



Blackburn with Darwen Children's Services

Statement of Purpose for the Fostering Service



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1. Introduction

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards of 2011 form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of fostering services.

Regulation 3(1) requires each fostering agency to produce a written statement of purpose which sets out the aims and objectives of the fostering service and contains detailed information on the services and facilities it provides.

The statement of purpose must be made available to the Chief Inspector (Ofsted), to those working for the fostering service, prospective and approved foster carers, children placed in foster care and their parents, and should also be published on the Council website.

Regulation 4 states that this statement of purpose must be kept under review and revised when appropriate.

Standard 16 aims to ensure that:

- Children, their parents, foster carers, staff and the responsible authority/placing authority are clear about the aims and objectives of the fostering service and what services and facilities it provides.
- The fostering service's operation meets those aims and objectives in the statement of purpose.

Standard 16.1 requires that the fostering service has a clear statement of purpose which is available to, and understood by, foster carers, staff and children and is reflected in any policies, procedures and guidance. It is available to the responsible authority and any parent or person with parental responsibility for a child in foster care.

Standard 16.2 decrees that the aims and objectives of the statement of purpose are child- focused and show how the service will meet outcomes for children.

Blackburn with Darwen's fostering service statement of purpose has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of these regulations and standards and will be a useful source of information for staff, foster carers, prospective foster carers, children and young people placed by the service and their parents.

2. Principles and Values

The principles which underpin the policies and practice of the fostering service are consistent with the Vision and Values of the Council, the Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 2004. The principles are consistent with the basic premise of the Human Rights Act 1998: that all individuals have the right to a full and private family life.

The fostering service aims to provide services which help all young people to achieve the five outcomes described in 'Every Child Matters':

- ✓ Being healthy
- ✓ Staying safe
- ✓ Enjoying and achieving
- ✓ Making a positive contribution
- ✓ Achieving economic wellbeing

Values

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

Children

- The welfare of the child is the paramount consideration. Children have the right to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs in childhood and beyond.
- All children deserve the opportunity to achieve their full potential irrespective of their gender, sexuality, ethnic origin, disability, culture, race, religion or language.
- Children have the right to understand what is happening to them and why; to know what is proposed in their care plan; and to understand the implications for their future.
- Children have the right to express their wishes and feelings and participate in discussions about their future; and to make representations and complaints and receive help to do so.

- Delay in decision-making can be damaging to a child's life chances. Unless delay is assessed as beneficial and in the best interests of the child, decision-making must be within the child's timescales.

Parents

- Parents/legal carers should be treated with respect and fairness irrespective of their age, gender, sexuality, ethnic origin, disability, culture, race, religion or language.
- Parents have a right to full information regarding the plan for their child; to participate in the decision-making process; and to have account taken of their wishes and views.
- Parents have the right to make representations and complaints and to full information on how to do so.

Foster carers, applicant foster carers and their families

- Foster carers, applicant foster carers and their families have the right to be considered equally and with equal rigour irrespective of their age, gender, sexuality, ethnic origin, disability, culture, race, religion or language in a way which is consistent with the needs of children requiring foster care.
- Foster carers and applicant foster carers have the right to make representations and complaints and to be supported to do so.

3. Council policies

The Council has a full range of procedures available to the public via the internet or on request.

It is Council policy to:

- Prioritise support for children to remain in the care of their own or their extended family.
- Place children who require alternative care within a family wherever possible.
- Make every attempt to keep siblings together.
- Consider the contact needs of every child/young person.
- Provide every child in need of an alternative family with a holistic, multi-agency assessment in order to determine individual need and inform placement choice. The assessment will consider the linguistic, cultural, religious, health, emotional and educational needs of the child and the wishes and views of the child and his/her family.
- Place children in families of the same race and culture wherever possible.
- Promote secure and enduring attachments between children and their carers through legal permanence, i.e. with their own families, their extended families or through adoption. Where this is not possible, the emphasis will be on the achievement of placement stability.
- Where long-term foster care is the placement of choice: carefully match every child/young person with a carer capable of meeting his/her assessed needs.
- Treat everyone with whom it deals in a fair and respectful manner, ensuring that service users and foster carers are not disadvantaged in their contact with the department on the grounds of age,

gender, sexuality, ethnic origin, disability, culture, race, religion, social class or marital or medical status.

- Respect the ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic needs of each child/young person looked after and respect the needs arising from a child's gender, sexuality or disability.
- Recruit a sufficient range and number of foster carers to meet the individual needs of each child requiring an alternative family and provide placement choice.
- Minimise the effect on a child/young person of any disability and assist him/her to lead as normal a life as possible.
- Monitor the ethnicity of all children and young people it looks after, its pool of carers and the appropriateness of placements made.
- Work in partnership and consult with the child/young person, the parents and foster carers in decision-making and care planning for the child/young person insofar as it is consistent with the safety and wellbeing of the child.
- Consult with foster children, their parents and foster carers in order to improve the quality of, and develop, the fostering service.

Corporate Parenting Promises

The council acts as 'corporate parent' to all the children in its care, underpinned by the aim to act as a good parent would.

These promises have been developed by children and young people and endorsed by councillors in Blackburn with Darwen:

- We promise to involve you in decisions that affect you and to treat you with respect.
- We promise to find you a safe, comfortable and caring place to live.
- We promise to provide you with a quality education which meets your needs.
- We promise to meet all your health needs.
- We promise to encourage and support you to access leisure, learning and training facilities.
- We promise to involve you in decisions that affect you and to treat you with respect.
- We promise to help you prepare for adulthood, through support and advice, as you leave care.
- We promise to provide well trained, experienced and caring staff and carers to look after you.

