



# Lincolnshire Fostering Service

Statement of Purpose 2021

## **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE FOR THE LINCOLNSHIRE FOSTERING SERVICE**

**This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirements of Standard 16 of the Fostering Services Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act, 2000) and Regulation 3 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. To be presented for approval by Lincolnshire County Council Executive in September each year.**

## **CONTENTS**

### Page

- 4. Aims, Objectives and Principles of the Fostering Service
- 6. Standards of Care
- 6. Status and Constitution
- 7. Leadership Structure
- 9. The work of the Fostering Service
- 10. Service Ambitions
- 17. Training
- 18. Recruiting and Approving Foster Carers
- 19. Finance
- 19. Monitoring
- 20. Complaints and Allegations
- 21. Advocacy and Children's Rights
- 22. Number of Children Placed
- 23. Equality and Diversity
- 23. Ofsted
- 24. Further Information

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 Leadership Structure

Appendix 2 Fostering Panel Structure

## **AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLES OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE:**

### **The main aims of the Lincolnshire County Council Fostering Service are to:**

Provide high quality and safe care within a family setting for children and young people who have been assessed as requiring a foster placement.

Provide a range of Foster Carers able to meet the emotional, physical, cultural, religious and ethnic needs of all the children in care with Lincolnshire County Council.

Lincolnshire County Council delivers its Fostering Service through dedicated Fostering Teams managed by Team Managers covering the north and south of the county.

### **The main service objectives are to:**

Place children and young people in local foster placements where relationships with family, friends and community are maintained and continuity of education, health and cultural links and activities is ensured. In instances where it is not possible to achieve this within the Council's Foster Placements an appropriate placement outside of the resources of the County Council will be sought.

Maintain a sufficient number of foster care placements in relation to the location, numbers, needs, age range and characteristics of the looked after population and review this annually through the recruitment strategy.

Recruit Foster Carers who are trained and supported in providing safe care to children who live with them. The service will determine the number and types of foster placements required and produce an annual recruitment plan.

Carry out an assessment of need on every child prior to accommodation. Where possible a safe family member or friend will be the preferred placement choice.

Provide a safe and nurturing foster placement with every effort made to achieve good outcomes for children in care, within set timescales and to agreed standards. The service aims to ensure that wherever possible, children can meet with their prospective foster carers prior to placement and if this is not possible, receive a foster family profile.

Provide for sibling groups to be placed together when this is in their best interests.

Respect and promote the child's heritage, culture and identity.

Promote family time between the child and their family where this is consistent with the care plan.

Achieve permanence for all children who are unable to return safely to their families and promote Staying Put for those young people who are secure within their foster placement

Ensure openness and partnership working between all those involved and concerned with the child's welfare.

Involve young people and foster carers in developing services and building their feedback into service development.

To continually promote Caring 2 Learn to encourage caring schools and learning homes. To support and develop foster care champions across the County to ensure that the model is extended as widely as possible.

The Fostering Service has set targets to achieve best practice for the following Children's Performance Assessment Framework and National Indicators:

NI062 – stability of placements of children in care: number of placement moves.

PAF B79 – the percentage of children in foster placements or placed for adoption.

NI063 – stability of placements of children in care: length of placement.

**The main principles underpinning the service are:**

Foster Carers will be treated with respect and recognition will be given to the valuable role they play in the care of children in care.

Recruitment of new Foster Carers and staff who work within the service, complies with regulations, national standards and good practice.

Foster Carers are vetted, prepared and assessed in line with national regulations and requirements.

The Lincolnshire Fostering Panel considers all carer applications and reviews of approval.

All approved Foster Carers are required to sign the Foster Care Agreement and the Foster Carer Charter which outlines expectations of the Fostering Service and commits to caring appropriately for children in care.

Wherever possible all placements are matched to ensure a positive match between the needs of the child and the skills and experience of the foster carer(s).

Every child placed will be subject to the children in care - care planning process.

All Foster Carers are provided with the required documentation and information to support the placement of the child in their care.

Children have their placement and plan reviewed within four weeks of initial placement.

All Foster Carers have a named Supervising Social Worker and children in foster care have a named allocated Social Worker.

#### **STANDARDS OF CARE TO BE FOLLOWED BY THE AGENCY:**

The Fostering Service aims to provide safe, secure and high quality care in family settings for children who need to be cared for away from home. This will be achieved in accordance with the standards set out in the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (referred to as the Regulations), the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review regulations (2010) and (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015 the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011) along with the policies and procedures of Lincolnshire County Council. These standards will apply equally to family and friends placements. The service complies with the requirements of the Training, Support and Development Standards.

