

Statement of Purpose

Wirral Fostering Service

January 2021

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Introduction

This Statement of Purpose is provided and made available to employees, carers, children and young people in fostering placements and to the general public via the Wirral Council fostering recruitment website wirral.gov.uk or in hard copy if requested via telephone 0151 666 4616. This Statement of Purpose is regularly reviewed.

Wirral Fostering Service is committed to complying with the standards set out in the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (2011) which are underpinned by the Fostering Service Regulations 2011 and 2013 and form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000.

The Fostering Services National Minimum Standards, 2011, Section 16, states that every Fostering Service should have a clear statement of purpose which is available to, and understood by, Foster Carers, staff and children and is reflected in any policies, procedures and guidance. It is available to the responsible authority and any parent or person with parental responsibility.

1. Aims, values and objectives of the Local Authority in relation to the Fostering Service

1.1 Mission Statement

- We believe that children are best cared for in their own families. However, where this is not possible, we strive to ensure that children have an experience of family life where they are safe, nurtured and respected for as long as necessary and where all their needs, including their racial and cultural identity needs, are met. We accept that for some children the experience of family life is not appropriate because of the effects of past trauma. Every child should be able to experience a secure and happy family life being safely cared for by a loving adult or adults. We strive to achieve this through providing a responsive and effective service to support individuals and families from all backgrounds involved in fostering. To enable them to provide the very best care for our children.

1.2 Values

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of their care.
- Children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefiting from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
- Every child should have his or her wishes and feelings listened to and considered.
- Each child should be valued as an individual and given personalised support in line with their individual needs and background in order to develop their identity, self-confidence, and self-worth.
- The significance of contact for children looked after, and of maintaining relationships with birth parents and the wider family, including siblings, half-siblings, and grandparents, is recognised, as is the Foster Carer's role in this.
- Children in foster care deserve to be treated as a good parent would treat their own children and to have the opportunity to have a full experience as possible of family life and childhood, without unnecessary restrictions. The central importance of the child's relationship with their Foster Carer should be acknowledged and Foster Carers should be recognised as core members of the team working with the child.

- Foster Carers have a right to full information about the child at the start of every placement.
- To work within the framework of the Foster Carer Agreement, to maintain open communication, mutual respect, and good working relationships with all Foster Carers, keeping the needs of children and young people as the central concern.
- To provide a range of training courses and learning opportunities for Foster Carers in order to provide the best care for children.
- To ensure that the Annual Review of Approval is carried out within their registration year for every Foster Carer.

1.3 Aims

- To provide a high-quality Fostering Service where all people are responded to promptly, treated courteously and fairly, and given equal consideration regardless of ethnic background, age, marital status, religion, language, sexual orientation, and disability. The Department aims to provide a comprehensive Fostering Service in co-operation with other teams and Departments, birth families and other service users to ensure there is a coherent local service to meet identified needs of children in the care of the Local Authority.
- To provide a comprehensive Fostering Service to meet the needs of children, birth families and social work staff by recruiting enough numbers of in-house Foster Carers to meet the needs of the local community.
- To recruit suitably qualified and experienced people to deliver the Fostering Service who will provide services to ensure compliance with all required safety checks.
- To ensure that the needs, wishes and safety of the children looked after are at the centre of the fostering process and that the views of children looked after, their parents and carers are actively sought and listened to.
- To provide as far as is reasonably possible practical support and services which will enable the child to return to, or remain with, his/her family of origin, except in those circumstances where it is considered that it would be detrimental to the child's welfare, due to issues of significant harm.

In making plans for the fostering placement for a child looked after, the department's first aims are to ensure:

- a) The child's welfare is safeguarded and promoted throughout their placement.
 - b) That children are securely attached to carers capable of providing safe and effective care for the duration of the placement.
- To ensure that people interested in becoming Foster Carers will be welcomed without prejudice.
 - Responded to promptly and given clear information about the recruitment, assessment and approval process. They will be treated fairly, openly and with respect throughout the process of becoming a Foster Carer.
 - To match children with approved Foster Carers who will ensure that their identity including racial and ethnic identity, is promoted and contact with their birth family is maintained, and that there is minimum disruption to continuity of education and established social contacts and activities.
 - To ensure that the Fostering Service is resourced to meet the above aims and that the premises from which the Fostering Service operates are fit for their purposes.
 - To assess and, where appropriate, approve prospective Foster Carers within stipulated timescales.
 - To provide a rigorous training and support programme in order that our carers can enhance their skills.
 - The overarching aim of the Fostering Service is to provide a range of high quality, appropriate foster placements that meet or exceed the Fostering National Minimum Standards and ensure the best possible outcomes for the Children Looked After of Wirral.