4. Aims and objectives

The Council's fostering service aims to:

- Provide a service which is managed ethically and efficiently by those with the appropriate skills and experience and who are suitable to work with children.
- Provide a service which considers and promotes the potential of relatives and friends (connected persons) as foster carers for those children unable to live with their parents.
- Provide a range of foster carers to ensure placement choice and the placement of children and sibling groups in families who can meet their assessed needs in terms of gender, sexuality, ethnic origin, disability, culture, race, religion or language.
- Administer the fostering panel in accordance with the requirements of the current fostering services regulations and national minimum standards.

- Ensure each child/young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting his/her assessed needs.
- Consider all foster carer applications equally and with equal rigour, irrespective of the applicants' age, gender, sexuality, ethnic origin, disability, culture, race and religion, consistent with the needs of children requiring foster care.
- Provide applicant foster carers with high quality preparation groups and training which inform, educate, develop and prepare them for the fostering task; and provide ongoing training and support to approved foster carers and their families so that they can carry out their role effectively and improve their level of skills.
- Ensure the safety and protection of foster children from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation and ensure the provision of nurturing and loving environments which promote the foster child's sense of worth, self-esteem and emotional wellbeing.
- Provide professional support, advice and guidance enabling foster carers to:
 - Promote the foster child's sense of identity, including his/her racial identity; promote contact between the foster child and his/her family; and promote the physical and mental health of all foster children.
 - Provide foster children with opportunities and encouragement to pursue their talents, interests and hobbies; and promote the education achievements of foster children so that they gain maximum benefit from education, training and employment opportunities.
 - Assist foster children in the development of skills to deal with discrimination and bullying and to assist them to become competent to look after themselves and cope with everyday living.
 - Ensure that each child with a disability receives the services and support to help him/her to maximise his/her potential and to lead as full a life as possible.

5. Team structure

Management of the fostering service is the responsibility of the Service Leader (Placement Services). The Service Leader reports to the Head of Service who in turn reports to the Director of Children's Services.

The Service Leader has overall responsibility for strategic development of the fostering service in conjunction with the team managers. The team managers have day-to-day management responsibility for the service. The advanced practitioner has specific developmental responsibilities across fostering and child care teams

Fostering team

The fostering service comprises of 3 teams, two mainstream fostering teams and a fostering support team. The two teams work flexibly across the service undertaking family and friends and mainstream fostering assessments, supervision and support of carers. The two teams each have a manager, share an Advanced Practitioner who is responsible for practice development and 9 full time and two part time social workers. They also share a strategy officer, recruitment officer and duty officer. The strategy officer is responsible for the Lets Foster website, social media and for collating, analysing and presenting data for quarterly reports.

Both team managers have undertaken management training and achieved awards at NVQ Level 4 or equivalent. All team members are appropriately qualified to work with children/young people, their families and foster carers. Two have the full post-qualifying social work award and the practice teaching award. The team offers student placements to social work degree students as well as contributing to the induction of other social work staff.

Fostering Support Service

The Fostering Support Service comprises of a three Fostering Support Officers. One who supports family and friends foster carers, one who is linked to the Adolescent Support Unit and supports young people aged 11 and over and their carers and one who supports the 6 to 11 age group . A Therapeutic Family Worker (0.5) assesses and provides therapeutic support across the full age range. This is a new and evolving service which is developing to improve placement stability.

6. Fostering Service

6.1 Functions

The following foster care services are provided:

- Recruitment, training and assessment of prospective foster carers.
- Short-term planned and emergency placements for children who need to be looked after by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council.
- Short break placements for children with disabilities, children whose families need additional support and to support the main foster placement.
- Long-term and permanent foster care placements for children who cannot return home, where this has been identified as the most appropriate care plan.
- Family finding for children identified as in need of long-term or permanent foster placements.
- A managed matching process for the placement of children with long-term or permanent foster carers that ensures that the child's needs have been fully considered in relation to the placement.
- Support, supervision and review of foster carers.
- Foster placement support that can include short breaks, outreach support, telephone on call support (out of hours), multi agency drop in.
- A comprehensive training programme for approved foster carers.
- Organisation and administration of the Council's fostering panel.
- Provision of information, advice, consultation and training for other professionals on fostering issues.
- Contribution to policies, procedures and practice guidance in relation to children looked after, fostering and adoption.
- Commissioning of foster placements in the independent and voluntary sector and liaison with agencies in relation to services provided for the Directorate.

6.2 Number of children placed



Recent figures show that, of 346 children and young people cared for by Blackburn with Darwen, 233 were in foster care. The majority were with the Council's own carers: 148 with mainstream foster carers and 32 with Family & Friends carers. The remaining 53 were either in foster placements provided by independent agencies or provided by other local authorities..

6.3 Number of foster carers



Recent figures show that Blackburn with Darwen had 119 foster families, of which 16 (13%) were Family and Friends.

6.4 Family and Friends foster carers (Connected Persons foster care)



Currently, the Council has 16 Family and Friends foster families caring for just over twice as many children and young people. Family and Friends carers are a unique group of people who look after children and young people known to them, usually as relatives. Such placements may arise in an emergency or in a planned way. When a suitable relative or friend comes forward to look after a child or young person, serious consideration is given to assessing whether this is a viable alternative to placing the child or young person with mainstream foster carers or in residential care, i.e. with carers they do not know.