There is a countywide management group whose function is to continuously improve standards of care informed by inspections, audits, new legislation and guidance and evaluate the effectiveness of service delivery.

#### **STATUS AND CONSTITUTION OF THE AGENCY:**

Lincolnshire County Council is an approved fostering service provider and will be inspected by OFSTED in accordance with the current inspection framework.

Decision making and arrangements for the management of the service including the appointment of the Fostering Service Manager (Regulation 6) and approval of Foster Carer registrations (Regulation 27) are delegated to the Assistant Director, Children's Services.

A Fostering Panel has been established in accordance with Regulation 23. The Panel is chaired by an independent person with considerable experience of working within Social Care.

Where Lincolnshire County Council needs to use another fostering agency for the provision of placements; the commissioning section of the Council must be contacted to ensure that the process is managed according to the Council's rules on commissioning.

## THE LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE:

The Fostering Service is managed by the Head of Service for Regulated Services; through two Team Managers who manage dedicated fostering teams from bases in Lincoln, Louth and Sleaford. The service employs five practice supervisors who have lead responsibility for specific areas of delivery.

The registered manager appointed to manage the Fostering Service under Regulation 10 of the Fostering Services Regulations is:

XXX, Head of Service – Regulated Services  
County Offices  
Newland  
Lincoln  
LN1 1YL

Telephone: 01522 552781

*Qualifications:* Diploma in Social Work, BA (Hons) Social and Professional Studies and Post Graduate Certificate in Leadership and Management in Social Work.

*Experience:* more than twenty years of experience of working in social care, specialising in the area of children and families and latterly fostering. The registered manager comes with various child care experience and has held previous leadership posts within Children's Services.

The nominated manager to lead the Fostering Service in the absence of the registered manager is XXX – Head of Service for Children in Care and Residential Estates.

The Fostering Teams are locality based and deliver a comprehensive fostering service. These teams manage the recruitment, assessment, approval, support and placement processes which enable children in care in Lincolnshire County Council to be placed in a range of fostering settings.

XXX is the dedicated Professional Agency Advisor for both the Fostering and Permanence Panels.

The organisational structure of the Fostering Service is shown in Appendix 1. The list of Fostering Panel members is set out in Appendix 2. This information in its fullest form is only available to Ofsted.

The Teams are managed by two Team Managers responsible for the service on a geographic basis. XXX is the Team Manager North and has over 10 years' experience in Children's Services. The South Team is managed by XXX. She has 20 years' experience of social work and has worked in a range of services across children and families including regulated services.

The teams comprise Practice Supervisors who are responsible for the supervision and development of staff; including Supervising Social Workers who are all qualified and experienced in a range of child care social work and a number of unqualified staff who work within recruitment, placement support and placement duty. In addition, the service employs a dedicated marketing officer who is responsible for the delivery of the annual recruitment strategy.

### **THE WORK OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE:**

*Putting Children First* is at the heart of our work in Lincolnshire; *Working Together with Families to Enhance Children's Present and Future Lives.*

The strategic outcomes that the Council commits to are:

- Young People are healthy and safe
- Children and Young People develop to their potential in their early years and are ready for school
- Children and Young People learn and achieve
- Children and Young People are ready for adult life.

The expectations for all Children in Care are enshrined within these outcomes.

- We will champion the importance of aspiration
- We will promote self-esteem, self-belief and resilience in all children
- We will encourage all children to be the best they can be
- We will use resources to focus on outcomes, life chances and opportunities
- We will work jointly with foster carers to help promote these objectives.

Lincolnshire aims to provide sufficient local placements to enable placement choice and enable children to remain, where appropriate, close to their communities.

Lincolnshire delivers Staying Put opportunities to enable young people to remain in their foster placements post 18.

The training, induction and development of new Foster Carers is in line with the requirements of Standard 20 (NMS) and carers are expected to meet the Training, Support and Development standards (TSDs) within 12 months of approval.

The TSDs are incorporated and combined with the Caring to Learn Home Toolkit which encourages all carers to complete their training and develop skills, develop their knowledge and gain support into their fostering journey.

This combined approach supports foster carers to assess how they work with children and young people to enable them to feel safe, belong in their home and school in order to provide them with a solid foundation to have the confidence to go on to learn, be aspirational and achieve their full potential.

## SERVICE AMBITIONS:

### Young People are Healthy and Safe

All children are registered with GPs and dentists and this is kept under review by the team managers. There are designated GPs and a named Doctor and small team of nurses responsible for this group of children. Children and young people placed in foster care have an initial health assessment carried out by a designated GP and are encouraged to have an annual review by the same GP or designated nurse. During the Covid 19 pandemic contingencies were made to ensure that all initial health assessments were completed and were undertaken by nurses within the designated children in care team and this worked well with the quality, onward referrals and advice to children, young people and carers being evidenced. Moving forward it is anticipated that this work will revert to being GP led.