1.4 Objectives

- We are committed to continuous improvement and want to maximise our achievements in the areas that make the most difference to children, young people and families.
- We wish to recruit and retain more high-quality Foster Carers that match the required needs profile of children looked after in Wirral.

Our primary objectives in support of this aim are to:

- Ensure the provision of secure, safe and consistent care to all children placed in foster care.
- Provide a positive experience of family life and a rich, enjoyable childhood to all children in foster care.
- Address the child's health, education and social development needs, and equip them with as good or better skills to achieve in their development as a child living in their birth home.
- Streamline recruitment and approval of Foster Carers to ensure that we are better able to meet the needs of our looked after children.
- Working together with the child's Social Worker and the children looked after support project to develop and embed a continually improving understanding of the child's needs in a fostering setting throughout safeguarding services.

1.4.1 The department will ensure that the above aims are met through compliance with the specific objectives stated in:

- The Children Act 1989.
- Every Child Matters 2004.
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.
- The Care Standards Act 2000.
- The Fostering Services Regulations 2011.
- The Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011.
- Amendments to Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers Guidance and Regulations and Statutory Guidance July 2013.
- Departmental Policies and Procedures, including the Placement Policy.

Equality and Diversity

Every effort will be made to match children with families that reflect their religious and cultural needs. We aim to recruit Foster Carers that will fully meet the diverse needs of Wirral's looked after children and young people.

We are totally committed to the principles of equal opportunity in employment and services. No individual, Employee, Foster Carer or Service User, will be disadvantaged because of race, gender, disability, sexuality or any other reason. Discriminatory behaviour of any sort will be challenged and dealt with appropriately. Through our inclusive approach to recruitment, we aim to integrate equality of opportunity into all its employment activities.

Our service provision to Foster Carers, Children Looked After and young people reflect this culture of diversity, ensuring that our services, recruitment and general business do not discriminate on any grounds of:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage or civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race and ethnicity
- Religion and belief (or non-belief)
- Sexual orientation

Inclusive Foster Care Provision we seek to operate within a framework of fairness, openness, integrity, accountability and expect the same of those providing services for the authority, or on behalf of the authority.

Our key values and principles are set down to ensure that:

- All employment and service delivery policies and practices reflect a positive value for human difference and diversity.
- All staff and Foster Carers are aware of and understand the authority's commitment to equality of opportunity and their responsibilities in relation to this.

- Our workforce has the knowledge, skills, and abilities to provide high quality services within a clear framework of anti-discriminatory practice.
- Our services are responsive, accessible, sensitive, and appropriate to those who need and may benefit from them.
- Foster Carer pre and post-approval training encourages care provision that respects the ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic background of children and young people who are looked after through service Foster Carers are provided with the necessary information, support and training to enable them to provide the best possible care and to promote the heritage of a fostered child or young person.

Quality Standards

- To comply fully with all relevant Childcare Legislation, Fostering Regulations and Minimum Standards for England & Wales.
- Issues around child protection will be dealt with immediately, in line with locally agreed procedures.
- School attendance and academic achievement will be promoted for all children and young people, in line with Department for Education and skills guidance.
- Good quality record keeping will be prioritised by the whole service. Written records on each child or young person will be provided by Foster Carers.
- Corporal punishment will NOT be used in any circumstances. Guidance will be provided on the use of sanctions and a written record kept of any implementation.
- Both we and our carers will maintain vigilance around confidentiality.
- Assessments will be completed by qualified and experienced staff with active participation by applicants.
- All Foster Carers will complete Skills to Foster training.

- Foster Carers will have continuing training in line with the DfE training, support and development plans.
- We shall ensure each Foster Carer and foster home fulfils all health and safety requirements, is risk assessed and has a safe caring plan.
- Foster Carers work to an agreed individual child and young person's care plan and within the terms of the Placement Agreement.
- Foster Carers will promote contact with the children's families unless this is not possible due to safeguarding factors.
- Foster Carers will receive regular support visits from Supervising Social Workers and regular telephone contact.
- Foster Carers will have an annual review.

Education - children in school

We have a dedicated education department who give priority to ensuring that children receive full-time education appropriate to their needs. We do this while recognising that Children Looked After have been shown to be disadvantaged in their education and within the framework of government guidance on the education of children in public care.