There are many different informal and formal arrangements for Family and Friends care, all of which have different legal implications. These arrangements are discussed at the time of placement. The process and procedures are explained by social workers and a supervising social worker or fostering support officer from the fostering team.

Family and Friends carers are assessed and approved at the fostering panel in the same way as other foster carers. Due to the complexity of the task, Family and Friends carers have access to training and are encouraged to attend their own support group.

Family and Friends carers have a supervising social worker, who advises, supports and supervises them. The supervising social worker conducts an annual review which is presented to the panel for continued approval. There is an expectation that Family and Friends carers adhere to the fostering regulations and national minimum standards and provide a safe and healthy environment in which the child/young person thrives and achieves the five outcomes.

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Foster Placement Support Service

This initiative was introduced on 1st April 2015 primarily as a support service to foster families where there was a young person aged 11+ in placement in the household. The service has now developed to provide support to placements across the 6 + age range. There are 3 fostering support officers in post. One is based at the ASU (Adolescent Support Unit) who acts as a support to foster families where targeted support is required for the 11+ age group, one supports family and friends placements and the other supports the younger age group. There is also a 0.5 Therapeutic Family Worker with a background in children's emotional and mental health who undertakes assessment and provides support to children and carers. There is an out of hours on call service and a regular multi agency drop in for carers to obtain advice directly from professionals in education, health, leaving care. A training programme specific to the needs of adolescents has been developed which includes an annual conference for foster carers. In 2016/17 the conference will focus on placement stability.

7. Recruitment of Foster Carers



One of the fostering team managers currently has specific responsibility for the recruitment of mainstream foster carers. There is joint responsibility for the management of the fostering service budgets, including a recruitment budget.

The recruitment officer deals with enquiries from prospective carers and also promotes the fostering service.

The recruitment and retention strategies are amended as required and at least annually by the fostering strategy officer.

Recruitment campaigns aim to provide both a realistic and positive portrayal of foster care. The campaigns are designed to generate relevant and quality responses. A number of foster carers have become 'recruitment champions' for the service and participate in events and information evenings.

Recruitment activity

Information points and evenings

Literature to advertise fostering and encourage applications is available at a variety of key locations – e.g. Darwen Leisure Centre and Asda. Recruitment stands may be set up from time to time to raise the profile of fostering. Several information evenings recruitment events in the community are held during the year to provide an opportunity for potential applicants to meet a cross-section of foster carers and supervising social workers face-to-face.

Local radio

BBC Radio Lancashire has shown a commitment to supporting national campaigns such as Foster Care Fortnight and usually invites Blackburn with Darwen foster carers and Council representatives to be interviewed on air in order to give a local flavour to it, which creates an opportunity for free advertising. There have also been displays in the radio station's exhibition area, thereby providing a shop front for publicity about foster care.

The service also regularly commissions radio advertising from other commercial radio stations like The BEEB and Leisure Radio which runs fostering adverts in all council leisure facilities hourly.

Blackburn with Darwen fostering website and social media

The fostering website WWW.LETSFOSTER.CO.UK is designed to offer information on fostering in an engaging way; to answer frequently asked questions; and to encourage anyone to register their interest by way of a simple email to the recruitment officer. The site is continually refreshed and updated with case studies and interviews with foster carers.

The service uses social media to advertise events and raise awareness of fostering. In 2016/17 an independent media agency has been commissioned to do a targeted social media campaign parts of which will focus on 4 key recruitment priorities – permanent placements for older children, placements for children with complex health needs and disabilities, placements for mothers with their babies and placements for siblings.

Local press

Periodically, the Lancashire Telegraph, Citizen and other local papers run articles on fostering based on accounts of real life experiences of fostering from the perspective of carers and children of all ages. Such articles are often based on Blackburn with Darwen foster carers (with due regard for confidentiality). The services also commission advertising, particularly digital advertising via Radio and Newsquest several times a year.

Local businesses



Mutually beneficial links with local businesses are sought to raise the profile of fostering. On one occasion, events in partnership with a local company were the subject of a feature on ITV local news. Clearly, free, widespread publicity of this type is exceptionally valuable and welcome.

Raising awareness of fostering & adoption in the Asian community

In order to be in a position to offer foster placements that best match the cultural requirements of the whole range of looked after children, it is important for Blackburn with Darwen to have a significant number of Asian foster carers. Local campaigns with the assistance of the Muslim Welfare Institute and the Lancashire Council of Mosques have assisted in the recruitment of Asian heritage carers. The service is seeking to recruit out of borough placements in the next year for children waiting for permanence.

Regional campaign

The fostering service has been part of a regional recruitment campaign which came to an end but is to be re-launched in 2016/17. The campaign known as 'You Can Foster' is a collaboration on foster carer recruitment between a number of North West local authorities. The aim of the regional campaign was to encourage people to foster for local authorities rather than for independent fostering agencies. There is a dedicated website, publicity material and TV advertising to support the regional campaign..

Foster Care Fortnight 2015



Foster Care Fortnight is a national initiative held annually to promote fostering and the need to recruit more foster carers across the country. It attracts considerable media interest and is often the catalyst for TV and radio programmes and documentaries about children in care and those who care for them.

Blackburn with Darwen's campaign for 2016/17 will build on the 'take a selfie, change a life' theme developed in 2015/16 as the photo booth proved invaluable in providing pictures and news for Facebook posting. All campaign literature is in keeping with this theme and the booth will continue to be part of this year's events.

