

# **CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE**

## **AGENDA**



**Tuesday 20 July 2021**

**at 4.00 pm**

**in the Council Chamber,  
Civic Centre, Hartlepool**

**A limited number of members of the public will be able to attend the meeting with spaces being available on a first come, first served basis. Those wishing to attend the meeting should phone (01429) 523568 or (01429) 523193 by midday on Monday 19 July 2021 and name and address details will be taken for NHS Test and Trace purposes.**

Councillors, Ashton, Boddy, Fleming, Groves, Harrison, Lindridge and Moore.

Co-opted Members: Jo Heaton, C of E Diocese and Joanne Wilson, RC Diocese representatives.

School Heads Representatives: Mark Tilling (Secondary), David Turner (Primary), Zoe Westley (Special).

Six Young Peoples Representatives

Observer: Councillor Fleming, Chair of Adult and Community Based Services Committee

- 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**
- 2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS**
- 3. MINUTES**
  - 3.1 Minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2021 (*previously circulated and published*).
- 4. BUDGET AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ITEMS**

No items.



**5. KEY DECISIONS**

No items

**6. OTHER ITEMS REQUIRING DECISION**

No items

**7. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

- 7.1 Holiday Activities and Food Programme – *Director, Children and Joint Commissioning Services*
- 7.2 Fostering Annual Report 2020-2021 – Statement of Purpose March 2021 – Children's Guide to Fostering March 2021 – *Director, Children and Joint Commissioning Services*
- 7.3 Covid in Schools – Verbal Update - *Director, Children and Joint Commissioning Services*

**8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

FOR INFORMATION

Date of next meeting – Tuesday 7 September 2021 at 4.00pm



# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

20 July 2021



**Report of:** Director, Children and Joint Commissioning Services

**Subject:** HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES AND FOOD PROGRAMME

---

## 1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 For information only.

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 To update members of Children's Services Committee on the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme delivered at Easter 2021 and outline plans and developments for the delivery of the scheme during the summer holiday 2021.

## 3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 On 8 November 2020, the government announced the holiday activities and food programme providing funding to local authorities to coordinate free holiday provision including healthy food and enriching activities during the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays in 2021. The HAF programme is aimed at children who receive benefits-related free school meals although other children can also benefit from the offer. Local authorities are being asked to ensure that the HAF programme is available for all children eligible for free school meals in the local area, although recognises that not all eligible children will participate.
- 3.2 A report was presented to Children's Services Committee on 02 March 2021 outlining the details of the programme, funding allocated and proposals for the Easter programme.
- 3.3 The HAF Steering Group is now well established and made up of a range of partners representing the breadth of stakeholders in the programme. The Steering Group benefits from the expertise of those who work with children and young people as well as those working in the activities and sports sector and food standards and nutrition sector.

3.4 The HAF delivery during the school Easter holidays was a great success despite the limitations on face to face contact due to the COVID-19 restrictions. The following events and activities were delivered which ensured that all eligible children and young people, as well as a high number of non-eligible children, were reached by the offer:

- Activity packs – 5,500 activity packs were distributed to eligible children and young people via Hartlepool schools. The activity packs were created by both the Hartlepool Borough Council Youth Service and Sports and Recreation teams. Compliments were received from a number of schools and families on the contents of the activity packs which were engaging, age appropriate and provided hours of fun for children.
- Digital offer – delivered by Centre for Excellence in Creative Arts and Community Hubs. This included a digital version of the activity packs, Zoom craft sessions, online tutorials including cookery demonstrations, outdoor arts and crafts and comic book creations. 935 logins or downloads were recorded for these events.
- Made in Teesside television – delivered a schedule of 40 programmes broken down into three age slots covering a range of enriching activities. All of the programmes broadcast were delivered by local volunteers with Hartlepool volunteers (including our young people) delivering 16 of the 40 programmes (40%). There was an average of 10,250 households tuned in daily, unfortunately the data cannot tell us how many of these were Hartlepool households, but given population size, it would be reasonable to assume approximately 2,000 households may have been Hartlepool children and families.
- HBC Sports and Physical Activities team and the Youth Service delivered a range of online activities including pilates, hip hop, yoga creative and craft sessions and boxing. Alongside this, Family Time delivered rock hunts, Xplorer trails and orienteering for families to engage with via the Get Hartlepool Active social media pages.
- Partner providers including Hartlepool Carers and Gamers@Hart delivered four hours per day for four days to a total of 115 children and young people through virtual platforms and included a food, activity and enrichment element.
- 224 children attended face to face sessions delivered through West View Project, Ward Jackson School, Kilmarnock Rd Family Centre, Springwell School and St John Vianney School. These face to face sessions were delivered in small groups and bubbles and were fully compliant with the restrictions in place at the time.

3.5 The total cost of the programme delivered at Easter was £77,000.

#### 4. PROPOSALS

- 4.1 The plans for the delivery of the summer HAF scheme are well underway. The Department for Education has now appointed a delivery partner Childcare Works to work with local authorities to oversee the development and delivery plans, identify how things are progressing and give advice and support in terms of any gaps in provision.
- 4.2 During May and June, providers were invited to submit applications to deliver HAF programmes over the summer holidays and 25 applications have been received at the time of writing. These are from a range of different providers including HBC teams, voluntary and community sector organisations, schools, churches, sports clubs and the Fire Brigade. These programmes will reach over 1,800 children and young people. Over the coming month, further applications will be encouraged and promoted to extend the reach of the programme even further.
- 4.3 Furthermore, the HAF programme will fund the popular 'free swims' programme that has been delivered for children and young people in Hartlepool in previous years for four weeks during the summer holidays. This year, in order to wrap the food offer around the activity, HBC Leisure, Recreation and Participation Service is working in partnership with the School Catering team to provide a nutritious meal alongside the swimming activity. It is anticipated that this HAF offer will reach a minimum of 2,500 children and young people.
- 4.4 The HAF steering group is keen to ensure that the programme reaches all eligible children and they benefit from the offer in some way. It is therefore proposed that food boxes, that contain the ingredients and recipe for a nutritious hot family meal, are prepared and distributed to all eligible children. These will be supported by online cooking videos that demonstrate how to prepare the meal and will be something fun that families can prepare together. These food boxes will also include an activity that families can undertake together for example a vegetable growing pack or Velcro ball and catch game as well as activity sheets and nutritional advice and guidance for both children and parents.
- 4.5 Given the COVID restrictions that may be in place over the summer, the plans for delivery cannot be finalised by all providers. However, a booking system has been developed that families can view and book into activities and events online. In the run up to the summer holidays, a publicity campaign will be delivered promoting the HAF programme, locally called #HartlepoolHolidayFun.

#### 5. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The HAF programme has been funded by the Department for Education and is supported by guidance documentation. Delivery of the programme is a significant undertaking for the Council and as can be seen from this report

requires the cooperation and partnership working across HBC and with a range of providers to make sure that the programme reaches as many children and young people as possible.

## **6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 6.1 The Department for Education has allocated an indicative grant of £626,500 for the delivery of the HAF programme in Hartlepool. This grant will be paid in instalments and is intended to cover all costs associated with the management and delivery of the programme.
- 6.2 If the grant phasing does not match the expenditure profile the Council will need to manage the cash flow implications within existing cash resources, which is not anticipated to be an issue and will be necessary for the successful delivery of this initiative.

## **7. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no specific legal considerations arising from this report. The decision is reported to the Committee in accordance with Article 12.3 (h) of the Constitution.

## **8. CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 The development of the HAF programme for summer 2021 has been delivered by a Steering Group made up of a wide range of partners who have contributed to the development of the programme.
- 8.2 Following the Easter programme, an online survey was rolled out with children and young people to gain feedback on what events and activities they enjoyed and other things they would like to be included. This was supported by focus group interviews with young people to get richer information. The feedback received on the Easter programme has informed the development of the summer offer.

## **9. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY (IMPACT ASSESSMENT FORM TO BE COMPLETED AS APPROPRIATE.)**

- 9.1 A child and family poverty impact assessment has been completed and is attached at **Appendix 1**.

**10. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS (IMPACT ASSESSMENT FORM TO BE COMPLETED AS APPROPRIATE.)**

- 10.1 There are no equality and diversity considerations arising from this report, the HAF programme will be offered to all children and young people who are entitled to free school meals. The programme will be delivered through a range of partners to ensure the offer is inclusive and meets the needs of all children and young people including those with protected characteristics.

**11. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS**

- 11.1 There are no staffing considerations arising from this report.

**12. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 12.1 There are no asset management considerations arising from this report

**13. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 13.1 Children's Services Committee is asked to note the successful delivery of the HAF programme during the Easter holidays which was far reaching and benefitted children and young people despite the COVID restrictions.
- 13.2 Children's Services Committee is asked to note the proposals and preparation for the delivery of the programme over the 2021 summer holiday.

**14. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 14.1 The HAF programme is an initiative of the Department for Education to tackle holiday activities provision, nutrition and physical health and reduce social isolation. The Council has received funding to deliver programme and will report progress to Children's Services Committee.

**15. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Report to Children's Services Committee 02 March 2021 'Holiday Activities and Food Programme'

[https://www.hartlepool.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/4143/childrens\\_services\\_committee](https://www.hartlepool.gov.uk/meetings/meeting/4143/childrens_services_committee)

**16. CONTACT OFFICERS**

Sally Robinson  
Director  
01429 523910  
[sally.robinson@hartlepool.gov.uk](mailto:sally.robinson@hartlepool.gov.uk)



<b>1. Is this decision a Budget &amp; Policy Framework or Key Decision? NO</b> If YES please answer question 2 below				
<b>2. Will there be an impact of the decision requested in respect of Child and Family Poverty? YES / NO</b> If YES please complete the matrix below				
GROUP	POSITIVE IMPACT	NEGATIVE IMPACT	NO IMPACT	REASON & EVIDENCE
Young working people aged 18 - 21				
Those who are disabled or suffer from illness / mental illness				
Those with low educational attainment				
Those who are unemployed				
Those who are underemployed				
Children born into families in poverty				
Those who find difficulty in managing their finances				
Lone parents				
Those from minority ethnic backgrounds				
Poverty is measured in different ways. Will the policy / decision have an impact on child and family poverty and in what way?				
Poverty Measure (examples of poverty measures appended overleaf)	POSITIVE IMPACT	NEGATIVE IMPACT	NO IMPACT	REASON & EVIDENCE

Children in low income families	X			HAF programme will provide activities and food to children and young people eligible for free school meals during the three longer school holidays in 2021.
Educational attainment	X			HAF programme will support disadvantaged children and young people during the school holiday period which is designed to provide them with healthy food and enriching activities that will support them to be more engaged with school
Healthy eating	X			The HAF programme is designed to support children and young people to eat more healthily and be more active during school holidays and provide them with a greater knowledge of health and nutrition.
Overall impact of Policy / Decision				
POSITIVE IMPACT	X	ADJUST / CHANGE POLICY / SERVICE		
NO IMPACT / NO CHANGE		STOP / REMOVE POLICY / SERVICE		
ADVERSE IMPACT BUT CONTINUE				
Examples of Indicators that impact of Child and Family Poverty.				
Economic				
Children in Low Income Families (%)				
Children in Working Households (%)				
Overall employment rate (%)				
Proportion of young people who are NEET				

Adults with Learning difficulties in employment
<b>Education</b>
Free School meals attainment gap (key stage 2 and key stage 4)
Gap in progression to higher education FSM / Non FSM
Achievement gap between disadvantaged pupils and all pupils (key stage 2 and key stage 4)
<b>Housing</b>
Average time taken to process Housing Benefit / Council tax benefit claims
Number of affordable homes built
<b>Health</b>
Prevalence of underweight children in reception year
Prevalence of obese children in reception year
Prevalence of underweight children in year 6
Prevalence of obese children in reception year 6
Life expectancy

# CHILDREN'S SERVICES COMMITTEE

20 July 2021



**Report of:** Director, Children and Joint Commissioning Services

**Subject:** FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT 2020 - 2021  
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE MARCH 2021  
CHILDREN'S GUIDE TO FOSTERING MARCH 2021  
CHAIR OF FOSTERING PANEL REPORT

---

## 1. TYPE OF DECISION/APPLICABLE CATEGORY

1.1 For information only.

## 2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

2.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Children Service's Committee with information relating to the activity of the Fostering Service for the year 2020/21. The provision of foster care is a regulated activity and as such there is a requirement to provide the executive side of the Council with performance information on a regular basis and also annually.

2.2 This report is also to present to Children's Services Committee the Statement of Purpose and the Children's guide for this service.

## 3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The work of the Fostering Service is subject to National Minimum Standards applicable to the provision of Foster Care for our children in care and care leavers. The National Minimum Standards, together with Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review, form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of Fostering Agencies.

