



Rutland Fostering Service Retention and Recruitment Policy



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1 Introduction

Each Local Authority has a duty to ensure there are enough carers of sufficient quality to meet the needs of the most vulnerable children, young people and parents and as such, recruitment and retention of carers is an important function of our Fostering, Adoption and Care Leaver Service. The Local Authority requires a clear recruitment strategy to ensure new carers are sourced each year to sufficiently meet the needs of the local area. In addition, we need experienced foster carers who are already approved to provide the experience and support to vulnerable children and to their peers who are just starting out. This Recruitment and Retention Policy sets out how we will meet this duty.

Currently there is a shortage of Local Authority foster placements across the country and consequently there is competition to recruit new carers, not just with other Local Authorities but also with Independent Fostering Agencies. This is particularly significant for Rutland both because of our size, and because of our multiple and larger neighbours. It is important therefore that we have a clear strategy for recruitment and retention, ensuring that we offer fees which are at least equitable with neighbouring authorities, and development and progression that supports and encourages carers to remain working with Rutland County Council, caring for our children and young people.

We are very lucky to already have some amazing carers who are committed and dedicated and offer children and young people a stable and supportive home.

We want to ensure our current carers feel supported and have their needs as carers met, as well as enabling them to meet the needs of the children and young people placed with them.

Throughout this policy when referring to 'carers' we mean both Connected Carers and Foster Carer unless otherwise stated.

2 Recruitment

2.1 Strategy for recruiting

In order to ensure that we can provide supportive and nurturing placements for those children who are, or become, Looked After in our area, and that we can meet their cultural needs, it is important that we reach a cross-section of the local community with the message that we need foster carers. We also need to reach potential foster carers who are willing to consider different types of placement.

We are ensuring that the Council has a presence both locally within the community and through the media to make contact with community members and encourage them to make enquiries. Below is a list of recruitment opportunities we have undertaken in the past year, and which we will continue to build upon:

- Attending local events and having stalls in the community during fostering fortnight;
- Having a stall at Rutland's 20th Anniversary celebrations
- Advertising on the local radio station, Rutland Radio
- Articles in local newspapers
- Regular leaflet drops to local businesses, cafes and public areas in Rutland

We plan to develop this over the next year and beyond by making sure we have a community presence at key times during the year, such as September (when children have gone to high school or university); Mother's Day; and Father's Day.

An important part of the recruitment process will be promoting fostering as an opportunity for all ages and cultural groups, and promoting the range of alternative placements, including: supported lodgings; respite and linked carers; parent and baby placements; unaccompanied asylum seeking children; and challenging teenagers.

The Children Looked After, Care Leaver and Foster Carer Sufficiency statement can be read in conjunction with this policy.

