

Together for Children Fostering Sunderland

**FOSTERING SERVICE
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2024**

**Approved by: Together for Children Senior Leadership Team
Date: December 2024**

If you or someone you know requires help to understand or read this document, please contact us:

Statement of Purpose: Fostering Service

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1. Introduction

Together for Children Sunderland Fostering became operational as an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) on 1 April 2017.

“In Sunderland we want to provide sufficient high-quality homes for children and young people in our care and for care leavers which enables them to achieve their potential. We are committed to delivering excellence in our approach with the intention that the outcome for every cared for child and those leaving care are at least as good as their peers who are not in care”

This Statement of Purpose is about Together for Children Fostering - Sunderland. It is for foster carers, children and young people who use the service and the staff working in all areas of Together for Children Fostering - Sunderland. The Statement of Purpose is also relevant for staff in a range of agencies who work with us and for people who are interested in becoming foster carers.

This Statement of Purpose outlines the aims and objectives of the Fostering Service and the services and facilities provided by it.

2. Legislative Framework

A range of legislation and guidance governs the way in which the Fostering Service is provided and managed. The Children Act 1989 underpins the detailed framework for the provision of the service found in the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011, and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (England) June 2015. Additional relevant guidance and procedures are found within:

- Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4 Fostering Services (2011)
- Children’s Services Procedures
- Fostering Service Procedures and Guidance
- Foster Carers Handbook
- Foster Carers Charter
- Health and Safety Policy
- Complaints Procedure

This Statement of Purpose links to the Children's Guide that is provided to all children cared for dependent upon the child's age and understanding at the point of admission to foster care.

3. Aims and Objectives

Together for Children Fostering – Sunderland is committed to ensuring that foster care provided for children in its care is of high quality and guarantees the best possible standards for care, safety and life opportunities.

The aim of the service is to achieve the best possible outcomes for cared for children. We strive to ensure that our children are safe and secure in nurturing homes; they remain healthy; achieve to the best of their abilities and become positive independent adults.

The overall objective of the Together for Children Fostering - Sunderland Service is to fulfil Sunderland City Council's duties and responsibilities in respect of fostering services in accordance with all relevant legislation and standards, and:

To plan and implement effective recruitment campaigns and strategies in order to attract the range of foster carers identified to meet the needs of cared for children.

To undertake effective assessments of prospective foster carers within specified timescales.

To establish and support a Fostering and Permanence Panel and to consider assessments and make recommendations for approval to the agency decision maker.

To provide pre and post approval training for applicants and carers, equipping them to meet the needs of this group of children and young people.

To provide regular recorded supervision and support contacts with carers by suitably qualified and experienced staff.

To ensure that additional support is available to carers to underpin home stability and improve outcomes for cared for children.

To protect children and young people from abuse and neglect.

To create stability for children and young people in foster care.

To achieve better life chances for cared for children particularly in relation to health, education and employment and leisure activities.

To maintain and promote family time with family members and friends where appropriate.

4. Values and Principles

It is the expectation of Together for Children Fostering – Sunderland that all staff and partner agencies and approved foster carers will actively endorse and support the following principles:

The welfare of children will be paramount in all considerations in the work of the fostering service.

Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family that can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.

Wherever possible, children should be brought up in their birth families, but where this is not possible, it is essential to ensure that children are securely attached to alternative carers capable of providing safe and effective care for the duration of their childhood.

The Fostering Service values working in partnership with the child, their family members and significant others and with all other agencies involved with the child as far as is appropriate to the safety and welfare needs of the child.

Children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be fully recognised, positively valued, promoted and fully taken into account when decisions are made.

All children will have the same opportunities in the Fostering Service, regardless of gender, identity, age, religion, race, culture, disability and language as far as is humanly possible to provide them.

Delays in achieving permanency for children can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and are to be avoided as far as possible.

The particular needs of disabled children, those with complex needs and older children who have existing attachments to their family and other significant people will be fully taken into account when decisions are made.

The wishes and feelings of children for whom there is a permanence plan will be carefully considered, but they will be helped to understand that the adults concerned will have the final responsibility for decisions made.