3.2 The report provides details of the staffing arrangements in the service, training received by both staff and foster carers, and the constitution of the Fostering Panel. The report also explains activity in relation to the recruitment, preparation and assessment of prospective foster carers and the progress in relation to the priorities for the service in 2019/20 - see **Appendix 1**.

3.3 The Fostering Services Minimum Standard 25.7 requires Fostering Services to ensure the executive side of the Local Authority:

- Receives a written report on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency once every 3 months;
- Monitors the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and achieving good outcomes for children;
- Satisfies themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of the registration.

#### 4. PROPOSALS

4.1 The Fostering Service Annual Report provides details of the service's full activity in respect of the following:

- The team;
- An explanation regarding governance and oversight of Hartlepool's fostering service and Hartlepool's fostering panel activity over the year;
- An understanding around how placements are made and our success around stability;
- Information about our recruitment drive to encourage new foster carers to come to Hartlepool, the places where we advertise for new carers and the successes and issues we face;
- Information about how we reward our carers and how we recognise their contribution to a child's life;
- Information about Hartlepool's training programme for foster carers;
- Information relating to support and services Hartlepool foster carers can expect from the fostering service after they have been approved;
- Our priorities for 2021-2022; and
- The voice of Hartlepool foster carers and children and young people who are cared for

4.2 It is a requirement of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services that each fostering agency produces a Statement of Purpose, outlining its aims and objectives, a description of the services and facilities that are provided, how the service is managed and its fitness to provide fostering services. The Statement of Purpose for Hartlepool's Fostering Service is attached at **Appendix 2** to this report.

## **5. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The fostering service needs to adhere to the Statement of Purpose and provide the executive side of the council information relating to the fostering service on a quarterly basis.

## **6. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. The Fostering Service has a set budget to support the year's activity. This also supports the recruitment of potential carers.

## **7. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no legal considerations arising from this report. The Fostering Team and Service adhere to the National Minimum Standards, Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, and the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of Fostering Agencies. The Fostering Service is inspected by Ofsted as part of its Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services.

## **8. CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 Foster carers are regularly consulted and their views and comments are reflected in the Annual Report. Foster carers are subject to reviews by an independent reviewing officer. As part of this process children and young people, and their social worker, provide feedback in terms of practice in the foster home.

## **9. CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY**

- 9.1 There are no child and family poverty implications arising from this report.

## **10. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY CONSIDERATIONS**

- 10.1 The Fostering Service practises in a sensitive and responsive way towards Foster Carers. The Fostering Service works with carers from any ethnicity, faith or belief, gender, identity, language, race and sexual orientation. This is detailed within the Statement of Purpose. (**Appendix 2**)

## **11. STAFF CONSIDERATIONS**

- 11.1 There are no staff implications arising from this report.

## **12. ASSET MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 12.1 There are no asset management considerations arising from this report

## **13. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 13.1 Children's Services Committee is asked to note the report in relation to the work of the Fostering Service in the annual report for 2020/21.
- 13.2 Children's Services Committee is asked to note the Statement of Purpose (**Appendix 2**) and the Children's guide to Fostering (**Appendix 3**).
- 13.3 Children's Services Committee is asked to note the summary report provided by the Chair of Hartlepool Borough Council's Fostering Panel (**Appendix 4**).

## **14. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 14.1 The Fostering Service is required to fulfill its statutory responsibilities to children in care by the local authority and provide regular reports to the Children Services Committee to enable the Committee to satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of the registration.
- 14.2 Children's Services Committee has an important role in the scrutiny of activities of the Fostering Service to ensure that performance in this area is of good quality, caring and robust and relates to the statement of purpose.

## **15. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 15.1 None

## **16. CONTACT OFFICERS**

- 16.1 Lisa Cushlow,  
Head of Services for Children in Care and Care Leavers,  
[Lisa.cushlow@hartlepool.gov.uk](mailto:Lisa.cushlow@hartlepool.gov.uk)  
(01429) 405588





# Contents

Foreword	<b>3</b>
Introduction	<b>4</b>
Team Structure	<b>5</b>
Governance and Oversight of Fostering	<b>6</b>
Preparation for Placement	<b>7</b>
Recruitment	<b>11</b>
Foster Carer Retention	<b>15</b>
Training	<b>19</b>
Post Approval Support and Participation	<b>20</b>
Priorities for 2021/2022	<b>24</b>
Views - Foster Carers, Staff, Children	<b>25</b>

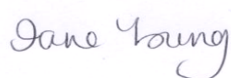
## Foreword

I am pleased and proud to introduce this Annual Report for Hartlepool Borough Council Fostering Service. In a year which has presented colossal challenges to the people of Hartlepool and to the Local Authority which has endeavoured to support and safeguard its children, the Fostering Service has stepped up to play its part. Hartlepool's Foster Care family has responded to the increased demand for caring homes for children, demonstrating massive dedication, commitment and often ingenuity in the service they have given.

The COVID pandemic saw a trend, echoed across the nation, of an increase in children becoming cared for alongside a decrease in the numbers of people expressing an interest in becoming Foster Carers. Despite this, Hartlepool's Fostering Service has approved almost twice the number of carers in 2020/21 than in the previous year, having strived to increase the range of placements available to better match children's needs with the skills and family culture/lifestyle of our Foster Carers. The result of this is that – against the odds – children have experienced stable, secure, local provision predominantly with Hartlepool's own carers. The stability of care placements is key to children and young people achieving positive outcomes and performance has remained high, with 77% of our children and young people experiencing stability in their placement. This has been a consistent achievement for several years and is the very basis from which children and young people are able to recover from trauma, to thrive and to begin to develop their dreams and aspirations.

We are determined that every child cared for by Hartlepool experiences the best quality care and positive, secure relationships. The roll out of the Secure Base Model for Foster Care in 2020/21 will support staff and carers in ensuring that our children are nurtured and will grow up with a sense of identity and belonging. This is our absolute priority and one which underpins all our work with children.

I look forward to 2021/22 with confidence that the Fostering Service will continue to give its Foster Care families the opportunity to grow, get involved in service development and to strive for excellence in terms of caring for children. Finally, I want to thank all our Foster Carers for their ongoing support and their commitment to providing the best possible care to our children and young people.



**Jane Young**

# Introduction

The annual report of the Fostering Service for Hartlepool Borough Council (HBC) provides information about the activity of and outcomes achieved by the service during 2020/21. The report will reflect on the work of the team and service provided, identify changes that have taken place within the service and detail the statistical information in respect of the Fostering Service from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. Finally the report will set out priorities for service development during 2021/2022.

The Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011 places a requirement upon Local Authority Fostering Services to ensure that the Executive side of the Council receive 3 monthly reports on the management and outcomes of the service. This Annual Report provides a full review of the service and interim progress reports will be presented to Children's Services Committee on a quarterly basis throughout the coming financial year.

The aim of the fostering service is to recruit, train and support foster carers to provide high quality placements for the children of Hartlepool. This is achieved through the following objectives:

The Fostering team actively works in partnership with children, young people, their families and other stakeholders involved in promoting positive outcomes for children and young people looked after by Hartlepool Borough Council in order to deliver a high quality foster care service;

The Fostering team actively seeks to involve foster carers, children and young people looked after and children of foster carers in the development and continuous improvement of the service;

The Fostering team recruits, assesses, trains, supervises and supports a suitable and diverse range of foster carers to provide quality care and placement choice for children and young people;

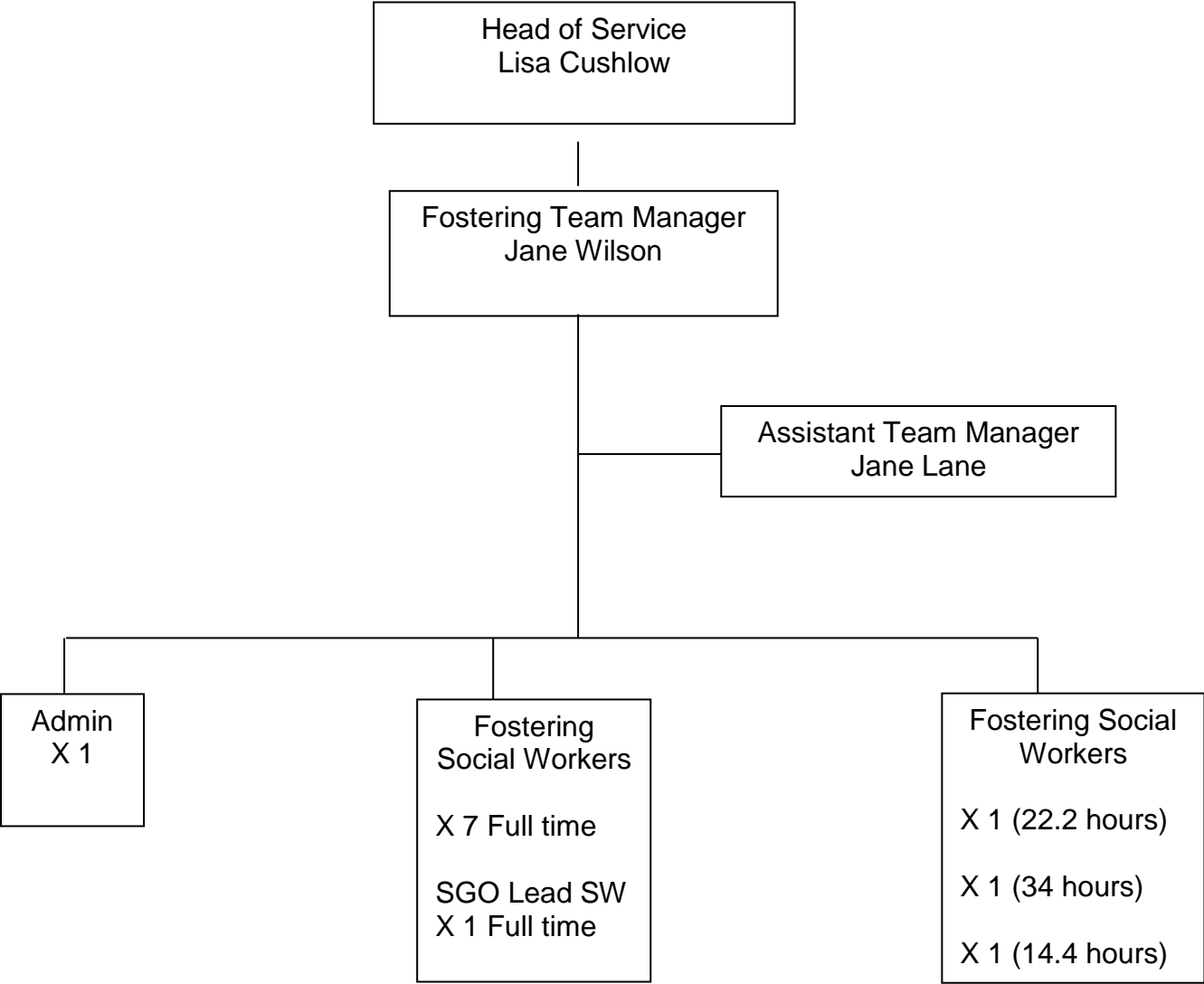
The Fostering team provides stable placements and continuity of care for children by ensuring that carers and children and young people who are cared for receive appropriate support, leading to good outcomes;

Wherever possible and appropriate, brothers and sisters will live together;

Individual child's needs/wishes and feelings are paramount and taken into consideration in relation to their placements.

# Fostering Team Structure

The following table provides information relating to the staffing structure of the Fostering Service:



# Governance and Oversight

Hartlepool Borough Council has established an appropriately constituted Fostering Panel which, in accordance with the Regulations, is chaired by an Independent Person and has established a 'central list' of persons who have the appropriate qualifications and/or experience to consider the cases submitted to the Panel for ratification.

This central list (as set out in the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards (Standard 14) includes an Independent Chair, two Vice Chairs, 10 Agency Social Workers, an Elected Member and six Independent Members, who are all either foster carers, retired professionals or employed by other Local Authorities. The Panel also receives advice from the Local Authority Legal Advisor, Medical Advisor and Panel Advisor. The Assistant Director of Children's Services, is the Fostering Agency Decision Maker, and as such, makes the final decision in relation to Foster Carer approval, Connected Person's approval, children's best interest decisions and matches. The Agency Decision Maker is robust in their quality assurance and decision making, ensuring that the best interests of children is always at the heart of everything we do.