Medical forms recommended by British Association for Fostering and Adoption (BAAF) are used to record both the initial and annual review and maintain a health profile for each child in care. Lincolnshire has a strategy to tackle teenage pregnancy. All carers are given a copy of the guidance on sex and relationship education within their handbooks. Carers and young people are able to access further information from the young person's pages on the Council's website.

A multi agency commissioning group is in place to understand and improve the health needs of children in care. Health needs of children and young people are regularly monitored through the children in care review process. The Local Authority has a contract with CAMHS and services for children in care are prioritised. CAMHS work to a target of seeing all referred children for an initial assessment within 28 days. A forensic psychology assessment service is available to children in care who have emotional, behavioural, interaction or mental health issues that are manifesting themselves in the form of offending behaviour.

Foster Carers complete a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQs) for children between the ages of four and sixteen years of age. This is to ensure that services for children who require additional support are accessed swiftly in order to improve emotional well being. The results of all the SDQs are monitored by a multi-agency group comprising Social Care, CAMHS and Psychology which identify intervention strategies for those whose scores are of concern. Foster carers have access to the CAMHS professional advice line to support in the management of concerning behaviours.

Part of the training programme for Foster Carers focuses on promoting a healthy lifestyle, good diet and exercise. All mainstream Foster Carers have to undertake first aid training as part of their mandatory post approval training. Foster Carers have training sessions on promoting the health of children in care. This core programme is

supplemented through special interest seminars including Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), autism and teenage pregnancy.

Foster Carers can access specialist services for those with substance and alcohol misuse problems through the young 'We are with you' service. (Previously Addaction)

As part of the assessment process of prospective Foster Carers, a health assessment is undertaken by the carers' GP which the Agency Medical Advisor for the Fostering Panel considers. If there are on-going medical issues, a full medical assessment is undertaken. Full medicals are also completed for all carers seeking approval for permanence. All carers are required to update their health assessment every 3 years. Foster Carers who offer respite care to disabled children are offered specialist training to meet the needs of individual children. Foster Carers are trained in the administration of specific medication.

The assessment of carers includes the taking of full employment and accommodation histories. Checks with the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and local authority checks are completed on everyone aged over 18 years of age living in the household. A range of referees are contacted and visited including previous partners who have parented together and birth children.

All Foster Carers attend mandatory training regarding safer caring and the implications of looking after children who may have been harmed.

Each set of carers have a safer caring assessment prior to approval which highlights key aspects of the safer caring process and this is reviewed in the light of each placement made. Every effort is taken when placing children to ensure that the assessed needs of the child are carefully matched to the skills and capabilities of the carers. All children placed are subject to a safety plan that identifies any risks that carers will be asked to manage.

All Foster Carers receive bi-monthly formal supervision, in addition to regular visits, to review their practice. During the pandemic carers and their families have been seen in person and virtually in an effort to maintain strong support to such families. An unannounced visit to the foster home is made at least once each year. Workers in the team are also aware of the particular vulnerability of disabled children.

Allegations against Foster Carers are investigated using an established procedure whereby all are considered by the Local Authority Designated Officer. An independent person chairs the initial strategy meeting and oversees the process. Independent support is offered to carers during the allegations procedure by Foster Talk. In addition the Fostering Service funds each fostering household's membership of the Fostering Network which brings the benefit of legal protection insurance and access to support and advice from their staff, including free legal advice and counselling service.

Children's plans are regularly reviewed through the Children in Care's statutory Review process, and procedures are in place for reporting significant incidents through the OFSTED notification requirements. All children are given information about how to report abuse and carers are prepared in how to manage disclosure and prevent allegations arising in the placement. In addition children and young people have access to an independent advocacy service. All children are provided with a coming into care kit.

All children and young people are expected to agree with their carer when they go out, where they are going and a time to return. If a young person fails to return at the agreed time, attempts are made to locate them by telephoning friends, family and relatives. Carers can obtain advice about the operation of the Missing from Care protocol from the Emergency Duty Team and are issued with a copy of it within the Foster Carer Handbook.

The process for conducting risk assessments on missing young people and making reports to the police is detailed in the Foster Carer Handbook.

Lincolnshire's Fostering Service Policy is that there is sufficient space within the foster carer's home for a child to have their own room. In certain circumstances, a child/young person may share a bedroom. Full risk assessments for each child/young person sharing must be undertaken before these arrangements are agreed. A matching policy is in place to ensure that effective matching of children to placements is undertaken to improve placement stability and good outcomes for children and young people.