Children have the right to full information about what is happening to them and why and to be given explanations commensurate with their age and understanding.

Children have a right to make representations and complaints and will be helped to do so when assistance is required.

The role of family members who are willing and able to contribute to planning for children will be valued and respected.

Services that are provided value difference, be anti-discriminatory and respect confidentiality as far as is appropriate to the safety and welfare of the child.

A policy of delegated authority is implemented to ensure cared for children have as normal lives as possible with the same opportunities as other children.

The Fostering Service will work to maintain an adequate number of appropriately qualified, skilled and trained fostering social workers in order to facilitate the running of the service.

The Fostering Service is committed to multi-agency working and developing partnerships that will enable us to support and meet the needs of our children. We work at all levels, in partnership with Education and Health to promote the wellbeing of cared for children by Together for Children Sunderland.

5. Kinship Carers

Where children and young people are not able to live safely with their parent(s) then consideration will be given to that child or young person being cared for within the extended family network. This may involve approval of family or friends as foster carers under Regulations 24 or use of appropriate legislation such as applications for a Child Arrangement Order or Special Guardianship Order.

Should the viability assessment recommend that the prospective kinship carer is approved as a foster carer a full fostering assessment will be completed by a social worker in the Kinship Team in conjunction with the child's social worker. Kinship carers are eligible for the same framework of entitlements such as allowances, support, training and involvement of a supervising social worker, as other approved foster carers.

6. Making care arrangements

Where children and young people are not able to remain with their birth family or within the wider family network then living in foster care will be the first choice for the majority of children whilst their longer term needs are assessed and plans agreed. Effective childcare planning and practice are essential and undue delay and drift will be avoided. The Fostering Service aims to ensure that there is a diverse and wide range of safe, stable and nurturing family care to meet the needs of Sunderland cared for children. This also includes foster carers able to provide short break and respite care.

All care arrangements need to take into consideration the need for the child or young person to live near to family and school. If at all possible, brothers and sister will live together unless their assessed needs are to live separately. The Fostering Service aims to ensure that full information is provided by the child's social worker about the child's background, family, needs and any issues of risk to inform the matching process and enable the foster carers to work to meet the needs of the child or young person in foster care.

7. Care Planning and Review

All children and young people who are cared for have a care plan, which is reviewed regularly. The wishes of the child or young person are taken into account in drawing up the care plan. The family should be fully involved and their views made clear in the plans. Foster carers also have an important contribution to make.

The care plan is reviewed at every Cared for Child Review and at the four-month review the child's plan for permanence will be addressed. This plan is based on the needs of

the individual child and includes consideration of permanence being achieved by return to family or other means including long term foster care or adoption.

The care planning and assessment work will ensure that the child, family and foster carers have access to appropriate specialist services to meet particular needs such as for education or health.

The views and wishes of the child or young person are sought through a range of age appropriate means, from speaking with the child, foster carer or via the child's Independent Reviewing Officer. Gathering the views and wishes of the child could also include the involvement of the children's advocate or independent visitor.

8. Family Time and relationships with family members and friends

The care plan for the child or young person will always consider the need for plans for time with family and friends. Foster carers are trained and supported to enable them to work with members of the birth family and deal with this sensitively with the child or young person. Where appropriate we would expect that the foster carer would support family time arrangements and could include transport to and from or supervision. Where there is a plan for permanence through adoption, the foster carer/s will have a very important role to play in gathering age appropriate information for the child's life story and work with the child's social worker who co-ordinates this.

SERVICES PROVIDED

9. Foster Care

There are a range of types of care provided through the Fostering Service:

Short-term care

Carers offering short-term care do so in a variety of circumstances and with a wide range of children and young people. It may be for a very short, predictable period of time whilst for example a child's parents/or carer is in hospital, or a carer may look after a child whilst detailed assessments and Court proceedings are undertaken and/or until an agreed permanence plan can be implemented for the child.

Long-term/Permanent care

Carers offering long-term/permanent care commit to caring for a child or young person whose 'permanence' care plan indicates that their needs will best be met in a foster home that takes them through to adulthood and independence.

