

# Fostering Statement of Purpose

## April 2022 - March 2023

Children, Families and  
Education Directorate

**Date: June 2022**



**Putting children, young people and their families at the heart of everything that we do**

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**Luton**

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## **FOREWORD**

Luton Council is committed to provide the best possible Fostering Service that offers safe, stable and stimulating foster care. This supportive environment will ensure that the children and young people are valued, supported and encouraged to grow, develop and maximise their potential as individuals.

We strive to comply with the principles outlined in the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011, the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and other relevant legislation as outlined in the Legislation and Policy Framework section below.

To maximise the outcomes for our children and young people looked after, we are investing in the training and support to our valuable foster carers, central to this is the Training, Support and Development Induction Standards for Foster Care.

This Statement of Purpose details the Councils (as corporate parents) aims and objectives; the way we recruit, approve, train and support foster carers; the rich diversity of our foster care service and the other services that support fostering and foster carers; and the staffing and management structure of the Fostering Service.

The Service monitors all aspects of the work including the Fostering Panel, all of which underpin the provision of an efficient and dynamic service.

Through the Fostering Service, Luton Council aims to place children in care in families locally wherever possible, where they will be supported to achieve their full potential.

The Fostering Service and its work are an integral part of the overarching Sufficiency Strategy for children looked after by Luton Council.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services place requirements on each Fostering Service provider to produce a written Statement of Purpose. The Statement of Purpose should set out the aims and objectives of the service, alongside the descriptions of the services and facilities it provides. This document sets out the Statement of Purpose for Luton Council's Fostering Service. It outlines the systems and provisions in place, which aim to ensure the very best outcomes for children in foster care in our borough.

This Statement of Purpose links with the Children's Guide which is provided to all children, subject to the child's age and understanding, at the point of admission to care. This document should also be read in conjunction with the Children's Pledge, which describes the Council's commitment to its children and young people living in care and the Foster Carers Charter also outlines the Council commitment to and expectations of foster carers

The Statement of Purpose aims to provide information to a wide audience, including: staff members, foster carers and their families, children and young people placed with Luton Council foster carers, the children's parents', professionals from partner agencies, and the general public. A copy of the Statement of Purpose is available on the Council's on line Tri.X procedures. The information it contains is reviewed regularly and amended at least annually.

## **LEGISLATION AND POLICY FRAMEWORK**

Luton Council's Fostering Service meets the requirements of:

- The Children Act 1989
- The Care Standards Act 2000
- The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011)
- Family and Friends Guidance (2010)
- Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Vol. 4: Fostering Services (2011)
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010
- Care Planning and Fostering Regulations 2015
- The Children and Families Act 2014
- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- The Disability and Equality Act 2010
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers (CWDC 2007)

Alongside national legislation, Luton Council's Fostering Service also has clear operational policies and guidelines to ensure consistent and high quality standards of service delivery.

## 1 SECTION ONE

### 1.1 Background information

Luton became a Unitary Authority in 1997. According to the latest data from the Office for National Statistics, Luton's population is now 213,500 (in the 2011 Census this was 203,650). Of these approximately 60,700 are children and young people under the age of 19, which is 28% of the total population in the area. In comparison in the UK as a whole, 22% are under the age of 19. 46% of the overall population of Luton are from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Origin or non-white (Census 2011, ONS) and there are over 150 languages and dialects spoken in the town.

Luton's population is projected to rise by 10 per cent over the next decade if pre-covid trends of migration and births are projected into the future. The older population will have the fastest rate of growth. The impact of Brexit, the pandemic, and now, the Ukrainian crisis are being monitored for future population projections and analysis.

### 1.2 Our Vision

Luton Council is committed to provide early intervention services to support children and their families at home, endeavouring as far as possible to keep the family unit together. Should the need for alternative accommodation arise in order to protect and safeguard children, the first priority will be to explore family members and connected persons (i.e. someone the child already knows), if such an arrangement is assessed to be appropriate.

Luton Council aims to place children and young people with locally approved foster carers, whose suitability has been assessed by the Fostering Service. Over the last year Luton Council has developed and invested in a dedicated and comprehensive Fostering Service that is focused on meeting the diverse needs of children who Become Looked After (BLA) in Luton, and aims to exceed the quality standards required by statute.

Our vision is to provide a safe, stable and caring environment which surpasses required standards in meeting the needs of all looked after children and young people, enabling them to realise their potential and to enhance their life opportunities.

We endeavour to place children and young people locally in order to facilitate contact with their birth family, preserve ties with their community and support existing friendships, as well as continuity in attending the same school. Wherever possible the distance will be no more than 10 miles of their local community, unless there are safeguarding concerns.