## **READINESS FOR SCHOOL**

All pre-school children who come into care will be placed in a foster placement equipped to meet their individual needs.

All Foster Carers are encouraged to register with their local Children's' Centre and take up the services available as part of the county's Early Help offer available to all children.

All children in care are able to access the 15 hours early entitlement at the age of 2 and have access to suitable nursery school provision to support their learning outcomes. Children aged 3 and 4 can access their 15 hours entitlement from the term after their 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday, and those in foster care can access an additional 15 hours (to provide a 30 hours offer) if the foster carers are in employment outside of their foster carer responsibilities.

Foster Carers are required and supported to engage children in their care in specific activities in order to develop their self-esteem and socialisation skills.

## CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LEARN AND ACHIEVE

Lincolnshire County Council is committed to maximising a child's potential in both academic attainment and personal achievement. All young people are expected to attend school and efforts are made to maintain children in their existing schools. Foster Carers who transport children to out of catchment schools have their transport expenses reimbursed.

Foster Carers are aware that it is unacceptable to take children and young people out of school for family holidays. A protocol has been agreed on this matter and has been issued to all carers.

The Fostering Service promotes the educational attainment of children placed with foster carers. Each child in foster care has a Personal Education Plan and, where appropriate, a Leaving Care Pathway Plan. Foster Carers are expected to involve themselves in assisting children in placement to achieve satisfactory attendance, assist with homework and participate in parent/teacher events.

All children in care have an entitlement to the Pupil Premium. This is further enhanced by the Council and the utilisation of the provision is monitored within the PEP process.

There is a designated teacher in every Lincolnshire school with responsibilities for liaison, educational monitoring and pastoral care for children in care. There are Education Officers whose role is to ensure effective liaison with schools and to promote educational attainment and attendance of children in care. This includes children who live with Foster Carers outside of Lincolnshire.

The Children in Care Education Service is managed by a Virtual Head Teacher. The Lincolnshire Virtual School Team is fully engaged with the fostering service and carers in order to promote the improvement of educational outcomes for children and young people in care. The team is well resourced and provides training and support to social care teams, foster carers and schools. Personal Education Plan meetings are held three times per year or more if required with high levels of engagement from children, social workers, schools and carers.

The Council has an embedded Caring 2 Learn approach which promotes joint working between schools and foster carers to maximise the potential of children in care. The programme is supported by foster carer champions in all areas and introduced an accredited award.

There is an Educational Psychology service which provides input to vulnerable children including children in care. The service broadens the support and intervention

knowledge and skills of carers and schools and actively identifies children in need of psychological involvement within the SDQ process.

The opportunity for children and young people to succeed in hobbies or sports is seen as an important element of the fostering task and is supported through fostering allowance payments. Annual Foster Carer Reviews consider the level of social opportunities young people in placement are supported in attending. Children and young people are encouraged to participate in a range of activities and interests. Their achievements are recognised each year in an annual award ceremony held under the banner of FAB! which sadly has not taken place for the last two years due to the pandemic.

The Children in Care Council has continued to develop and in addition to a steering group, groups in the four quadrants of the county have been established to ensure that the voice of children in care is heard. These groups operate under the banner of V4C (Voices for Choices) and are held in 4 quadrants of the County on a quarterly basis. V4C is currently working on a refresh of the Coming Into care Kit. In addition the Big Conversation is held three times per year and gives young children in care the opportunity to work jointly with Council officers and Members on key areas for development.

## **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE READY FOR ADULT LIFE**

Lincolnshire County Council's Foster Carers are recruited and supported to meet the needs of children placed with them and provide the stability that they require to achieve and ready themselves for adult lives. The authority therefore makes sure that there are no barriers, financial or otherwise, to prevent Foster Carers becoming permanent carers be they adopters, Child Arrangement Order holders or special guardians; where an assessment determines that this is the best outcome for the child. The Council has fully committed to the Staying Put requirement with 41 young people remaining in their present foster placements. Young people are issued with a Skills for Adult Life booklet which identifies and develops the core skills for independent living which is a focus for the young person, foster carers and all involved agencies.

The training plan for Foster Carers contains special interest seminars, which assist carers in helping children progress to independence. On an individual basis, placement support workers will also have a role in helping young people acquire skills for independence and have developed a range of work preparation and apprenticeship opportunities. Children in Care are encouraged to follow courses of higher education and appropriate support is made available to them. In 2019 the tender for Lincolnshire's Leaving Care service was awarded again to Barnardo's. All young people leaving care have a named worker and a clear plan for support in their transition to adulthood.

