as a minimum, statutory visits undertaken by their Social Workers, in accordance with legislation. The Lancashire Children's Rights Service provides independent advocacy and Independent Visiting, when required, for looked after children.

There is an established Participation Officer post whose role is to ensure the voice of Children looked after and Care Leavers reaches senior managers and county councillors who act as "corporate parents" to those young people. The opinions of children, young people and carers help to inform policies and developments.

There is an established Contact Card System where Children and Young People can make their views, including complaints, known and receive a response. The young people representatives have voting rights on the elected member Corporate Parenting Board (CPB).

There is also an annual Celebration Event (Proud) for children who are looked after.

A new way of seeking the views of children and young people who are looked after has been developed by using an app called 'Mind of My Own'. This was developed by the participation service (including young people).

Lancashire is committed to providing services to support children looked after, including the provision of financial support. All children looked after should have an agreed permanence plan by their second review and the Adoption and Children Act 2002 increased the range of permanence options available with the introduction of the Special Guardianship Order.

Education

We help children looked after to achieve their potential in education. The Virtual School for Looked After Children and Education of Looked After Children Team aim to improve the educational achievements and enhance the personal and social development of looked after children. Those of ages 3-18 are monitored under the remit of the virtual school, with their education responsibilities remaining with the named school/provider where they are on roll. The Head teacher for vulnerable and

challenging groups provide various advice and support functions in relation to schools and other education providers, education services, carers and social care teams.

The service ensures that carers assist in the completion of the personal educational plans of children in their care. The contribution carers make to young people's education plans is valued as an essential part of joint working to improve their educational achievements and attendance.

Every school in Lancashire has a designated teacher for Children Looked After and training is provided to update them on their role.

Children who are looked after attending university are financially supported. Supported apprenticeships are available to children looked after.

Children looked after can access a holiday abroad for educational purposes in secondary school years, additional to any normal holiday arrangements made.

We help children who are looked after to find employment and accommodation when they are leaving care. Lancashire has a well-established Leaving Care Service. Care Leavers have access to support and specific resources provided under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

Health

Children and Young People are encouraged to access timely and appropriate health assessments and systems are in place to help them to do so. Health of children looked after nurses are well established. Their role is to co-ordinate and promote healthy outcomes for looked after children.

Children looked after nurses are accessible to young people and available to advise carers on medical issues. Additional funding for an increase in the number of nurses has recently been agreed.

A "dental pathway" exists which successfully ensures that young people have a dentist.

23. The Children's Guide(s) to the Fostering Service

All children who are placed in a foster home, will receive a booklet which informs them of what the service is for, what it might feel like to live in another family home, the services that children/young people can expect from a foster carer (and the service) and what to do if they are unhappy about any aspect of their care. Three booklets are available for differing age ranges/reading abilities and types of placement and reviewed regularly, with young people, to ensure the details are updated.

24. Monitoring and evaluation of the service

Lancashire's Fostering Service aims to continually improve and develop with the key aim to improve outcomes for children and families. High priority is placed on monitoring and evaluation of the service and gaining service user feedback to use in service development.

The performance of the service is monitored and analysed in the annual service plan. The Fostering Panel performs a quality assurance function to uphold best practice and this is analysed and evaluated within the annual fostering panel report. The panel adviser provides support, advice and quality assurance to the Fostering panel. The adviser manages the Panel arrangements and facilitates panels training needs and supports the Independent Panel Chair. All formal placement disruptions are presented at fostering panel and analysis is provided.

Staff at all levels are provided with regular supervision by their line manager and consultation is also available for very complex cases.

Monthly audits are undertaken to ascertain the quality of social work practice and service delivery, and inform fostering service improvements.

Monthly performance clinics are held with managers within the service to review data and performance and identify issues and themes and look at solutions.

The child's statutory review and the foster care reviews along with the function of the Independent Reviewing Officer has a quality assurance role.

25. Feedback from service users

Lancashire's Fostering Service endeavours to gain feedback from applicants throughout their approval process and from carers and children during their fostering career. This includes:

- Feedback requested by fostering panel on the views of applicants on the assessment process.
- Questionnaires following the preparation course for prospective carers.
- The statutory children in care review ensures that the child and birth parent's views are fully explored.

The agency places high priority on direct work with children and provide the opportunity for them to explore their feelings and give their views. Children are always seen alone by the Supervising Social Worker during the unannounced visit and where age appropriate their views are sought. Feedback from child's social worker, child, IRO and carers at least annually for each carers review

Evaluation forms are completed with foster carers before and after the nurturing and attachment course facilitated by the SCAYT+ service. Feedback forms are also required to be completed after each training course.

The views of foster carers are gathered during regular supervisions with an allocated Fostering Social Worker, and fed through to Practice Managers/Consultant Social Workers.