We pledge to work in an open and accessible way: treating children and young people, their families and fostering families with fairness and respect, as well as promoting equality.

We are committed to working in partnership with children and young people and foster carers: actively seeking their views through the young people's panel and carers' consultation.

We apply a partnership approach to providing services to foster carers, children and young people and their families; which includes health, education and other agencies.

Alongside the Fostering Service there is a dedicated Shared Care Team, which offers support to families who have children with special needs. This Team is part of the Children with Disabilities Service.

Presently the Local Authority is working on developing a Supported Lodgings scheme with a view to providing semi-independent supported family-based accommodation for young people over the age of 16.

### **1.3 Aims of the service**

The main aim of Luton Borough Council Fostering Service is to provide stable and high-quality foster care placements for children of all ages that value, support and encourage them to grow and develop as individuals. Luton Borough Council Fostering continues to develop the service and work collaboratively with our stakeholders and our foster carers to strengthen our support and retention of foster carers. In addition to promoting their health and general well-being the service is also committed to ensuring that every foster carer recognises the importance of the educational achievement of Children in Care and work with LBC in raising their academic attainment. The service also recognises that a small number of children may not achieve formal academic qualifications but will encourage foster carers to help children and young people to reach their maximum educational ability.

The service aims to provide:

- a skilled and flexible service that is responsive to the wide range of assessed needs of children and young people who require foster placements
- a variety of assessment options (including general, connected person, SGO) to secure suitable placements responsive to the children and young people's care plan
- high standards of care in a nurturing family environment for all children and young people, where their individuality is recognised and valued, and these needs are meeting a positive manner

- children and young people with stable placements that allow them to fulfil their potential in every aspect of their lives; whilst giving respect to and promoting their racial, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds
- children in Private Fostering arrangements that are safeguarded and supported
- consideration for the gender, sexuality, disability and heritage of children and young people when considering making placements
- a multi-agency partnership approach that can progress the needs of children in care and their foster carers, and includes education authorities, health and social care trusts and other agencies
- a service consisting of managers, practitioners and support staff who are appropriately qualified, DBS checked, registered with their professional regulatory councils, and supported in all areas of professional development
- a recruitment strategy for foster carers which encompasses and promotes a diversity of backgrounds thus allowing the service to appropriately match placements for children and young people, not just with general carers, a commitment to develop and provide ongoing training, learning and development opportunities to all foster carers and their family members
- a service which offers continued support to foster carers balanced with appropriate safeguarding and quality assurance, values and respects the work they do and actively promotes retention

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Service**

- To ensure the Fostering Service has a detailed knowledge of the needs profile of looked after children such as age, disability, ethnicity and location that will inform a targeted foster carer recruitment strategy.
- To ensure there is a choice of high quality foster placements available to meet the complex and diverse needs of children and young people in care.
- To raise awareness in the community about Private Fostering, have robust assessments of suitability of such arrangements and offer appropriate levels of guidance and support.
- To ensure foster carers are supported and supervised regularly by a suitably qualified social worker; and receive suitable preparation through training that enables them to respond positively to the needs of children placed with them.
- To ensure all approved foster carers are clear about their roles and responsibilities and know how to seek advice or support if needed.
- To have processes and procedures in place to ensure consistency across the service and promote equality.

- To have clear processes and procedures in place that safeguards against radicalisation and sexual exploitation of children and young people.
- To create a skilled workforce by promoting team and personal development and training for both staff and foster carers.
- Placement decisions that take into account the following (whenever possible): identified needs of the child and young person (including race, language, culture, disability, religion, gender orientation) and the carers ability to meet them, as well as the children and young person's views, wishes and feelings.
- Siblings will be placed together whenever possible and appropriate.
- To facilitate good communication and development of effective working relationships between all parties in the child's life; in order to promote their physical, social, emotional and intellectual development.
- To ensure there is meaningful consultation with children and young people, carers and staff, using a variety of methods to encourage participation.
- To agree and implement strategies that will ensure the retention and continued support of general foster carers and connected persons carers. This will include working in partnership with social work teams, therapeutic services, Health and Education
- To implement a flexible staffing strategy to explore the use of suitably qualified staff to ensure continued support to foster carers. This strategy also includes the professional development and supervision of staff within the Fostering Service.
- To develop strategies to improve collective responsibility for the placement of Luton children and ensure all parts of the Children and Learning Directorate and other partner agencies understand the core function of the Fostering Service and how they can contribute to achieving this. All staff have a clear role which ensures an effective delivery of the Fostering Service Regulations and the National Minimum Standards with the aim of achieving good outcomes for children and young people.
- To review the structure of the Fostering Service when necessary to ensure services are provided in the most efficient and timely way.