## **SUPPORTING THE FOSTERING SERVICE**

The work of the Fostering Service is delivered through a number of key relationships and support functions which are described below.

### **1. Supervising Social Worker**

The role of the Supervising Social Worker is to provide support and supervision to the Foster Carer household. They also assist with practical difficulties and the provision of equipment. They are a crucial link between the carer and the child's Social Worker. There is a supervision policy for Foster Carers. Supervision takes place bi-monthly and includes a focus on personal development.

Although most support visits will be prearranged the Supervising Social Worker has a duty to undertake at least one unannounced visit per year. They are also responsible for undertaking the annual review of approval, which incorporates the carers' views and those of any birth children and fostered children. The review also includes reports from social workers and the Supervising Social Worker who will identify strengths and future learning needs. Following completion of the review the foster carer is issued with a statement of re-approval.

### **2. Child's Social Worker**

The child's Social Worker is responsible for the overall management of the child's care plan. They have a statutory duty to visit the child within one week of placement and thereafter at a minimum of six weekly intervals until a child is confirmed as being in their permanent placement when a three monthly visiting pattern may be appropriate. However in most circumstances the visiting pattern will be more frequent and determined by an individual child's needs.

### **3. Foster Carer Support**

The service delivers quarterly focus groups with foster carers across the County. These provide opportunities for engagement with the service, support and training opportunities including greater networking. The service has developed a group of foster carer mentors who are linked with foster carers at the point of approval and provide an essential support and point of contact to enhance the confidence and skills of newly approved foster carers. The Caring2Learn programme has recruited foster carer champions to provide training and guidance with regard to the development of a learning environment within the foster home.

All Foster Carers receive a handbook which details local policy, information about fostering terms and conditions and guidance about requirements concerning the care and control of children and other procedures. The handbook is frequently updated and

amended versions are distributed to Foster Carers. The service continues to provide an electronic newsletter which remains the preferred generic communication method between the fostering service and foster carers. This allows us to disseminate information, including training events and dates, social events, good news stories and best practice information to the majority of our foster carers. Those without email or who chose not to receive emails are provided with a copy of the newsletter via their Supervising Social Worker.

Fostering households have access to secure sites such as Facebook and Whatsapp to share general information and offer support to one another. Zoom is also used to facilitate foster carer social activities to encourage the community spirit.

All foster carers are provided with individual membership of the Fostering Network.

#### **4. Out of Hours Service - Emergency Duty Team (EDT)**

This service provides a team of social workers who are available outside of office hours to offer emergency support to service users and the public. The EDT can offer telephone advice and has access to placement information and emergency placements with Foster Carers. Early Help Workers and Future4 me staff are available to provide practical assistance out of hours in certain circumstances.

#### **5. Placement Support Workers**

The service employs a dedicated group of Placement Support Workers whose role is to support and assist Foster Carers and children in care. They offer support and assistance to carers to develop, understand and implement a therapeutic style of care. This is undertaken via group work, one to one direct work, and support to the fostering community.

Placement Support Workers work collaboratively with the other professionals and network around the child (ren) and attend the Child in Care Review meetings to plan and review outcomes for children. Placement Support Workers are committed to continuous professional development informed by latest research and trauma informed practice.

### **TRAINING**

The Fostering Service ensures that Foster Carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care to meet the needs of each child placed in their care.

Training of Foster Carers is a significant aspect of the service and is provided both pre and post approval and is included within the Fostering Service's Annual Training Plan.

Training is not an option but a clear expectation of all carers and is evaluated in supervision sessions and annual reviews. Personal and professional development is supported through the Learning Homes Toolkit and regular practice workshops, supporting carers to transfer theory into practice. A three year cycle of training in Safeguarding, Safe Care and First Aid is a requirement for all carers. In addition, mandatory courses on Diversity and Trauma Awareness are held and should be completed on a 3 yearly basis.

Following feedback from carers the TSD (Training, Standards and Development) and Learning Home Toolkit were combined, the feedback from both staff and carers has been overwhelmingly positive. This ensures that all new carers meet the standards but can also progress and develop their practice and homes to ensure children can heal and meet their full potential. The toolkit encourages training and development in line with Lincolnshire Children's Service's priorities and national research. The toolkit encourages the development of relationships between Foster Carers, schools and other professionals and their participation within a community.

Pre-approval training is over three days and is provided in-house with a Supervising Social Worker being the lead facilitator. The course has evolved over the years to reflect changing practice, local experience and the national fostering agenda. All foster carers are provided with online access via Fostering or the LSCP (Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership) suite of training post approval.