Emergency Care

Carers offering emergency care can be contacted at short notice, at evenings and weekends, to accept unplanned care of children. A list of emergency carers with vacancies is updated daily and forwarded to the Emergency Duty Team (Out of Hours Team).

Respite Care/Short Break/Timeout/Sleepover support

The service has a small number of carers who offer care on a regular basis where a child's care plan has indicated that such arrangements will be helpful in maintaining a child to live in his/her own family. This is particularly important for families and carers who care for a child with a disability or a have a complex need. These carers also offer support for mainstream foster carers who require respite care for specific reasons or as part of the child's care plan.

Kinship Carers

The Fostering Service provides the supporting social worker to complete assessments and offers support to carers for children placed with family and friends. These carers are eligible for the same framework of entitlements such as allowances, support and involvement of a supervising social worker, as other approved foster carers.

Staying Put

The service has a number of foster carers who have young people remain with them under Staying Put arrangements after the young person reaches the age of 18 years.

10. Participation and Consultation with Children and Young People

All Cared For children and young people can participate in decisions that affect their lives. We ensure that they can access the services they need and that they have the opportunity to shape how these services are planned, designed and delivered alongside supporting the organisation regarding the use of language associated with the care they receive.

Together for Children Sunderland's Children in Care Council

(CiCC) The Change Council is a representative group of children and young people who meet regularly. Mini Change Council 7-11 years, 12-15 years and 16+ years. They play a vital role in ensuring children and young people with care experience have a say in their care and the issues that matter to them. They bring together passionate and

dedicated children and young people with those who run care services to share their experiences and ideas on how to improve the support and services they receive.

Celebration Event for Cared for Children

This event is planned to take place at Christmas time and celebrates the achievements of Cared for Children. Foster carers play a significant role in supporting children and young people at this event and in celebrating with them.

Children and Young People's Survey

The views of children and young people are valuable in helping to monitor, evaluate and re-design services.

VOKOL – Voice of Kids Our Lives.

This group was specifically developed to ensure that children in foster care help to shape and influence how we do things in the future. This includes all children in the fostering family including children of foster carers.

11. Foster Care Recruitment

Sunderland's children come from a range of cultural, racial, linguistic and religious backgrounds and the Fostering Service will endeavour to recruit foster carers who reflect these needs. Any foster care arrangement made will, as far as possible, reflect children's diverse needs. Publicity is normally via website, newspaper, social media or radio advertising and also includes use of public information stands. Information about fostering is available in libraries, schools and health centres and can also be downloaded from our website. Fostering Fortnight is promoted each year via website and social media. The service has available to them the support of a marketing officer who works across both fostering and adoption services.

Foster carers will be carefully recruited and trained and given access to support services to enable them to provide high quality care for the child/ren placed with them. This will include support to enable the child or young person to make use of education, health, leisure, creative and sporting activities to develop self-esteem and life opportunities. They will also work to provide safe, caring and appropriate boundaries for the child or young person.

The Fostering Service work to retain foster carers by providing a comprehensive training plan and development opportunities. There is also a payment scheme to ensure their skills, knowledge and dedication to their role as foster carers is acknowledged. The Fostering Service has produced a Fostering Recruitment Strategy which is reviewed annually, and this document sets out the recruitment initiatives planned to increase the numbers of foster carers for Together for Children Sunderland over an annual period.

Together for Children Sunderland is part of a new collaborative partnership with the 11 other Councils in the North East of England called **Foster with North East**. The aim of Foster with North East is to help recruit foster carers and provide support for them. Foster with North East is a united, single support hub backed by the Department for Education.

Information about Together for Children Fostering Service and recruitment is available on the dedicated **Foster with North East** and **Together for Children** fostering websites. Enquiries are welcomed from a wide range of prospective carers including couples with or without children, single parents, single people, lesbians and gay men, bi or transgender, people from all ethnic backgrounds, different religious beliefs, people with a disability and older people. Prospective applicants need to be aged over 21 years old.