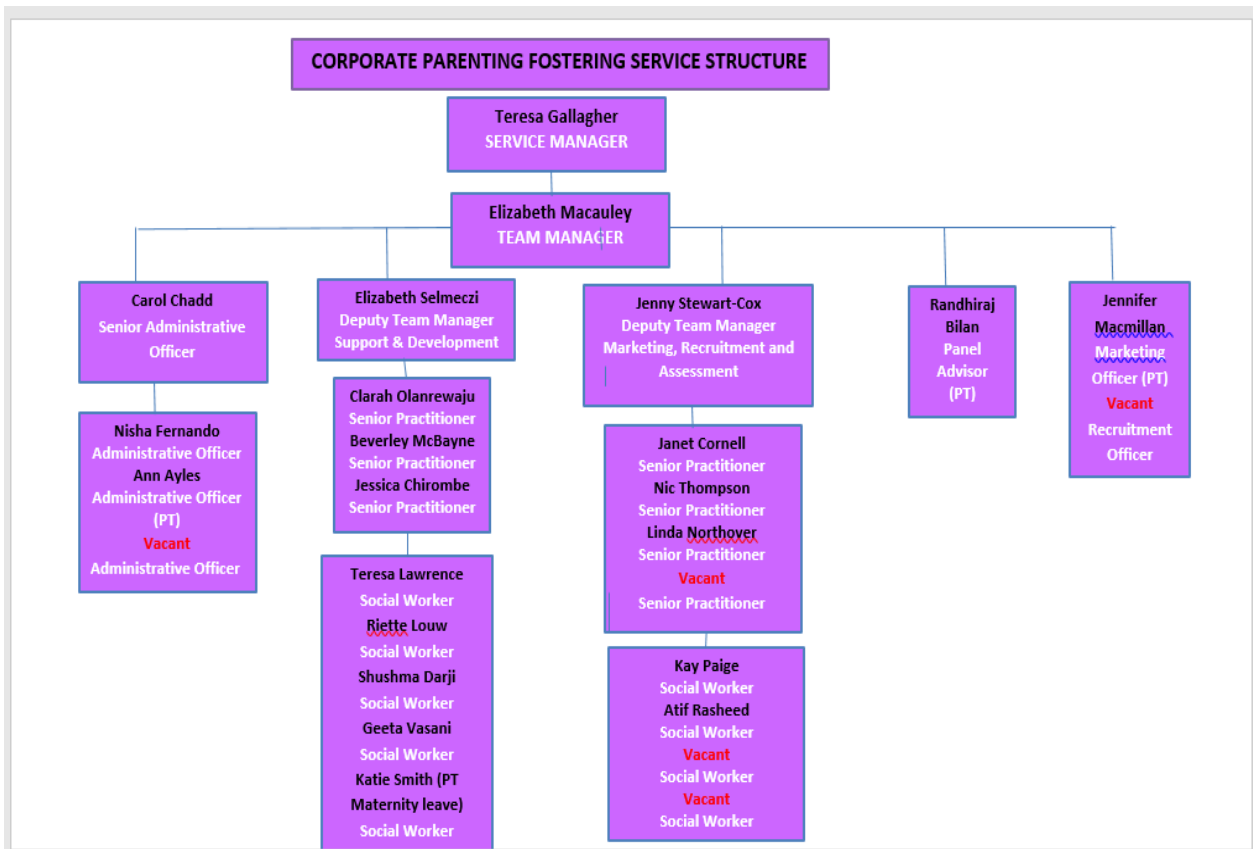
## 2 SECTION TWO

### 2.1 Structure of the service

The Fostering Service sits within the Corporate Parenting Department of Luton Council and is made up of 3 teams:

- Fostering Support and Development team
- Marketing, Recruitment and Assessment team

The 2 Teams are managed by a Team Manager and 2 Deputy Team Managers who have the responsibility for the day to day running of each team and the Strategic Management lead is with the Head of Service, Corporate Parenting.



**Figure 1:** Current Structure of the Fostering Service and associated teams

#### 2.1.1 The Fostering Support and Development Team

The Fostering Support and Development team consists of a Deputy Team Manager, 3 Senior Practitioners and 5 Social Workers. The Fostering Support and Development team provide guidance and support to Luton Council's foster carers and ensure foster carers receive suitable training that enables them to respond positively to the needs of children placed in their care.