An Annual Foster Carer celebration Conference is held and offers both training, information and recognises the work that foster carers undertake via a range of long service awards. This event took place remotely during the pandemic in 2020 and it is hoped in the future this will revert to a face to face event to celebrate the efforts and commitment from so many.

## **PROCESS OF RECRUITING AND APPROVING FOSTER CARERS**

Foster Carers are recruited and assessed in line with Lincolnshire guidance based on the National Minimum Standards 2011, Fostering Regulations 2011 and the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services and Amendments 2013.

Dedicated staff are in place to ensure a prompt response to all first time enquirers. The Practice Supervisor is responsible for the implementation of the Recruitment and Retention strategy and managing all aspects of the recruitment process.

Recruitment involves:

- Co-ordinating evening events whereby foster carers and young people in care attend and give their real life experiences
- Utilising social media to reach wide audiences
- Holding drop-in sessions at Community establishments
- Newspaper advertisements
- Newspaper articles
- Distribution of posters
- Information distributed through displays and presentations
- Word of mouth through existing carers
- The recommend a friend scheme
- Lincolnshire County Council website
- Targeted activity within specific communities in county.
- Participation in a range of county wide events.

All initial enquiries relating to fostering are completed online through the Lincolnshire County Council website and are then passed to the Recruitment Co-ordinators or the Recruitment Co-ordinators are telephoned directly.

The Recruitment Co-ordinators aim to make contact with all enquirers within 24 hours of them registering their interest online. Their role is to ensure that enquirers have all the information they need, and following an initial discussion, an initial expression of interest can be completed over the phone and/or a detailed information booklet is made available to all interested applicants about the fostering process which is sent within five working days.

Once an initial expression of interest is received and allocated to a recruitment team worker; they aim to make contact within 24 hours to arrange a mutually agreeable date and time for the initial home visit. The engagement of foster carer champions within this process has been a recent development and gives prospective applicants a helping hand in realising the realities and benefits of becoming a carer for Lincolnshire.

The fostering service is focusing on enhancing the overall customer experience and the Recruitment Co-ordinators represent the Local Authority in a professional manner and being respectful to all enquirers.

As part of the Stage One process statutory checks are undertaken and prospective carers attend a three day preparation group. If all aspects of Stage One are completed then the prospective carers are invited to begin the Stage Two assessment process. The service aims to have all stage 2 applications approved within 6 months. The assessments are completed by qualified social workers and follow the format of the Coram BAAF Form F.

Foster Carer approvals (including family and friends carers) are considered by the Fostering Panel. Applications to become permanent Foster Carers are considered by the Permanence Panel. The composition and organisation of the Panels is in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

The service provider decision maker is the Assistant Director, Children's Services.

Every Foster Carer is required to sign a Foster Carer Agreement (Regulation 27 (5) – (5b)) prior to the placement of a child. A Supervising Social Worker is allocated to the family; this is usually the person who has undertaken the home study. Foster Carers are provided with a copy of the Foster Carer Charter.

Foster Carers are supervised and supported by a named locally based Supervising Social Worker and the child has their own named Social Worker. Independent Reviewing Officers undertake all childcare reviews.

The Fostering Panel always considers first reviews; however subsequent reviews are normally completed under locality management arrangements, unless there is a disagreement regarding the terms of approval which necessitates referral back to Panel. During the covid pandemic the panel has been held virtually to ensure all business is maintained in timescales. The service continue to develop IFAB (Independent Fostering Advisory Board) which offers an independent quality assurance system for fostering annual reviews and will appraise reviews on the basis of year 4, year 7 and year 10 following initial approval. This process supports the ethos of a learning organisation by highlighting best practice and subsequent learning from reviews of carers.

Serious complaints or allegations will also be put before Panel to consider whether or not there should be any alterations to the terms of approval. Since April 2009 Foster Carers have the right to challenge decisions through an Independent Mechanism Review or the Councils Corporate complaints section.

## **FINANCE**

Most Foster Carers receive weekly allowances according to the age of the child. Despite the financial difficulties faced by Local Authorities, in 2020 fostering allowances have increased by 2%.

A specialist fostering scheme remains in place targeted on harder to place children. Placement+ Carers are paid higher fees. Carers able to make permanent commitment to children, receive an increased rate of allowance as do those able to take the more

complex adolescents. The service also offers parent and child placements and placements for young people on remand.

## **MONITORING THE QUALITY OF THE SERVICE**

Foster Carers have at least one unannounced visit per year. This is undertaken by a Supervising Social Worker. They also receive regular supervision from an allocated Supervising Social Worker. This is held bi-monthly. Each Foster Carer is subject to an annual review and contributions are sought from IROs, Social Workers and children placed.

The Service Manager monitors a range of matters identified in the National Minimum Standards 2011 (Regulation 35 (1)) to ensure that standards are adhered to and that the service is developing to meet the needs of a range of children. Reports are submitted on a quarterly basis to the executive to monitor service development.

Regular quality audits are completed by staff from the Fostering Service at key stages in a Foster Carer's career. These are to ensure compliance with procedures and policy and evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention of the Supervising Social Worker.

## **COMPLAINTS AND ALLEGATIONS**

### **Summary of the Complaints Procedure**

The Directorate has a statutory complaints service; the detail of which is contained in the guide for staff 'Handling Comments and Complaints'. It is a three stage process:

- Stage 1 - Local Resolution
- Stage 2 - An independent investigating officer is appointed
- Stage 3 - A formal review by an Independent Panel of independent members plus the Complaints Manager.

Staff must ensure that all carers know how and who to complain to.

Complainants have the right to involve a friend or advocate.

The Named Manager monitors all complaints and liaises with the Complaints Officer and the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP) Business Manager. This information is available to authorised persons only.

All Foster Carers have access to support and information regarding the complaints procedures and at the point of any investigation, support can also be accessed through membership of Fostering Network; the cost for which will be met by the agency.

Complaints are collated and reported to the Corporate Parenting Sub Group and themes are shared within the service. Details of complaints relating to the service are considered within the annual fostering report.

## ALLEGATIONS

Foster Carers can sometimes be the subject of allegations in respect of the care of the children or young people they are looking after. If this occurs the allegation will be investigated in line with the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership child protection procedures with all allegations managed by the Local Authority Designated Officer. In addition to the role of the Supervising Social Worker, Foster Carers have access to an Independent Social Worker via Foster Talk who can offer practical and emotional support.

All allegations and other matters are monitored by the manager who ensures that these are retained for agencies to view as appropriate.

## ADVOCACY AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Lincolnshire County Council commissions its advocacy for children through Voiceability "Total Voice"



Total Voice Lincolnshire

Referral and Information Line: 01529 400 479

Text:

07860 018 887

Email:

[tvf@voiceability.org](mailto:tvf@voiceability.org)

Website: [www.totalvoicelincolnshire.org](http://www.totalvoicelincolnshire.org)

### When might you want an advocate?

You can ask to speak with advocate if you:

- Have serious concerns about the care you are getting

- Want to be more involved in decisions being made about you and your future
- Want to fight decisions being made about you
- Want to make a complaint.

Office of the Children's Commissioner



### **Children's Commissioner for England**

The Children's Commissioner is Rachel de Souza. She has a legal duty to promote and protect the rights of all children in England with a particular focus on children and young people with difficulties or challenges in their lives, and in particular those living away from home, in or leaving care, or receiving social care services.

The Children's Commissioner can be contacted:-

By writing to her at

The Office of the Children's Commissioner, Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT.

Phoning her on Freephone 020 7783 8330

Emailing at: [info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk)

Visiting the website [www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk](http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)

### **NUMBERS OF CHILDREN PLACED**

On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 there were 680 children in care to Lincolnshire County Council.

Of this number 476 were placed with Foster Carers (including kinship carers), including 29 placed in independent foster placements, two children placed with other local authority carers and 5 unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

## **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY**

The Lincolnshire Fostering Service works to the Lincolnshire County Council's Equality and Diversity Policy which is available on the council's website.

The Lincolnshire Fostering Service will treat all service users fairly, openly and with respect throughout the fostering approval process. Applicants wishing to be approved as Foster Carers will be considered irrespective of ethnicity, religion, belief, gender, sexual orientation or disability providing the Fostering Service considers they can safely meet the needs of children throughout their childhood and into independence.

Every attempt will be made to find a placement which meets a child or young person's emotional and developmental needs taking into consideration their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability.

The Lincolnshire Fostering Service recognises that no child or young person should have to wait indefinitely for the ideal placement.

## **OFSTED**

Ofsted is the single, independent inspectorate for all social care services in England. It is responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting fostering services under the provisions of the Care Standards Act, 2000.

### **Questions or complaints**

The one point of contact for all questions, queries and complaints is Ofsted.

The telephone number is 0300 123 1231. This number manages all general enquiries and will redirect them as necessary; they can also be contacted at [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk) or write to:

Ofsted  
Piccadilly gate  
Store Street

Manchester  
M1 2WD

### **FURTHER INFORMATION**

The Fostering Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually.

If you require this document in a different language or an alternative format such as large print, audio tape or Braille, please contact the Equality and Diversity Team on 01522 782060.

The Statement of Purpose, Children's Guides and other information are also available on the Lincolnshire County Council website: [www.lincolnshire.gov.uk](http://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk)

A copy can also be obtained from the registered manager:

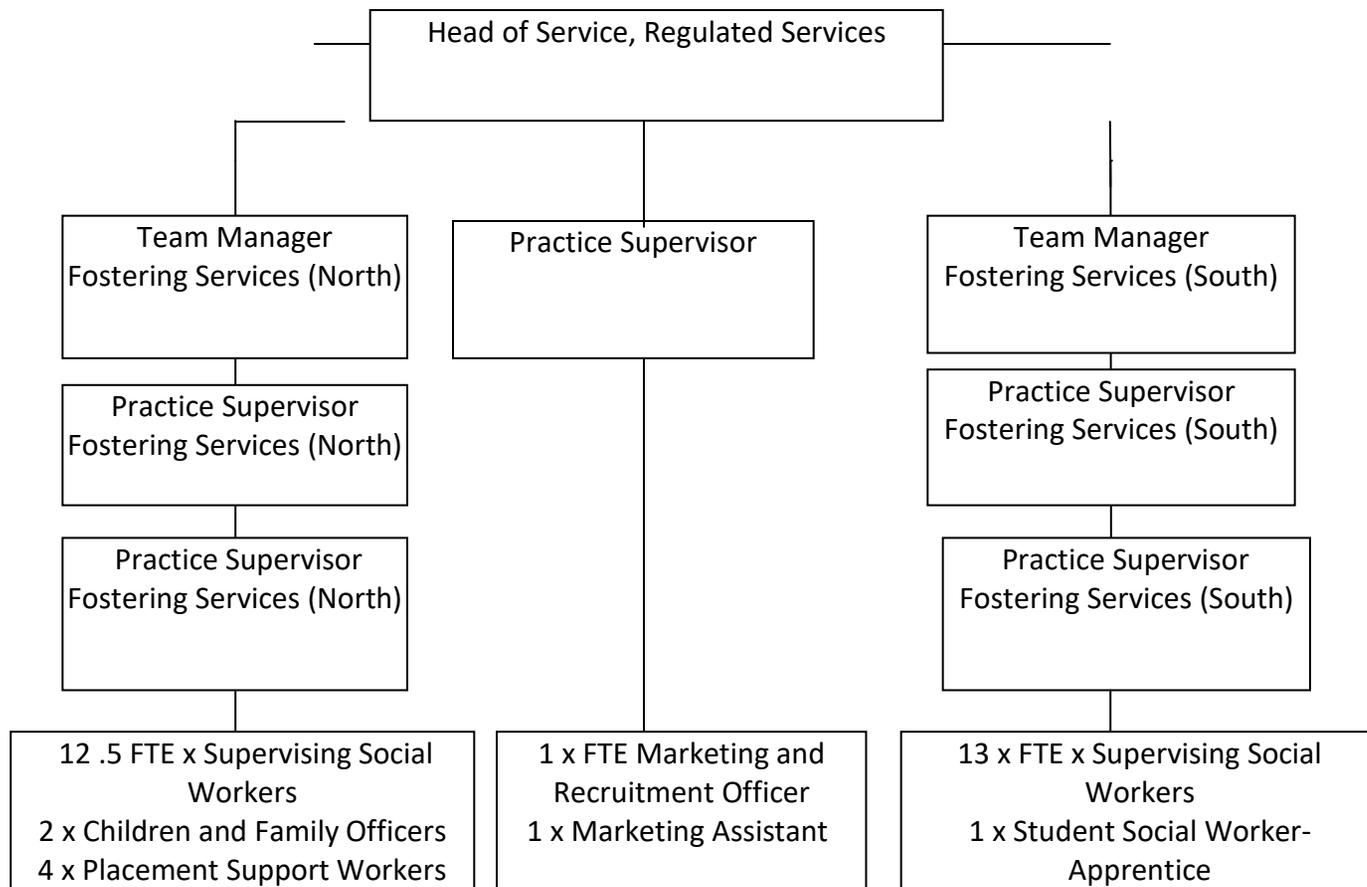
Head of Service– Regulated Services  
Lincolnshire County Council  
County Offices  
Newland  
Lincoln  
LN1 1YL  
01522 552781

## APPENDIX 1

### FOSTERING SERVICE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE – SENIOR MANAGEMENT

There are two Team Managers for the Fostering Service who line manage the two teams of Fostering Social Workers and Supervising Social Workers.

### FOSTERING SERVICE – LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE



**APPENDIX 2  
FOSTERING PANEL**