Fostering Fortnight will start with a Family Fun Day in the town centre on a busy Saturday and will be followed up with a 'giant selfie' involving local celebrity 'Mr Selfie'. To follow up Fostering Fortnight, the team will take part in two major local events, Race for Life and the Flower Festival at the Cathedral which is a 4 day event. The booth will accompany the Lets Foster stands to maximise opportunities for posting on social media.

A digital media campaign has been commissioned to commence in July 2016 to focus on a number of key priority placement needs. These include permanent placements for older children, placements for children with complex health needs and disabilities, placements for mothers with their babies and placements for siblings. The campaign will use 'Google Ads' to target potential carers.



Recruitment and pre-approval training

The recruitment of carers is carried out in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations and the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (both 2011). Amendments of these regulations came into force in July 2013 and approval and assessment processes have been amended accordingly to reflect a new stage 1 and 2 process.

Recruitment activity and pre-approval training courses are planned to occur so as to reduce delay between the stages of pre-approval (from first contact to receipt of information, receipt of the expression of interest form, initial visit and on to initial training). In general, training courses are planned in advance for each year and additional courses are arranged if the need arises.

Carers are recruited to provide short- and long-term placements plus short breaks for children with disabilities and additional needs or who require a break from their main carer to promote placement stability. Foster carers are also recruited for the treatment foster care programmes.

The fostering service recruitment strategy is operated in partnership with Blackburn with Darwen Foster Carers Association.

Initial response

The fostering team operates a duty system whereby the recruitment officer or one of its supervising social workers responds to enquiries from potential applicants within 24 hours. During this first contact basic information is obtained and prospective foster carers have the opportunity to discuss the type of fostering they may be suitable for. When this indicates to both applicant and duty officer that the application may be appropriate, an information pack is sent to the applicant within five working days.

On receipt of the expression of interest form, a visit is arranged with the prospective carer. During this initial home visit, the supervising social worker provides more details of the nature of the fostering task; the competencies, skills and aptitudes required of carers; the assessment process; and timescales, in order to help the applicant make a well-informed decision on whether to proceed. Should the applicant wish to do so, this is considered to be the end of the recruitment process and the start of the assessment process.

Assessment

The two stage assessment process consists of a number of components and requires the consent of applicants for checks to be undertaken on themselves and any members of the household over 18 years. These include checks with the DBS, probation Service, the Department of Health and other Children's Services Departments.

Applicants are required to provide two referees who will provide written references and be available for interview as part of the assessment process; and to have a full medical examination by their GP, whose report is made available to the agency medical advisor for comments.

Contact will also be made with applicants' ex-partners and adult children where relevant so that appropriate interviews can take place.

Where applicants have children, contact will be made with schools.

At stage 2, assessments of each applicant's child care experience, skills and competencies and their social and environmental background are conducted by qualified social workers from the fostering service.

Typically, the supervising social worker visits the applicant's home on 6 – 8 occasions to meet and collect information about all members of the household. The information gained forms the basis of an assessment report compiled in accordance with the Form F format published either by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering [BAAF] or the Fostering Network.

Assessment will include completion of a health and safety checklist, computer safety assessment and pet assessments where relevant.

The purpose of the assessment is to ensure that children are appropriately safeguarded and that applicants have the skills, qualities and competence to meet children's needs.

Applicants must undertake preparation training prior to approval. The training covers the responsibilities of foster carers and is based on the "Skills to Foster" materials provided by Fostering Network. All applicants receive the training manual to support the course. Family and Friends applicants are encouraged to attend this preparatory training specific to their needs.

Apart from references – which are confidential – the content of the assessment report is shared with applicants. The assessment in its entirety is presented to the Council’s fostering panel. The attendance of applicants is encouraged and facilitated by the fostering service.

Approval

The fostering panel is established by the local authority fostering service and administered in accordance with the requirements of the current Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards. The approval process should take no longer than 8 months.

8. Fostering Panel

The fostering panel aims to:

- Provide a body of experienced and skilled personnel suitable to work with children and perform its functions ethically and efficiently in accordance with the requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards 2011.
- Provide expertise in child and foster care, child health and education issues; and make independent recommendations regarding approvals, terms of approval, continuing approval and termination of approval of foster carers.
- Ensure that the assessment of foster carer applicants complies with the requirements of the current fostering services regulations and national minimum standards.
- Give sensitive consideration to, and promote the potential of, relatives or friends as foster carers for those children unable to live with their parents.
- Advise and support the local authority in the provision of a range of foster carers so that children can be placed with families who can meet their assessed needs in terms of gender, sexuality, ethnic origin, disability, culture, race, religion or language and the placement of siblings together.
- Ensure each child/young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting his/her assessed needs and that placement decisions always consider the child’s assessed ethnic, cultural, racial, religious and linguistic needs and match these as closely as possible with a foster family.
- Consider all foster carer applicants equally and with equal rigour, irrespective of their age, gender, sexuality, ethnic origin, disability, culture, race and religion, consistent with the needs of the children requiring foster care.
- Provide advice on the training and support needs of foster carers and their families in order that they can carry out their role effectively and improve their level of skills.
- Ensure the safety and protection of foster children from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation; and the provision of nurturing and loving environments which promote the foster child’s sense of worth, self-esteem and emotional wellbeing.
- Oversee Exemption and Change of Approval paperwork.

The functions and processes of the fostering panel

Panel Members are taken from a central list which includes social workers who can sit on both the main and review panel.