The key function of the work is to provide regular supervision and support to foster carers and their family. This includes , completing unannounced visits and foster carers' household



reviews yearly, liaising with other professionals and attend/participate in meetings regarding the children in placements, completing Personal Development Plans with each fostering household and deliver some of the fostering training courses. They facilitate support groups for the fostering households and co-ordinate special events for foster carers and their families. They also provide support to foster carers' own children in the form of a 'Children Who Foster' group.

### **2.1.2 The Marketing, Recruitment and Assessment Team**

The Marketing Recruitment and Assessment team consists of 1 Deputy Team Manager, 3 Senior Practitioners, 2 Social Workers with 3 social work vacancies (including 1 senior practitioner).

This team undertakes all assessments of applicants wishing to be foster carers of any type and the two teams jointly undertake the delivery of the 'Skills to Foster' 3 day training programmes for new applicants.

The primary functions of the team are to raise awareness of fostering in the community including Private Fostering, recruiting prospective foster carers, deliver 'Skills to Foster' preparation course for prospective foster carers, assess suitability of prospective general carers, PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence), and Connected Persons and present the assessment report to the Fostering Panel and/ or court. The team also manages Private Fostering and completes assessments for Special Guardianship Orders, be they Court Ordered or Private. The Post Order Support to approved Special Guardians is managed by the Family Partnership Service from May 2021.

The team holds operational responsibility for Private Fostering and provides key focus and supervision in this area, raising awareness in the community, undertaking Private Fostering assessments of potential private foster carers, supervising and providing support as required and in line with Private Fostering Child Care guidance (CA 1989).

### **2.1.3 Fostering Service Key Supporting Roles**

The Fostering Service also has key roles supporting those teams who report directly into the Fostering Service. The Team Manager manages 1 Fostering Panel Advisor (0.4 FTE), 1 Marketing Officer, 1 full time Recruitment Officer and 1 dedicated Senior Administrator who supervises 3 administrators (1 currently vacant)

The roles all have key functions including managing the formal Panel process from start to finish, supporting the recruitment process and supporting with the day-to day administrative functions.

## **2.2 Service Provision**

Foster placements are primarily for children aged 0-18. Some young people who become adults at 18 may continue to live within a family placement under the 'Staying Put' scheme if their assessment recommends that they require support post 18 years.

The service offers foster placements for children and young people from diverse ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds with varying needs including: babies, young children,

persistent offenders, children with challenging behaviours, children with disabilities, unaccompanied asylum seekers, young mothers and their babies and those who have been arrested for a criminal offence under PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence act (1984)). The service also monitors and supports Private Fostering arrangements, when children and young people live outside of immediate family with parental agreement. These arrangements are made privately and without the involvement of the Local Authority.

The Fostering Service is based on the second floor of the Town Hall Extension, Upper George Street, Luton, LU1 2BQ. The main reception is located at the Town Hall and it is open to the public. Opening times are: 8.45am-5pm. on Monday to Thursday, 8.45am-4.30pm on Fridays.

### 2.3 Range of placements provided:

- **Emergency placements:** provided at short notice initially for up to 5 working days, with a view of children and young people returning home or to their previous or alternative placement.
- **Short-term placements:** an initial placement which provides a safe and nurturing environment to the children and young person whilst rehabilitation to home is explored, long-term needs assessed and plans for their future are formulated.
- **Long-term/Permanent Matched Placements:** a provision which offers long-term stability and continuity with the same foster family for children and young people until they reach adulthood, and if appropriate beyond.
- **Connected Person placement:** a provision which enables a child or young person to live with extended family members or connected persons in line with Fostering Regulations.
- **Contract Care placements:** this service is provided to children and young people who require an intensive level of support. Such placements are considered and agreed by the External Resource Panel for children and young people, based on assessed needs. The contract carers are self-employed and are provided with a written agreement for each child/young person placed with them. The Contract Care scheme is currently under review by the Head of service to address the increasing need for young people in this category to be placed with a contract carer when they are unable to settle in alternative placement choices.
- **Parent and child placement:** a safeguarding fostering provision for parents and their child, in order to help parents develop sound parenting skills whilst assessing their ability to care for their child independently.
- **'Staying Put' placements:** a service provision which enables young people who reach 18 years to remain living with their foster carers whose role changes as they become an adult, if that is considered a suitable arrangement.
- **Respite placement:** a service which supports foster carers and their families by providing time-limited overnight stays for children in placement with another foster

carer. This is a provision to promote placement stability, agreed on an individual basis.