From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, Panel has met twenty eight times. The panel made recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker on the following fostering matters:

- For **thirty nine** children there was a recommendation to agree a plan for long term fostering for a child looked after
- The matches of **seventeen** children with a long term foster carer were recommended
- **Twenty nine**, foster cares have been approved, **nineteen** of these are connected carer households
- **Twelve** foster care reviews
- **Four** Foster Care resignations

The table below highlights Fostering Panel activity for 2019//2020 then 2020/2021:

Year	2019/20	2020/21
Panel met	17	<b>28</b>
Matches considered by the Panel	10	<b>17</b>
Recommendations for approval of prospective Foster Carers	8	<b>10</b>
Recommendations for approval of connected person Foster Carers	10	<b>19</b>
The Fostering Panel considered and endorsed the recommendations of Foster Carer Reviews	8	<b>12</b>
Resignation of Foster Carers	11	<b>4</b>
Recommendations to agree a plan for long term Foster Care for a cared for child (Best Interest Decision)	17	<b>39</b>

The increase in panel activity reflects the work of the whole of Children's Services and shows a significant increase in need and demand.

## Preparation for Placement

The Fostering Service operates a duty system for responding to placement requests. Supervising Social Workers will liaise with the 'placing' Social Worker to ensure that there is a thorough understanding of the child's needs so that they are able to match him/her to the most suitable carer.

It is our procedure that children and young people requiring permanent placements are matched at panel prior to introductions taking place. For children and young people already in a placement and where a request is made for this placement to become permanent, the foster carers are considered within the family finding process. A thorough assessment of their suitability to meet the long term needs of the child/young person is undertaken and presented to panel.

A thorough matching process is undertaken prior to placements being made and where time allows, a placement planning meeting is held prior to the child being placed, involving foster carers and the child's parent/s.

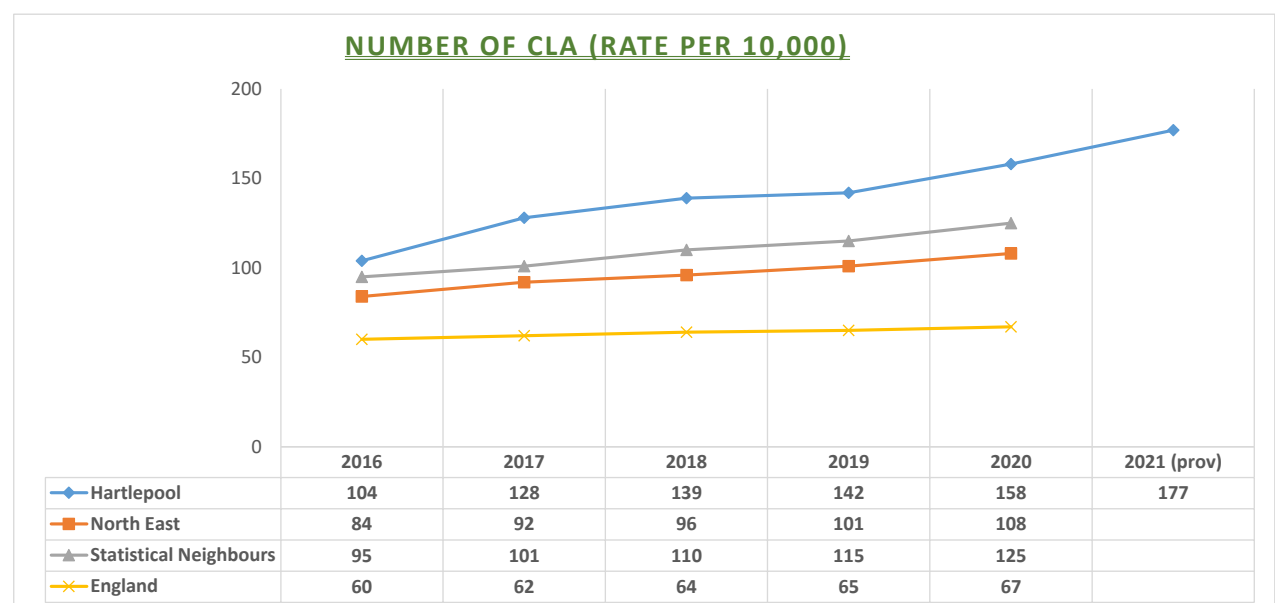
In some instances it is necessary for a child to be placed at short notice to safeguard and promote their welfare. On these occasions a planning meeting is held as soon as is practically possible following the placement.

The team takes into account the assessed needs of the child and their (and his/her family's) wishes, and wherever possible maintains sisters and brothers together in the same placement.

The service benefits from a 'family finder' role; that person becomes involved with children who have a plan for permanence through long term fostering at the earliest opportunity. The family finder identifies appropriate matches for the children, looking firstly at internal provision before exploring matches with independent fostering providers. Hartlepool continues to provide good placement choice and stability with our foster carers. In this year, nine children were matched to live permanently with foster carers from the independent sector and 8 with Hartlepool's own Foster Carers.

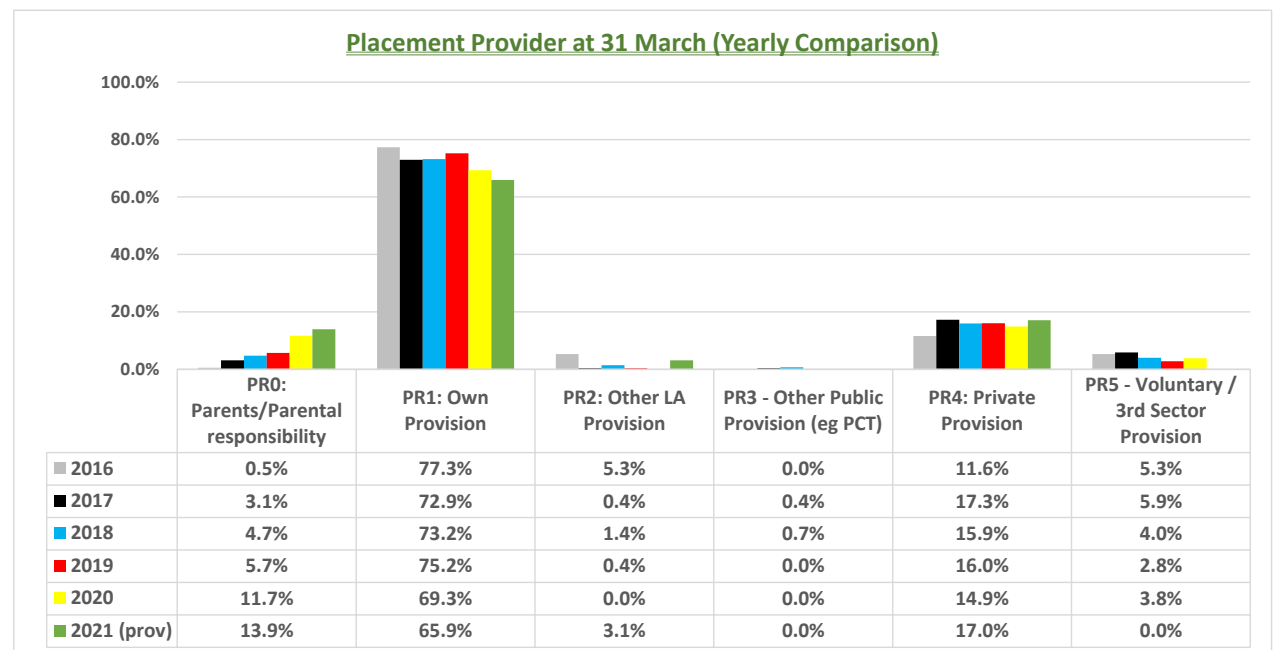
The family finder also attends a monthly permanency tracker meeting. The function of this is to ensure all children's plans are given careful consideration with input and oversight of the Assistant Director for children's services. The tracker meeting aims to resolve any potential barriers to children being placed with the best carers and that there is no delay or 'drift' in achieving that plan.

## Profile of Children and Young People Cared for in Hartlepool



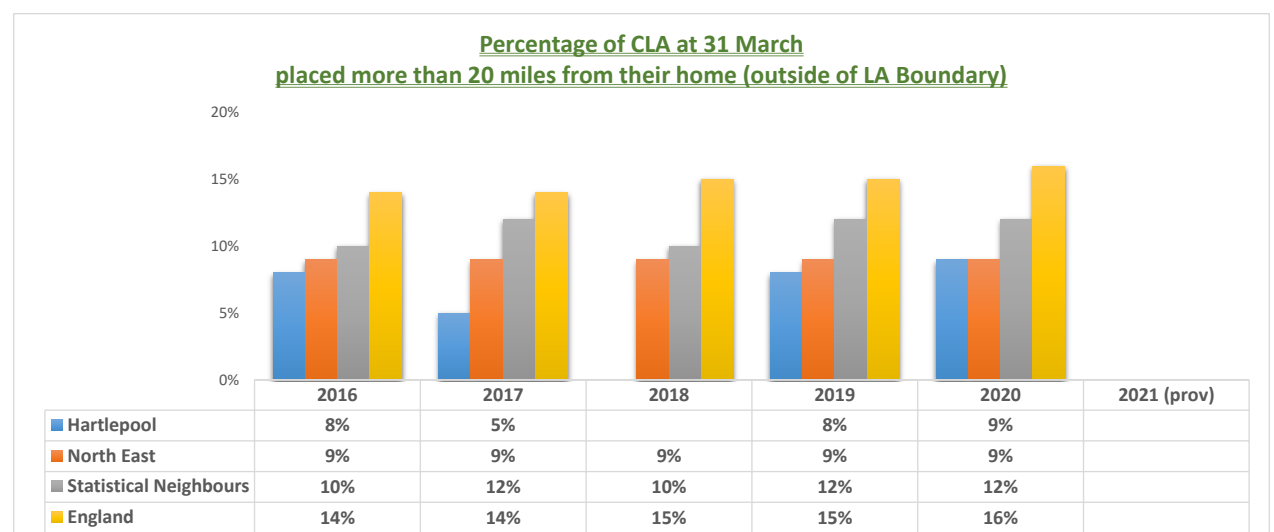
Hartlepool has one of the highest number of children in care per 10,000.

## Placement Type and Provision



This chart demonstrates Hartlepool's high use of fostering placements, and that 65.9% of children are living in in- house provision. It is worthy of note that the use of private provision has remained fairly static, despite the increase in children becoming cared for. This reflects the increased number of Connected Care placements and small rise in the number of children placed with parents.

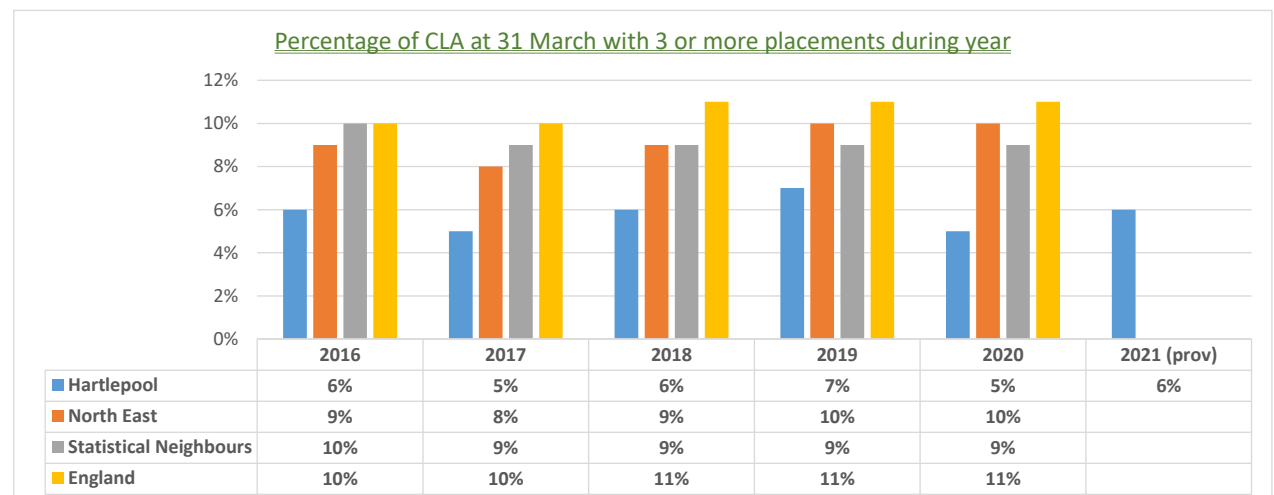
## Percentage of children looked after as at 31 March 2021, placed more than 20 miles from their homes, outside Local Authority boundary.