Social workers, support officers and administration staff within the service respond to enquiries and applications about fostering promptly and with high standards of customer care. Recruitment events are held regularly and include contributions from experienced foster carers. Individual home visits will be offered to all people who express an interest in fostering and are eligible for consideration.

12. Assessment and Preparation

After making an enquiry, all prospective foster carers receive contact from Foster with North East to complete the enquiry process. Following this, the enquiry will be forwarded to Together for Children Fostering who make contact with the enquirers. All enquirers receive an information pack and will have an initial home assessment visit to discuss their interest in fostering in more detail. All prospective foster carers are assessed as part of a two stage process.

Once permission forms are received back from applicants Stage 1 begins with statutory checks being carried out, including disclosure and barring (DBS) checks, these checks comply with the requirements of Schedule 3 of the Fostering Services Regulations of 2011. Stage 1 of the process should take no longer than 8 weeks. At this point the applicants are allocated an assessing social worker and are invited on the Skills to Foster preparation course.

On the successful completion of the checks and processes of Stage 1 formal applications can be accepted and the prospective foster carers begin Stage 2. The fostering service aims to complete all assessments within 4 months of Stage 2 commencing.

All foster carers are required to complete Skills to Foster Training a programme designed by the Fostering Network. This training includes six modules covering:

- What do foster carers do?
- Identity and life changes
- Working with others
- Understanding and caring for children
- Safer caring
- Transitions

Each assessment will cover a range of areas including:

- Caring/parenting capacity, awareness and competencies
- Applicants' family, life history, lifestyle and background
- Full statutory checks are completed, together with financial checks, medical reports and personal references
- A Home and Safety checklist is completed, including transport
- Adult children are contacted and asked to complete a questionnaire about their upbringing and make comments about an applicant's suitability to become a foster carer
- Ex partners are contacted (where appropriate) and asked for their views about the proposed application
- Each applicant works closely with the assessing social worker to complete the assessment. The applicant is able to read (excluding references), comment on and address any issues within the report, and then sign it

The assessment report is then forwarded to the Registered Manager or delegate for checking and signing before being circulated to members of the Fostering and Permanence Panel.

13. Approval and Termination of Approval

Once completed, the assessment report will be presented to the Fostering Panel for recommendation whether to approve or not. Any recommendation made by the Fostering Panel has to be approved by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

Together for Children Sunderland Fostering Service will inform all prospective foster carers in writing of their approval and any conditions such as the age range and number of children that the carers are approved to care for.

The foster carers then enter a signed foster carer agreement with Together for Children Sunderland Fostering. The agreement sets out a range of terms and conditions about being a foster carer. Foster carers are required to notify the Fostering Service of any change in their family or household circumstances.

The Fostering Service has responsibility to recommend to the Fostering Panel the termination of approval of any foster carer if it is no longer satisfied that the foster carer/s or the household are suitable. This is discussed at a Foster Carer Review and a recommendation made from this meeting for consideration at the Fostering Panel.

Following any proposed decision taken by the Agency Decision Maker, the carer has the right to appeal either through the fostering service or since April 2009 foster carers are able to use an Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) to challenge the agency's decisions with regard to their assessment and approval. Information regarding accessing the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) is available to all foster carers.

Foster carers can contact the IRM via their website

www.independentreviewingmechanism.org.uk or by email to www.irm@irm.org.uk or by telephone on 0845 450 3956

- The IRM has the following timescales:
- Applicants have 40 days from the agency decision to contact the IRM.
- The Fostering Service will be contacted to produce relevant documents within 10 days.
- The IRM will set up a panel within 3 months of the application.

When Foster Carers decide to retire or resign from the fostering service this is also reported to the Fostering Panel.

14. The Fostering Panel

The Fostering Agency is required by the Fostering Services Regulations to establish at least one Fostering Panel. The membership, role and functions of the panel are

prescribed within the Regulations and set out in the Fostering Service Procedures and Guidance.

Together for Children Sunderland Fostering has two Fostering and Permanence Panels, the frequency of meetings is usually twice per month. The Fostering Panels have an independent Chair who has the skills and expertise to chair the panel meetings effectively. Together with the Panel Adviser the independent chair works to develop the skills of those panel members on the Central List.