- **Day-care:** a support provision, if/when foster carers engaged in activity which is not suitable for children and other members of the foster family are unable to help i.e. carer attending training.
- **PACE:** a service provision that provides overnight placements to young people under the age of 18 years who have been charged with a criminal offence.

## 3 SECTION THREE

### 3.1 Recruitment and approval of foster carers

- Foster carers are approved in accordance with standards set out in the Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Regulations 2011.
- Foster carers' assessments follow an adaptation of the Coram BAAF Form F format. The authority also incorporates the use of competencies drawn up by Coram BAAF and outlined in the Training Support and Development (TSD) Standards for Foster carers.
- In accordance with the standards and regulations all relevant statutory checks are made, including enhanced Disclosure and Barring Scheme checks for all adults in the household.
- The applicant's birth, marriage, divorce, naturalisation certificates and passports where applicable are seen.
- Employers' references are obtained and three personal referees are interviewed in person however referees may be interviewed via the telephone if it is not possible to visit in person. References are also obtained from ex partners and every attempt is made to acquire these particularly in instances where there is acrimony between ex partners. Any decision not to pursue a reference in the instance of significant acrimony is carefully considered by the Service Manager.
- Each applicant receives clear information about the process of assessment along with details about fostering allowances.
- The assessment and approval process involves all members of the applicant's household.
- The assessment is carried out by a qualified social worker.
- The assessment report is prepared by the social worker; it includes a clearly evidenced recommendation on the applicant(s) suitability as a foster carer and the types of placement appropriate to the applicant(s).

- Each applicant sees a copy of the non-confidential sections of the assessment report before going to Panel and has the opportunity to make written comments if they wish to do so. They sign the paperwork and agree the content or make comments on it separately.
- The Fostering Assessment Team aims to complete assessments and the approval process within four to six months of the application being received.
- All applications are considered by the Luton Fostering Panel. Prospective carers are invited to attend the Panel that considers their application.
- The recommendations of the Fostering Panel are considered by Luton's Agency Decision Maker (ADM), who makes the decision on behalf of the Council. The assessing social worker verbally informs the applicants of the ADM decision. The ADM then writes to the applicants within 7 days to inform them of the decision formally.
- On approval, the applicants are required to sign a Foster Carer Agreement with the Council. They are also provided with access to the on line handbook and any necessary equipment in line with the assessment.
- Where the Fostering Service decides not to proceed with an application (at stage 1 of the assessment process), the reasons will be discussed with the applicant, along with any other options available to them. The decision and reasons will be confirmed in writing by the Team Manager. Applicants will be given information about the complaints process.
- Where a decision is made to stop an applicant at stage 2 of the assessment process the case is presented to Panel are given a qualifying determination concerning their approval as foster carers, which if they disagree with, they have the option of applying to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) or making 'written representations' within 28 days of the Agency Decision Maker's (ADM) decision. This would only occur if the information about the prospective or current carers has been presented to Fostering Panel or, in relation to prospective foster carers, if stage one has been completed. Applicants and current foster carers will be assisted through the process if they wish to pursue this. Access to independent advice is available from Fostering Network.

### **3.2 Luton Foster Carers Association (LFCA)**

The LFCA came in existence in November 2020. All foster carers automatically become members of the association following approval by the Agency decision maker. The Association meets monthly and Service managers attend the meeting bi monthly, Senior manager's, every 4 months and the Corporate Director for children and families with the Council's Portfolio lead attend every six months.

### **3.3 Appeals against refusal or termination of approval**

Prospective foster carers who have their application turned down by the ADM following Fostering Panel, or existing foster carers who have had their approval withdrawn or altered following a review, have the right to appeal against such decisions and information regarding the appeal process is sent to them. Applicants can ask that Panel reconsider their case or alternatively can ask for an independent review from the independent review mechanism (IRM.)

The IRM contact details are:

Contract Manager, Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) Unit 4, Pavilion Business Park, Royds Hall Road, Wortley, LEEDS LS12 6AJ

Tel: 0845 450 3956 (charged at local rate)

Fax: 0845 450 3957

Email: [irm@baaf.org.uk](mailto:irm@baaf.org.uk)

### **3.4 The Fostering Panel**

The Luton Fostering Panel operates in line with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

The Panel considers applications from Luton Council only.

The Fostering Panel considers recommendations for the approval and ongoing approval of foster carers, plans for children where the plan is long term fostering; the matching of children to long term placements, and all other significant matters relating to the assessment and issues relating to Council approved carers.

Foster carers' annual reviews are presented to the Panel within a year of their approval and then every three years, or sooner if necessary or if there is a proposed change of approval range. Reports are also sent to Panel about any significant changes in the fostering household or following an allegation or complaint regarding the carers.