Prior to appointment, all fostering panel members will be subject to statutory checks to ensure their suitability to work within children's services and must sign a confidentiality agreement. Panel members also sign an agreement which sets out the respective responsibilities of both the member and the service. Termination of membership of the panel will be effected in writing at any time in the event that a panel member is no longer considered a suitable member.

The fostering panel sits monthly with panel dates scheduled a year in advance. Additional 'emergency' panels are convened if necessary. The attendance of foster carers or prospective foster carers is encouraged and facilitated by the fostering service.

Panel papers are distributed to panel members by secure tablet. Panel members are responsible for the secure storage of their tablet prior to the panel meeting.

The fostering panel ensures that assessments of applicant foster carers are in accordance with the requirements of the fostering services regulations and national minimum standards. It will make recommendations in respect of the approval, continuing approval, and withdrawal of approval; and on the training needs of foster carers. It will also consider proposed matches of children and carers.

The panel's decision-making is based on the principle of majority voting. In the event that a panel decision is not unanimous, the minutes will record any opposing views to those of the majority and these will be drawn to the specific attention of the agency decision-maker. In circumstances where the decision is tied and the panel cannot through any other means reach a majority consensus, then the chair's vote will prevail and the situation will be drawn to the specific attention of the agency decision-maker.

The fostering panel will also maintain written records of its proceedings and the reasons for its recommendations. These are signed and dated by the chair or vice chair of the panel. The minutes of the fostering panel meeting and its recommendations are forwarded to the agency decision-maker and outcome letters of his/her decision are sent to applicants/foster carers within seven working days of the panel meeting. A copy of the outcome letter is placed on the file of the applicant/foster carer.

One copy of the minutes of the fostering panel is stored securely by the panel administrator. If the panel and the agency decision-maker make the recommendation not to approve or continue to approve, the applicant/foster carer will receive a letter detailing the available options, which are to:

- a) Accept the decision of the agency decision-maker, or
- b) Appeal against the decision within 28 days, or
- c) Submit an application to the Independent Review Mechanism for a review of the decision. The letter outlines and explains the process. (see '19. Independent Review Mechanism')

9. Training

It is recognised that fostering has become increasingly demanding and complex. Training is viewed as an increasingly important element of our support to foster carers.

The fostering service is committed to the provision of good quality training that is accessible and relevant and which enables carers to develop their skills; and also to supporting carers to receive formal recognition of their skills, knowledge and experience.

The training programme is set each year by the fostering team managers in consultation with the workforce development team. The training provided reflects an analysis of training needs for foster carers' annual reviews and the input of supervising social workers and foster carers. Staff members within the fostering service may themselves provide training and certain training may be commissioned from people with relevant expertise.

In addition, more specialised training may be commissioned for individual carers if they have a particular need relating to a specific child.

KEEP – an evidence based training programme for foster carers commenced in February 2014. Six cohorts of carers have now been through this programme and the service will continue to run at least one programme annually to enable new carers to attend.

In 2014 Department for Education is sponsored the delivery of training to foster carers called 'Nurturing Attachments' The Fostering Service followed this up with a second course delivered by an in house psychologist and a supervising social worker January to may 2016. The service will run this course annually.



During their first year, mainstream hoped all newly-approved foster carers are required to complete the TSD Standards. (short break carers and Friends and Family have 18 months to complete).

With the benefit of one to two years' practical experience to draw on, foster carers are eligible to apply to study at Blackburn College for the QCF Diploma (Level 3) in Social Care (Children).

Overall, the training provided is designed to encompass some of the following: (which includes Mandatory Services

- Child protection
- Safe caring
- Managing difficult behaviour
- Managing and promoting contact
- Identity and self-esteem
- Valuing diversity
- Health and safety
- First aid
- Health care of foster children
- Education of foster children
- Drugs awareness
- Missing from Home
- Sexual Exploitation
- Foetal Alcohol
- Moving Children on Risk Assessment
- Young People moving to independence

A healthy homes training booklet has been produced during this last year, with very positive feedback. A second booklet, along with an Induction Pack is currently in production.

A review of training was undertaken during Quarter 2016/17 to explore ways of improving foster carer attendance. Foster carers are regularly consulted about training as part of the six monthly fostering forum. From September 2016 training will be delivered via a number of full day conferences reducing the number of short courses.

10. Support

It is recognised that appropriate support for foster carers and their families is vitally important to successful placements. Identifying and arranging the necessary level of support occurs either at the matching stage or, in the case of an emergency placement, at the placement planning meeting. Support needs are monitored by the foster carers' supervising social worker during the course of the placement.

Every foster carer has a named supervising social worker appropriate to the terms of their approval, e.g. short break foster carers are supported by a social worker from the short break fostering service.

The named supervising social worker provides foster carers with information and advice through telephone contact and home visits on request. Home visits are undertaken at least at six-weekly intervals. Supervising social workers also visit at least every three months for the purposes of more formal

supervision. The named supervising social worker also undertakes an annual review of the foster carers, identifying their individual training needs and completing a personal development plan.

Supervising social workers ensure that foster carers know, understand and comply with the department's policies and practice guidance. They will assist in identifying their training needs and advise in respect of practical problems such as finance or equipment.

The supervising social worker will ensure foster carers promote the educational achievement and health of their foster children and inform them of additional support systems and the means of accessing these for children in their care.

