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Definition of roles

The foster carer's role

Foster carers look after children by developing meaningful relationships in a safe and nurturing family environment. The stability, care and love provided by foster carers helps the child to achieve recovery and healing from past trauma and promotes resilience in order for the child to realise their full potential. A foster carer's relationships with other members of the team around the child should be based on mutual trust and respect.

The social worker's role

The role of the social worker when placing and supporting children in a foster home is to act in their best interests, and promote their physical and mental health and wellbeing. It is important to encourage young people to express their views, wishes and feelings and take them into account. Social workers help young people gain access to, and make the best use of services provided by the placing authority and its relevant partners. They aim to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes for young people. Social workers ensure that young people are safe, that there is stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work and prepare them for adulthood and independent living.

The Fostering Service's role

The Fostering Service aims to provide stable and first rate foster care for children who are valued, supported and encouraged to grow and develop as individuals. To achieve this aim the service recruits, trains and approves foster carers and delivers ongoing support to them in order to give them the skills and confidence they need to develop meaningful relationships with the children and young people they care for. In this way the service provides stable and loving homes while the children are part of the foster family.

***All parties must be explicit in their commitment to open and honest communication.
All parties will embrace the Leeds Restorative approach and play a full part
in decision making about the child appropriate to their role.***

What can be expected from social workers?

1. Working in partnership

We understand that we must provide foster carers with the best possible opportunity to give the children in our care a loving, stable home, and to enable those children to enjoy a positive, nurturing experience of family life. A life that does not set them apart from their peers.

We must:

- Treat foster carers as experts on the child and include them in all relevant meetings where planning and decision making affect them or the children they care for.
- Treat foster carers without discrimination and respect them as colleagues.
- Value foster carers' skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals.
- Respect confidentiality.

2. Information

We know that information is vital in order for foster carers to provide care that meets the child's need.

We must:

- Provide the Placement Support Team with all the necessary information to enable the creation of a high quality profile.
- Share with the Fostering Service and/ or foster carer all the relevant information needed in order to safely care for the child and to support the child in fulfilling their potential.
- Provide this information in writing prior to the placement, or as soon as possible in the case of emergency placements. This may include information from the previous foster carers. The possibility of a "handover" meeting should be considered to secure clear and timely plans for the child's care.

3. Clarity about decisions

We recognise that in order for children to live a full family life, foster carers must be able to make decisions regarding the children they look after.

We must:

- Arrange a placement planning meeting within five days of the placement commencing and ensure a clear record is made of agreed delegated decisions and ensure this is reviewed at least annually.
- Ensure that foster carers are able to make everyday decisions that mean that their fostered child is not treated differently from their peers and is able to feel part of their family.
- Provide clarity about any decision foster carers cannot take at the outset so that everyone is clear about their respective responsibilities.
- Deal swiftly with any requests for decision making on matters that are outside of the foster carer's authority.
- Enable honest discussions about school, health & contact arrangements recognising the carer's circumstances and opinions.

4. Communication and consultation

We believe that open and honest dialogue between all partners is the key to good relationships. The contributions of all members of the team around the child should be equally valued.

We must:

- Facilitate communication between foster carers and decision makers.
- Provide foster carers with the opportunity to influence relevant practice policies and procedures.
- Provide foster carers with an explanation for decisions made by the Social Work Team about the child.

What can be expected from the Fostering Service?

1. Working in partnership

We recognise that foster carers have skills and expertise and can make the biggest difference to the everyday lives of children in care.

We must:

- Value foster carers' skills and expertise equally to those of other professionals.
- Recognise that foster carers are the people who live with children every day and usually know them best.
- Include foster carers in all meetings that affect them and the children they care for.
- Ensure that our fostering service will comply with fostering regulations and guidance.
- Respect foster carers as colleagues and value their contributions.
- Follow policies and procedures about how we use information.

2. Information

We know that information is vital in order for foster carers to provide care that meets the child's needs.

We must:

- Share relevant information about the child including the care plan, delegated authority and medical consent, ideally in advance of the placement being made and certainly within five days to inform the placement planning meeting.
- In the case of emergency placements a Mosaic based information sheet must be printed off and taken with the child to the placement.

- Provide foster carers with information on all financial matters including tax, allowances and additional entitlements. Ensure any changes are communicated as soon as possible.
- Provide foster carers with full details of all relevant policies, procedures and updates, and a weekly email to be sent to all carers with general information updates.

3. Support

We recognise that fostering can be an isolating and challenging task, and that appropriate and timely support makes all the difference to the fostering family and to the children in their care.