Carers and their Supervising Social Workers build up close working relationships with their local schools to ensure that children placed receive the most effective service. This will be reviewed in Children Looked After reviews and fostering supervisions. Support regarding liaison of all educational needs including admittance into schools, education training for Foster Carers, advice and guidance for 16 plus for transition to college/apprenticeship.

1.5 Services provided

- Advice and information on fostering, including providing a Duty System for the Department when referrals are made, and requesting placements for children both in the short-term or on a planned basis.
- Initial home visits by a fostering Social Worker to assess the motivation and ability of prospective carers to provide a safe caring environment for a child.
- Skills to Foster course.
- Comprehensive preparation and assessment for prospective Foster Carers.
- All assessments of prospective Foster Carers to be presented to the Fostering Panel for a recommendation to be put forward to the Agency Decision Maker within stipulated timescales.
- Provision of a Supervising Social Worker to work in partnership with the child's Social Worker and Foster Carer and to family find for individual or sibling groups of children requiring permanency via long term fostering.
- Planned general and specific recruitment programmes for Foster Carers for individual and specific groups of children.
- Advice and information on services for Foster Carers to assist them in their care of children placed with them.
- Advice and information to other professionals working with children.
- Fostering Social Workers will endeavour to attend with their Foster Carers children looked after Reviews.
- Mandatory training sessions are planned for the year for Foster Carers to support their registration and ensure that their skills are developed to meet the needs of children in their care.
- Fostering support/training programme is provided for Foster Carers to enhance their skills and to achieve the training support and development standards.
- Wirral Fostering Panel fulfils its statutory functions as required and offers advice and consultation to Social Work staff on fostering matters.
- Services of Medical and Legal Advisers for advice, information and consultation in addition to their specific roles and functions.

Matching

All children and young people are different and as a result all placements are unique. Therefore, we operate an Active Placement Management process. Approved Foster Carers have a wealth of experience and many specialise in areas in order to meet the needs of children who come into care.

We have dedicated duty workers who respond to all enquiries about placement choices and who liaise closely with Supervising Social Workers, Foster Carers and allocated Social Workers. This ensures the best possible match for the child and the Foster Carers.

Supervision of Placement

Supervising Social Workers have regular contact with the foster home. Supervising Social Workers have at least 6 weekly contact with the child in placement as part of their supervisory duties supporting outcomes for children. Foster Carers are supported in facilitating contact between the child in placement and their birth family in accordance with their care plan if this is appropriate.

Management and support of Foster Carers

Supervisory visits are regular, supervision and support meetings take place between our Social Worker and Foster Carers. These meetings provide an opportunity to discuss the needs of the child in placement and the Foster Carers are able to progress the child's care plan. Any concerns or challenges are identified with support plans identified as required.

Another primary focus during supervision is to develop the skills of the Foster Carers and identify training needs. Support Foster Carers receive support from various professionals.

Independent support is offered if carers face safeguarding concerns.

Unannounced Visits

All our Foster Carers will have a minimum of one unannounced visits each year; this is a requirements of National Standards and Regulations. In addition, we aim to undertake management visits to the Foster Carers home as these visits provide further assurances that the care provided to the foster child is in keeping with the high-quality expectations of the authority. These visits also allow us to receive feedback from the Foster Carers to ensure that they are receiving the level of support they require.

Foster Carer Review

All Foster Carers have an annual review which is an opportunity to appraise the last year of their Foster Care and set new goals and action for the year ahead. Training needs are assessed and identified. Feedback from our Foster Carers on the training courses we provide is consistently positive.

If any concerns do arise about a Foster Carer's commitment to on-going development this is addressed with them. Where necessary this can include reviewing their registration at the fostering panel.

Record Keeping

Foster Carers maintain an individual daily log on the children they look after. Maintaining records is an essential part of the Foster Carer's role and accurate factual recordings help monitor the child's progress. These recordings are shared with the Local Authority Social Worker.

All Foster Carers are provided with links to and copies of a current policies, procedures and information on Fostering Law, Complaints Procedures, access to records, Child Protection, support, health issues, health and safety matters, education information, managing behaviour and various other subjects relevant to Foster Carers and the task of caring for a young person.

These documents are reviewed regularly, and updates are issued as required to Foster Carers and staff.

Foster Carer Support Groups

These are run virtually bi-weekly at present because of COVID 19. These are groups where information can be shared, any issues can be raised with the authority and most importantly carers can socialise together, learn from, and support each other.