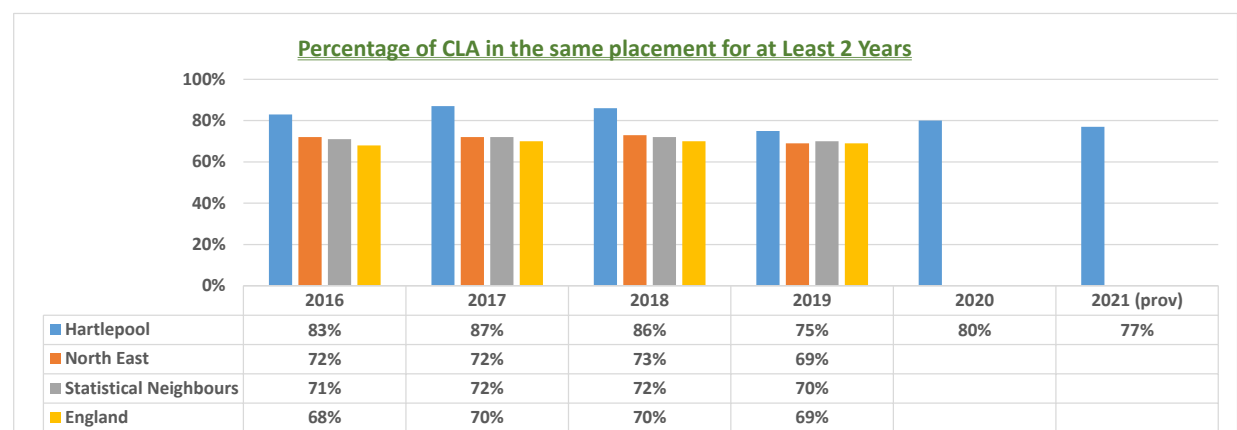


This shows that the use of placements outside of Hartlepool is lower than our statistical neighbours and the England average.

### Percentage of children as at 31 March with three or more placements during the year.



### Percentage of looked after children in same placement for at least two years, or are placed for adoption and their adoption and their adoptive placement together with their previous placement, last for at least two years.



This table demonstrates only a 3% reduction in respect of placement stability (in placement two years or more) for children and young people cared for by Hartlepool, which is remarkable given the increased pressure upon children and their families in the town and for cared for children and Foster Care families, during the COVID pandemic.

Despite the continued rise in the number of children becoming cared for in Hartlepool, our stability figures, for all cared for children, have remained good

at 6% with 3 or more placement moves over the last two years, as compared with 10% (North East), 9% (Stat Neighbours) and 11% (England). As demand for placements increases, it is imperative that the pace of Foster Care recruitment is improved to ensure that the choice and range of potential families for our children is increased proportionately. This will enable us to continue making good 'matches' so that children and young people experience the safe, nurturing and predictable care which allows recovery from adverse childhood experiences. Such stability is crucial to them building the resilience necessary to become happy, fulfilled adults who make a positive contribution to their community.

## Recruitment

The Fostering service has a recruitment strategy which uses a range of mediums to market the service to attract new foster carers. This activity takes place locally within Hartlepool, supported by Hartlepool's Marketing and Media Team.

The Fostering Team Manager attends a quarterly Regional Manager Meeting which shares good practice ideas and bench marking in relation to recruitment, training and key issues/ trends relating to, for example, demand around Connected Care Assessments and how this impacts upon recruitment of 'mainstream' Foster Carers. The aim of this forum is to create collaboration to improve service delivery, for example reciprocal arrangements for applicants attending Skills to Foster training and sharing the cost of staff training when a specialist training topic is commissioned. An example of the latter is Hartlepool hosting training on the Secure Base Model of Fostering and giving opportunity to the other four Tees Valley Local Authorities to attend. This was well received, bringing some income into Hartlepool whilst harmonising an approach to Foster Care provision to maximise placement stability for cared for children in the area.

In 2020/21 work continued to raise the profile of Fostering within the community – though the pandemic obviously curtailed the type of activity the service would usually be involved with to have real interface with local people. Posters were placed around the town in council buildings, in bus shelters and a 'wrap around' advert put onto school buses which drive around Hartlepool's estates.

During initial visits and the Skills to Foster Training sessions, Social Workers encourage enquirers/applicants to consider caring for older children and groups of sisters and brothers, which remains an area of need, both locally and regionally.

Local recruitment activity within the last 12 months has included;

- A video interview involving an experienced Foster Carer and the Fostering TM which reached 18,000 people within 48 hours
- Posters in all council buildings, Carer's windows and in shops and key venues across the town – also put out on Social Media
- Wraparound article in Hartlepool Mail
- Advertising on Hartlepool School buses

**The following image was developed in 2020/21 and distributed right across Hartlepool;**



A significant challenge each year is the recruitment of new foster carers to replace the foster carers who retire from the service and to increase placement availability and choice. In 2020/21 the fostering service accepted the resignation of 4 Foster Carers and approved 39 new Foster Carers - 10 'mainstream' and 19 Connected Care Foster Carers. The target for recruitment for the year was 18. When Ofsted inspected services in 2018, they were particularly impressed by Hartlepool's Foster Care retention and this year has seen an improvement in performance at a time when our children really needed it.

Throughout 2020/21 there was a continued increase in the number of children becoming cared for and the fostering service has strived to meet need using Hartlepool's own Foster Care provision.

**The table below details Foster Care capacity as at 31 March 2021**

<b>Number of foster carers</b>	161 (of whom 52 are connected carers) <i>(was 155 as at March 2020 with 44 Connected Carers)</i>
<b>Number of placements possible if all in use</b>	202 ('mainstream')
<b>How many children in placement?</b>	151 within 'mainstream' placements;  81 in connected care placements  16 Young people in Staying Put placements
<b>How many unused?</b>	24 – for reasons of matching
<b>How many not able to use/on hold?</b>	9, equating to 11 potential placements

The table below details recruitment activity for 2020/21

<b>Initial enquiries - where did people hear about the service?</b>	<p><b>37</b> Initial enquiries</p> <p>Prompted by, where stipulated:            Adverts            TV programmes            Posters            News Items</p> <p>Team's learning from the above is that enquirers are asked more specific questions relating to the trigger which prompted their call</p>
<b>Information pack sent out</b>	28 packs sent out
<b>Initial visits</b> - How many proceeded?	<p>16 home visits completed</p> <p>16 proceeded to the Skills to Foster Training</p>
<b>Preparation Groups held:</b>	<p>16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> September 2020 – 9 attendees</p> <p>28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> November 2020 – 3 attendees</p> <p>29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 – 4 attendees</p> <p>It is important to note that the conversion rate from enquiry to approval is very low at 10% as Fostering Network has highlighted in their benchmarking work. The Fostering Team follows up each family or individual who withdraws from the process to ensure that there is learning for the service and nothing more that could have been done to retain them as prospective carers.</p>

# Foster Carer Retention

Hartlepool Borough Council recognises the invaluable contribution that Foster Carers make to Children's Services, and as such views Foster Carer retention is a significant priority.

Foster carers are consulted on all aspects of the service and their views inform planning. Though this was more challenging in 2020/21, the service developed ways of communicating with its carers which meant that consultation continued and indeed improved.

It was imperative that our Carers and Children were given the best support we were able to give during the lock down periods of 2020/21 as guidance was ever changing and therefore the risks associated with family time and education. The service provided briefings to carers throughout this time and those were well received. Here is an example;

## *CORONAVIRUS PLAN in relation to HBC Foster Carers* *24th April 2020 (4)*

### *Checking in - tell us what you need*

*Hartlepool Borough Council will prioritise the health and well-being of children and young people it cares for and that of their Carers, by following all government and public health advice and guidance issued on the current COVID-19 outbreak. Key information relating to services impacted by the virus will be shared with all HBC Foster Carers and staff.*

*The plan will be reviewed as new information is made available.*

*Fostering Team Manager, Jane Wilson, remains responsible for service delivery and contingency plans and will be the main point of contact.*

*HBC is assessing the risk to service delivery, to the children and young people it is responsible for, its staff and Carers and reviewing that risk on a daily basis. Regular communication (and arrangements which come out of that) aim to ensure that children and young people experience safety and stability with their Foster Carers during this COVID-19 outbreak.*

*What's life like for you and yours?*

*Hello everyone! We are at the end of 5 weeks of this lock down situation - in fact it seems to be becoming the 'new normal'. We have certainly learned some new skills - it is amazing that you and we have begun to master the art of remote meetings as Looked After reviews, PEP meetings, family time, the Fostering Panel, Child protection*

conferences have gone ahead because of the drive we all have to keep our children safe and well. It has given us lots of scope to think about how we might adapt our practice in the future. It was great to see you all applauded in yesterday's council wide note from the Chief Executive, Gill Alexander – in case you missed it;

## **'CORONAVIRUS: Let's show our appreciation again**

*Published Thursday, 23rd April 2020*

*Residents of Hartlepool are again being asked to show their appreciation for the dedication and commitment of a wide range of key workers during the Coronavirus outbreak.*

*The Clap for Carers event at 8pm this evening is a further opportunity to recognise the many people who continue to play vital roles on a daily basis.*

*This week, Hartlepool Borough Council is particularly keen to highlight the work of foster carers across the town and staff in its three residential children's homes.*

*Councillor Shane Moore, Leader of Hartlepool Borough Council, said: "There are many people across the town who deserve so much praise for the way they are supporting others during this difficult time, and I would like to thank each and every one of them.*

*"However, I would particularly like to pay tribute to the tremendous work of foster carers and staff in our residential children's homes who are playing a vital role in looking after some of our most vulnerable young people."*

*While every parent is undoubtedly finding it difficult to keep their children and teenagers indoors and safe during lock down – the current situation brings added challenges for those caring for children who are looked after by the local authority.*



*Alan Welsh, a Children's Manager at one of the homes, said: "I have got to say that all the young people and the staff have been absolutely fantastic throughout this lockdown period and before.*

*"Covid-19 has caused a lot of issues. There has been a cessation of hobbies, young people haven't been able to see their friends, and they can't do their rugby, for example. These voids have had to be filled and staff have really stepped up."*

*He added that staff were giving up days off and holidays.*

*Sylvia Lowe, Manager of a children's home looking after children with additional needs, added: "Due to Covid-19 we have split our team into 4 mini teams of 6 staff and a manager/shift lead. This ensures that we minimise the risk of the virus infecting our full team which would have significant impact on our ability to provide a full service. Staff have been fantastic and have adapted remarkably well to the new way of working.*

*"Keeping our children safe but stimulated can also be a challenge. In our service we pride ourselves on our community participation and giving our children a wide range of life experiences. How we deliver our service has had to change dramatically, as we are no longer allowed to access the community. This can be confusing and difficult for our children to understand and we are constantly looking for ideas and resources to help our children during this challenging time. The staff are proving to be fantastic at accessing and finding these resources for our young people."*

*Andy and Lisa who have been foster carers for 10 years and currently look after two children aged 7 and 10, say Covid-19 is throwing up a number of challenges.*

*However, they say that a range of fun activities is helping to relieve the boredom of the lockdown, while Hartlepool Borough Council social workers and the children's school are providing invaluable support to them.'*

*Reality*



*We do know, though, that in some instances, pressures are building and despite everyone's brilliant efforts, maybe a little relief is needed. Next week you will be contacted (as usual) by your Supervising Social Worker - this time they will be digging deep with you about the impact of lock down for you and our children and, from that, we will get a better understanding of what additional support you may need. As part of that conversation, we need to review individual children's need to attend school - even if only for a day or 2. The Head of the Virtual School, Emma, will then help make the links with schools for that to happen.*

### *Helpful info and links*

*You may have seen this already on Facebook - belt and braces - at this time of separation, our children (and we adults!) may be feeling the trauma of multiple losses all over again - this guide looks very helpful and is there to support;*

*A guide for helping our children with loss and bereavement*

*[https://www.nurtureuk.org/sites/default/files/bereavement\\_box-booklet-cov19-edition-2020-web.pdf](https://www.nurtureuk.org/sites/default/files/bereavement_box-booklet-cov19-edition-2020-web.pdf)*

*You might have heard that we have a new provider to assist our children with their emotional health and well-being, The Junction? They produce a useful newsletter for staff and carers (please subscribe) - here is the link to this week's;*

*<https://mailchi.mp/d676f4272164/hartlepool-wellbeing-newsletter-4140800>*

*Stay safe and keep in touch*

*Jane and the Fostering Team*

Additionally, Hartlepool Foster Carers (along with independent Foster Carers, caring for Hartlepool children) were prioritised in terms of vaccine roll out and a massive amount of logistical work was undertaken by the service – lead by our business support officer – to complete that in an effective and carer friendly way.

## Feedback from the foster carers;

On COVID vaccinations;

*“Good morning Leanne, I went yesterday evening to get my covid injection, would you please send the team my thanks as I'm sure this wasn't easy to organise and know it will have created*

*lots of extra work for them but I am really grateful to have received this and count myself very lucky as many people are still waiting to get it, thank you you all so much ♥*

*Val”*

An HBC Independent Reviewing Officer shared the following;

*“I chaired K E’ s Cared For review last week. She is placed with IFA carers, they were immensely grateful to Hartlepool for organising for them to be prioritised for a Covid vaccine”*

Hartlepool Borough Council values (and therefore retains) its Carers in a range of ways, amongst which is offering fair and competitive remuneration – the Banding Payments were increased in the last year and the age related allowances remain the highest in the Tees Valley.