The primary responsibility of the child's social worker is to the child in placement. S/he will visit the child in accordance with statutory requirements, regularly seeing the child alone, monitoring the child's care plan and ensuring all involved are active in its implementation.

The child's social worker will provide the carer with full information on the child and his/her background and support foster carers by advising them and/or making referrals for additional support from other resources.

Other support available to all foster carers

Fostering Support Service

Comprises Child Support officer, 2 Fostering Support Officers, Therapeutic Family Worker. The service is linked to the Adolescent Support Unit for the 11 Plus age group. For those placements that need it short breaks, outreach and in reach support, telephone on call, multi agency drop ins and therapeutic support can be provided through the service.

Emergency Duty Team [EDT]

The emergency duty team is staffed by qualified social workers who provide an out-of-hours service. They are available 24 hours a day at weekends and during national holidays and between 5 pm and 8.45 am every weekday. All staff are skilled in providing telephone support and in exceptional circumstances will do an out-of-hours home visit. The emergency duty team staff report such out-of-hours contact to child care social workers, supervising social workers and team managers by 9.30 am the next working day to ensure that follow-up support is forthcoming

Foster carer support helpline

This helpline operates every day between 10 am and 9 pm and is run by experienced Blackburn with Darwen foster carers. They have access to the residential 'on call' service for 'out of hours' emergencies, which is covered by children's services managers. The Adolescent Support Unit offers additional support to carers managing young people displaying challenging behaviours and is part of the 11 plus project.

Blackburn with Darwen Foster Carers Association

All Council foster carers are members of Blackburn with Darwen Foster Carers Association. The officers of the association provide support and guidance to foster carers and more formal assistance should they be the subject of complaints or allegations. The association has regular meetings for its members and has regular guest speakers on fostering-related issues. The FCA also has their own website for carers offering advice, support and guidance at www.bwdfca.co.uk

Fostering Network



At the point of approval, foster carers are enrolled with the Fostering Network and receive their publication, 'The Foster Carer's Handbook'. Foster carers are provided with individual membership of 'Fostering Network', which furnishes them with additional support in the form of a helpline and independent representation in the event of complaints or allegations.

The service subscribes to an independent support and mediation service provided by the Fostering Network so that carers can be supported in the event of complaints or allegations. There is a specific

named contact at Fostering Network who will, if necessary, visit foster carers and accompany them to panel or other meetings to help represent their views.

Training

The department will provide initial and ongoing training relevant to the fostering task.

Support & consultation meetings

The purpose of these meetings is to give foster carers the opportunity to play a part in the development of the fostering service.

Equipment

The fostering service provides foster carers with equipment, including safety equipment and any additional equipment specific to the needs of the individual child placed.



Lease car

Blackburn with Darwen operates a car lease scheme that enables a set number of foster carers who meet the criteria to be provided with a lease vehicle so that everyone may travel together safely as a family.

Allowances

Blackburn with Darwen operates a banding system related to foster carers' skills. The fostering allowances structure is linked to the Fostering Network's recommended rates. This structure provides the opportunity for enhanced allowances to be paid in recognition of improved skills acquired through training and experience.

Sources of specialist advice and guidance

- CAMHS service
- Nurse for children in our care
- Education manager for children in our care
- Lytham Road adolescent support unit
- Fast track psychologist
- SCAYT team (psychological support and advice for young people and carers)
- Fostering Support Service

11. Review of foster carer approval

A foster carer's approval will be reviewed at least annually. A review will also be convened whenever there is a significant change in the foster carer's household or circumstances.

The main aim of the review is to determine whether approval should be continued and whether any changes should be made to the terms of approval.

Reviews of foster carers will be undertaken by the carers' supervising social worker in the foster carers' home and involve, as far as possible, discussion with all members of the foster carers' household, including children in placement.

The review provides the opportunity for both the department and the foster carers to reflect on the past year and plan for the future. The review process will include updates of statutory and medical checks as necessary (every three years); completion of the health and safety checklist; and a requirement that the foster carers re-sign the foster carer agreement.

The review will be in the form of discussion with the foster carers and their family; and will consider any placements made in the preceding year, the value and relevance of training undertaken and the support provided. The supervising social worker will, where appropriate, seek feedback from all children/young people who have been in the foster home during the preceding year and also from their respective social workers.

The review will consider the appropriateness of existing terms of approval. All the children from the age of five years upwards will sign the family safe care plan to ensure they understand the issues around safe care.

Account will be taken of any complaints or allegations received over the previous year and the outcomes. All placements and any exemptions made during the review period will be recorded.

The supervising social worker will prepare a written report and share this with the foster carers to ensure accuracy. The review will fully record the views of foster carers in respect of the support and training they have received and which they require in the future. This report is submitted to the fostering team manager for comments. The foster carer will receive a written invitation to attend the appropriate fostering panel and, where necessary, attendance will be facilitated by the fostering team.

In the case of a first foster carer review, the main fostering panel will consider the review report provided by the supervising social worker and discuss any issues arising with the foster carer and the social worker. The panel will make recommendations in respect of continuing approval and the terms and conditions of approval.

In the case of subsequent reviews, unless there are material changes proposed to the terms and conditions of approval, review reports will be considered and signed off by the team manager and presented to the review panel.

Reviews will be triggered whenever there is a significant change in the circumstances of foster carers and the fostering panel will consider this review.

Review recommendations of the fostering panel follow the same route as recommendations on the initial approval of applicants as foster carers. (see '8. Fostering panel')

12. Standards of care

The fostering service aims to provide a high quality of care for foster children which protects them from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and deprivation; and which places children with carers who provide a safe, healthy and nurturing environment.

