

Sefton MBC People Directorate

Children's Social Care

Fostering Service

Statement of Purpose

2021-2023



Table of Contents

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|--|----|
| Table of Contents..... | 1 |
| National Legislative and Policy Framework | 3 |
| Policy Statement..... | 3 |
| Principles, Aims and Standards of Care | 4 |
| Sefton Fostering Service | 5 |
| Status and Constitution | 6 |
| Organisational Arrangements and Management Structure | 7 |
| Staffing – numbers, relevant qualifications and experience of staff..... | 8 |
| Services provided | 9 |
| Recruitment | 9 |
| Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers | 9 |
| Support, Supervision, Review & Training of Approved Foster Carers | 11 |
| Independent Support for Foster Carers..... | 12 |
| Delegated Authority (DA)..... | 13 |
| Other Support to Foster Carers and Children they are caring for | 13 |
| Types of Placement..... | 13 |
| Short term Fostering..... | 13 |
| Emergency | 13 |
| Long term fostering | 14 |
| Short breaks..... | 14 |
| Connected Carers (Family and Friends)..... | 14 |
| Staying Put | 14 |
| Fostering Teenagers | 14 |
| Parent and Child Fostering | 15 |
| Matching..... | 15 |
| Annual foster carer reviews | 15 |
| The Fostering Panel..... | 16 |
| Confidentiality and conflicts of interest..... | 16 |
| Compliments, Comments and Complaint | 17 |
| Allegations..... | 17 |

Introduction

It is a requirement of the Fostering Service England Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 that each fostering agency produces a Statement of Purpose which includes its aims and objectives, a description of the service and the services that are provided. This Statement of Purpose is a guide for parents, professionals, foster carers, the public, Council members and external organisations. The Fostering Service has also produced a Children's Guide for children and young people. Copies of both Statements of Purpose can be obtained from Sefton Fostering Service:

Sefton Fostering Service

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Stanley Road Bootle

L20 3NJ

Telephone **0151 934 4060**

Freephone **0800 923 2777**

Email fostering@sefton.gov.uk

Sefton Fostering Website - seftonfostering.co.uk

Arrangements can be made for this guide to be produced in electronic format, in larger print, braille, audio or alternative languages.

National Legislative and Policy Framework

Sefton Fostering Service is run in accordance with the principles outlined in the:

- Children Act 1989
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2013 (Amendments to the Children Act 1989)
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011)
- Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010)
- Care Planning and Fostering Regulations (Amendments) (2015)
- The Disability and Equality Act 2010
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD) for Foster Carers (2007)

Policy Statement

Sefton Council believes that every child and young person who becomes looked after by the local authority should be able to enjoy the same quality of life and opportunities as children who live with their families. The Council's commitment and responsibilities to children and young people in its care is reflected in its Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021 -2023 and Sefton Children and Young Peoples Plan 2020 – 2025. We want every child and young person to be heard, healthy, happy, safe and secure; for children and young people to be feel loved, valued, supported and respected. Our aim is for every child in Sefton to achieve, be prepared for adulthood and reach their full potential irrespective of their age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, faith or disability.

Children and young people who are cared for by our Council have the right to expect everything from a Corporate Parent that would be expected from a good parent. Our aspirations for children should reflect those aspirations we have for our own children. Our foster carers should expect the best for our children and know the children they are caring for well. Children and young people in our care should be encouraged to celebrate their interests, share achievements and successes. Children and young people's welfare, safety and needs should be at the centre of their care and decision making about their futures. We believe that every child should have their wishes and feelings listened to and considered.

Our aim is to match children with foster carers who can meet their individual needs; considering their interests, hobbies, family composition, experience and skills and offering choice to children and young people wherever possible. Foster carers have a right to full information about children and young people to inform careful matching.

Sefton Fostering Service recognises that a child's needs are best met by a nurturing family and to this end will actively consider placing children who are not able to remain in their own family in appropriate

alternative family placements under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning Regulations. When children can return to the care of their parents, our foster carers will endeavour to support safe child centred transitions home.

Within this document is our pledge to children and young people which reflects what children and young people in Sefton tell us they want. The Fostering Service will ensure that Sefton's Pledge is embedded into practice at every level to improve outcomes for children and young people. The Children's Guide – Statement of Purpose which is shared with children and young people at the point of placement (subject to their age and understanding) summarises what the Fostering Service sets out to do for children, their rights and useful contacts should they have any concerns.