The Council provided Active Leisure Cards to all its children and young people who are cared for (up to the age of 25) and to its Fostering Families in this year and is committed to continuing this provision.

## Training

All of the Council’s experienced foster carers have completed the DfE Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers and new carers are working on the standards and on target for completion within required timescales.

Prior to approval, all prospective carers undertake a 3 day preparation course run by the team following the BAAF Skills to Foster Programme, approved foster carers play an important part of this training meeting with prospective carers and co-delivering aspects of the training. The Preparation Training is regularly reviewed to ensure that the material remains up to date, is relevant and reflects recent research. This year, Fostering Network produced a digital version of Skills to Foster, which Hartlepool adopted in order to maintain momentum in terms of Foster Care recruitment. All foster carers undergo a full home study assessment which also assists them in preparing to become foster carers and to care for other people’s children. Applicants have responded well to the need for Social Workers to undertake some assessment sessions ‘virtually’ this year.

Post approval training includes access to all courses available to the children’s workforce in Hartlepool and three mandatory training days for foster carers. In 2020/21 the bespoke training days covered:

- Safeguarding Children

- Autism
- Child Sexual Exploitation

The team ensured that Carers were provided with a range of virtual training opportunities during Lockdown and below is a sample of what was offered;

- [Hartlepool Learning and Skills | Hartlepool Borough Council](#)
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/training-support-and-development-standards-for-foster-care-evidence-workbook>
- Safeguarding / Basic Child Protection
- Emergency First Aid
- Attachment (available through the OU, which also has a range of other relevant training available for free: <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/education-development/early-years/attachment-the-early-years/content-section-0> )
- PACE
- eSafety
- [https://teeswide.melearning.university/course\\_centre](https://teeswide.melearning.university/course_centre)
- <https://www.thefostercaretraininghub.co.uk/>

It is imperative that Authority's Fostering Panel continues to be fit for purpose and meets all regulatory requirements – this includes them receiving at least one training session per year, preferably alongside workers from the service. In 2020/21 Panel Members (joined by newly appointed Supervising Social Workers) had a full day's training on the Secure Base Model for Fostering. The trainer (Joan Hunt) herself a Foster Carer, Social Worker and Secure Base expert had already trained key care team workers from Hartlepool and the Tees Valley so this, and the planned training of Foster Carers themselves, will close the circle of training which the service sets out to provide.

## Post Approval Support and Participation

All foster carers have an allocated Supervising Social Worker and receive a four to six weekly supervision and support visit. Supervising Social Workers also make a minimum of one unannounced visit a year to foster carers, this can be undertaken by a different member of staff to the foster carer's allocated Social Worker.

The Fostering team communicates regularly with carers; all carers have a council e-mail account so information can be shared securely and received between carers, the fostering team and the children's social workers.

The Fostering team also hosts a private Facebook group for approved foster carers, to communicate with each other, share experiences, advice and knowledge with other foster carers. This has proved to be an excellent communication tool with foster carers particularly during Lockdown.

Looked After children and Foster Carers benefit from the support of trained Filial Therapists and Carers have access to support in relation to individual young people for whom they are caring.

The Fostering Team has a duty worker throughout the working week who is available to respond to any calls from carers. In addition to this, foster carers have access to the Emergency Duty Team, the commissioned out of hours service and an out of hours telephone support service provided by a Head of Service on a rota basis. Foster carers can contact the support phone line at any time.

The fostering service takes a lead role in ensuring that children, young people and carers have time to spend together and celebrate their achievements. We ordinarily hold an annual Celebration Evening and Summer Barbeque for children and young people who are looked after. In this (hopefully!) unique year, the Service was keen to ensure Foster Carers knew that their tenacity and commitment to Hartlepool's cared for children was recognised and valued. Though we could not meet, carers were each sent a letter of appreciation and a gift voucher to say 'Thank you' for all they had done to ensure our children remained safe, healthy, educated and connected with their family of origin;



On behalf of Hartlepool Borough Council

Sally Robinson, Jane Young, Lisa Cushlow and your Fostering and Safeguarding Teams want to say a huge 'THANK YOU' to you for caring for our children during the hardest of times, for staying positive and for finding solutions to keep everyone safe. We look forward, with you, to a brighter 2021. Please accept this gift as a token of our appreciation

You are the best

Our children were also written to and sent a voucher for all they had achieved in the face of great adversity.

## Service Developments and Consultation

Participation Officer Kim Butler has driven and now completed a significant amount of consultation work with Foster Carers for their reviews, the Foster Care Charter and Foster Care Family profiles. Despite the amount of work Foster Carers are already doing with our children, they continue to support the service to improve and are working well with us on Skype and Teams.

Kim is also working closely with our Children in Care Council to inform developments around savings for cared for young people, their views on pocket money and what they would want to know about a Fostering family before going to live with them.

Foster Carers have told us that the work they are required to complete post approval i.e. the Training Support and Development Standards and Band 2 portfolio, are repetitious. We have therefore reviewed the process so that it is less onerous and the tasks are being consolidated into one document.

In December 2020 the new Head of Service Lisa Cushlow requested that Police colleagues assist in the roll out of the 'Philomena Protocol' to all Foster Carers caring for Hartlepool Children. An extensive piece of work commenced involving police officers visiting Foster Care households to either remind them of, or introduce them to, the process for responding when children and young people go missing from home. This personal touch – so unusual in the current climate – is how Carers state they prefer to learn.

## Priorities for 2020/21- how did we do?

- Recruit at least eighteen additional Foster Carers – ACHIEVED, APPROVED 39
- Engage approved Foster Carers in work to improve services and to increase the range and choice of Foster Carers - ACHIEVED
- Target recruitment to attract foster carers for older children and sibling groups and those with more challenging behaviours – PARTIALLY ACHIEVED
- Increase the number of Supported Lodgings Providers by at least 4 - OUTSTANDING
- Extend the Skills to Foster preparation training programme to better reflect the 'Hartlepool Offer' to children, young people and Foster Carers ie presentations from Care Leavers, the Head of the Virtual School, CAMHS.- PARTIALLY ACHIEVED
- Improve the range and accessibility of training and support for Foster Carers – PARTIALLY ACHIEVED

- To continue use of the family finding post to help early identification of (wherever possible) Hartlepool Carers to offer permanence to children and young people as early as possible - ACHIEVED
- To work with the Independent Reviewing Officer Service to improve the Foster Care reviewing process so children and young people have stable, secure and predictable care and outcomes are improved as a consequence – ACHIEVED VIA A ‘DEDICATED’ IRO FOR THE SERVICE
- To continue to demonstrate how much Hartlepool values the role Foster Carers play in supporting its children - ACHIEVED
- To use the feedback from consultation with Foster Carers to develop future priorities – for example, reinstating support groups across the year and at varying times to maximise attendance and provision of an annual training booklet – ACHIEVED AS FAR AS WAS POSSIBLE
- Review the provision of the ‘Children who Foster’ (sons and daughters group) for children of foster carers - OUTSTANDING
- To encourage carers who have the correct skills and experience to provide placements for older children and those who have complex needs - ACHIEVED
- To continue to work collaboratively with the neighbouring authorities to share resources and expertise in foster carer recruitment - OUTSTANDING
- Review Special Guardianship Support offer to promote and encourage foster carers to apply for Special Guardianship Orders where it is in the best interests of the children for whom they are caring – ACHIEVED – POLICY REVIEWED AND AN SGO ‘LEAD’ APPOINTED
- Review the Foster Care Handbook and provide a specific area for this within the on line Policies and Procedures Manual - OUTSTANDING

## Priorities for 2021/22

- Approve a minimum of 20 new Foster Carers
- Sustain performance in respect of placement stability at under 7% for placement moves and at or over 80% for children and young people in their placement for two years or more
- Continue the roll out and implementation of the Secure Base Model via the annual Foster Care Conference for 2021/22
- Review and up-date all policies and procedures relation to the Fostering Service
- Provide and deliver a schedule for training to include mandatory FC recording training
- Improve outcomes for children subject to Special Guardianship Orders by developing the 'support offer' to families
- Complete work commenced on savings and pocket money for the children and young people we care for
- Increase the age related Fostering Allowance and the Banding Payments by 1.5% each.
- Develop the Foster Care Focus and Consultation Group to embed the feedback loop in respect of service improvement.



## Some Views from and about our Foster Carers and our Fostering service;

### Foster Carers - why We Foster with Hartlepool;

- *“DD said- We foster for Hartlepool because we want to be able to support and help families and children from our home town and in the future we would like to see the service: use solely a therapeutic model throughout”*
- *“The support we have received over the years from various SSW has always been exceptional. If we have ever needed any support they have always been there for us a family. The redesigning of the paperwork we use as Foster Carers has been great. This was carried out via consultation with Foster Carers ensuring that our ideas/opinions were put forward. I would love to see a training programme specific to banding grade/length of service. This would ensure that experienced Carers are not just repeating the same training year after year”*
- *“I foster because I want to make a difference. To help a young person get through what’s already as a teenager a mine field. There’s more access to things such as drugs from an earlier age, and what that comes up. We need to be that sounding board and mentor without talking down to our young people. Hopefully guiding them through a tough time. I’d like the service to be more inclusive, sharing the caring more. So professionals talk to each other more and more efficiently. Cut down the paperwork as there seems to be a lot of duplication in services surrounding the child or young person. What you are doing now is going well, keep in touch with live chats etc. is really good. Depending on the subjects some of the online training has been good. I still like face to face but the conference was good. 6 weekly supervisions are a help”*
- *“I’ve always wanted to help children from birth to adult life. Helping them to feel loved and get over many fears. Hopefully help them into adult life and always being a part of them. I love the live pop up chats on Facebook”*
- *“The reason we foster as a family is to help make a change in children’s lives. Even if it just a little change it is better than none at all. I will be glad when we can do more face to face training and when the support groups get back up and running, as it is nice to have someone to talk to and understand what we are going through without feeling we are being judged”*

### Placing Social Workers comments;

- *“just wanted to let you know how great LK is as a foster carer. She has been really nurturing, understanding and patient with J and B. She has, in particular, been great the last few weeks around final hearing and supporting us and the children with the changes and decisions being made and really using her skills and reflection to help B process what is*



*happening for her and her plan. L and her grandson are always chatty and welcoming when Beth and I are in her home. I think this has been difficult for her to see when B has been upset but she has been so good with her and patient and using her experiences with her last placement to help B process and understand”.*

#### And another;

- *“K and S - I wanted to thank you particularly for your contribution towards ensuring the girls' needs are met fully within their care team. The recording sheets, information emails, contribution towards LAC review meetings and PEP meetings, as well as keeping me up to date with the girls wishes and feelings by sending me written information, photographs and general regular updates via telephone has been very helpful. This has helped me to understand the girls holistic needs and creates a very positive care team around them who all understand their strengths and difficulties, as well as what work each member of the care team are doing.*

*As a result, they have developed excellent relationships with you and it is evident they feel they have a secure base within your home and your family. This is vital for our children, as they are then able to feel they belong and feel effective by being supported to develop trust, manage feelings and build self-esteem.*

*You have also successfully moved another one of my YP onto another placement. She is a child who has always severed relationships when she moves on, as this is how she can best manage her feelings at the time, however, as a result, adds to her trauma. I feel you have helped and supported her to change her mind set with repairing relationships, talking through problems and being reflective. She now holds more positive memories about moving home. The fact you continue to 'check in' with her by sending 'how are you?' text messages also adds to her feelings of being cared for and cared about”*

#### IRO's Comments;

- *“I have been the IRO for L and S since December 2019 and chaired two Foster Carer Reviews. I was aware that one of their goals for the future was to hopefully care for another child, as this was discussed in the first review I completed, with the couple considering adapting their home to suit. I have to say that this couple are remarkably skilled and I have been really impressed with their passion, dedication and care for the children they have looked after. I think the added bonus, particularly with this suggested match for B, would be the couple's experience and knowledge within the mental health arena, as they pay particular attention to how the children in their care can maintain good emotional and mental health and this has been a real focus for their family during the pandemic. In addition, they are avid learners and I recall them researching topics in order to better support and understand the children*

*in their care such as Filial Therapy and Attachment, so I am sure they would tailor their learning to match B's needs".*

#### Filial Therapist comments;

- *"M has worked so hard in the filial training and has actually gone beyond the expectation of the training and has really looked at how her own experiences have formed the person she is today. She has been willing to explore how these issues have impacted on her ability to parent a child with M's level of trauma and has shown an amazing understanding of how M can activate her own insecurities, going on to work on them for her own personal growth. With this level of self-reflection and processing comes an excellent carer which is what M is"*

#### Lastly and most importantly – Children and Young People;

- *"I love the house I live in, it is an amazing home. I have just decorated my room and it is just as I want it. I painted it myself."*
- *"Made me not look scruffy"*
- *"Form a bond with them"*
- *"Give me a better life"*
- *"When I first came into care I was really unfit and now I am 60m and 100m running champion; I also love Rugby. My carers have helped me by encouraging me to do something I enjoy. They have taken me places where the activities are held and provide me with new equipment so I can be the best I can be"*
- *"You can talk to them and they can become our friends"*
- *"They have helped me become a child again"*



**HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL  
FOSTERING SERVICE**

**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

This Statement of Purpose was initially approved by the Elected Members of Hartlepool Borough Council on 29 September 2003.