#### **3.4.1 Membership of panel**

Luton Councils Fostering Panel Central List consists of the following members, one of which has experience of children with special needs:

- An independent Panel Chair
- An Independent Vice Panel Chair
- Luton Council Elected Member
- A Social Worker
- An Independent Reviewing Officer (SW)
- An Adult ex care leaver
- A Virtual Schools Officer
- An independent member who is an adopter
- An independent member who is a foster carer

## 4 SECTION FOUR

### 4.1 Support and Development Team

#### 4.1.1 Supervision and support for carers

Following full approval of a foster carer at Fostering Panel or temporary approval by ADM under Reg. 24, a qualified social worker (supervising social worker) is allocated from the Support and Development Team to provide supervision and support.

The supervising social worker undertakes regular supervisory visits to the foster home; which varies between 4 to 8 weeks. Factors such as length of foster placement (matched long term) and level of support to foster carers informs the frequency of visits. Although a minimum of 4 weekly visits is prescribed, this can be changed and the frequency can increase if there are standards of care concerns or challenges within the foster placement. Supervising social workers also make unannounced visits to the placement, at least once annually. All visits are documented on a pre-designed format and stored on the carers' electronic files. Any discussions outside of the visits are recorded under Case Notes on the same electronic system.

There are two elements to supervisory visits: to facilitate information sharing and support for the carer, as well as quality assurance of the placement to ensure the standard of care is appropriate and that the carer is meeting the child's individual needs as well as Fostering Regulations/required competencies.

All foster carers are subject to an annual review, at which their continued approval is evaluated. The process is co-ordinated by the supervising social worker and the review is chaired by an independent Fostering Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer (FQARO) who is based in the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Team.

This is a formal review of the work the carer(s) have undertaken during the previous year, and is an opportunity to reflect on achievements and learning. The review reports (which include feedback from carers, child/young people in placement, his/her social worker and the child's Independent Reviewing Officer) is presented to the Fostering Panel in the case of all first reviews, every 3 years or when changes are proposed to the carer(s) registration or there are cases of concern. The Fostering Service aims to ensure carers are able to access support at the time that they need it. During office hours the allocated supervising social worker, duty worker in their absence is usually the first point of contact for the foster carer and is able to offer support, advice, guidance and supervision regarding most matters relating to fostering.

In addition, every child in placement has an allocated social worker who is be able to advise the carer about issues relating to that child. In case the allocated social worker is not available the child care teams operate a duty system, whereby the social worker on duty would respond to any urgent problems or issues.

Support to foster carers outside of office hours is delivered by the Emergency Duty Team, whose contact details are 0300 300 8123. In order to provide local support to carers and EDT, a member of the Fostering Service is available for consultation over the telephone at weekends from 10am to 8pm. This service is staffed on a rota basis by senior practitioners and team managers from both teams.

Luton Fostering Service has a corporate membership with The Fostering Network, which extends to all Luton Council approved foster carers. Through this provision carers receive regular updates/newsletters from The Fostering Network and are able to access mediation service and advocacy support, as well as legal advice.

Consultation and information sharing with foster carers is an integral part of a productive and positive working relationships. The Fostering Service co-ordinates regular Foster Carers' Forums every 4 months where planned changes are discussed and carers views are sought, as well as guest speakers being invited to give information or update on support services linked to fostering.

In-between Forums foster carers are kept up to date with any changes or proposed events via e-mail communication from the Fostering Service.

The benefit of peer support is well recognised and valued in fostering. In Luton there are support group meetings for foster carers facilitated by the Fostering Service, and an annual Summer Event which is a fun day for all foster carers, their families and children in placement. Foster carers' long-term commitment to Luton is recognised by annual Long-Service Awards.

Luton's foster carers receive a fostering payment in respect of each child placed with them. The fostering allowance comprises of two parts: the child's allowance which is age related to the child placed, and a fee payment recognising the length of service to Luton as well as experience and training the carers have completed.

#### **4.1.2 Training for foster carers**

Training is an integral part of personal and professional development for staff and carers alike. Foster carers are required to attend training to retain their approval as Council approved foster carers. Learning for carers, which can take a variety of forms, will help carers feel better equipped and more confident in responding to the needs of vulnerable children who they are looking after.

The annual training programme for foster carers (2022/23) covers pre-approval training for potential carers, induction training for newly approved carers, as well as Training, Support and Development Standards. The comprehensive programme of training is designed to meet the changing development needs of foster carers throughout their fostering career and include; mandatory and core-training, stand-alone courses on a range of topics, training delivered by partnering agencies (education, health). In order to promote wider participation training is available not just during the day-time but in the evenings and weekends as well. There is also a wide range of on-line training available. The training programme is updated and reviewed termly with foster carer representations

All training courses are evaluated by feedback from foster carers, which informs future commissioning.