Exit interviews are completed when a foster carer resigns so we can pick up key themes and implement changes and ensure support for existing foster carers.

Each locality has identified foster carers who are representatives of the service. On a quarterly basis these representative meet with managers from the fostering service to discuss service developments, seek feedback from foster carers and raise any issues.

26. Complaints, Comments, Compliments and Allegations

The Fostering Service is a continuously learning organisation. Complaints, comments, compliments and allegations can provide opportunities to review services and promote service developments.

Complaints

The Fostering Service has a policy in place to manage complaints from both children, young people and adults, including foster carers. There is an established system for children and young people who are looked after to make complaints and/or comments about the service they receive. The Complaints Procedure requires staff to attempt to resolve complaints informally, whenever appropriate. However, when complaints do need to be dealt with formally there is a clear policy and procedural guidance available.

Complaints by children, young people and carers are taken seriously and investigated thoroughly lessons learned from any recommendations.

The Directorate produces two leaflets 'Let us Know what you Think of Us' and 'Your Choice, Your Voice' available to all carers. Foster carers are given information about the complaints procedure as part of the Welcome Pack which each carer receives.

- Stage 1: We try and resolve problems by front line staff and their managers listening carefully to complaints, offering advice and using skills and common sense to resolve the difficulty.

We aim to resolve complaints at this stage in 10 working days (although this can be extended to 20 working days in the interest of conducting a proper investigation).

- Stage 2: If it is not possible to resolve a complaint at a local level (stage 1) then complainants may use the stage 2 of the complaints procedure which involves an investigator, independent of the service, investigating the complaint together with an independent person.
- Stage 3: If the complainant still remains dissatisfied the complainant may take the complaint to an independent panel.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the complaint he/she may, in some circumstances, seek the intervention of the Local Government Ombudsman.

Where appropriate the Directorate offers mediation as a positive means of resolving disagreements through a neutral person – the mediator. Mediators are qualified and experienced at helping people who disagree find solutions to their common problems. Mediation is a confidential process; the mediators are impartial and independent of the service which is the subject of complaint.

Foster carers, in some circumstances, may access the 'Social Care Complaints and Representations for Children, Young People and Others Policy and Procedure'. The policy is not just about complaints; it gives an opportunity for compliments and other views to be forwarded.

In some circumstances it may not be appropriate for the foster carers to access the Children Act complaints procedure (if the complaint does not relate to a specific child). In these circumstances foster carers and prospective foster carers may have access to the Corporate Complaints Procedure.

In certain circumstances prospective foster carers and foster carers may have access to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

Comments and Compliments

The Fostering Service values its staff and carers and regularly seeks the views of foster carers and staff to inform service developments. The service facilitates local and county fostering forums to consult with foster carers.

A record is maintained of compliments regarding the services or individuals within the Fostering Service.

Staff and carers are acknowledged for their contribution to the service and acknowledgments are sent when an individual has been complimented.

The service shares good practice in order to learn and develop.

Allegations

Through high quality, training and support we minimise the risk of complaints or allegations against foster carers. Allegations include when an individual, it may be a child, parent, young person or another person makes an allegation that the foster carer has harmed a child. If such an allegation is made then the allegation will be thoroughly and fairly investigated. The relevant government department will be made aware of the allegation.

Whilst the allegation is being investigated the foster carer will be supported by their own support worker. Foster carer's may wish to have independent support and advice whilst an allegation is investigated. In this case the service will commission an independent supporter from an independent organisation.

The Fostering Service is a member of the Fostering Network, a national organisation, and this organisation is also able to provide help and support.

27. Fairness, equality and diversity

The Fostering Service works within Lancashire's Equality and diversity framework. The key aims are to ensure:

- Employees and service users alike are treated equally with fairness and respect and that their diversity is both valued and celebrated;
- That our working practices are characterised by flexibility, efficiency and excellence, the results of a supportive management style that enables its diverse work force to realise their full potential in serving our customers;
- That our employee profile reflects diversity at every level of the organisation, and posts will be filled through a fair system of recruitment and promotion.

Our recruitment literature and materials promote diversity and this issue forms part of preparation training and assessment.

We are committed to anti discriminatory practice and providing a service sensitive to individual's culture, beliefs, sexuality, gender and disability. We recognise the culture, religious and racial origins of children for whom we are responsible and celebrate these origins. We value and respect the children we look after for their individuality and unique personality. We have high aspirations for all the children we look after.

We welcome enquiries from prospective foster carers irrespective of their racial origins, age, disability, gender sexuality or marital status.

28. Inspection

The local Ofsted office responsible for inspecting our services is:

Ofsted,
Royal Exchange Buildings,
St Ann's Square,
Manchester,
M2 7LA Phone: 0300 123 4666
Text: 60085
Email: enquiries@ofstead.