Each of the panels meets monthly and considers assessments of prospective foster carers, annual reviews of carers, de-registrations and issues in relation to foster carers. The business of the Panel is formally recorded.

The Fostering Panel makes recommendations that are presented to the Agency Decision Maker to endorse or reject. These decisions are recorded and notified in writing to the prospective/existing foster carer. A training day for panel is held at least once a year with additional training offered from the Sunderland Safeguarding Children Partnership. For membership of Together for Children Sunderland Fostering Panel see Appendix 3.

15. Matching for carers

The Fostering Service provides a weekday duty service to field social work staff needing a foster carer for a child or young person. Full information is taken about the child's needs via a carer request form, to assist in the matching process. As far as possible children are placed within the Sunderland area so that contact with family and friends, continuity with school and leisure pursuits can be maintained and links to services can be kept.

The Registered Manager for the Fostering Service ensures that regular matching discussions take place about children who are awaiting matching with a foster carer and foster care availability within the fostering team meeting.

All matches made are recorded on the carer and child's electronic files that details the reasons for the match, the positives in the match and any issues in matching that will need further consideration. This information is then recorded within our electronic recording system. The Emergency Duty Team working outside normal office hours is provided with a list of available foster carers who can be approached in an emergency situation.

16. Training and Development for Foster Carers

During assessment and prior to approval prospective foster carers will be expected to complete Skills to Foster Training and have access to other training opportunities to

support applicants in preparation to their approval. In a two carer household this will include both foster carers. These courses are face to face and can include some online training. At the time of approval or following approval all foster carers will sign a Personal Professional Development Plan, which is their learning contract and will be expected to attend training as identified within this Plan. This learning contract is re-visited in carer supervision and at foster carer annual reviews.

Training is seen as essential to the fostering task and every encouragement is made to ensure that foster carers attend training through the opportunity of online, face to face and self directed learning. For carers who may struggle childcare support and training times are explored.

A wide training offer has been developed which includes classroom based learning, distance learning and online training courses and is delivered by a range of providers, including: the fostering team; health service, education service, CoramBAAF, Children and Young People's Services and commissioned training from a range of providers.

The Fostering Service provides an online Practitioner Portal for Foster Carers. It is accessible via mobile devices as well as tablets and personal computers. The system hosts all the latest training and development sessions available to foster carers. Foster carers are now able to book places on courses in a few easy clicks. The system provides a number of e-learning courses that will enable foster carers to access training at a time that suits them. We have also commissioned the Big Initiative eLearning training programme to allow foster carers to continue with their progression and development alongside classroom training. All foster carers are expected to complete their Training and Development Standards within 12 months of approval (18 months for kinship carers) and are supported to do this by their Fostering Social Worker and the Together for Children Sunderland training scheme.

After approval foster carers are offered a wide range of face to face and online training that includes:

- First Aid for children and young people
- Safeguarding Procedures
- Safer care
- Foster Carer recording keeping and confidentiality;
- Valuing and promoting diversity;
- Attachment
- Life Story
- Working with families and supporting Family Time.
- Managing Allegations
- Solihull Approach Parenting Programme
- Impact of Abuse
- Caring for children who have been sexually harmed

Child Development
Theraplay
Children and Domestic Violence
Delegated Authority
Fire Safety
Fostering and Anti Bullying
Child Sexual Exploitation and County Lines
Disability Awareness
Online Safety
GDRP

In addition to our mandatory training courses, a range of courses are offered to foster carers undertaking specific tasks. These include training on life story work and care transition, training on sexual health, Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), County Lines and drugs and alcohol.

A range of support groups, seminars and workshops are arranged on relevant issues, in response to recognised need/request by foster carers. These offers can be aimed at both foster carers and social workers to enhance common understanding of respective roles.

Fostering social workers discuss foster carers' training needs as a part of the carers' supervision process and the annual foster carer review will address carers training and development needs through a review and update of their Personal Development Plan.