Targets for learning are identified by the foster carer and their supervising social worker, and outlined in the carers' individual Personal Development Plan (PDP). Foster carers are expected to update their mandatory training (identified in legislation) every 3 years and core training (fundamental courses identified by the service) every 4 years.

Each fostering household is expected to complete at least 4 training events a year. In a two parent fostering household both carers are expected to participate in training. The PDPs are

reviewed six monthly and updated annually. Information from the PDPs helps identify the training needs of the service for the following year.

## **4.2 Support to foster carers from partnering agencies**

Support to foster carers and children in placement is also provided by a number of local agencies/organisations. The Fostering Service has direct access to the input of a senior educational psychologist who works closely with the multi-disciplinary Virtual School. A consultation service is available and referrals can be made by social worker and foster carers to support placements.

### **4.2.1 Therapeutic service**

In Luton there is a specialist child and educational psychologist (SSEP). Since April 2021 the Senior Specialist Post has increased from 3 days per week to 5 days per week to increase the support provided to Luton Fostering Team and Social Care Teams. The support provided to Foster carer includes consultation, training and therapeutic work.

In addition The Luton Educational Psychology Team offer Video Interactive Guidance which can be commissioned through the Senior Specialist. This is an intervention to support attunement and secure attachments. Another key training offer is The Emotional Brain workshop which is a two hour on line workshop delivered 6 times a year.

Since April 2021 6 supervising social workers and 19 Luton Foster Carers have attended the workshop.

### **4.2.2 Health support services**

The Fostering Service is committed to ensure the health outcomes for children in care continually improve. Health professionals work with foster carers to promote healthy living and eating, as well as tracking dental and eye health.

There is a designated nurse for children in care who, with the support of other health professionals, oversee the children and young people's six monthly/annual health assessments and has input into the health promotion of children in care.

Luton Council provides free training, advice, information and support to young people and carers through the Luton Sexual Health Service

### **4.2.3 Education support services**

The Fostering Service recognises the importance of improving school attendance and education attainment for children in care. Foster carers are expected to attend Personal Education Planning Meetings with the children and young people, and any other education meetings.



There is an expectation within Children's Services that holidays are not taken in term-time, and children are not taken out of school without senior manager's approval.

There is a dedicated group of professionals in the Virtual School, who have close links with local schools and are available for consultation and support to foster carers. They are able to advice on a wide range of topics from exclusion, to the use of pupil premium plus, and willing to support carers in education meetings.

There is a close working relationship between the Virtual School and Fostering Service with joint training and information events such as the foster carers forum.

#### **4.2.4 Other information/support sources for foster carers:**

- **Introduction pack:** Sent to foster carers as hard copies or online following their approval or given to carers by the supervising social worker at the first visit. It comprises the following:
- **Foster Carers Handbook:** gives factual information to carers about the Service, roles and responsibilities. It contains information about a variety of topics: from procedures to safer caring or attachment issues. The handbook is updated regularly and available on-line.
- **Foster Carers Agreement:** outlines expectation of the working relationship between carers and the Authority. Carers are given two copies to sign and they will receive one signed by the ADM to keep.
- **Allowances booklet:** gives detailed information about financial matters, this is part of the revised handbook.
- **Information leaflets:** bite-size information pamphlets by The Fostering Network on relevant topics: benefits, tax, insurance for foster carers. Information about advocacy, independent visitors.
- **Training Programme for foster carers:** a comprehensive guide to all training available to foster carers.
- **Guide to Complaints and Compliments:** outlining procedures to making a complaint or complement.
- **Training, Support and Development Portfolio:** a folder containing the TSD workbook and guidance and access to the Services training policy and expectations
- **Subscription to the Fostering Network** – information about what membership covers.

## **5.1 Safeguarding Children and Quality Assurance**

The Fostering Service operates in line with the Local Safeguarding Children Board in keeping children safe and responding to concerns raised when children are thought to be at risk of abuse or exploitation.

The Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures can be accessed through their website: <http://lutonlscb.org.uk/>

## **5.2 Children's Guide**

At the point of entering foster care children are provided with a Children's Guide by their social worker, subject to their age and understanding. Foster carers are expected to support children in understanding the contents of the Guide and make the services accessible for them.

The Children's Guide includes information about the advocacy service and independent visitors available for children in care and how they can find out more about their rights. It gives details of how children can contact their IRO or Ofsted if they wish to raise a concern.