Principles, Aims and Standards of Care

Sefton Council believes that all children who cannot live with their parents should have the opportunity to live in a family. The Fostering Service is committed to achieving high standards and ensuring quality provision. The Council's commitment and responsibilities to children and young people in its care is reflected in the Corporate Parenting Strategy which sets out Sefton Council's 2030 vision and explains how we, as the Council, will be effective, trustworthy Corporate Parents.

The following aims and principles guide the practice of the Fostering Service:

- The welfare of the child and young person is paramount.
- Whenever possible children are supported to live within their own community, with family and close to their friendship network.
- Foster care is a partnership between the Foster Carer(s), Supervising Social Workers and the Child's Social Worker; all working together with the child, their family and extended family to achieve the best outcome possible (whenever possible).
- The Fostering Service will work in partnership with other professionals to promote the child's health and wellbeing.
- Children and young people's cultural, racial, linguistic, religious and identity needs are considered as is their gender, sexuality, and disability when identifying care for them.
- Children have the right to continuity in their lives in order to enable them to develop and maintain positive self-esteem and identity and to promote their physical and mental wellbeing and for them to achieve their full potential.
- The true cost of caring for a foster child must be met and foster carers given the opportunity to receive payment for their time, experience and skills.
- Foster carers and social workers have a right to prepare for their role and a responsibility to use training opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills.
- Foster carers, social workers, children who are looked after and their parents must be able to call upon the Council for support.
- A Foster Carers Handbook must be available to Foster Carers to assist them in understanding their role and that of others.

- Formal decisions relating to an individual child's foster care should be taken in full consultation with the child or young person, their parents, and the foster carers.
- Foster carers, children and their parents should be able to challenge decisions and plans proposed by the fostering service and be informed about how to make a complaint or representation.
- Foster carers should be consulted to develop and improve services for foster carers, their children, children who are looked after and their families.
- The Fostering Service operates in accordance with the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards. Managers, staff and foster carers all receive supervision, support and training to assist them in maintaining the Standards and as a means of them striving to exceed the Standards.

Sefton Fostering Service

In December 2020, Sefton Fostering Service was divided into two distinct teams with individual Team Managers supporting each; a **Recruitment & Assessment Team** and a **Supervision, Support & Review team**.

The Fostering Service assesses, approves, supervises, supports and reviews mainstream foster carers and connected carers (friends and family); who care for children aged 0 -18 years old. There are different types of approval terms - short term fostering, long term fostering, respite and connected care. Approval terms may be age or gender specific or relate to a particular child or young person.

Decisions to accept or refuse applicants are based on clear eligibility criteria and are fully discussed with applicants with oversight from Fostering Panel and the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who is responsible for final decisions.

The Fostering Service is responsible for ensuring that approved foster carers have practical and emotional support, information, advice and training to support them to provide safe and nurturing homes for children they look after. It is acknowledged that fostering can be physically and emotionally challenging. Many of our children have experienced trauma, abuse, neglect and loss; some will present with worrying or difficult behaviours as a result of their experiences and may have significant needs.

The Fostering Service places high importance on training and support for foster carers, regarding them as part of the team entrusted to provide and advocate for the physical, emotional and educational needs of children. A comprehensive range of training courses, mandatory and developmental ensures that our foster carers have the very best opportunity to meet/talk with other foster carers; acquire skills and knowledge and receive support. The Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD) for foster care provides a national benchmark that sets out what all foster carers should know, understand and be able to do. All mainstream foster carers are required to achieve the Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD) within the first 12 months of approval (18 months for connected carers). Support and guidance is

available from Supervising Social Workers and the Training and Development Officer who can support foster carers to complete required workbooks.

Sefton Fostering Service is committed to working in partnership with the community, the child and their family, the child's social worker and all other agencies with an emphasis on health and education in order to provide a high level of quality foster care for children who are looked after by Sefton. The Service keeps the needs of children and young people central to its activities; in line with legislation and government guidance.

Enquiries to Sefton Fostering Service can be made via telephone, our website, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or via our office duty system which is supported by a member of the Fostering Service during working hours (9.00am to 5.30pm, Monday to Thursday and 9.00 am to 4.00pm Friday). A duty social worker will always be available during these hours to respond to fostering enquiries, provide advice and guidance to Children's Services colleagues and support approved foster carers.

For out of hour's emergency placements, contact can be made with the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) Social Worker on 0151 934 3555. EDT are provided with an availability list of foster carers who can provide emergency care to children and young people over the weekend period from Friday until Monday morning. Emergency foster carers are paid a specific rate for this level of care and an ongoing retainer if a placement is not required over the weekend. Their support and flexibility enables EDT to place young people with carers without the stress of a placement search which ultimately benefits children and young people. EDT should notify the fostering service if any children are placed over the weekend.