We must:

- Ensure there is a robust post-approval induction process.
- Respond positively to requests for additional support, including short break support and day care to enable attendance at training events.
- Provide foster carers with regular supervision and phone contact primarily from the supervising social worker but also from the child's social worker.
- Give foster carers honest and open feedback.
- Provide foster carers with access to 24 hour support from people with fostering expertise.
- Pay foster carers' allowances, expenses and fees in a timely manner.
- Ensure that there is a local group that recognised by the fostering service where foster carers and their family can find support and share experiences with other fostering families.
- Facilitating contact with birth families is sometimes difficult but it is an absolute priority for Children's Social Work Service so it is essential foster carers are given all the support they require to enable family time to be a positive experience.

- Recognise and champion the contribution foster carers and their families make to fostering.
- Ensure carers are aware of the Council's staff counselling service.

4. Learning and development

We believe foster carers must have learning and development opportunities throughout their fostering career. This will ensure they have the skills and knowledge they need, and allow them to develop their practice in order that they can help transform the lives of the children they foster.

We must:

- Ensure all foster carers have an individual annual training plan and receive regular supervisory visits from their allocated supervising social worker.
- Provide foster carers and their family with appropriate, accessible and relevant training from trainers who understand the fostering process.
- Support foster carers to develop meaningful relationships with the children in their care and the other members of the team around the child.
- Continue to provide all foster carers with other development opportunities which make the best use of their skills and expertise, such as mentoring or providing training or support.
- The fostering manager who is responsible for carer training to regularly review the offer, and consult with carers about future provision.

5. Fair treatment

We recognise that foster carers have a right to be treated fairly, no matter what the circumstances.

We must:

- Consult with foster carers before changing terms and conditions.

- Ensure honesty and openness in all of our discussions and communications with foster carers including reviews and fostering panel.
- Provide a framework for dealing with allegations, including access to independent support and adhere to agreed timescales.
- Ensure that foster carers are treated with respect, kept informed and provided with emotional support should they be subject to an allegation.
- Ensure that foster carers know the arrangements for the payment of fees and allowances in the event that they are not able to foster while the subject of an allegation.

6. Communication and consultation

We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship.

We must:

- Ensure that we consult with foster carers in a meaningful way on matters that affect them.
- Give foster carers timely feedback from consultations.
- Provide clear information on how foster carers can give us feedback and report concerns.
- Significant meetings and practice issues should be confirmed in writing.

What can be expected from foster carers?

1. Working in partnership

We must demonstrate a high standard of care and conduct. We believe that open and honest dialogue is the key to a good relationship and we will aim to build a meaningful and collaborative relationship with our supervising social worker and the child's social worker.

We must:

- Demonstrate our expertise and make use of our skills to the best of our ability.
- Provide children with a positive experience of family life.
- Attend meetings about the children and young people we care for.
- Work with the individuals and agencies involved with the child such as the child's social worker, fostering service, school, health and religious bodies.
- Work with birth parents, wider family and any other significant people in a child's life.
- Meet the standards set out in fostering regulations and guidance and follow policies and procedures e.g. maintaining an adequate wardrobe of clothes and providing a suitcase for moves.
- Inform our supervising social worker about factors that impact on our fostering including changes in our household members and circumstances.
- Inform our supervising social worker about any difficulties that arise for us.
- Inform the child's social worker about any concerns we have related to the child.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Maintain an open dialogue with the fostering service and social work team.

2. Respect for the child

Every child and young person should be respected as an individual and be supported in meeting their needs and achieving their aspirations and potential.

We must:


- Develop a meaningful relationship with the child and understand their needs, support their growth, become an advocate and champion for them, and endeavour to remain in touch with them if they move on.
- Care for the child in a manner that recognises and respects their identity including their ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural heritage.
- Afford the same level of protection and care to a child as we would our own child.
- Support the child to make decisions regarding their own lives as appropriate to their age, understanding and ability.
- Support the child to inform the development of the services which affect their care as appropriate to their age, understanding and ability.
- Ensure the child has access to independent advocacy e.g. children's rights.
- Support children to make their own decisions about their lives.

3. Learning, development and support

We must access learning and development opportunities throughout our fostering career in accordance with the needs of the children we are caring for. This will ensure we have the skills and knowledge we need and allow us to develop our practice in order that we can help transform the lives of the children we foster.

We must:

- Be willing and able to develop our skills throughout our fostering career.

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- Attend relevant training.
 - Be willing to attend and contribute to support groups.
 - Maintain a reflective log and regularly discuss with our supervising social worker.