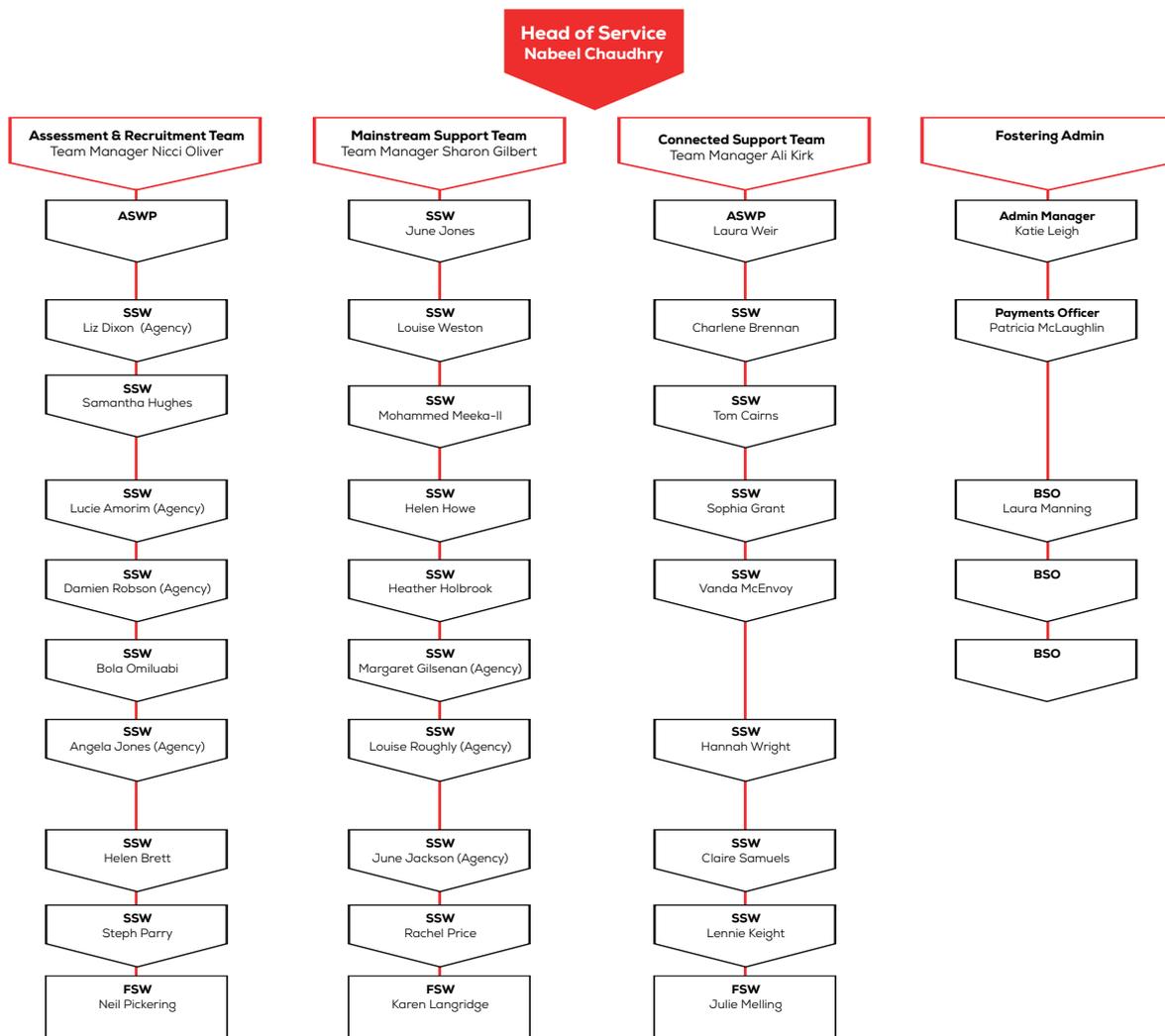
Respite

Should any respite be necessary we are supportive of a child focussed practice and require that any respite is taken in line with the child's care plan and with the Social Work teams' agreement. We actively encourage carers to utilise their support network/close family members or friends who are known to the child.

Payment

We pay a fostering allowance directly into the Foster Carer's account by BACS transfer. All Foster Carers are self-employed and as such should pay their own tax and National Insurance.

Organisation of Structure of the Fostering Service



Paul Boyce is the Corporate Director for Wirral Children’s Social Care and is responsible for the delivery of the Fostering Service.