Status and Constitution

As a local authority, Sefton MBC holds statutory powers and responsibilities in relation to Fostering Services and children who are looked after. Acting on behalf of the Local Authority, the Fostering Service actively endeavours to ensure that equality and diversity is promoted and incorporated into all aspects of service delivery. All prospective foster carers are recruited and supported based on their ability to undertake the fostering task and meet the needs of the service regardless of their age, race, religion, class, marital status, sexual orientation or disability. Our recruitment campaigns aim to dispel myths in terms of who can and cannot foster.

Organisational Arrangements and Management Structure



Lisa Lyons
Interim Executive
Director of
Children's Social Care



**Laura
Knights**
Head of
Children's Social
Care



**Lisa
Cummings**
Service Manager



Donna Kelly
Fostering
Manager



**Maria
Spatuzzi**
Fostering
Manager



**Sue
Morrow**
Panel Advisor

There is a transparent senior management structure within the Directorate for the management of the Fostering Service. Lisa Lyons is the Interim Director of Children's Social Care and the Head of Children's Service is Laura Knights.

Lisa Cummings was appointed as permanent Service Manager for Fostering in July 2021; a social worker qualified in 1996 who has a background in statutory social work, therapeutic social work, training and education, CAFCASS and Fostering Independent Reviewing. Lisa Cummings has a Dip SW and a Masters in Social Work.

If the Fostering Service Manager (or Corporate Parenting Service Manager) are unavailable, the service can consult the Head of Children's Social Care or another Children's Service Manager.

Donna Kelly is the Fostering Manager responsible for the Recruitment and Assessment of new foster carers. Donna qualified in 2007 with a BA (hons) degree in Social Work. Donna has extensive statutory social work experience to include management roles in MASH, Assessment, Looked After Children and Fostering.

Maria Spatuzzi is the Fostering Manager responsible for supervision, support and review of carers. Maria qualified in 2004 with a Dip SW and holds the NVQ Level 5 in Management Award. Maria has extensive experience in fostering, previously having worked as a Supervising Social Worker and Assistant Team Manager.

Sue Morrow, Panel Advisor was recruited in May 2021 on a temporary basis to full the Panel Advisor role which was previously undertaken by Fostering Managers. A qualified social worker with experience of children and families social work and fostering. It is hoped this role will become permanent. There are clear arrangements to ensure that there is always one Team Manager available to manage and support the team.

Staffing – numbers, relevant qualifications and experience of staff

There are 5 part time, 10 full time and 2 temporary Social Work posts within the current establishment to cover the work of the assessment and support team. Occasionally, Social Workers will be called upon to complete different work. There are 4 experienced Placement Support Workers (PSW) who provide practical support to looked after children, young people and foster carers and support the recruitment process. Their support also extends to children of the foster family who often play a significant role in supporting placement stability (also, these children have needs in their own right). All our PSW's bring substantial experience of work with children and families. 1 PSW is currently undertaking a recognised Diploma in Therapeutic Life Story Work.

All Social Workers in the Fostering Service hold professional qualifications (Dip SW, CQSW, BA Hons in social work). They are registered with Social Work England and have DBS checks that are renewed on a three-yearly basis; their references are held on file.

All Social Workers should receive monthly supervision provided by their Team Manager and team meetings are held on a monthly basis to allow for group discussions, sharing and learning. The Fostering Team Managers, Training & Development Officer and Recruitment and Support Officer are supervised by the Fostering Service Manager; as is the Admin Manager. Bi monthly supervision is available for PSW's and group supervision can be used to consider priorities, plan activities and to increase support.

Whole service meetings are facilitated by the Fostering Service Manger on a monthly basis to promote good communication and Team Managers facilitate additional meetings with their individual teams.

The Fostering Service is well supported by a full time Training & Development Officer who has a Diploma in Social Work, Masters in Applied Social Sciences, Certificate in Counselling and Child Care Award. The Service benefits from a part time Recruitment & Support Officer who has a background in marketing and a BA (Hons) in Business Studies. She works alongside newly appointed Marketing and Publicity Officer who brings experience of communications work to plan campaigns and social media coverage. Our new officer is completing Level 5 apprenticeship in Operational Leadership and Management. The Fostering Service receives business support from 1 Admin Manager and 6 Business support staff; 3 of whom take responsibility for Fostering and Adoption panel activity.

The Fostering Service has expansion plans to include the creation of 3 additional teams to provide greater focus and increase capacity and management oversight. Also, it is hoped that the new Panel Advisor and Marketing & Publicity post can be made permanent.