It is good practice where possible for foster carers to have opportunities to train with the Fostering Service, children's Social Workers and staff from other agencies to increase communication and understanding about each other's roles, responsibilities and experiences. Foster carers are supported and encouraged to attend multi agency training, more recently Signs of Safety training.

17. Support

All foster carers receive the allowance of weekly payments and payments for children and young people. Foster carers are advised about what the allowance should cover in caring for the child or young person. An additional weekly allowance is also paid to contribute to the cost of birthday's, festive breaks and summer holidays.

All foster carers have an allocated Fostering Social Worker from the Fostering Service who must visit, support and supervise the carer. The Fostering social worker will visit at least monthly or more frequently if required. They will also liaise closely with children's social workers.

All foster carers have access to the foster carer handbook. The service has adopted an online handbook that is regularly updated. The handbook provides access to policies, procedures and guidance for foster carers. It is an expectation that all foster carers are supported to be able to use the internet and have access to a computer in order to help and support the children in their care. In the event that foster carers do not have access to a computer the Fostering Service will also provide a hard copy of key documents.

All foster carers have an annual review, chaired by a Fostering Reviewing Officer. The first review completed by the Fostering Reviewing Officer is also presented to the Fostering and Permanence Panel. In addition, Fostering and Permanence Panel will also consider the reviews of foster carers where there have been specific and significant complaints, allegations, or issues about standards of care or other major changes in circumstances. Whilst the emphasis in these circumstances is on the safety of any child involved, there will also be regard to the support and needs of the foster carers and attempts to resolve the situation satisfactorily.

Foster carers can access telephone support from a duty Fostering social worker from the fostering team throughout normal daily working hours. Outside of these hours, the use of buddy carers is used alongside the use of the Emergency Duty Team is available to all foster carers.

The Fostering Service will promote links with a range of support services and agencies that are involved in children's care and are important for the foster carer. These will include:

- Child Protection Social Workers
- Safeguarding Children Services
- CAMHS
- Cared for Children Nurses
- Paediatricians
- Virtual School Team
- Schools and education providers
- Youth Offending Team
- Leaving Care Services
- Children's Advocacy Services
- Independent visiting service

Foster carers will be supported where required in having arrangements for a break and respite care.

The Fostering Service recognises the significant role played by the foster carers' own children in fostering and the pressures this can bring to the family. The Fostering Service supports the role they play within our VOKOL group and Children who Foster Group offering specific support to those children who foster.

It is the expectation that all foster carers will be involved in providing transport for children or in Family Time arrangements however there is also support provided for some children to be transported to school and Family Time if required and to supervise this. If foster carers are required to give evidence at court relating to a cared for child then they will receive support, advice and guidance in preparing to support them in doing this with confidence. All approved foster carers have access to Independent Support and Mediation Services via Fostering Network.

The Fostering Service provides a regular update for foster carers through the fostering newsletter, foster care consultative group and support groups. Together for Children and Foster with North East website, Instagram, Facebook and X are also used to provide a range of means to keep carers informed about local and national developments in fostering. The Foster Carer Consultative Group is held regularly, and this forum is used to disseminate information and consult on service development.

Foster Carer Surveys are sent out annually to gather the views of all foster carers. Our Foster Carer Celebration Event takes place annually to acknowledge and to thank foster carers for their valued contribution to the service.

The Fostering Service has implemented four constellations of the Mockingbird Family Model for Fostering. The first constellation went live in May 2021 and the second in 2022, third in December 2023 and fourth in January 2024.

The Fostering Service have recruited a clinical psychologist who is able to support Foster carers and Fostering Social Workers when required. This addition to the service has extended our therapeutic offer and is able to provide an immediate access to support when this is needed. This service can include the offer of psychological consultations with foster carers and Social Workers, specialist training to foster carers and Social Workers and support in respect of matching considerations for children and young people.

18. Structure and Staffing

The day-to-day management of the Fostering Service is the responsibility of the Fostering Registered Manager. The Registered Manager reports to the Service Manager for Cared for Children. The staffing of the Fostering Service is set out in Appendix 1 and Management Structure in Appendix 2.

The Assistant Managers within the Fostering Service are experienced social worker practitioners and maintain currency in fostering and management practice through attendance at appropriate training courses, seminars and conferences and through research and other briefings.