The Fostering Service as of the 1st April 2019 has moved into three dedicated specialisms:

- Recruitment and Assessment
- Mainstream Foster Care
- Connected Carers

The Wirral fostering service is responsible for establishing, maintaining, and servicing the Wirral fostering panel. The panel, in carrying out its regulatory functions, makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker, (Simone White - Assistant Director for Children’s Social Care).

2. Procedures for Recruiting, Preparing, Assessing and Approving Prospective Foster Carers

2.1 Recruitment

- There is ongoing general recruitment for Foster Carers who will be able to meet the needs of children in Wirral. There will also be targeted recruitment for specific age ranges and/or specific children needing foster placements.
- Our website is in operation to attract new prospective Foster Carers.
- Prospective applicants can dial a recruitment line and expect a call back within 24hours/ 1 working day; download information or/and complete an initial enquiry form on the website; email the department or attend information sessions held throughout the year.
- A member of the recruitment team will complete an initial visit within five days of the contact by the fostering applicant and a formal application form will be completed if applicable.
- A dedicated team of recruitment personnel manage all enquiries for information about fostering in Wirral and sends out information upon request.
- The Recruitment Team, aims to respond to all enquiries within one working day of initial contact.

2.2 Assessment Stage 1

- Pending the outcome of the initial visit a discussion is held within 3 working days with the team manager of recruitment as to whether the fostering applicant can proceed to formal application. This formal application includes an initial medical check, DBS and other relevant checks. Following approval of the formal application by the Team Manager the process will initiate the Stage 1 assessment.
- Candidates can withdraw at any point. If the candidates are not considered suitable at the completion of the stage 1 assessment, a letter confirming the outcome will reach them within ten days of the decision being made. The applicants can access Wirral's complaints process if they feel they have been treated unfairly.

- If the stage 1 assessment is agreed by the team manager the applicants are progressed to stage 2 of assessment this includes attendance at a Skills to Foster training programme (preparation group). This is run as a minimum at least five times a year and are run on different days of the week and times in the year to facilitate attendance.
- Prospective Foster Carers complete evaluation forms and these are considered by the trainer and a Team Manager. The trainer facilitating the course will produce a report on the interaction of the applicants during the preparation training which will go towards their overall assessment.

2.3 Assessment Stage 2

- A comprehensive fostering assessment is undertaken using BAAF Form 'F'. All members of the household are seen individually as well as in a family group.
- Two personal references are sought, none can be a family member and must have known the applicant longer than two years
- Ex-partners are contacted for a reference unless there has been significant domestic violence and the applicant would be in danger if we contacted the ex-partner.
- Adult children who are not living within the home are also contacted.
- The Form 'F' is shared with the applicant(s) so that they can make factual corrections and observations on the report prior to it being submitted to panel.
- The assessing Social Worker receives regular supervision throughout the assessment.
- If at any time during Stage Two, there are concerns about the competence of participants, then a brief report will be presented to panel. If the panel and the Agency Decision Manager confirm that the candidates are unsuitable, the candidates have the right to make representations to the Panel or to use the Independent Review Mechanism if they feel they have been treated unfairly.

2.4 Approval

- The assessing Social Worker prepares the applicant(s) for attending the Wirral Fostering Panel. An information sheet is provided explaining the role of the panel.
- The assessment report, together with any written observations or representations, is submitted by the assessing Social Worker to the panel.
- The panel's recommendations are then passed to the Agency Decision Maker to make the final decision. The performance standard here is to make the decision within seven working days of the panel.
- The decision is sent to the Foster Carer(s) within seven working days of it being made.
- If the Agency Decision Maker does not agree for the applicants to be approved, they are notified in writing. They will then have 28 days to make representations to the panel or use the Independent Review Mechanism.

2.5 Timescales

- A full assessment should be completed within 16 weeks of the applicant's initial inquiry.

3. Support for Foster Carers

- Following approval, all Foster Carers will be allocated a Supervising Social Worker who supports and supervises them through either the mainstream or connected carer team.
- The Supervising Social Worker supports the Foster Carer by providing information about policy and procedures, relevant legislation, and resources within and outside the department.
- A child placed with Foster Carers also has an allocated Social Worker who offers support to the child and to the Foster Carers in their caring for the child.
- A Foster Carer supervisory form will be completed upon every Foster Carer supervisory visit by the Supervising Social Worker to ensure Fostering Standards are being met. 6 weekly supervisory visits will be completed with Foster Carers unless a long-term plan has been ratified for a child/ren placed with Foster Carers for supervisory visits to be completed 12 weekly. Foster Carers who do not have a child/ren placed with themselves on a permanent basis 12 weekly visits will be completed.
- Supervising Social Worker will undertake one unannounced supervisory visit each year, the pro-forma should indicate and record the unannounced nature of the visit. This visit will be completed to all Foster Carers irrespective or not any children being placed.