All Fostering team members are expected to keep up to date with mandatory training required of Children's Services staff. The Fostering Service is committed to ongoing learning and development and welcomes and supports social work student placements.

Services provided

Recruitment

The team responds to initial enquiries about fostering via telephone, email, word of mouth, office attendance, Facebook, Twitter, post or website enquiries.

The Fostering Service has received support from Council colleagues from Strategic Support, Marketing and Communications to consider our structure, processes and assist with recruitment and sufficiency. Digital platforms and social media are used to attract interest and raise awareness. Campaigns build on existing links within the local community to ensure that the service recruits' carers from a wide range of backgrounds who can support children to remain living in their own communities across the borough. Throughout the year, the Fostering Service runs carefully coordinated campaigns, which can include a range of media such as poster sites, leaflet-drops, community events, information sessions, press advertising and digital campaigns (Google, Facebook, and Twitter). Our foster carers support campaigns offering real insight into fostering via videos.

The Fostering Service has a 2-year marketing plan (2021 – 2023) which is reviewed regularly to monitor impact and consider new opportunities. Regular meetings take place with Communications and Marketing colleagues as part of a wider Demand Management Strategy; to review marketing materials and consider the number of foster carers joining and leaving the service. The Fostering Service has been offering exit interviews to mainstream foster carers leaving the service since April 2021 in order to capture learning and strengths.

The Fostering Service has developed a range of materials in order to aid the recruitment of foster carers. The website provides information for potential foster carers including a questions and answers page and it has an on-line application registration link. Recruitment information events take place with support from Placement Support Workers, foster carers and other team members.

Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers

Following an initial enquiry, applicants will first speak to a member of the Fostering Service on the telephone who will collect basic information including details about accommodation, family composition and motivation to foster. If the applicant(s) and the Fostering team agree that the application should proceed, an appointment for a more in-depth discussion will be arranged. This will normally take place in

the applicant's home however, could take place via Microsoft teams or telephone. This was more common during lockdown periods linked with the Covid 19 pandemic during 2020 and 2021.

The Fostering Service has introduced a two-stage process for fostering as per The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Regulations (Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 2013). A visual journey has been created to simplify the process which is on the Fostering website and shared with those interested. Our aim is to complete all mainstream fostering assessments within 5 months; for a decision within 8 months.

If a decision is made to continue with a full assessment (stage 2), the applicant will be invited to attend the "Skills to Foster" preparation group to learn more about the fostering task. Preparation training has previously been conducted over three days and covers the fostering role, values, legislation and regulations; attachment, behaviour management, recording, risks, allegations and safe care. In recent times, online training has been developed.

Potential foster carers are checked to ensure that any child placed with them is safeguarded. Checks involve obtaining references from people that know them well, (including, employers, professionals, voluntary bodies, friends and family and ex partners) and having an Enhanced DBS check and local authority checks. Medical checks will be obtained to inform the application and subsequent medical health checks will be requested post approval if any health concerns arise; at least every 5 years. Checks and references will be processed as early as possible to promote transparency, inform decision making and promote timely completion of assessments.

The Stage 2 assessment can run alongside preparation training. This will require the applicant(s) to meet with the assessing social worker over a period of time. Information will be gathered to consider skills, knowledge and experience relevant to fostering and discussions will be held around the applicant's own life experiences, including their childhood and relationships, and how they brought up their own children (if they have any); as well as discussion about their understanding of the fostering role. The assessing social worker will complete an assessment report which will identify strengths and competencies, as well as any areas for further development. Members of the fostering household will be part of the assessment and any adults in the household will require safeguarding checks.

The report will be shared with the applicants for comment before being submitted to the Fostering Panel with a recommendation. The Fostering Panel will make a recommendation after considering the report and talking with the social worker and/or the applicant(s) who are always invited and supported to attend Fostering Panel. The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) makes the final decision. The appeal process is the same if Fostering Panel recommend the applicants are unsuitable to the ADM.

The safety of children is central to the delivery of the Fostering Service and underpins the recruitment, preparation, assessment and continuing development of foster carers as well as the support and monitoring of placements. Sefton Local Safeguarding Children Board provide a comprehensive framework for safeguarding the welfare of children and contain specific procedures for dealing with children missing from care, and allegations of abuse made against foster carers.

Qualified Social Work Practitioners take responsibility for assessment of mainstream and connected carers and those considering Special Guardianship. Assessing Social Workers undertake the following tasks:

- Viability Assessments.
- Mainstream fostering assessments.
- Family and Friends Connected Carers Assessments (Kinship)
- Special Guardian Assessments.