The local authority aims to ensure that all persons working in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children/young people and will safeguard and promote their welfare. All social work staff and managers are recruited in accordance with the local authority's recruitment, selection and vetting policies, which follow good practice in safeguarding children/young people. DBS checks are undertaken prior to appointment and subsequently every three years.

All social work staff in the fostering service are qualified to work with children/young people, their families and foster carers; and have a thorough understanding of foster care. Any members of staff not qualified in social work do not carry out assessments of applicant foster carers and fulfil their duties under the direct supervision of qualified social work staff.

All members of staff receive regular professional supervision from, and consult with, appropriately qualified and experienced staff and are provided with opportunities for ongoing training in child care and fostering issues.

As stated previously, the approval of all foster carers is in accordance with the requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards of 2011. DBS checks are undertaken prior to approval and subsequently every three years. Foster carers receive regular supervision and annual reviews are undertaken by their supervising social worker. Any incident or situation of concern is presented to the fostering panel for consideration as to whether the continued approval status of the foster carer is appropriate.

The whistle blowing policy is made known to all foster carers and staff.

Membership of the fostering panel is dependent on the satisfactory outcome of enhanced CRB checks. The fostering panel ensures that the assessment of foster carer applicants complies with the requirements of the current regulations. The panel provides expertise in child and foster care and accesses expertise on child health and education issues. The panel makes independent recommendations regarding approvals, terms of approval, continuing approval and termination of approval of foster carers.

Foster carers are:

- Provided with clear information in respect of permissible and non-permissible forms of control, discipline and sanctions. The foster carer agreement is explicit that no foster child should be subject to corporal punishment, humiliating treatment or physical restraint (except that proportionate physical restraint is permissible where a child is at risk of harm or placing others at risk of harm).
- Required to provide warm and adequately furnished homes maintained to a good standard of hygiene and to provide each child with his/her own bed and private space.
- Aware that their homes are inspected at least annually to ensure compliance with health and safety standards and that planned and unannounced visits are undertaken by the fostering service.
- Supported by the fostering service in the provision of an environment free of avoidable hazards that might expose the child to risk of injury or harm.
- Provided with training on safe care and health and safety issues and receive full information about any child placed with them in order to ensure protection of the child, of any other children in the household and of other family members.

13. Complaints

Children/young people are provided with information about their right to complain, the complaints procedure and their right of access to an independent visitor in situations where they have no contact with their birth family.

Complaints about the quality of care provided by foster carers are investigated through the department's complaints procedure. Complaints and their outcome are recorded, monitored and evaluated by the fostering service.

Allegations of abuse made against foster carers are investigated in accordance with the safeguarding child protection procedures, which contain specific procedures for dealing with such allegations.

Number of complaints

During the period 1st April 2015 – 31st March 2016, a total of 4 complaints were received by the service. All were resolved in Stage 1. The fostering service investigates all complaints and reports back to complainants promptly. A copy of the report is sent to the customer care team.

All complaints must be made to Lynda Henderson, Customer Care Manager, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, 10 Duke Street, Blackburn.
Tel. 01254 282161 email: Lynda.Henderson@blackburn.gov.uk

14. Valuing diversity

The fostering service aims to ensure that children and young people live in an environment which promotes equality – valuing and respecting both their individuality and diversity – and which addresses their needs in terms of gender, sexuality, ethnic origin, disability, culture, race, religion or language.

The fostering service:

- Aims to ensure that each child is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting his/her assessed needs in terms of gender, sexuality, ethnic origin, disability, culture, race, religion or language; and, where possible, ensures the placement of siblings together. Where an acceptably close cultural match is not immediately possible, action is taken to identify a more culturally appropriate placement within six weeks unless there are specific reasons why a child should remain in a trans-cultural placement.
- Facilitates the provision for fostered children with complex health needs services and support, including equipment and adaptations, which enable them to access as wide a range of activities as possible to maximise their potential to lead as full a life as possible.
- Assists foster carers and provides training which promotes their ability to enhance a child's confidence, identity and feeling of self-worth.

15. Promoting contact

The council takes seriously its duty to promote contact between child and family and friends in accordance with the contact policy. Contact contributes to the development of the child's sense of identity, self-worth and self-esteem.

The fostering service:

- Takes into account the contact needs of the child/young person in determining contact needs and arrangements.
- Provides training to enable foster carers to help a child maintain appropriate contacts and facilitate contact.
- Contributes to the statutory reviews wherein contact arrangements are established, maintained, monitored and reviewed.
- Ensures financial support is provided to carers who incur costs in facilitating contact between a foster child and family or friends.
- Ensures that foster carers understand the importance of recording the impact of contact arrangements on children in their care.

16. Promoting children's health, emotional development, education and leisure

Children in foster care have a right to expect the same outcomes we all want for our children. They should be able to take care of their own health and expect that adults will support them in this. They should have access to leisure and educational facilities that enable them to pursue their interests and have their educational needs met. Our ambitions for children in our care are the same as for our own or any other child and we are committed to providing the additional support our young people will require to achieve. Foster families are provided with pre- and post-approval preparation and training on the importance and availability of health, education and leisure services to enable them to help children achieve their potential and enhance their emotional wellbeing.

Health

Children in foster care have regular medicals at the statutory frequency appropriate for their age.