A range of fostering support services are made available to Foster Carers:

- The Supervising Social Worker should support the carer in their work, including the impact of fostering on the wider family.
- The Supervising Social Worker will undertake direct work with the child children of the carer.
- Foster Carers meet a minimum of six times a year in support groups. They MUST attend mandatory training programme set up for Foster Carers these training courses are run to enhance Foster Carers' skills.
- The Supervising Social Worker ensures that the Foster Carers meets all the standards of care set by the Department and is responsible for assisting the carer in the development of their competencies and their career as carers.

- A comprehensive development plan will be developed individually for carers and reviewed in supervision sessions which will be a minimum of every six weeks.
- Access to services of Medical and Legal Advisers for advice, information, and consultation in addition to their specific roles and functions.
- Financial support - Foster Carers will be paid an allowance as stated in the current policy on payments.
- Specialist Education and Health teams.
- The Supervising Social Worker will ensure that the views of the Foster Carer are heard in relation to care planning for a child in their care, they will endeavour to attend all meetings for the child alongside the carer.

4. Staying Put

Staying put Placements; a staying put arrangement is not the same as a foster placement. The young person must be a former looked after child but is no longer a looked after child. They are a young adult and a care leaver. They are entitled to support as a care leaver and will be allocated a Personal Advisor (PA). The Foster Carer is no longer acting in the capacity of Foster Carer for that young adult. They are their 'former Foster Carer'. The foster placement becomes a 'Staying Put Arrangement' and is not governed by Fostering Services Regulations.

The 'former Foster Carer' offering a staying put arrangement may at the same time be offering foster placements to children who are looked after. Such placements will continue to be subject to provisions of the Fostering Services Regulations.

The former looked after child will, in this circumstance, require a DBS check as they become a member of the fostering household, although this requirement is under review by the Department for Education.

5. Complaints Procedure

- All carers and applicants are given a copy of the Department's Complaints Procedure, 'Getting it Right' for if they feel they have been treated unfairly. However, we endeavour to reach a reconciliation with complainants before it becomes necessary to make a complaint.
- Applicants who have completed Stage One of the Assessment but are subsequently not considered suitable as Foster Carers may make representations to Panel or the Independent Review Mechanism.
- If complainants feel we have not addressed their complaint, they are informed of their right to complain further to Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD. Tel: 0300 123 1231.

Head of Service of the Fostering Service

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Visit our website: wirral.gov.uk/fostering or wirralfostering.org

Appendix 1 - Quality Assurance

- The Team Managers are currently responsible for ensuring the supervision of all staff in the Fostering Team. All staff are seen in supervision on a monthly basis. Supervision and line management practice follows Policy and Management Standards.
- Team Managers are provided with supervision by the Head of Service.
- Monthly reports will be produced by Team Managers and these will inform a monthly report to the Assistant Director regarding the current activity of the Fostering Service.
- Copies of the signed supervision notes are placed on the relevant electronic file with any agreed actions noted.
- Foster Carers maintain an individual daily log on the children they look after. Maintaining records is an essential part of the Foster Carer's role and accurate factual recordings help monitor the child's progress. These recordings are shared with the Local Authority. Wirral has a bespoke database called Liquid Logic, allowing data to be recorded, monitored, and shared in a secure format.
- The Fostering Panel provides a quality assurance function which is exercised through individual recommendations on cases presented and recorded in the Panel Minutes and Panel Decision Sheet, together with advice from medical, legal and other advisors to Panel.
- A Fostering Panel report on fostering activity is produced and submitted to the Assistant Director and the Safeguarding Partnership annually.
- In line with requirements, the Fostering Service will be inspected by Inspectors appointed by Ofsted under the Care Standards Act 2000.
- All Foster Carers are supervised and supported by an allocated Supervising Social Worker, annually reviewed with the Foster Carer and if possible, the foster child will contribute to this. The first annual review is presented to the Fostering Panel. All other reviews are presented to the Agency Decision Maker. Reviews are carried out earlier than one year if there are concerns or issues the Fostering Panel should be made aware of.
- Carers are sent questionnaires independent of their reviews as part of the on-going consultation process to ensure the service is effective and responsive.

Wirral Fostering Service

The Rock Ferry Centre, 257 Old Chester Road, Rock Ferry, Wirral CH42 3TD