It was signed on behalf of the Elected Members by the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services.

This Statement of Purpose was reviewed and updated in March 2021 and is to be approved by the Elected Members of Hartlepool Borough Council.

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed and revised as appropriate by the Team Manager of the Fostering Service no later than April 2022.

# Contents

Introduction	<b>4</b>
Aims, Objectives Principles & Legalisation Framework For Standards of Care	<b>5</b>
The Service Provided	<b>10</b>
Management Structure	<b>14</b>
Specific Services Information	<b>15</b>
Safeguarding, Complaints & Allegations	<b>16</b>
Procedures and Processes for Recruiting, Approving, Training, Supporting and Reviewing Carers	<b>18</b>
Appendix 1: Relevant Legislation, Regulation and Standard	<b>25</b>
Appendix 2: Numbers, Relevant Qualifications and Experience of Staff	<b>28</b>

## Introduction

It is a requirement of the Fostering Services England Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, that each fostering agency produces a statement of purpose, including its aims and objectives, a description of the service it provides and the facilities that are provided. This Statement of Purpose gives an outline of those requirements and also how the service is managed and its fitness to provide fostering services. It shows the policy and performance framework that underpins our work and shows how the welfare of children will be met and good outcomes achieved for all children in its care. It also demonstrates the systems which we have set in place to recruit, train, supervise and support Foster Carers.

This statement is available to all members of staff, Foster Carers, children and birth parents and is available on the Hartlepool Borough Council Website. A copy of this statement is also to be lodged with Ofsted. The information contained is regularly updated, and will be amended annually.

A separate Children's Guide to the Fostering Service is given to all young people who are to be placed with Foster Carers. This is also available on the HBC website and Practice manual.

### **CHILDREN'S GUIDE**

Subject to the child's age and understanding, the fostering service ensures the child receives the Children's guide at the point of placement and that the Foster Carer explains the contents of the Children's Guide in a way that is accessible. The Children's Guide includes a summary of what the fostering service sets out to do for children, how they can find out their rights, how a child can contact their Independent Reviewing Officer, the Children's Rights Director, or Ofsted if they wish to raise a concern. The fostering service will update this guide as required on an annual basis to ensure that information is current and reflects developments in the service. The service would seek to ensure that the guide is available in a format appropriate to the communication needs of the child



concerned and would access council resources such as language translation to achieve this.

## **Aims and Objectives, Principles and Legislative Framework for Standards of Care**

### **AIM**

The aim of the fostering service is to recruit, train and support Foster Carers to provide high quality placements for the children of Hartlepool. The service will support Foster Carers and family Network Carers (Connected Carers) to value, support and encourage children and young people to grow and develop as individuals, to be physically and emotionally healthy and to aim high in their education so that they achieve the best possible outcomes.

### **OBJECTIVES**

- To plan and implement effective recruitment campaigns and strategies in order to attract the number and range of carers identified to meet the complex and diverse needs of the looked after population of Hartlepool and to ensure a choice of high quality foster placements.
- To ensure that wherever possible and appropriate sisters and brothers will be accommodated together.
- To ensure that the individual child's needs/wishes and feelings are paramount and taken into consideration in relation to placements.
- To undertake effective timely assessments of prospective carers including Connected Persons carers within specified timescales to ensure that children are afforded safe and effective placements.
- To maintain and support the Fostering Panel to consider Foster Carer and Connected Persons assessments and make recommendations for approval of prospective Foster Carers, children's plans for long term foster care, and approval of the match of Named Children with Foster

Carers. The panel also considers the first reviews of Foster Carers and subsequent reviews where category changes are being agreed or there have been issues regarding placements.

- To provide pre and post approval training for applicants and carers, equipping them to meet the diverse 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 and flexible support is available to carers to underpin placement stability and improve outcomes for children in placement.
- To protect children and young people from abuse and neglect through safer recruitment practices and adherence to safeguarding policy and procedures in all areas of the service including for staff, carers and panel members.
- To create stability for children and young people in foster care through robust matching processes and a good standard of consistent and effective support.
- To have a Staying Put policy and procedure in place in order that young people are encouraged to remain in placements post 18.
- To achieve better life chances for children who are cared for, particularly in relation to health, education, employment and leisure activities.
- To promote the development of skills and expertise within the fostering community, to create a culture of aspiration for our children.
- To maintain and promote contact with family members, where appropriate, through creating opportunities for positive family time.



- To prepare young people adequately for when they eventually leave their foster placement.
- To increase the number of supported lodgings providers, providing greater placement choice for young people.
- To create lifelong attachments with carers in order that children and young people continue to be supported into adulthood.
- To work in partnership with children and young people, their parents and carers and social workers.
- Provide an environment where each child and young person is helped to make the best of his or her abilities emotionally, physically, educationally and socially.

## PRINCIPLES

The work of Hartlepool Fostering Service is based on the following principles:

1. **Child focus** – the child's welfare and needs are at the centre of the fostering process and their wishes and feelings are sought and taken into account about all aspects of their care.
2. **Partnership working** – the Fostering Service will work in partnership with children and their parents, Foster Carers and their families, and social work staff and other professionals when delivering the service.
3. **Anti-discriminatory practice** – the Fostering Service will respect human rights and will ensure that there is fair and equal access to all its services. The services it provides will be free from discrimination, prejudice and racism. The service will value diversity and promote equality.

## **STANDARDS OF CARE**

The Fostering Service will support Hartlepool Children's and Joint Commissioning Services in meeting the child focussed standards which set out what children in foster care need, as detailed in the **Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011**:

### **Standard 1: The child's wishes and feelings and the views of those significant to them**

- Children know that their views, wishes and feelings are taken into account in all aspects of their care; are helped to understand why it may not be possible to act upon their wishes in all cases; and know how to obtain support and make a complaint.
- The views of any others who have important relationship to the child are gathered and taken into account.

### **Standard 2: Promoting a positive identity, potential and valuing diversity through individualised care**

- Children have a positive self-view, emotional resilience and knowledge and understanding of their background.

### **Standard 3: Promoting positive behaviour and relationships**

- Children enjoy sound relationships with their foster family, interact positively with others and behave appropriately.

### **Standard 4: Safeguarding Children**

- Children feel safe and are safe. Children understand how to protect themselves and are protected from significant harm, including neglect, abuse and accident.

### **Standard 5: Children Missing from Care**

- Children rarely go missing and if they do, they return quickly
- Children who do go missing are protected as far as possible and responded to positively on their return

### **Standard 6: Promoting good health and wellbeing**

- Children live in a healthy environment where their physical, emotional and psychological health is promoted and where they are able to access the services to meet their health needs.

### **Standard 7: Education, employment and leisure activities**

- Children are able to enjoy their interests, develop confidence in their skills and are supported and encouraged to engage in leisure activities
- Children are able to make a positive contribution to the foster home and their wider community

### **Standard 8: Promoting educational achievement**

- The education and achievement of children is actively promoted as valuable in itself and as part of their preparation for adulthood. Children are supported to achieve their educational potential.

### **Standard 9: Promoting and supporting contact**

- Children have, where appropriate, constructive contact with their parents, grandparents, siblings, half-siblings, wider family, friends and people who play a significant role in their lives.

### **Standard 10: Providing a suitable physical environment for the foster child**

- Children live in foster homes which provide adequate space, to a suitable standard. The child enjoys access to a range of activities which promote his or her development.

### **Standard 11: Preparation for a placement**

- Children are welcomed into the foster home and leave the foster home in a planned and sensitive manner which makes them feel loved and valued.
- Children feel part of the family. They are not treated differently to the Foster Carer's own children living in the household. The child's needs are met and they benefit from a stable placement.

## **Standard 12: Promoting independence and moves to adulthood and leaving care**

- Children are prepared for, and supported into, adulthood so that they can reach their full potential and achieve economic well-being.

## **CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER – OUR VALUES**

In addition to the national standards, Hartlepool Fostering Service has adopted a vision and aspirations for children who are cared for, which underpin the Team's approach to service delivery. These include:

- The vision to ensure that every looked after child in Hartlepool experiences high quality care and stable relationships, is nurtured and grows up with a sense of identity and belonging.
- When a child becomes looked after, there must be sufficient range of accommodation options available to be able to match the child to a placement that will meet his/her needs.

## **The Service Provided**

The services provided specifically by the Fostering Team fall into two main areas:

### **1) those provided to registered Foster Carers and potential Foster Carers including Connected Persons Carers**

- initial visits to people expressing an interest in becoming Foster Carers
- preparation training for applicants
- competency based assessments of applicants
- support systems for approved Foster Carers and Connected Persons carers including allocated Supervising Social Worker and regular supervisions
- post-approval training and development for Foster Carers and Connected Persons Carers
- consultation with Carers over the development of the service

## **2) those provided to children requiring a foster placement**

- a duty social worker available during office hours Monday to Friday
- provision of a range of foster care placements for children looked after by Hartlepool Borough Council
- provision of carers for use by the Emergency Duty Team for placements at evenings, weekends and bank holidays.
- Consultation with looked after children on all aspects of the service.

The Fostering service also works in conjunction with a number of other agencies and professionals to ensure a cohesive and effective package of support is available to children who become looked after. The agencies and partners involved with looked after children and young people including carers and young people are represented on this forum and are fully involved in its activities. The Child in Care Council plays a critical role in service development and has a valuable contribution to make in terms of feedback. The authority is committed to learning from the experiences of its children in care and to seeking improvements.

### **PROVISION OF THERAPEUTIC SERVICES**

The Fostering Service receives a discreet service from the Therapeutic Social Work team and in addition commission a service from The Junction Foundation. These services provide therapeutic input to children and young people in foster placement, consultation to carers and other professionals.

In addition, the members of the Therapeutic Social Work Team work closely with carers and often work directly with them in conjunction with the child in placement. The key objective of the work is to provide a regular, easy to use guidance and support service to all Foster Carers and to improve placement stability for children in care. They also provide training to Foster Carers, Connected Persons carers, social workers and other professionals.

### **PROVISION OF HEALTH PROMOTION SUPPORT SERVICES**

There is a named nurse identified for Looked after Children and Young People who oversees Children's Annual Health Assessments and has a proactive role

in the health promotion of Young People. They will provide support to foster carers in addressing a range of health issues which may affect children in care. They also provide advice and support to young people on an individual basis on issues such as contraception and sexual health

A dedicated consultant paediatrician advises the Fostering panel on medical issues for prospective Foster Carers and children with a plan for long term fostering.

In addition to the above, there is a named emotional Health and Well-Being coordinator and a psychologist, whose respective roles are dedicated to children who are cared for and to care leavers.

### **PROVISION OF EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES**

The Fostering service has strong links to the educational support services for Looked after children and in particular works closely with the Virtual Head Teacher who has a strong commitment to cared for children.

### **PROVISION OF LEISURE, SPORT, CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY**

Foster Carer training and supervision promotes the importance of leisure provision for looked after children and young people, and the expectation that carers will seek out and support new experiences and activities to enhance children's self-worth, social development and independence. The council has a leisure offer for all children in care which is promoted by the supervising social worker and the foster carers and children have welcomed this.

We aim to support all young people in their religious and cultural beliefs and customs. We ensure that information is available to provide understanding of different cultures and religions. We provide resources that may be needed to ensure young people are able to practice their beliefs and customs.