The Fostering Service has a responsibility to respond to the needs of local children. Where children are unable to live with their birth parents, the first priority is to consider whether there is suitable alternative care within their extended family or friend's network. The Fostering Service is responsible for ensuring that children receive good quality care with extended family or friends, and it provides preparation and training, workshops, support groups, individual supervisory and support sessions, a duty service, and financial support (as appropriate) during the connected carers assessment process. The Supervising Social Worker presents assessment of friends and family carers, (connected carers) to the Fostering Panel.

The Fostering Service undertakes Special Guardianship Assessments. Fostering Panel do not consider such assessments although the court will often ask for the Local Authority to consider Connected Care and Special Guardianship simultaneously. The Fostering Service can link those who are granted Special Guardianship Orders with training opportunities available to our approved foster carers. Sefton Council has also commissioned Kinship Charity who are able to offer our connected carers (kinship) independent support, advice and guidance. Kinship Charity was formerly named Grandparents Plus.

Support, Supervision, Review & Training of Approved Foster Carers

Regulation 17(1) of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 states that the fostering service provider must provide foster carers with training, advice, information and support (including support out of hours) as appears necessary in the interests of children placed with foster carers. Every approved foster carer should be allocated a qualified Supervising Social Worker who is responsible for overseeing the support they receive. It is the Supervising Social Workers role to supervise the foster carers work, to ensure that they are meeting the child's needs, and to offer support and a framework to assess the foster carers performance and develop their skills. They must make one unannounced visit to the carers at least once a year and Sefton expectation is that Supervising Social Workers undertake 6 supervisory visits per year; more at increased times of change or stress. Supervising Social Workers key role is to explain the importance of the minimum standards and regulations to foster carers, highlighting that they need to meet these standards to maintain registration. The role of the Supervising Social Worker is complex. It encompasses both support and supervisory aspects whilst ensuring that the welfare, safety and individual

needs of children are met, and children and young people's wishes, and feelings are considered. Supervising Social Workers are also responsible for preparing Foster Carer annual reviews; gaining feedback from others to inform these reviews and presenting reviews to Fostering Panel as required. Supervising Social Workers work with the foster carers and Training and Development Officer to ensure compliance against the foster carer's written agreement and Fostering standards.

All foster carers have the option to attend support groups (coffee mornings) facilitated by Sefton foster carers. Attendance at such groups has the potential to provide support and an opportunity to discuss issues and socialise. The Fostering Service has been offering additional support since June 2021 via a monthly virtual support group for carers (Mainstream, Kinship & Special Guardians). Speakers are invited to attend these meetings.

The Fostering Service Training & Development Officer co-ordinates and plans a training programme for applicants undergoing assessments and approved foster carers. Training is also open to those granted Special Guardianship Orders and to carers who continue to support young people they have previously fostered under staying put arrangements. The training programme sets out to provide access to specialist workers from the team around the child to enhance carers understanding of their role and support available to them. Effort is made to ensure the learning environment feels both safe and inclusive. The Training & Development Officer can be consulted to identify specialist resources or training to respond to the unique needs of individual children or families.

Sefton Fostering Service keeps a record of training undertaken by Foster Carers within their individual Foster Carer file. The Training & Development Officer will offer workbook workshops or if requested 1-1 support to help carers complete the Training Support and Development element. The training calendar is reviewed on an annual basis to consider learning, new areas of interest and feedback from foster carers and others as to what is more relevant. Appropriate training is in place to run concurrently with the requirement for the levels of skills scheme. Fostering Service staff can also access this training.

Upon approval, Supervising Social Workers can support foster carers with their professional development through annual foster carer personal development plans and annual foster carer reviews which involve consultation with foster carers and others.

There are processes in place so that the Fostering Service can continually improve effectiveness and achieve better outcomes for children and foster carers. The Service has its own improvement plan.

Independent Support for Foster Carers

Foster carers are eligible for individual membership of Foster Talk. Foster Talk provides foster carers with a comprehensive range of specialised support services that benefit the whole of the fostering household. This allows them access to advice and support, including legal advice, independently of the service. The Fostering Service will automatically upon approval pay for the foster carer's annual subscription.

Delegated Authority (DA)

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2010 & 2013 set out the principles of Delegated Authority in Foster Care placements. A Placement Planning Meeting is held within 5 days of a placement being made and delegated authority will be discussed and managed according to Sefton's DA policy. The Supervising Social Worker will attend these meetings.