## **5.3 Complaints**

The Fostering Service uses Luton Council's Social Care Complaints Procedure to manage complaints made by foster carers or on behalf of the children in their care. The complaints procedure is in 3 stages.

### **5.3.1 Stage one – problem solving**

Most problems or concerns can be resolved informally by discussion with the relevant social worker or their manager. The complaint is acknowledged within five working days and the complainant will receive written notification of the outcome within twenty eight days. Complaints made by foster carers regarding the services they receive will initially be dealt with by the team concerned i.e. if it is a complaint against one particular social work team it will go to their manager to address. If the problem or concern cannot be resolved informally by discussion with the particular team manager, the complaint will go to the relevant Service Manager to address.

### **5.3.2 Stage two – independent investigation**

Where problems or concerns cannot be resolved informally at stage one, an independent person is appointed to investigate the complaint. They will report to an adjudicating officer within 28 days.

### **5.3.3 Stage three - review panel**

If the complainant is not satisfied with how the investigation was carried out or the outcome at Stage two, they may request that the matter is considered by a review panel. The review panel consists of three independent people, one of whom will act as the chairperson. The panel will recommend any action that in their view needs to be taken in respect of the complaint.

### **5.3.4 Ombudsmen**

If the complainant is not happy with the final outcome of the social care complaints procedure they will be advised how to contact the Local Authority Ombudsman.

In all circumstances allegations made against a foster carer or member of their family are investigated and responded to in accordance with the current Luton child protection procedures, in collaboration with the Local Area Designated Officer (LADO) under the procedures for investigating allegations against adults caring for children.

Foster carers are required to undertake training on 'Safer Caring and Managing Allegations', this is a mandatory course and outlines the different processes depending on the nature of the allegation. The training is co-delivered by the LADO).

All foster carers, subject to an allegation or complaint are offered independent support from the Fostering Network's Advice and Mediation Service.

## **5.4 Monitoring the quality of the service**

The Fostering Service is monitored by Luton Council's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service and inspected by OFSTED

- the quality of the work undertaken by assessing and supervising social workers is monitored through supervision, appraisal and audit processes. Reports are quality assured by respective DTMs and feedback given to individual workers to promote improvement and professional development.
- the Fostering Panel adviser and the Fostering Panel Chair provide 'quality assurance' for foster carers' assessments and reviews presented to Panel which is discussed at the Panel business meeting chaired by the ADM
- the FQARO (Fostering Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer) provides a quality assurance function in relation to foster carers, supervising social workers work, and the Fostering Service from chairing the foster carers annual reviews
- feedback is also obtained from key stakeholders via foster carers' reviews, child care reviews and the complaints procedure
- foster carers receive at least one unannounced visit annually, and four to six weekly supervisory visits by their allocated supervising social worker
- the Head of Service responsible for the overall management of the Service monitors a range of matters identified in schedule 6 of the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards to ensure the standards are met and developments of the Service are in line with regulatory requirements and national trends,
- Periodical inspections are undertaken by Ofsted.

## 6 SECTION SIX

### 6.1 Review of the Statement of Purpose

The Fostering Service reviews and updates the Statement of Purpose annually to ensure its aims and objectives remain appropriate and meet the needs of service users.

The information contained in the Statement of Purpose can be translated, and/or made available in alternative formats on request.

## 7 SECTION SEVEN

### 7.1 Key contact details

OFSTED	National Business Unit Royal Exchange Building Ann's Square Manchester M2 7LA	Tel: 0300 123 1231 0845 640 4040
Fostering Service	Luton Council Town Hall Extension Upper George Street Luton LU1 2BQ	Tel: 0158 254 7737 Website: <a href="http://www.luton.gov.uk/fostering">www.luton.gov.uk/fostering</a>
NYAS Children and Young People Advocacy Service	Free Post Tower House Birkenhead Wirral CH41 1 FF	Tel: 0300 330 3131 0151 649 8700 0808 808 1001 E-mail: <a href="mailto:help@nyas.net">help@nyas.net</a> Website: <a href="http://www.nyas.net">www.nyas.net</a>
Complaints and Representation Manager	Luton Council Town Hall Extension Upper George Street Luton LU1 2BQ	Tel: 0158 254 6747 E-mail: <a href="mailto:feedback@luton.gov.uk">feedback@luton.gov.uk</a>
Mediation and Advocacy Service	The Fostering Network 87 Blackfriars Road London SE1 8HA	Tel: 0207 401 9582 ext. 5004 <a href="http://www.fostering.net">www.fostering.net</a> Website: