



Lincolnshire Fostering Service

Statement of Purpose 2022-2023

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.

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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 within a countywide approach.

The main service objectives are to:

Place children and young people within Kinship or 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 sufficient foster care placements in relation to the location, numbers, needs, age range and characteristics of the children in care population and review this annually through the recruitment and retention 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 and retention plan.

Carry out an assessment of need on every child prior to accommodation. Where possible a safe family member or friend from the family network 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 adults 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 continue to promote Caring 2 Learn to encourage caring schools and learning homes as part of day to day practice

To continue 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. 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 and 2021, 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 friend's placements also referred to as 'Kinship' The service complies with the requirements of the Training, Support and Development Standards (2012).

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 Registered Manager (Regulation 6) and approval of Foster Carer registrations (Regulation 27) are delegated to the Assistant Director, Children's Services.

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

Where Lincolnshire County Council need to secure the provision of external Foster Care placements they will do so via the Placements Team, within the Strategic Commissioning Team and a market search will then be undertaken, in accordance with the Council's Contract and Procurement Procedure Rules (CPPR).

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:

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

Telephone: 01522 552781

Email: deborah.crawford@lincolnshire.gov.uk

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 five years of experience of working in social care, specialising in children and families, and latterly fostering. The registered manager comes with various childcare 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 Rachel Freeman – 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.

Dawn Oldroyd 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.

Two Team Managers manage the teams responsible for the service on a geographic basis. Emily McAllister is the Team Manager North and has 18 years' experience in social work working across the fields of fostering and adoption. Nicola Brangam manages the South Team. She has 23 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 childcare social work and several unqualified staff who work within recruitment, placement support and placement duty. In addition, the service employs a dedicated marketing officer and assistant who contribute to the delivery of the annual recruitment and retention strategy.

THE WORK OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE:

The Council's vision of 'Working for a better future' is firmly embedded within the Council's Corporate Plan which underpins the 'One Council' approach which ensures that all services are working towards shared goals and will help different parts of the council work together more effectively.

The council have identified key priorities for Lincolnshire communities, and these include:

- High aspirations
- The opportunity to enjoy life to the full
- Thriving environments
- Good value council services

Within the pledge, the council want Lincolnshire to be a place where everyone has the opportunity to live their lives to the full, with independence and access to the right support at the right time.

Within this the council will lead with others to enable everyone to enjoy life to the full and will *'intervene effectively to keep vulnerable people safe, making sure children in care and care leavers get the best opportunities'*.

Children's Services delivers a vast range of services to children, young people and families in Lincolnshire to ensure that they are safe, well and supported. This support ranges from universal services through to child protection and beyond including children in care.

Staff continuously strive to achieve the Children's Services vision, Putting Children First – everyone working together for all children, young people and families to be happy, healthy, safe and best they can be.

Our principles, which underpin how we will commission and deliver services to achieve our vision are:

- **Early Help:** Strong protective universal services accessible to all with a range of early help available so children have the best start in life and families have extra help when they need it
- **Safeguarding:** A shared responsibility to ensure children are safe at home, school and in their community
- **Aspiration:** Children are able to thrive and cope with life challenges
- **Learning and Achievement:** All children being the best they can be with targeted interventions to close the gap so vulnerable children achieve as well as their peers
- **Best Use of Resources:** Integrated commissioning with a focus on best value, improved outcomes and community engagement.

Children's Services staff also work closely with partner agencies to ensure children and young people and families are receiving the right support, at the right time and from the right person. The partnership working is underpinned by the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership (LSCP), a multi-agency partnership board with a vision to safeguard, support and improve the lives of children and young people.

The 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/18 months of approval for Kinship carers.

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 in 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 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.

The efforts to ensure that all medical and dental checks are completed is a priority for the service and engaging with carers to support this is held routinely and via the fostering newsletter.

Medical forms recommended by CoramBaaf, (the leading organisation for professionals working with children and young people in care) are used to record both the initial and annual health review and maintain a health profile for each child in care.

The Integrated Care Board is committed to supporting and prioritising the physical health and emotional well-being of children and young people in care and care leavers. Carers and young people can access further information from the young person's pages on the Council's website, including the updated Children in Care & Care Leavers Strategy 2022 - 2025 and updates on service provision are available via the Fostering Service monthly newsletter.

A multi-agency commissioning group is in place to understand and improve the health needs of children in care. As Corporate parents, the Fostering Service take collective responsibility alongside of the broader Council, its elected members, all employees, and its partner agencies to be ambitious and provide the best possible services for the children in our care.

In terms of priorities the service promotes good long term physical and emotional health and want to enable our children, young people and care leavers to have contented and healthy lives and be helped to evolve from what has happened in the past.

In order to achieve this our emphasis and focus is on:

- Developing the workforce to increase understanding of the widespread impact of trauma and potential paths to promote healing and recovery.
- Fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices.
- Ensure there are robust, holistic chronologies of events leading up to a child requiring care.
- Promoting the importance of emotional, physical and mental wellbeing e.g., working with Child, Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)
- Enabling priority access to healthcare and wellbeing services.
- Ensuring services are sensitive to past harm and trauma.
- Keeping young people safe and helping young people to navigate the world in a way that promotes their safety when we are not around.
- Supporting interpersonal skills development..

Foster Carers complete a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQs) for children between the ages of four and sixteen years of age. This score is then added to the Valuing Care tool, so it is clearly recorded and noted for moving forward. This is to ensure that services for children who require additional support are accessed swiftly to improve emotional wellbeing.

Foster Carer training and development focuses on promoting a healthy lifestyle, good diet, and exercise. All Foster Carers must 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, teenage pregnancy, developmental delay, the effects of Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) etc.

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/short breaks 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 and are supported in accessing the latest guidance from the NHS.

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 caring for children who may have been harmed and experienced trauma.

Each fostering household 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.

In the last few years this has been reinforced and further developed within the Children in Care Transformation Agenda where the Valuing Care approach aids us understand the needs and support requirements of children in our care. There are two analysis tools in use, one that is designed to support decision-making about the level of support needed by our children and young people. The other is a Fostering Tool that considers the skills, knowledge, and experience of foster carers in relation to support the needs of the young people being placed in their care.

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 and support their practice. This is more frequent where identified. All supervision visits are in person with support being in person, by telephone and tailored to the needs of the fostering family and the respective children placed. A minimum of one unannounced visit to the foster home is made annually.

For all children and young people in foster care whether cared for within or outside of the family network, they will have stability and be safe from harm. All placements for children and young people will be targeted to support their needs with the ambition to create and maintain the stability of placements through co-produced and child centred care plans.

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 allegation's 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 the 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 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:

Education for children is a priority and forms part of every child's plan when in foster care. When children are below school age, education is promoted through the care provided by their foster carers. Carers are positively encouraged to register with their local children's centre, community initiatives and engage in the Early Help, Early Years and Family Hubs programme.

All children in care can access the 15 hours early entitlement at the age of 2 and have access to suitable nursery school provision to support their learning outcomes. From September 2018 the Government extended 30 hours free childcare for 3 and 4 year olds giving them the same access to support as other working families.

The introduction of this flagship childcare policy increased the potential for children in care to have access to the same support and opportunities which continues to positively impact on vulnerable children by promoting their best interests educationally, socially and emotionally.

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 not acceptable or agreed practice to take children and young people out of school for family holidays. A protocol remains in place in an effort to ensure that children are not taken out of school during term time.

The Fostering Service promotes the educational attainment of children placed with foster carers. Each child in foster care has a Personal Education Plan (PEP) and, where appropriate, a Leaving Care Pathway Plan. PEP meetings are held each term or more if

required with high levels of engagement from children, social workers, schools, and carers.

Foster Carers are expected to involve themselves in assisting children in care to achieve satisfactory attendance, support and encourage them with homework and participate in carer/ parent/teacher events.

Lincolnshire Virtual School supports the education of children in care and works in co-operation with all children and young people in care aged 3-18 years wherever they are educated, carers and professionals linked to those children and young people and the virtual schools within other local authorities.

All early years and statutory school aged children in care have an entitlement to the Pupil Premium. This funding is available as soon as children enter carer in an effort to raise the attainment of children in care of all abilities and close the gap between them and their peers.

It is a statutory requirement for all schools to have a Designated Teacher with responsibilities for liaison, educational monitoring, and pastoral care for children in care. Lincolnshire Virtual School Co-ordinators' role is to ensure effective liaison with schools, early years setting and post 16 providers and to promote educational attainment and attendance of children in care. This includes children who live with Foster Carers outside of Lincolnshire.

The Lincolnshire Virtual School Team, managed by the Virtual School Head, is fully engaged with the fostering service and carers 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.

Caring2Learn is the Children's Services approach developed to support improved outcomes for children in care, previously looked-after children, and children with a social worker. This approach promotes joint working between schools, carers and social care teams and is focused on growing the understanding, knowledge, confidence, and support for all adults who work with or care for most vulnerable children.

The Caring2Learn approach is fully embedded into the Fostering Service as part of the Fostering Hub and core support offer for Foster Carers. This includes the Learning Homes accreditation which also forms part of the statutory fostering training, Training and Development (TSD) standards, the training offer to foster and kinship carers and the wide-ranging peer and professional support offer from the whole team including Foster Carer Champions, Placement Support Workers, and Supervising Social Workers.

The opportunity for children and young people to engage in hobbies or sports is seen as an important element of their development, the fostering support and is financed 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.

Children and Young Peoples' achievements are recognised each year in an annual award ceremony held under the banner of FAB! Following the FAB Awards being postponed due to covid restrictions and concerns over the past 2 years the Council are in the planning for the event scheduled for June 2023. A working group of key stakeholders has been established to develop the plans and implement the event which for a number of years has been a resounding success and something that our children and carers enjoy. The June 2023 event will include key contributions from partners including soundLincs and the University of Lincoln.

V4C is Lincolnshire's Children in Care Council with the aim being to share experiences of being in care in Lincolnshire and to inform teams who support Children in Care what does and does not work for them. V4C meetings are held within the four Children's Services locality quadrants and include care leavers as members and are supported by the participation team.

The continued agenda of V4C talks about issues that matter to children, young people and care leavers in an effort to make friends, develop confidence, learn new things and organise events, trips and have fun. This and the participation agenda via the Big Conversation ensure the Council undertake their pledge to the children in care community by maintaining their Caring Promise.

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 45 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.

All young people leaving care have a named worker and a clear plan for support in their transition post 16 years. The Leaving Care services continues to be delivered by Barnardo's who work with young people leaving care aged 16 to 25. All young people who are eligible for a service are entitled to support up to the age of 25 regardless of their circumstances.

THE FOSTERING SERVICE:

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

1. Supervising Social Worker:

The role of the Supervising Social Worker is to develop and provide support to foster carers in their task of caring for children in care. This is achieved in a variety of ways including through the provision of supervision and support visits to the approved household in accordance with the National Minimum Standards 2011.

Supervising Social workers will pre-arrange visits with carers, using the supervision policy for Foster Carers as a guide, however they also have a duty to undertake at least one unannounced visit per year. Supervision takes place bi-monthly and more regularly as required and includes a focus on their personal development, training and the importance of delivering high quality care in the context of a professional and supportive relationship.

Supervising Social Workers assist with building relationships and act as a crucial link between the caring household, children's Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer. Further to this they will support with arranging respite/short break support and provision of equipment. Supervising Social Workers will undertake Initial expression of interest visits with new prospective applicants, Form F assessments for those who progress to stage 2 of the recruitment process and Kinship assessments as required meaning that all staff are able to deliver the whole fostering agenda.

They are also responsible for undertaking the annual review of approval, which incorporates the carers' views and those of any birth children and the children in care. The review also includes reports from Social Workers and Independent Reviewing Officers and the Supervising Social Worker who will identify strengths and future learning needs.

The Valuing Care Toolkit is incorporated into the annual review, so it remains updated and live to the carer's strengths and areas for development. Following completion of the review the foster carer is issued with a statement of re-approval once satisfied the carers continue to be suitable to continue fostering.

The Valuing Care Toolkit is incorporated into the annual review, so it remains updated and live to the carer's strengths and areas for development. 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 with guiding principles that inform visits and ensure that children and young people are seen at timescales in accordance with statutory guidance and Lincolnshire's procedures.

The emphasis of such visits is to ensure that the visits are focussed, with a dialogue where there is an opportunity to hear and record the child/young person's views (dependent on their age and level of understanding) with observations being noted. Part of the visit is to understand the children's experiences, ensure the standard of care offered is meeting the needs of the children as part of the overall support and safeguarding responsibilities as a corporate parent.

The statutory visits are to ensure that the welfare of the child/young persons is being promoted and therefore the expectation is that wherever possible the child/young person must be seen alone (unless is not of sufficient age and maturity) or observations made of them and their private space such as their bedroom to be reassured regarding safety and wellbeing.

3. Foster Carer Support:

The service has developed a group of foster carer Champions who are linked with foster carers during the assessment stage and provide an essential support and point of contact to support the persons transition to becoming a foster carer and enhance the confidence and skills of newly approved foster carers. They also support the fostering community by creating opportunities for connection, building, and maintaining of relationships between foster carers. Zoom is also used to facilitate foster carer social activities to encourage the community spirit.

All Foster Carers have access to an online forum which makes available local policy, information about fostering terms and conditions and guidance about requirements concerning the care and control of children and other procedures. The information is frequently updated and amended. The service continues to provide an electronic newsletter which remains the preferred generic communication method between the fostering service and foster carers. This allows for information updates to be disseminated, including training events and dates, social events, good news stories and best practice information to most of our foster carers. Information is also distributed across the various online hub forums such as the Caring2learn Facebook group and the fostering WhatsApp groups.

Work continues to develop a community hub approach across the county. The support forums continue to act as a way for Foster Carers to access support from other Foster Carers and children's service's teams. This is providing a more integrated approach to support.

Fostering households also use Facebook and WhatsApp to share general information and offer support to one another. Online support plays a huge part in helping people to connect and support each other away in addition to the service core offer.

Participation in the different areas of the hub continues to rise. Assessed need is monitored to ensure that the right kind of support is identified and delivered. Carers have welcomed the return of face to face support and feedback from carers remains positive with regards to their feelings really supported.

All foster carers are provided with individual membership of the Fostering Network and carers are being supported with accessing exclusive discounts which offer fantastic savings across a range of services and brands on the high street using Lincolnshire County Council foster carer discount cards, Blue Light discounts and LCC employment membership benefits.

An Annual Foster Carer Celebration is held recognising the difference foster carers make to children and the dedication they have shown through time.

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 Children in Care Review meetings to plan and review outcomes for children. Placement Support Workers are committed to

continuous professional development informed by latest research within a trauma informed approach.

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 role and responsibility 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 optional, and a clear expectation is placed on all carers and is evaluated in supervision sessions and annual reviews. Personal and professional development is supported through the TSDs and Learning Homes Toolkit and regular practice workshops, supporting carers to transfer theory into practice. A three-year cycle of required training in first aid, Safeguarding and Safe Care regarding safer caring and the implications of looking after children who may have been harmed. In addition, mandatory courses on Diversity and Trauma Awareness are held and should be completed on a 3 yearly basis.

All mainstream Foster Carers must undertake first aid training as part of their mandatory post approval training. Foster Carers have training sessions on promoting the health and wellbeing of children in care. This core programme is supplemented through special interest seminars as detailed above.

The Learning Home 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 fostering representative, a Foster Carer Champion, and Supervising Social Worker. 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 suite of post approval training and materials/articles of interest.

The fostering national charities also share materials with carers to aid their development and guide them through their roles and responsibilities.

PROCESS OF RECRUITING AND APPROVING FOSTER CARERS

Foster Carers are recruited and assessed in line with Lincolnshire guidance based on the Fostering 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/Employer Fostering Friendly approach.
- 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 contact 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. Foster carer champions within this process has been on request contact those considering fostering to provide 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 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 friend's 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 Agency 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 Form F. 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 Children in Care 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.

Since March 2020 the panel has been held virtually in an effort to ensure all business was maintained in timescales. The service has implemented IFAB (Independent Fostering Advisory Board) which offers an independent quality assurance system for fostering annual reviews and appraise reviews based on 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 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:

Foster Carers receive weekly allowances according to the age of the child. Despite the financial difficulties faced by Local Authorities, in 2022/2023 most fostering allowances were increased by 2% but the announcement by government following the Care Review the anticipation is that the next financial year will see a significant rise.

Carers who are 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 within the criminal justice process.

MONITORING THE QUALITY OF THE SERVICE:

Foster Carers have at least one unannounced visit per year. A Supervising Social Worker undertakes this. They also receive regular supervision from an allocated Supervising Social Worker. This is held bi-monthly or more frequently as required. Each Foster Carer is subject to an annual review and contributions are sought from various professional disciplines to ensure a rounded assessment.

The Regulated 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

Lincolnshire County Council wants to make sure customers including Foster Carers are satisfied with our services. People may wish to tell when they are satisfied with the services they have received, make suggestions on how we could improve or tell us when things have gone wrong. We believe dealing effectively with all such feedback is essential to providing good services.

The Complaints Policy sets out how complaints will be dealt with ensuring concerns raised are considered and any resulting adjustments made, where required.

- Stage 1 – Local Resolution
- Stage 2 – Independent Investigator is appointed
- Stage 3 - Independent Panel formal review by an Independent Panel of independent members plus the Complaints Manager.

Staff do ensure that all carers know how and to whom to complain.

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 complaint's procedures and at the point of any investigation, support can also be accessed through membership of Fostering Network and Foster Talk; the support cost for which will be met by the agency. 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 LSCP 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:

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



The Children's Commissioner is Dame Rachel de Souza. The Commissioner 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 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: 0800 528 0731

Emailing at: help.team@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

Visiting the website www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

NUMBERS OF CHILDREN PLACED:

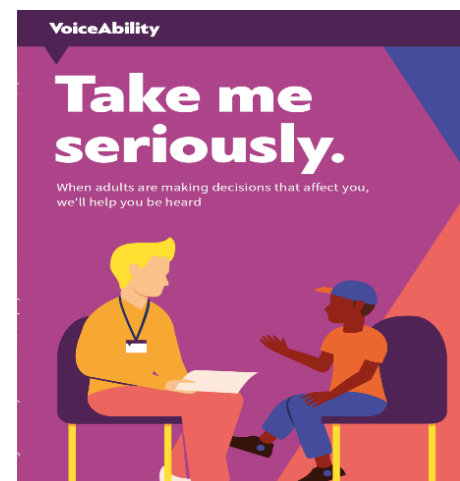
On 31st March 2023 there were 723 children in care to Lincolnshire County Council.

Of this number 488 were placed with Foster Carers (including kinship carers), including 45 placed in independent foster placements.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

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

The Lincolnshire Fostering Service will treat everyone 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 or write to:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
Tel 0300 123 1231

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 a member of the Fostering Service via telephone on 01522 554114.

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

A copy can also be obtained from the registered manager:

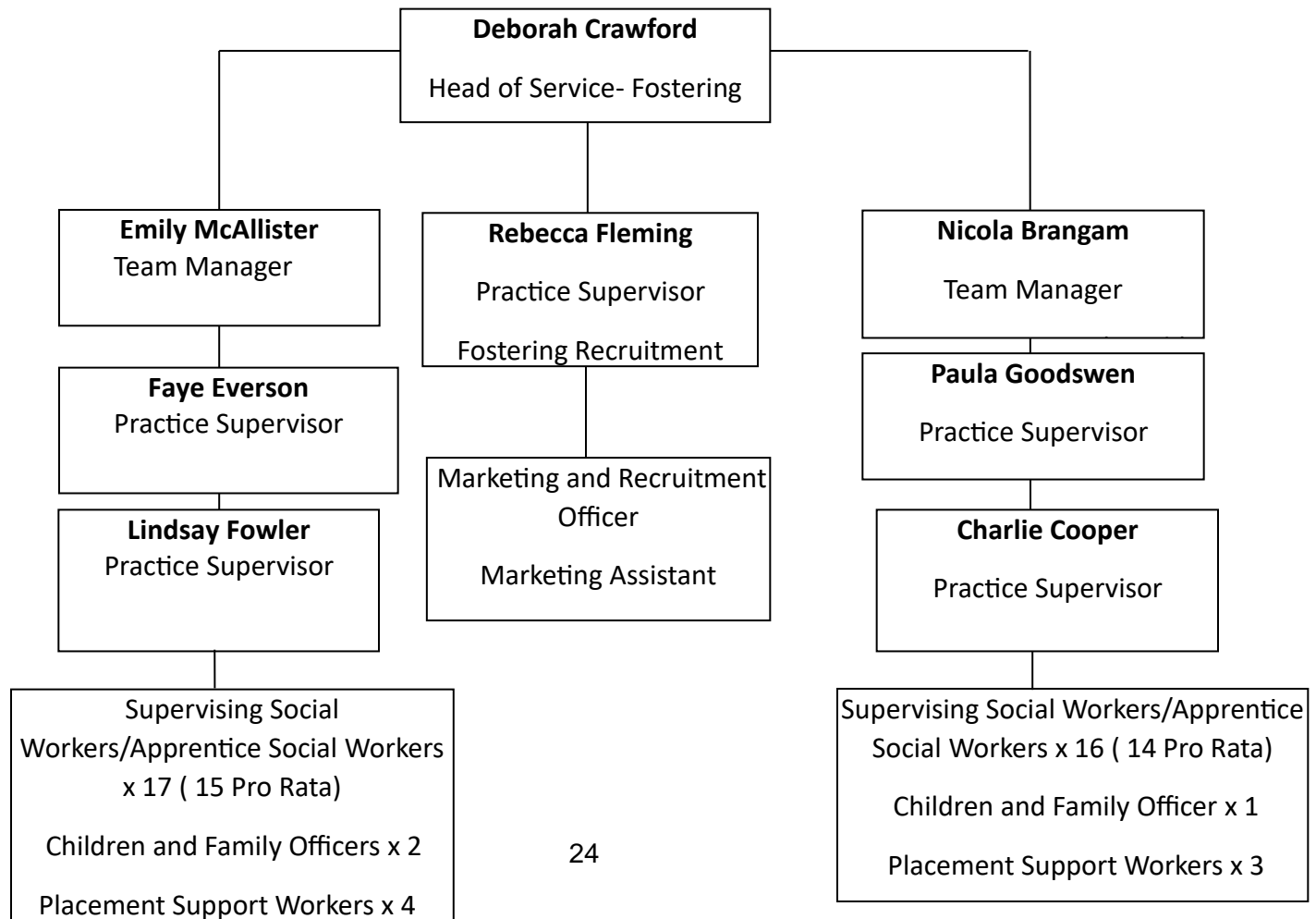
Deborah Crawford Head of Service– Regulated Services
Lincolnshire County Council
County Offices

Newland
Lincoln
LN1 1YL
01522 552781

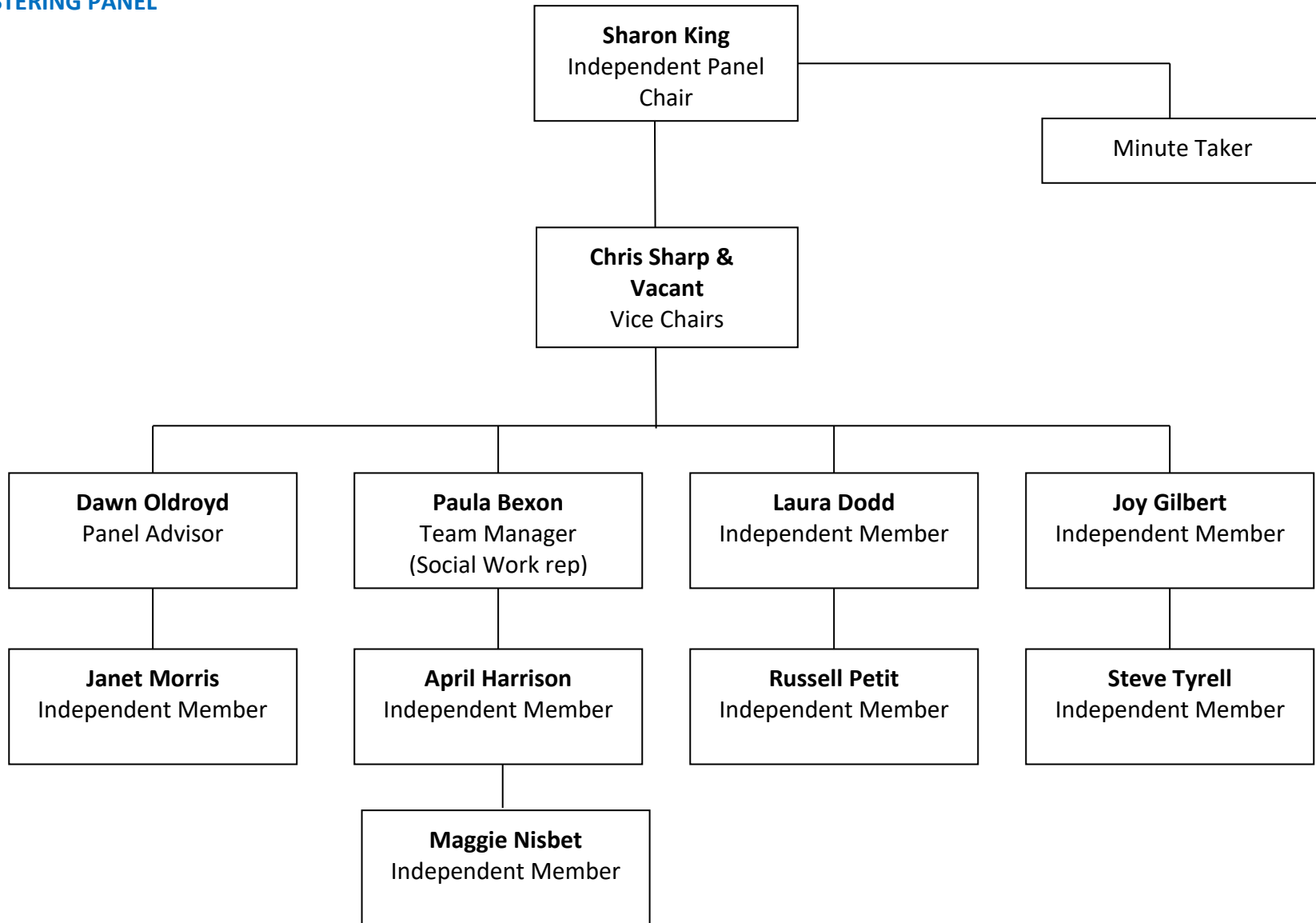
APPENDIX 1

FOSTERING SERVICE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE – LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

There are two Team Managers for the Fostering Service who line manage the two teams of Fostering Supervising Social Workers, Children and Family Officers and Placement Support Workers.



APPENDIX 2
FOSTERING PANEL



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