There is a designated nurse for looked after children who takes an active role in following up health issues and assisting with health promotion work. She is a member of the fostering panel and ensures health issues are fully taken into account in the panel's deliberations.

For each child they care for, foster carers have a health passport in which they and/or the child record all the child's health details. The passport allows the child / foster care to keep medical information safe and to record dates of health appointments. The passport moves on with the child if there is a change of placement. The keeping of the passport is discussed in the foster carer's supervision.

The foster carer review document records details of how foster carers have met the child's health needs, as identified in their care plan.

First aid training is mandatory for all foster carers. Foster carers also receive training on a variety of health-related issues, including 'Infectious Diseases in Childhood' and 'Managing Medicines'.

There is an annual foster carer conference on Promoting Children's Health

Emotional wellbeing

Looked after children have access to emotional and mental health services through CAMHS. The former SCAYT team no longer operates in Blackburn with Darwen and is to be replaced in 2016 by an in house team led by a Consultant Clinical Psychologist who will coordinate the full range of emotional and mental health practitioners. Advice is readily available to social workers and foster carers working with children in foster care.

Education

In line with Standard 8 of the current national minimum standards, the department has, and implements, a written education policy that was prepared in partnership with the education manager for children in our care.

The education manager is managed within the 'children in our care' [CIOC] social work service and, where necessary, actively intervenes to liaise with schools to promote the needs of children in foster care. As part of their preparation and assessment process, and through the foster carer agreement, foster carers are set a clear expectation that they will promote and support children's educational attainment. The ways in which foster carers meet children's educational needs are monitored through the foster carer review process and supervisory visits. Foster carers receive training on 'The Education of Children in Care' at regular intervals. They are expected to make sure children attend school regularly; contribute to the child's personal education plan; maintain contact with school; attend parents' meetings; and ensure any barriers to educational attainment are identified and addressed.

All children in care who are of school age have a personal education plan which is updated regularly. Following placement, educational issues continue to be considered as part of the statutory review process.

There is an annual 'Celebration of Achievement' awards ceremony for children in care.

Leisure

Foster carers are encouraged to support children's hobbies and interests and promote their participation in leisure activities. Foster carers are encouraged to obtain a Beez card which offers access on concessionary terms to leisure facilities in the Borough. Information about play and leisure activities is provided through the regular 'Fostering & Us' newsletters. Foster carers may apply for additional payments to support children's hobbies and interests.

The Foster Carers Association also organises trips and activities for foster families.

Placement stability

9.8% of all children in our care had three or more placements during 2015/16 which is 2.5% higher than the previous year. Specific figures for those in foster care are not available but it is usually the case that multiple moves are more predominant in residential placements or where children have moved in and out of home and care placements. The Fostering Support Service was initiated to address placement stability and has sustained a number of fragile placements in the last year. Work is ongoing to improve data on fostering placement disruptions and to ensure that disruption meetings take place so that lessons may be learned from experience.

Engagement with children and young people

The fostering service is committed to working in partnership with children and young people on an individual level and in developing the service.

Children and young people in foster care are invited, encouraged and assisted to provide feedback to their foster carers' review about their placement. This feedback is seen by the fostering panel and managers within the service and action is taken to address any issues raised.

The Voice Group includes young people in foster care.

Young people contribute to fostering preparation groups so that prospective foster carers can hear first-hand about what it is like to be in foster care and what foster carers can do to make it a positive experience.

In December 2015 the Fostering Service alongside the Children in our Care Team achieved Investing in Children status. The assessment process for this award is entirely reliant on the views of children and young people. Accreditation is reviewed annually.

The council has achieved 5 out of the 7 LILAC (Leading Improvements for Looked After Children) Standards and is working towards the remaining two. LILAC focuses on participation and making sure looked after children and young people are involved in decisions relating to both their individual care and the policies and practices of the services that look after them. Assessments against the LILAC standards are carried out by care-experienced young people.

Children and young people in foster care regularly contribute to their own statutory reviews.

A 'Foster Carer's Own Children's Support Group' has been established during the past year. Events have been arranged to encourage foster carers' children to meet and have the opportunity to share their thoughts on fostering.

17. Children's guide

There are three children's guides to the fostering service, each for different age groups of children. These are given to children when they are placed with foster carers. Social workers and foster carers assist young children in understanding what foster care is and what to do if they have any difficulties. The guides contain the relevant Ofsted information as well as the council's details should the child wish to make a complaint.

18. Inspection and registration

Inspection and registration of the fostering service is carried out by Ofsted, which can be contacted as follows:

Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD.

General helpline: 0300 123 1231

www.ofsted.gov.uk

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

19. Independent review mechanism [IRM]

The remit of the IRM includes conducting an independent review of fostering suitability applications from potential and current foster carers whose fostering service provider has decided not to approve them as foster carers or to terminate or change the terms of their approval.

For further details:

Independent Review Mechanism (IRM), Unit 4, Pavilion Business Park, Royds Hall Road, Wortley, Leeds, LS12 6AJ.

Tel: 0845 450 3956 Fax: 0845 450 3957

www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk

E-Mail: irm@baaf.org.uk

20. Fostering service structure



Team Manager	Team Manager	
Team 1	Team 2	Fostering Support
Advanced Practitioner	4.5 Supervising Social Workers	Child Support Officer Fostering Support Officer
5.5 Supervising Social Workers	Strategy Officer	Fostering Support Officer
	Recruitment Officer	0.5 Therapeutic Family Worker
	Duty and Training Officer	

This document is normally reviewed annually and updated as required

Last review: November 2016