Members of staff from the Fostering Service and other appropriate services are involved in the review, planning and development of the service and contribute to service development and design.

19. Staff Qualifications and Experience

All staff in the Fostering Service have a Professional Development Plan that identifies their development needs and the training, which can help them to progress and improve their skills, abilities and knowledge.

Social workers working within the Fostering Service are registered with Social Work England and have current DBS checks. The qualifications held by members of staff working in the Fostering Service are set out in Appendix 1.

20. Complaints

All children and young people in foster care receive information with regard to the complaints procedure and how to make a complaint. This information is available in the Children and Young People's Guides to Living in Foster Care and online. All complaints are dealt with through customer feedback services. All young people in foster care have access advocacy and support from their Independent Reviewing Officer.

Foster carers are provided with complaints information in their online foster care handbook.

Any allegation about foster carers that comes within a Child Protection remit, is investigated within the Sunderland Safeguarding Procedures. Foster carers are provided with independent support throughout the process of investigating any allegation. This support is provided via Support and Mediation Services from The Foster Network. Details of how to access this support will be provided to the foster carers by their Fostering social worker. Any concerns about the Fostering Service may also be addressed to Ofsted, the address, email and telephone contact details are provided at the end of this document. The outcome from any complaint is addressed and findings always used to further improve and develop the services.

21. Monitoring of the Fostering Service

- Children's care plans and permanence plans are monitored by the Independent Reviewing Officers, Team Managers, Service Managers and by an audit system.

- After each Panel a questionnaire will be sent to all attendees and Social Workers, seeking their views and feedback. The outcome of these questionnaires will be incorporated into the Panel annual report and discussed at the Annual Business Meeting.
- Each member of the Fostering Panel receives an annual appraisal and the general outcomes of these appraisals are reported back to the Panel.
- The quality of reports is monitored by the Fostering Panel and reported to the agency every six months.
- The agency's performance and numbers of foster carers approved are reported to the Senior Management Team and Ofsted quarterly and annually to the Department for Education via the Fostering Data Set Quality Assurance document.
- Preparation and training courses for foster carers are regularly evaluated and the activities of the Fostering Panel are evaluated. These evaluations are used to develop the service. Following the introduction of the regional support hub, *Foster with North East*, this pre-approval training is undertaken by that specialist service.
- All employee files are audited to ensure compliance and that all relevant checks are up to date.
- This Statement of Purpose is reviewed and revised annually and is agreed by Senior Managers and the Together for Children Board.
- An annual report is provided for the Together for Children Sunderland Board, elected members, foster carers and other interested parties to provide more detailed information about activity and performance for the Fostering Service.
- In line with Regulations 35 a detailed report of the monitoring and development of services within the Fostering Service is prepared and provided to Together for Children Sunderland Board and to Ofsted.

22. Registration Information

Name and Address of Registration Authority

OFSTED
National Business Unit
Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester

M1 2WD Telephone: 0300123123

Independent fostering agencies are inspected by Ofsted at least once in a three-year cycle. All fostering agencies are requested to complete an annual fostering quality assurance and data form. This data is used to inform inspections and to help Ofsted to decide whether an inspection is required within the coming year's cycle. The annual cycle is between 1 April and 31 March each year.

Name and Address of Registered Provider

Together for Children Fostering Sunderland
Sandhill Centre
Grindon Lane
Sunderland, SR3 4EN
URN 1254786

The Responsible Individual

Kathryn McCabe
Head of Service – Cared for Children and Provider Services
Together for Children Sunderland
Sandhill Centre, Sunderland, SR3 4EN

Agency Decision Maker

Kathryn McCabe
Head of Service - Cared for Children and Provider Services
Together for Children Sunderland
Sandhill Centre, Sunderland, SR3 4EN

Registered Manager

Lisa Strother
Together for Children Fostering Sunderland
Sandhill Centre, Sunderland, SR3 4EN

Any conditions currently in force in relation to the registration of the registered provider - None

23. Useful Contacts

The Office of the Children's Commissioner

The Office of the Children's Commissioner
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London

SW1P 3BT

Tel: 020 7783 8330

Email: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

Complaints – Together for Children Sunderland

Complaints@togetherforchildren.org.uk Telephone 0191 561 7997

Childline provided by the NSPCC

Weston House

42 Curtain Road

London

EC2A 3NH

Call free on 0800 1111

If this document is required in any different format, including large print, braille or alternative language then this can be provided once requested.

Appendix 1 - Staffing Details

Lisa Strother	Registered Manager	Frontline Pathway Manager's training 2024 Mental Health First Aider DDP Level 1 and 2 PQ Award 1 and Level 2 Practice Educator BA Hons in Social Work 2007 NNEB Nursery Nurse Diploma 1992
Dawn Bell	Assistant Team Manager	Empower Manager Training 2024 CQSW 1993 BA Hons Sociology 1987
Chris James	Assistant Team Manager	Frontline Pathway Manager's training 2024 BA Hons Social Work 2009
Geoff Burnham	Fostering Social Worker	Diploma in Social Work 2006 Practice Educator
Nicola Frost	Fostering Social Worker	BSc Hons Social Work / learning disability nursing 2010
Karina Gibbons	Fostering Social Worker	BA Hons Social Work 2013
Mick Gifford	Fostering Social Worker	DIPSW – 2004 Post qualifying award including PE award.
Nicola Atkinson	Fostering Social Worker	BA Hons Social Work 2016
Carole Young	Fostering Social Worker	Therapeutic Life Story Work CBT Principles of Theraplay 1 and 2 Group Theraplay DDP Level 1 and 2 BA Social Work 2007
Lucy Taylor	Fostering Social Worker	BA Hons Social Work 2012
Nicola Robinson	Fostering Social Worker	BA Hons Social Work 2013

Anna Woodcock	Fostering Social Worker	MA in Social Work 2019 BA Hons Sociology and Psychology 2002
Penny Woods	Fostering Social Worker	BA Hons Social Work 2019
Christine Pace-Rowntree	Fostering Social Worker	Practice Educator BA Hons Social Work 2003 Diploma Social work 2002
Samantha Wardle	Child and Family Worker	Extensive fostering and administrative experience.
Alison McArdle	Fostering Panel Advisor	



Appendix 2 - Membership of Together for Children Sunderland's Fostering Panel Central list

Panel members are drawn from a list of people whom it is considered have the appropriate qualifications and/or experiences to consider cases submitted to the Fostering Panel. There is no limit to the number of people who are on the central list and the same people do not have to be appointed to every Panel. Together for Children Sunderland's Fostering Service will decide how many Panel members should sit on each Panel meeting, subject to the Panel meeting being "quorate" (a certain number of people need to be present for the meeting to go ahead). It is usual for Together for Children's Fostering Panels to meet twice each month. Panel business can only be conducted if there are at least 5 members present, including the Chair or Vice Chair and the social worker. Where the Vice Chair has to chair the meeting and is not an independent, at least one independent member must be present for the Panel to be quorate. The Panel should not be so large so that it is difficult to chair and could be seen as rather overwhelming to prospective foster carers attending the meeting.

The central list for Together for Children Sunderland Fostering includes:

- A Chairperson – an independent person with the necessary skills and experience.
- Three Social workers, each with at least three years' relevant post qualifying experience in childcare social work, including direct experience in fostering work. The social workers do not need to be employed by the agency.

- There is no requirement under Fostering Regulations to have an Elected Member as a panel member. Elected Members with experience of children's services can be valuable members of the panel. Together for Children Sunderland has retained Elected Members from Sunderland City Council as members of the Central List for Fostering and Adoption Panels.
- The Medical Adviser – will have expertise in child health and health related issues.
- Other persons – “independent members”, including where practicable at least two persons with personal experience of fostering. This could include specialists in education, child and adolescent mental health, race and culture and those who have personal experience of fostering.
- Additionally, a Legal Adviser to the Panel is identified, who may or may not be a Panel member. The Legal Adviser is a qualified solicitor who is experienced in child and family law.