Children's Social Workers are responsible for completing the delegated authority form in partnership with the Foster Carer, their Supervising Social Worker, the child according to their age and understanding, birth parents and any other relevant stakeholders. The Supervising Social Worker will ensure that written information is given to the Foster Carer along with the Placement Information Record and a copy of the Child's Care Plan. This will be checked at the 24-hour visit made by the Supervising Social worker to the foster carer.

Other Support to Foster Carers and Children they are caring for

Foster carers and children in their care can receive support from: The Leaving Care provision: Independent Visitors and Advocates Scheme: Children's Rights Service: Corporate Parenting Officer: Head of the Virtual School: Children in Public Care Team (Education): and nurses for looked after children (Health). The Fostering Service has access to a Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) who can provide a service for children, foster carers and prospective foster carers. CAMHS can also give advice and support to social workers to benefit planning and support for children.

Types of Placement

Short term Fostering

Foster Carers approved as short-term carers can look after children, within the age range for which they are approved. If a foster carer wishes to look after a child long term, an updated assessment is required, with matching and Panel consideration and approval to inform this change.

Emergency

There are foster carers who are available to care for children and young people outside of normal office hours. These foster carers are paid a retainer to enable the Emergency Duty Team to draw on their support at short notice. Sometimes it is necessary to make an unplanned placement during office hours and the Fostering team may approach any foster carer if they have a vacancy and a match can be made (subject to regulations in respect of emergency placements not exceeding 6 days).

Long term fostering

For some children, who maintain close and have significant relationships with their birth parents or relatives, long term fostering may be preferable over adoption. Other children with complex needs or behaviours may be matched to long term carers who can commit to them and help them thrive.

Short breaks

Sefton provides short breaks for children with profound or permanent disabilities through the Children with Disabilities Team or through specific residential care. This service can offer support to parents of children; helping them to continue to care for their children and preventing children coming into care. The Children with Disabilities Team recruits their own day carers for families as well as supporting parents to access the direct payment scheme where they can purchase care from a provider of their choice.

Connected Carers (Family and Friends)

These carers are part of a child's extended family or friendship network and as such can provide continuity of care and promote positive identity and self-esteem.

Staying Put

“Staying put” is the term used to describe a situation in which the Local Authority support young people to remain living with their foster family after they are 18, until they are fully able to live independently. This can be of great benefit to young people leaving care enabling them to transition to adulthood with the safety net of a family which other young people benefit from. This inevitably impacts upon available foster carers as young people can remain living within their fostering families. Staying put is known to be positive for many young people however, arrangements can bring different complexities to foster families who effectively have an adult living with them but are still required to meet fostering standards for children/young people. There is limited statutory guidance in relation to staying put arrangements. As a service, we continue to review how we provide a supportive but proportionate service. Additional training (with input from Leaving Care) is provided to foster carers to help them better understand the complexity that these arrangements can bring, as well as the financial and practical support available to them.

Fostering Teenagers

Caring for and supporting young people to grow into healthy, secure and achieving adults can be both rewarding and challenging. Recruiting foster carers to meet the needs of teenagers can be difficult. Specific training is available to support foster carers who look after teenagers.

Parent and Child Fostering

This type of placement is for young people who have become parents at a young age who need support and guidance in caring for their own child and require foster carers who have specific skills, experience, interest and space within their homes.

Matching

We endeavour to match children carefully to proposed carers considering their views, wishes and feelings along with their heritage, culture, race, gender, and religion. Ensuring all children and young people in foster care are supported to maintain and develop positive views of their own identity is a priority. When it is not possible to match children; we work to establish community links to address children's cultural needs and offer additional training to foster carers.

Annual foster carer reviews

The legal framework for Fostering Reviews is set out in Regulation 28 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations (2011) and states that the Fostering Service must "review the approval of each foster carer not more than a year after approval (and after that whenever necessary, but at intervals not exceeding a year) in order to consider whether the foster carer and their household continues to be suitable." In doing so, the Fostering Service must consider the views of the foster carer(s); any child placed (subject to their age and understanding) and seek the views of the child's social worker.

The foster carer review is usually carried out at the foster carers' home, but it may be appropriate for reviews to take place in an office or virtually. A newly appointed full time Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (FIRO) will be in post from October 2021 to chair carers annual review meetings, quality assure review documents and prepare a separate report of the meeting with recommendations. The FIRO will be based in the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit alongside other IRO's to increase independence.

Children's consultation forms have been created to assist the Child's Social Worker to gain the views of children over age 5. Supervising Social Workers are expected to consult with any children of the foster family and consultation forms have been created to gain specific feedback from foster carers, education, IRO's etc. A leaflet has also been created to explain expectations to all involved in reviews.