We are committed to directly challenging racism and ensure that all young people who access our services are aware of our policies in relation to anti-oppressive practice and anti-racism. We will ensure that all people are treated equally, regardless of age, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, disability or religion. We

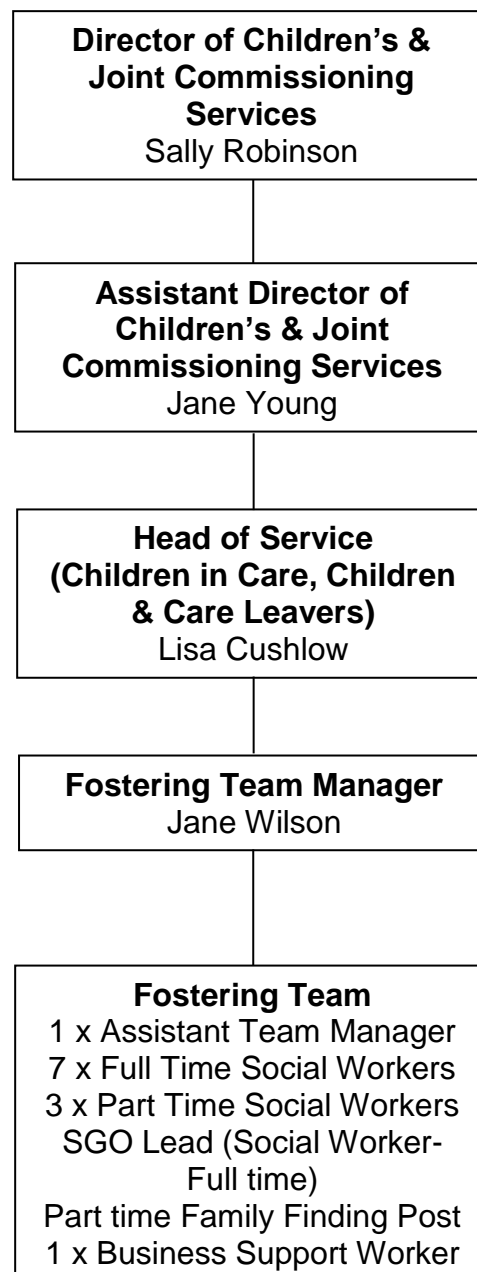
have supervising fostering social workers to help carers with issues with trans-racial and unaccompanied asylum seeking placements.

### **PREPARATION FOR ADULTHOOD / PATHWAY PLANNING**

The Through Care Team and the Fostering Service work closely with other professionals to provide a holistic approach to meeting young people's needs. Hartlepool is committed to supporting care leavers and ensuring that they are able to build the skills and ability to eventually live independently. The service is committed to the ethos of 'Staying Put'. We acknowledge that young people mature at different rates and we will support where possible young people to remain in their foster placement beyond 18 years of age in order to experience normal family life if this supports them more effectively.

## Management Structure

The Fostering Service of Hartlepool Borough Council is provided by designated workers from the Fostering Team who are part of Children's and Joint Commissioning Services





## Specific Service Information

### **NUMBERS OF FOSTER CARERS**

The number of Foster Carer approvals achieved between 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021 comprised of 10 approvals of mainstream carers and the approval of 19 Connected Person Carers. In the period 2020 - 2021 the fostering service accepted the resignation of 4 Foster Carers.

The total number of Foster Carers approved by Hartlepool Borough Council on 31 March 2021 was 161, which number is comprised of 109 'mainstream' Carers and 55 Connected Carers.

### **NUMBERS OF CHILDREN PLACED**

The total number of Looked After children cared for by Hartlepool as at 31 March 2021 was 350 (as against 316 at the same time in 2020) of whom 232 were placed with Hartlepool's own foster placements. 16 young people were in a Hartlepool staying put arrangement at this time. There were 3 young people in Supported Lodgings placements.

### **DESIGNATION OF CARERS**

The majority of carers are 'mainstream', offering either short or long term care to children and young people up to the age of 18 years and 'staying put' placements for those who are over 18.

A banded payment scheme is in place ranging from band 1 to band 4. Progression is based on experience, competencies and training. This scheme also includes the potential to make the payment of a specialist fee for placements for children with more complex needs, or for groups of brothers and sisters, or a parent with their baby.

Of the carers approved as of 31 March 2021, the Fostering Service had 27 Fostering Households providing specialist placements, due to the complex needs of the children placed.

Hartlepool currently has three carers who have experience in providing 'parent and child' placements and carers who have the capacity to provide such placements in very specific circumstances. This is an area which continues to require attention so that our resources are able to meet the demand for these placements in the most effective manner.

## Safeguarding, Complaints & Allegations

### **PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM HARM**

Hartlepool Fostering Service operates a safer recruitment process for all staff employed by the agency and panel members. In addition, there is a rigorous vetting and assessment process undertaken with all potential carers. Enhanced Disclosure and Barring checks are repeated every 5 years for all carers and in addition all staff and panel members are required to confirm that they have had sight of, and will adhere to, the General Data Protection Regulations, Data Protection Act 2018.

Hartlepool Fostering Service has policy and guidance underpinning our service on safe caring, health and safety, bullying, management of behaviour and Foster Carer agreements.

**Our processes and procedures will ensure that any concern is addressed and monitored by the management team and will inform service developments, for example:**

- Issues regarding standards of care,
- breach of foster care agreement
- child protection/safeguarding issues
- Allegations of abuse against foster carers; and
- complaints made about a foster carer

Children will know about these procedures through their social worker and the Children's Guide. They also have access to a Children's Rights and Advocacy

Service independent of the service currently provided by National Youth Advocacy Services (NYAS).

## **COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE**

Hartlepool Borough Council Children's and Joint Commissioning Services operate a complaints service which is independent of the Fostering Service.

Foster Carers are given a Complaints and Compliments Leaflet at the outset of the assessment, detailing the process if they wish to make a complaint, and also when they sign the Foster Carer Agreement.

## **NUMBERS OF COMPLAINTS AND THEIR OUTCOMES**

In the year 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 there were 2 complaints made against Foster Carers in respect of the standard of care they provided, one of which was upheld, the other not. The first was investigated by the Fostering Team Manager at stage one, the second went to stage 2 to be investigated independently. In each case the Foster Carer's review was brought forward in accordance with procedures and any recommendations and learning coming out of the complaints have been implemented.

## **ALLEGATIONS**

All allegations in relation to Foster Carers are investigated and actioned through Hartlepool Child Protection Service reporting to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) on behalf of the Hartlepool Safeguarding Children's Board under the procedures for Managing Allegations against people who work with children or who are in a position of trust. Foster Carers are offered independent support during this process which can be accessed via their Fostering Social worker.

## **NUMBERS OF ALLEGATIONS AND THEIR OUTCOMES**

Between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021 one child made an allegation against their (previous) Foster Carer. The matter was not investigated under S47 because what was said could not have occurred in the way described. The child was listened to and supported and the whole scenario discussed with the Carer with the conclusion that the child may have been confusing past experiences

and primary Carers in her life. Had the situation required it, the Foster Carer would have been referred to the LADO and managed via the Managing Allegations against people who work with children or who are in a position of trust. Where necessary, independent assessments of Foster Carers can be commissioned and the recommendation of those would inform the Foster Carer's review and be presented to panel for consideration.

## **Procedures and Processes for Recruiting, Approving, Training, Supporting and Reviewing Carers**

### **RECRUITMENT**

#### **PUBLICITY**

Hartlepool's recruitment strategy is reviewed annually. All enquirers are asked where they obtained the contact details of the service and this information is analysed in order to target specific campaigns.

The team has worked with the Public Relations Team to refresh the Fostering brand and new posters and leaflets are being displayed in council and public buildings in the town, local advertising and editorials in Hartlepool's 'Hartbeat' publication and the council's website. The publicity materials reflect the brand which we hope will assist in our efforts to attract new carers.

Hartlepool Borough Council Media Team helps us promote the service to the press through editorials and we have a page on Hartlepool Borough Council website and a web site for fostering and adoption information where potential carers can register interest in becoming a Foster Carer. There are links with the local radio station and officers and Foster Carers have been interviewed live to encourage the community to offer Fostering services to Hartlepool children. In this year of Lockdown, the service has used Social Media to reach out to the community, to good effect.

## **RESPONSE TO ENQUIRIES**

Enquiries regarding fostering are responded to quickly. An Information pack is normally sent out within one day of the enquiry being received. Once the return slip is received from the enquirer a joint home visit is normally made within three to five working days. Information about the assessment process is given and information about the family is gathered, including their motivation to foster. They are asked to make a formal registration of interest to proceed to stage 1 of the assessment process. If no response is received within 4-6 weeks then a further contact is made to ascertain their wishes and reason for delaying or withdrawing. If the potential applicants do not respond in a further 4 weeks then the file will be closed. Of necessity, some of this process has been conducted virtually in 2020/21 and this has worked well with more applicants (almost 50% more) progressing to approval than in the previous year.

## **ASSESSMENT**

### **STAGE ONE**

Stage 1 of the process to become an approved Foster Carer can last 8 weeks. The registration of interest form is signed to give consent to proceed and for statutory checks to be completed for all relevant people in the household. Once the form has been completed and returned, the applicants are required to undergo a number of statutory checks including an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check, local authority checks and current employer. The purpose of these checks is to safeguard children to be placed. Personal references are also undertaken.

If an applicant has been a Foster Carer in the previous 12 months, a written reference from their previous fostering service is obtained.

A Medical examination is carried out by the applicant's doctor using the Coram BAAF medical form and returned to the Hartlepool Medical Adviser for comments and a recommendation regarding suitability to foster.

All applicants are required to attend a 3 day preparation course. The preparation training undertaken uses the Fostering Network's Skills to Foster

programme including, Skills to Foster, Child Development, Separation and Loss, Attachment, Working Together, Safer Care, Moving On, Life Work. IN this period, the programme has been run virtually and the trainers have incorporated the Secure Base Model into the programme. There is an evaluation at the end of the course and applicants are requested to give feedback.

If it is decided not to continue with an assessment because of information collected as part of stage 1, the applicant must be informed that they can complain via the fostering service's complaints process. Once all statutory checks and references are completed and no issues have arisen stage two will begin. Stage 2 of the process to become approved Foster Carers normally lasts 4 months.

## **STAGE TWO**

Stage two assessment has seen the Service use the Coram BAAF Form F as its template. The topics covered include; personal background, history and experiences; parenting experiences; birth children's views; the home environment, including dog/pet safety and; the applicant's own contributions. In addition to the assessment sessions with the applicants and their family, at least 2 personal referees are interviewed, as are the ex-partners of the applicants where it has been agreed that there was a 'significant' relationship. Children of the applicants living elsewhere will also be interviewed, with the agreement of their carer or their own agreement.

When all the necessary material is available, the Form F is completed by the social worker using contributions from the prospective Foster Carer. The Form F is read and signed by the prospective Foster Carer and is presented to the Fostering Panel which usually meets every 2 weeks. Prospective Foster Carers are encouraged to attend the Panel meeting when the application is discussed. The Fostering Panel considers the Form F and makes a recommendation regarding the application. This recommendation is then approved (or not) by the Agency Decision Maker. Prospective Foster Carers are then notified in writing of the outcome of their application

If an application is not recommended by Panel and the prospective Foster Carer/s do not accept this, they can choose either to make further representations to the Panel or to have their application referred to an independent body known as the Independent Review Mechanism. The IRM will review the recommendation made by the Family Placement Panel and make its own recommendation about the prospective Foster Carer/s suitability, which the agency must then take into account when making the decision about the application.

## **SUPPORT**

Once a Foster Carer has been approved by Panel they complete a Foster Carer agreement and are provided either with the paper copy of or information to access the Foster Carer Handbook electronically. All Foster Carers are allocated a Supervising Social Worker from the Fostering Service. This person will visit the Foster Carers, provide formal supervision on a monthly basis or at an agreed level dependent upon current placement and carer capability. They will also provide directly, or facilitate access to, any practical, emotional or professional support required.

Foster Carers are provided with equipment to enable them to care for a child in placement.

Foster Carers will be invited to attend a monthly support group that is facilitated by two members of staff from the team. The group is an opportunity to build networks of support amongst other carers, exchange ideas about fostering and to have the opportunity to hear guest speakers on a variety of relevant subjects. This provides a valuable forum for carers to be updated regarding service developments and to network with other professionals.

The Fostering Service operates a duty system within office hours which is staffed by a fostering service worker. Foster Carers can access support and advice from this worker if their allocated worker is not available. An out of hours telephone support service is also provided additional to the Emergency Duty Team arrangements which are in place. This telephone support is provided by the Heads of Service for Children's Services. .

All Foster Carers receive full membership of Fostering Network and access to an independent advice and mediation service should an allegation be made against them.

The Fostering Service liaises with the Foster Carers about any matters which may impact upon their role and consults with them about any necessary or proposed changes. There is a Foster Care Focus Group which is comprised of Carers who wish to contribute to any changes or developments within the service. The Fostering Service (usually) arranges a yearly Celebration event to recognise the efforts of the all carers and specifically to give thanks to the longest serving Foster Carers. Most importantly, the event aims to demonstrate our gratitude to all our carers for their dedication and commitment to the children of Hartlepool who are cared for.

The fostering service has a Foster Carer Charter and this sets out the local authority's responsibilities to approved Foster Carers and what it will provide to carers including all support and information. It also sets out the Foster Carers' responsibilities, detailing the expectation of Carers being committed to working in partnership with the local Authority to provide the best possible care for our children and to pursue learning and their personal and service development so that there is continuous improvement.

## **TRAINING**

An annual training schedule details and supports the provision of sufficient and regular training opportunities for Foster Carers, during the approval process and throughout their Fostering career.

All Foster Carers will attend a preparation training course incorporating the Skills to Foster materials during their preparation and assessment.

An Induction programme involving the completion of the Training Support and Development Standards (TSDS) workbook has been developed and all new Foster Carers will be required to undertake this piece of work within the first



twelve months of their approval, or 18 months for Connected Foster Carers. Foster Carers will have the opportunity to be supported on an individual basis to complete the workbook by their Supervising Social Worker. There is also the opportunity for carers to be mentored by more experienced carers.

Foster Carers are required to complete a training portfolio and their Supervising Social Workers supports each carer to ensure they have a Personal Development Plan which is reviewed as part of the Foster Carer's annual review.

Foster Carers are given support and encouragement to attend all training events that are relevant to their role. Wherever possible Foster Carers and staff attend the same training to enhance partnership working and to ensure the best care is offered to children and young people. Carers are given information about training provided corporately, through Children's and Joint Commissioning Services.

## **REVIEW**

The registration of all Foster Carers is reviewed on an annual basis. The views of the Foster Carer are sought, together with the views of children and placing Social workers via end of placement reports and within the review documentation. The supervising social worker is responsible for collating the information and adding their own views based on the experience of, and outcomes for, children and young people who have been placed with the carer during the review period. The Supervising Social Worker will also use their observations of the carer during visits and supervision to provide an analysis of, and recommendation about, the Carer's suitability to continue in the role.

The first review is normally held after twelve months and then annually thereafter. Reviews are chaired by Independent Reviewing Officers who are independent of the Fostering Service. The review report is presented to the Fostering Panel by the supervising social worker for consideration after the first review and if there is a proposal to change the approval category or recommend de-registration. Foster Carers have the option to attend panel if they wish.

The registration of Foster Carers may be reviewed by Panel at any time if there are changes of circumstances or events which indicate that Foster Carers are no longer suitable to care for children.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

Foster Carers are provided with full information about the children placed with them and are expected to observe high standards of confidentiality. As an agency we maintain records on carers and looked after children, who are subject to National Standards and General Data Protection Legislation (Data Protection Act 2018) known as GDPR. Staff and Foster Carers are expected to declare any potential conflicts of interest, as are panel members.

## **DE-REGISTRATION**

Most Foster Carers voluntarily withdraw from the fostering task. The details of their resignation are placed before the Fostering Panel and their de-registration is formally recorded.

There are occasions when the registration of a Foster Carer is reviewed with a view to considering the options available, i.e. changes to approval or de-registration. Foster Carers are offered the opportunity to submit a response or attend the Fostering Panel in these circumstances. If the Foster Carer is unhappy with the decision reached, they are also able to request a review of the decision or to have their case addressed by the Independent Review Mechanism.

## **THE FOSTERING PANEL**

The Fostering Agency is required by the Fostering Services Regulations to establish a Fostering Panel. The membership, role and functions of the panel are prescribed within the Regulations. Panel membership is drawn from a central list of members and quoracy dictates that at least five members are present in order to conduct business. These members must comprise the chair or vice chair, 2 social work representatives and, where the chair is not present and the vice chair who is present is not independent of the Social Work Agency, at least one of the other panel members must be independent of the Agency. Panels must also have access to medical and legal advice as required.

Hartlepool's Fostering Panel normally meets every second Thursday in the month and considers assessments of prospective foster and Connected Persons Foster Carers, annual reviews of carers, Connected Persons Foster Carers, de-registrations and issues in relation to Foster Carers. Although not a requirement within the regulations the Fostering Panel also considers the plan for a child for long term fostering and also matching children long term with carers. The business of the Panel is formally recorded.

The Fostering Panel makes recommendations that are presented to the Agency Decision Maker for consideration. These decisions are recorded and notified in writing to the prospective/existing Foster Carers.

Foster Carers who disagree with the Panel decision regarding their approval, de-registration or changes to category of approval will have the opportunity to request a review of the decision made by the Fostering Panel either through the agency or through the Independent Review Mechanism, which is provided by Coram Children's Legal Centre on behalf of the Department for Education.

The Hartlepool Borough Council Fostering Panel policy and procedures document provides additional information regarding the constitution and running of the panel.

## APPENDIX 1

### **RELEVANT LEGISLATION, REGULATIONS AND STANDARDS AND STAFF**

The work of Hartlepool Fostering Service is delivered within the following legal framework and in accordance with the following standards:

- Fostering Service Regulations 2011
- The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 from section 23 of the Care Standards Act 2000
- Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)

- Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for local authorities 2010.
- GDPR April 2018.

This Statement of Purpose is produced in accordance with the following standards and regulations.

#### **NMS 2011 STANDARD 16**

- 16.1 The fostering service has 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.
- 16.2 The aims and objectives of the statement of purpose are child focused and show how the service will meet outcomes for children.

#### **THE CHILDREN ACT 1989 GUIDANCE AND REGULATIONS VOLUME 4: FOSTERING SERVICES (2011)**

- 4.1 The Fostering service provider must compile a Statement of Purpose, which sets out the aims and objectives of the service as a whole, and the services and facilities which are provided (including the provision of any 'parent and child arrangements'). The statement must be reviewed and updated as necessary , but at least annually and published on the provider's website (if they have one), with a copy provided to Ofsted. Copies must also be available upon request to anyone working for the purposes of the fostering service, any Foster Carer or potential Foster Carer of the service, and to any child placed with one of the service's Foster Carers and their parents.
- 4.2 The Statement of purpose is a key document which sets a framework for all of the business of the fostering service. it must be consistent with relevant legislation, Regulations, NMS and statutory guidance, be child focused and show how the fostering service will help children achieve positive outcomes. The manager of the fostering service must ensure

that the service is at all times conducted in a manner consistent with the Statement of Purpose.

## APPENDIX 2

### NUMBERS, RELEVANT QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF STAFF AS AT 1 APRIL 2021

The staff of Hartlepool Borough Council's Fostering Service consists of:

NAME & STATUS	DATE OF APPOINTMENT in Fostering Team			QUALIFICATIONS	RELEVANT EXPERIENCE
Lisa Cushlow Head of Service	01	09	20	DIPSW – 2006 BA – Specialist Social Work (children and families) 2013	Team Manager – Safeguarding Assistant Team Manager Safeguarding Social Worker – safeguarding Social Worker Fostering Family Support Worker
Jane Wilson Team Manager	07	01	19	CSS 1987 CMS 2001	Instructor – Adults with Learning Difficulties Safeguarding Social Worker Team Manager Fostering Head of Service for Looked after children, Care Leavers, Adoption and Fostering Panel Adviser
Jane Lane Assistant Team Manager	14	03	16	DIPSW (2003) HCPC Registered	Early help Safeguarding Family Placement Social Worker Children & Families Supervising social worker

Laura Jeffreys	17	05	21	DIPSW and Masters Sociology Degree Degree (2005) PQ1 (2006)	SGO Lead IRO Social Worker Safeguarding Permanence Social Worker
Charlotte Austin Social Worker	07	10	13	BSC Hons in SW and LD Nursing 1:1 Practice Educator	Fostering Social Worker Children and families/children with disabilities
Leanne Johnson Social Worker	01	10	17	BA (Hons) in Social Worker July 2011	Children's Safeguarding Drug and alcohol practitioner Family Placement Social Worker
Alison Bousfield Social Worker	01	07	17	MA in Social Work BSc (Hons) Sociology	Fostering Social Worker Children & Families Social Work Safeguarding Senior Practitioner Safeguarding Team
Jolene Duggleby Support Officer	25	06	19	NVQ 1, 2 and 3 in Business Administration – July 2016 Foundation Degree in Business Management 2021	Fostering - Children's and Commissioned Services
Emma Howarth Social Worker	01	10	11	BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies degree	Social Worker Family Finder Family Resource Worker
Joanne Colledge Social Worker	08	06	18	BSc in Social Work 2013	Fostering Social Worker Safeguarding SW Family Support Worker
Suzanne Rayment Social Worker	04	05	21	BA (Hons) Social Work 2010	Social Worker Fostering Safeguarding SW
Megan Sargent Social Worker	27	08	19	BA (Hons) Social Work 2019	Social Worker – Fostering Supported Living and fostering placements

Moira Spencer Social Worker	03	08	20	BA (Hons) Social Work (2012)	Social Worker – Fostering Social Worker – cared for, care leavers Lead n UASC Personal Advisor – Care Leavers Sessional Worker for Care Leavers
Amanda Watcham Social Worker	09	09	19	BA (Hons) Social Work (2013)	Fostering Social Worker Social Worker Children with disabilities
Paul Reynolds Social Worker	19	08	19	Masters in Social Work (2013)	Fostering Social Worker Social Worker children with disabilities Looked After children's SW Social Worker- safeguarding Adult Mental Health Social Worker





# A FOSTERING GUIDE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

## CONTACT US

Through Care Team  
01429 405588

The Fostering service aims to provide information on caring for children and young people. This leaflet will give you information about what to expect.



### What does fostering mean to you?

Fostering is a safe home with a caring family who look after children and young people. They will offer support and guidance, and make sure you are healthy, safe and secure.

### Going to live with a foster family

It may feel a little strange at first but your foster family will help you to settle in.

### Finding the right family for you

If you are unhappy living with your foster family you can tell your social worker.

It can take a while to feel settled in a new home, particularly if you have a lot of other things going on. Your social worker can help work out any difficulties.

### In your foster home you can expect:

- To have all your personal belongings
- A bedroom
- Someone to listen to your hopes and fears
- Space to put your things
- Pocket money
- Help with your education or training
- To celebrate your birthday and religious festivals
- Support to have contact with family and friends
- To develop your life story
- Attend review meetings where you will be able to talk about any concerns you may have

### Education

- We will make sure you can stay at the same school or college
- A Personal Education Plan (PEP) will be developed with you
- Your PEP shows how well you are doing at school and gives you an opportunity to say what other educational activities you would like to be involved in.

### Health

- You will have a health assessment to make sure you are in good health
- You will then have a yearly health assessment with a nurse or a doctor
- You will be registered with a GP, and attend the dentists and opticians regularly

### Independent Visitors and Advocates

An independent visitor is someone who works for an Independent Organisation to help support you with your concerns and to give you advice

You are entitled to an independent visitor they can attend your reviews with you

The independent visitor will come out to your home and get to know you

### Complaints and concerns

You can discuss any concerns or worries you may have with your social worker.

Children and Young People have a right to complain.

If you would like to make a complaint you can contact the complaints officer on:

**01429 284020**

email to:

**[cas.complaints@hartlepool.gcsx.gov.uk](mailto:cas.complaints@hartlepool.gcsx.gov.uk)**

## **Independent Panel Chair - Summary**

**2020 -2021**

### **Hartlepool Borough Council Fostering Panel**

Panels have continued to take place virtually following this being implemented in March 2021 which is in line with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Panel members, social workers and prospective foster carers continue to have embraced this way of working and overall, panels have functioned well when considering the reliance upon technology within this way of working and the challenges that can come with this.

Given the current road map set out by the government with a view to easing and at some stage possibly eradicating current restrictions, panel have begun to consider future arrangements. This will need to take into account the maintenance of social distancing and how we can best meet the needs of foster carers whilst ensuring effective service delivery is maintained. No decision has yet been made about what the future will look like, and this is something that panel members and foster carers are currently being consulted about.

Panel has a cohort of established members and quoracy within panels has not been an issue. However, the ambition of further extending the range of skill and knowledge within panel membership is being progressed by the Panel Advisor/Team and Chair. The central list includes individuals with experience in education, health and an elected member who is a well-respected and valued member of Panel. The next step in further strengthening and widening representation within panel is to ensure the voice of the child is woven into our current processes. It is also hoped to recruit a care experienced young person and people from a BAME background.

The electronic distribution of paperwork in advance of panel taking place has continued to be well co-ordinated with this still being made available at least seven working days before panel. It is clear from the breadth and depth of discussion that takes place within each panel that members have robustly read and considered the information to make informed recommendations.

The distribution of minutes from panel continues to be within required timescales and the notable quality is undoubtedly a result of the established minute takers having been maintained within this designated role.

In conclusion despite these difficult times the fostering panel has functioned well, with a real commitment from panel members, social workers and particularly foster carers to ensure the children of Hartlepool are being kept safe and well.

**Yvonne Hamilton**

**Independent Chair of Hartlepool Borough Council Fostering Panel**