A report of the First Annual Review or any review in response to a change of circumstance or concern is presented to Fostering Panel for consideration and their recommendation. Depending on the severity of the issue/concern, additional training/support may be provided in the first instance. However, the matter may be presented to the Fostering Panel. Panel will give the carer(s) an opportunity to express their views and will consider all the information provided. The foster carer(s) will be provided with advice and support from Foster Talk which is an independent support service in these circumstances. If Fostering Panel recommends that approval should not continue, this will be considered by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who will make a decision (qualifying determination). If this is to terminate a foster carers approval,

a letter is then sent to the carer(s) stating this and giving reasons. The foster carer(s) then has 28 days within which to make representation to the decision maker or to apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for an independent review on behalf of the Secretary of State.

The Fostering Panel

Those who sit on Sefton's Fostering Panel have a wide range of experience and interests. The Panel is constituted according to the Fostering Services Regulation; there is an Independent Chairperson, Chris Dingley and the Deputy Chairperson Linda Woodcock; both of whom are suitably qualified and experienced to undertake their role. We have recruited 4 new Foster Panel members in 2021 who bring diverse experience. One new panel member is a foster carer for a neighbouring local authority, another whose family fostered when she was a child, a specialist foster carer who fosters children with severe disabilities and who has previously worked as a Team Manager with troubled families and lastly a panel member who is the Director of a mental health charity targeted at supporting families living in deprivation. We are also fortunate to have an experienced Social Worker who sits on our panel. Sue Morrow, an experienced social worker is our newly appointed Panel Advisor. In her absence Team Managers support this role.

The Panel considers new approval applications for short-term and long-term mainstream foster carers, family and friend's (connected persons) foster carers and the annual review of existing foster carers or early reviews. We encourage and support applicants and existing foster carers to attend the Fostering Panel to which their report is presented. Once approved by Sefton, foster carers can only foster for this authority.

The Fostering Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker for Sefton who is the Head of Children's Services – Laura Knights. All decisions are forwarded to the applicants in writing. If applicants disagree with any decision made, they can follow the Representations/ Complaints procedure.

If a foster carer decides to resign, a brief report will be made to the Fostering Panel and their approval will be terminated and their name removed from Sefton's Register of Foster Carers. If the Panel considers that a foster carer is no longer suitable, the Panel can recommend to the Agency Decision maker termination of their approval terms. The Fostering Panel produces quality assured minutes for consideration by the Agency Decision Maker and prepares an annual report. Feedback is shared after every panel meeting. Those attending Fostering Panel are also encouraged to provide feedback to panel members in the form of an evaluation form and feedback is shared with the Fostering Service in respect of those presenting at panel. Quarterly meetings take place with Fostering Panel members, Fostering Team Managers, Panel Administrator, Fostering Service Manager and Agency Decision Maker (ADM) to promote communication.

Confidentiality and conflicts of interest

Foster carers are provided with full information about children in their care in order to understand their experiences and meet their needs; and so are expected to observe high standards of confidentiality and

ensure all personal information is held securely. As a service, we maintain records on carers and children who are looked after; subject to GDPR standards. Staff and foster carers are expected to declare any potential conflicts of interest. The Foster Carer handbook includes information relevant for carers.

Compliments, Comments and Complaint

Sefton Children's Social Care has a Complaints officer who is independent of the Fostering Service – Kathryn.Penlington@sefton.gov.uk

Applicants and approved foster carers are given a copy of the Compliments, Comments and Complaints procedure within the welcome pack shared with applicants and approved foster carers.

It is the role of the Child's Social Worker to ensure that children receive relevant literature which is shared in the form of a welcome pack. Children and young people can make their views known through their Social Worker or via their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), foster carer or independent advocates; other professionals. Details can be found in the Children's Guide – Statement of Purpose.

Anyone who receives a service from Sefton Fostering service has a right to complain if they think that something that should have been done has not been done or that something has been done badly or incorrectly. The Fostering Service is keen to learn from any complaints and put matters right. Information for carers on the procedures for dealing with complaints both by and about them, and about allegations of inappropriate behaviour is available through our complaint's procedure and detailed within the Foster Carer handbook.

Exit interviews have recently been set up; these are facilitated by an Independent Social Worker.

The Fostering Service also welcomes comments or compliments and shares these with team members when received. Feedback from the annual Foster Carer survey is also analysed.

Allegations

All allegations in relation to foster carers are referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) who is in the MASH (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub). The LADO Officer is Tracey Holyhead.

Allegations are assigned to a different social worker within the Fostering Service to consider; allowing the allocated Supervising Social Worker to remain available to the foster carers for support. Foster carers also have access to Foster Talk advice line for independent support and guidance.

Following an allegation or complaint against a foster carer(s), a review should be held which should then be presented to the Fostering Panel to ensure appropriate scrutiny. Recommendations as to the carer's ongoing suitability to foster should be made. In all cases the needs and immediate safety of any children being cared for by the foster carers remain paramount.

Get Involved! Get Informed!

The following pledge has been put together by looked after children and young people, staff, management and leadership. A special 'Thank You' to the members of the Kids in Care Council and The Care Leavers Forum who put a huge effort into the development of the pledge.

1) We promise you will have a named social worker who you know how to contact and who will keep in touch with you

This means:

- You will have your social worker's address, phone number and email so you can contact them when you need to.
- When you leave a message for your social worker, we will make sure someone returns your call as soon as they can. We will try to do this within 24hrs
- Your social worker will keep in touch with you regularly to check you are ok -this will be every 4 weeks for the first six months and then at least every 6 weeks.
- Your social worker will only be changed when it is completely unavoidable.

2) We promise we will involve you in all the decisions that affect your life.

This means we will:

- ask you what you want
- **listen** to what you say
- **act** on what you have told us
- We can't promise to do everything you ask, but when we can't, we will always explain why.

3) We promise that you will have a care plan that is up-to-date and meets your needs

- This plan will include all the support you need, including any support to meet your religious, racial or cultural needs.

- It will be written down and you will be given a copy of this.
- It will be regularly reviewed - at least every 6 months.
- The meetings to review the plan will be run by an independent person called an Independent Reviewing Officer.
- You will know the name of your Independent Reviewing Officer and how to contact them.
- You will be given copies of the notes from your review meetings.
- We will make sure that your care plan contains all the positive things about you.

4) We promise we will do our best to find a home that suits you

- This will be a home where you are cared for, feel safe and are supported
- We will take our time to find you a home that supports your needs.

5) We promise we will help you stay in touch with your family and any other people who are important to you.

- If you are not allowed to see someone, your social worker will make sure you understand the reasons why.
- We will listen to your opinions when we are arranging contact with family and friends.
- We will try to place you somewhere that is not too far away from family and friends if it is safe to do so.

6) We promise to help you to do the best you possibly can at school.

- We will give your school all the information they need to look after you properly.
- If you do not make as much progress as you can we will give you extra help to catch up, both at and outside school.
- We will make sure that you are involved in drawing up your personal education plan to support you at school and you will get a copy of this.
- We will make sure you get a place at the best possible school for you.
- If you have to move placement wherever possible we will try to keep you at the same school.
- We will support you if you have problems at school.

7) We promise to encourage you to develop your talents, interests and hobbies and to support you to do things you enjoy.

- We will make sure that you have a leisure pass
- We will celebrate your successes and achievements.
- We will support you to take part in hobbies and interests.

8) We promise to take an interest in your health and encourage you to be healthy.

- We will make sure you get regular health and dental check-ups.
- You will be given the name, address, phone number and email for the nurse for children and young people in care who can give you confidential advice and help you to be as healthy as you can.
- We will support you with any appointments you have or treatment you need.
- We will give you information to help you keep yourself safe and healthy.

9) We promise to work with you to give you all the help and support you need to make a success of moving on from care to adult life.

- You won't be expected to move on from care before you are 18
- Whatever you decide to do when you leave school (whether you want to find a job, go to college or university or do something else) we will give you help and support to achieve this.
- We will make sure that you have support to find suitable accommodation.
- We will not move you on from care until you have found suitable accommodation.
- We will stay in touch with you until you are 21 (or 24 if you are still in education).
- We will make sure you are involved in developing your pathway plan and you will be given a copy.
- Your pathway plan will be regularly reviewed - at least every 6 months.
- We will make sure you get information about leaving care well before it happens.
- We will link you up with the Leaving Care Team who will offer you ongoing support when you do, eventually, leave care.

10) We promise we will work hard to sort out any problems or worries you have.

- We will make sure you know how to get an independent advocate. That's someone who will listen to you and work with you to get things stopped, started or changed.
- We will make sure you have all the information you need to make a complaint, including the name and contact details of the Children's Complaints Officer
- We promise to take all complaints seriously and deal with them fairly and as quickly as possible.
- We can't always promise to do what you ask, but we will explain the reasons why.
- We will make sure that your social worker has the time to see you regularly.