2.2 Assessment of new recruits

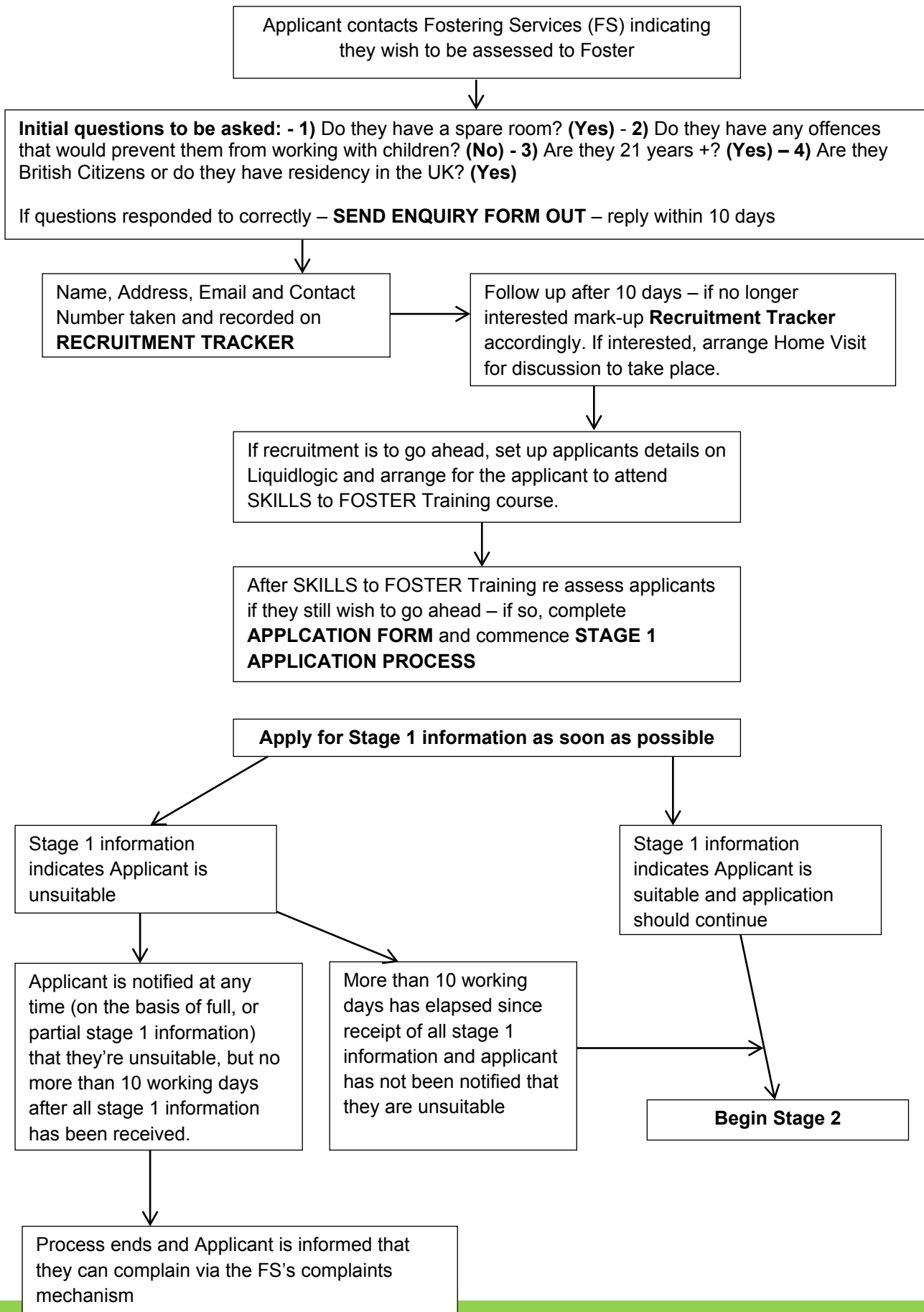
All new recruitments go through a process of assessment and development in order to assess their suitability to be carers.

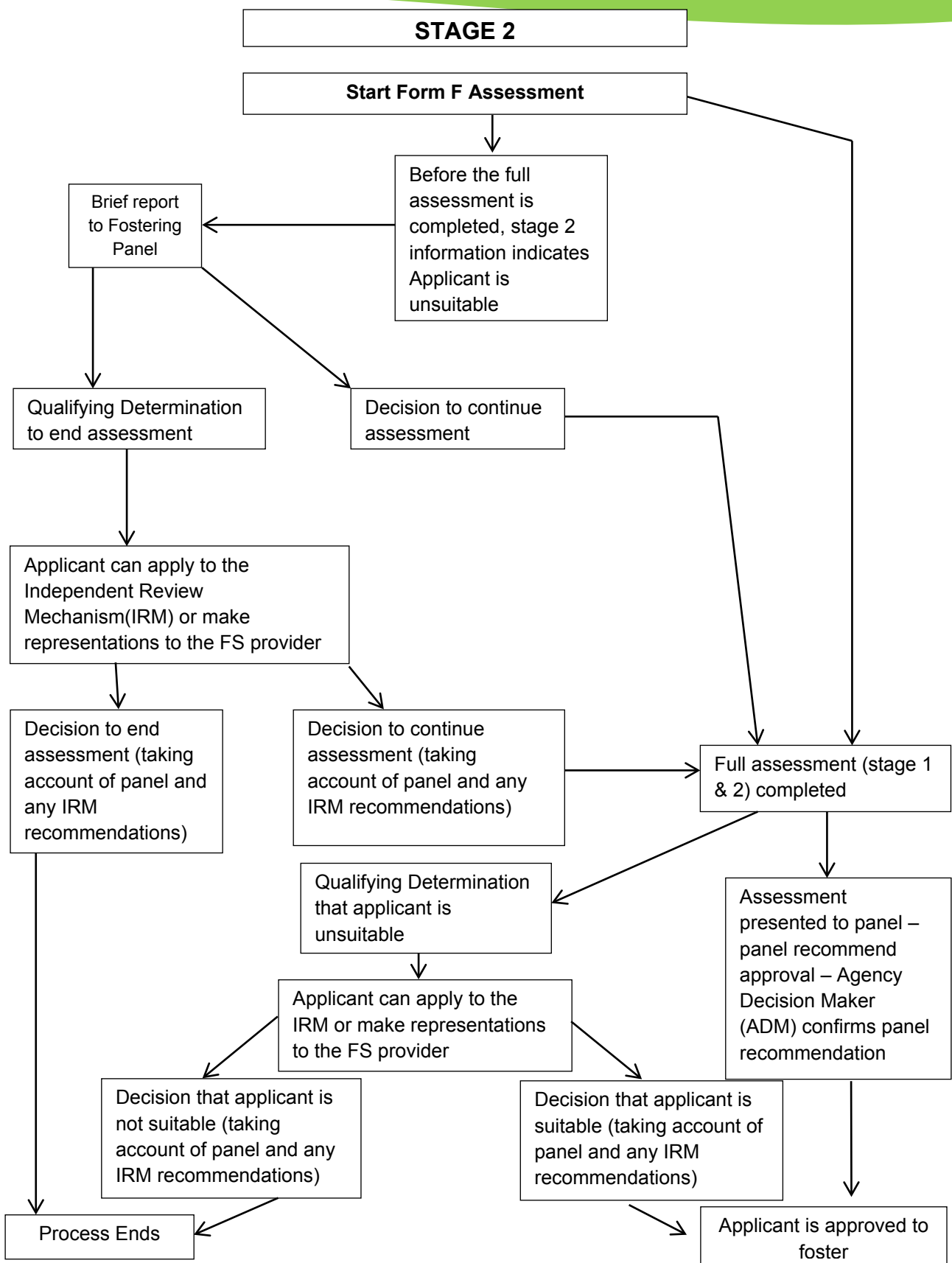
Once an enquiry has been made, the first step is for a social worker to visit the potential foster carer(s) to discuss what fostering entails and explain the assessment process. Following that discussion the completion of the Skills to Foster training potential carers make their formal application.

Connected carers are usually approached by social care during social care involvement where there are concerns regarding the children living within their home environment.

Full statutory checks are completed to ensure that the potential carer is suitable to provide care to our most vulnerable children. These include: a check with police and an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check; checks with other Local Authorities; checks with schools of birth children; and written references from their employer and character referees are sought. A medical assessment is also required at this stage. This is known as Stage 1 for foster carers or the Viability Assessment for Connected carers and the outcome will determine whether the potential carers are eligible to move to Stage 2 where full assessment and development takes place over a period of up to 6months.

Foster Carer Assessment and Approval Process

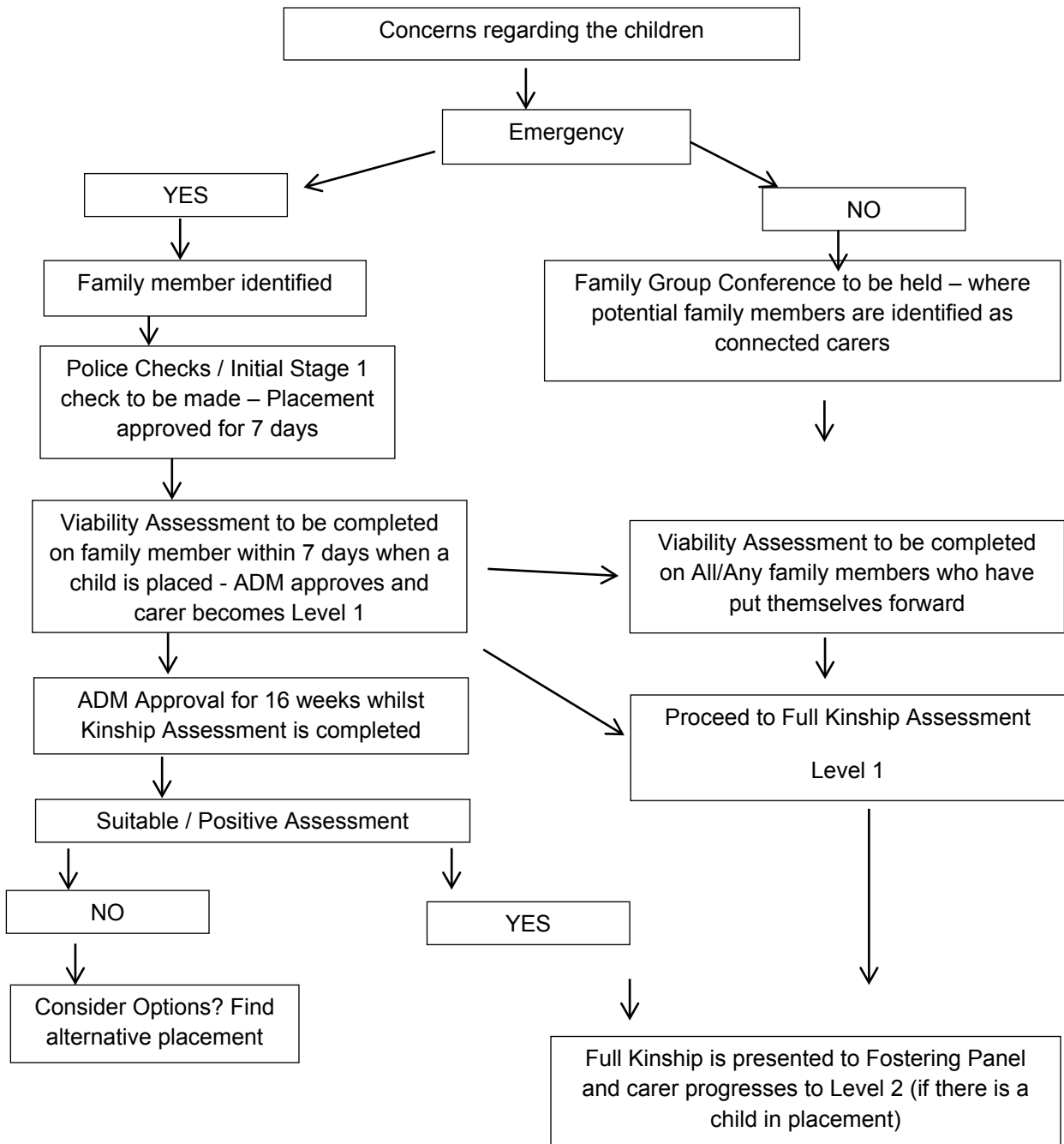




NB – This diagram illustrates how stages 1 & 2 of the assessment process fit together. It is not intended to cover all actions a FS must undertake as part of the process – FSs must refer to the regulations and statutory guidance for this information. It should be noted that at any point in the process applicants(1) can withdraw, in which case the process ends; and (2) can complain to the FS (and must be informed of their right to do so if they are turned down in stage 1).

NB - IRM Independent review mechanism - <http://www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk/?q=fostering> can support potential carers who have been declined.

Connected Carer Flow Chart...



2.3 Expectations of new recruits

Potential carers are required to engage with the checks and attend the Skills to Foster course as laid out at Stage 1, they are then required to engage with the full assessment and both prospective carers need to make time available for the assessment visits as part of Stage 2.

Connected foster carers are recruited differently, they are only considered as potential carers for children they are connected to, such as a family member, and they have an 'initial viability assessment' to assess whether the connected child can be placed in their care. Once in their care, the connected carer is assessed as a foster carer in the same way as other potential carers; however they are still only assessed as carers for the connected child. They are required to engage fully with the assessment and statutory checks in the same way as all potential foster carers.

2.4 Fostering Panel

Once the assessment of the potential carer is complete, the Team Manager will decide whether they should be presented to Fostering Panel for approval. The Fostering Panel is an independent panel which recommends to the Local Authority whether a carer should be approved to have child(ren) placed with them. This includes recommendations for approval for connected foster carers.

The Panel also makes recommendations on permanence for those seeking to foster a child through to independence.

The Panel reviews and provides ongoing approval for all carers. Carers are expected to attend panel for their annual reviews.

2.5 First year after approval

In the first year following approval, carers will be supported when a placement is made. Part of this support is the completion of their Training, Support and Development Standards which will evidence their learning and development throughout their first year.

Following completion of their first year, they will return to Panel for their first annual review to explore with Panel members how their first year has been.

3 Rutland County Council Commitment to our Carers

Rutland County Council greatly values all our carers, we feel this role is exceptional and for it we need exceptional people and maintain high standards.

We want to retain our carers and to do this we will ensure:

3.1 Training and development

The Council recognises the need to provide continuing development opportunities to all our carers so that we can support them in caring for our most vulnerable children and young people. We ensure that they have the tools to do the job, but also support carers to progress and develop in their caring careers (including Connected carers should they wish to progress). The Council has processes in place to promote this training and development:

- i. Every carer has a Personal Development and Learning Plan which is reviewed in each supervision with their social worker. This will include mandatory training which should be regularly repeated by carer's throughout their caring career, such as safeguarding and paediatric first aid.
- ii. There is also space for carers to speak to their supervising social worker about more specialist courses they would like to attend. This will be discussed with managers, but carers are encouraged to seek training in areas that are relevant to them and/or interest them.
- iii. Carer support groups are a crucial element to the support we offer our carers. They are held every month, with sessions alternating between the day and the evening. There's a reflection session in each support group which allows for further development and learning in a peer environment, with the evening session mirroring the daytime session to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to receive and reflect upon the same information. Sessions are structured with learning and then discussion, with the opportunity for carers to raise themes important to them at the end of each session.
- iv. In addition, the Council offers carer's access to CareKnowledge, an online learning site which provides development on the latest research and reviews, and social work processes for specialist areas. Carers are also encouraged to attend some social worker training where this is helpful and relevant to their role as foster carers in line with the level they are or wish to be.
- v. Carers may also be invited to attend Children's Conference (held monthly for all Children's Services staff) so they can engage in relevant workshops - such as Hearing the Child's Voice - and to provide them with networking opportunities so they can meet workers from the different services provided within Children's Social Care and the wider Children's Services.

3.2 Support to Carers

We consider all our carers as equal, regardless of level, connected or foster.

All carers have:

- A supervising social worker
- Monthly supervision with their supervising social worker
- Manager visits twice a year
- Respite - for example, to allow holidays
- A buddy system where you are supported by a more experienced carer

We provide a dedicated worker to support carers during, or after, any form of allegations to ensure carers are independently supported.

3.3 Progression and Levels for carers

Within Rutland County Council, we have 4 levels of foster carers based on experience and skill, allowing for progression of carers. There are different expectations with each level of carer and carers go through a process of assessment to progress to each level.

Level 1

These are family/connected carers who have put themselves forward to care for a child connected to them to prevent the child being placed in Local Authority care; however they are Looked After by the Local Authority. The carers will have had a short assessment called a Viability Assessment prior to, or at the point of, placement of the child/ren. The expectation is that these carers are willing to be assessed as full connected carers for the connected child/children.

Unlike potential foster carers, connected carers are paid the child's allowance during their assessment as they need financial support for the children they are caring for, however if connected carers are being assessed without children in placement, they would not receive payments during assessment in line with LA foster carers. However fees will not be paid until carers are fully approved by the independent fostering panel.

Level 2

These are connected carers who have been fully assessed as connected foster carers for the children in their care and have been approved by the independent Fostering Panel as connected foster carers for a specific child/ren.

These are also local authority foster carers who have been assessed as carers and approved by the Independent Fostering Panel, entering their first year as foster carers.

Level 3

These are all carers who have completed a year of fostering, with a child placed in their care for at least 20 nights in their first year.

They will also have completed the Training, Support and Development Standards and been approved by Fostering Panel to continuing fostering after their annual review.

This applies to connected carers who wish to progress.

Level 4

These are carers who have completed at least 2 years of fostering with a child placed in their care for at least 20 nights the previous year.

They will have completed their Training, Support and Development Standards meeting the requirements and been approved by Fostering Panel to continuing fostering after their annual review.

They will also provide support to Level 1 – 3 carers as part of the buddy system to support them in their role as carers and be prepared undertake other work within the council when a child is not in placement.

3.4 Carers Allowances

All Rutland County Council carers receive a fostering allowance for each child in placement. This is paid to carers to cover all costs in relation to looking after children and young people. This allowance is based on the National Fostering Network recommended rates.

In most cases the allowance will enable carers to meet every day needs of foster children and connected children at the standard of an average family. In certain circumstances, other exceptional costs may be met – with the Service Manager's agreement.

Connected carers will receive this allowance for each child placed in their care whilst they are assessed as connected foster carers. Connected carer will always be encouraged and supported to seek a Special Guardianship Order should this be the right care plan for the children they are caring for.

The allowance rates are as follows:

Age Group	Weekly Basic Allowance	Festivity Allowance	Birthday Allowance
0-4 years	£145	£145	£145
5-10 years	£165	£165	£165
11-15 years	£206	£206	£206
16+ years	£249	£249	£249

Breakdown of allowance

Age Group	Food	Clothing	Transport	Personal Allowance	Household
0-4 years	£49.30	£31.90	£11.60	£8.70	£43.50
5-10 years	£52.80	£42.90	£11.55	£13.20	£44.55
11-15 years	£65.92	£53.56	£22.66	£20.60	£43.26
16+ years	£74.70	£64.74	£22.41	£42.33	£44.82

NB: The personal allowance includes at least £5 per week to be saved in a bank account for the child

3.5 Fees

Fees are paid to carers recognising their skills, experience and qualifications in caring for children and young people based on an assessment by the Fostering Team. They are only payable once carers are approved and have a child (children) in placement. Fees are payable to all carers. Carers will receive a weekly fee based on their fostering level when a child is in placement. Carers will receive the additional child fee for each subsequent child in placement.

Connected carers, once assessed as connected foster carers, will receive a weekly fee, however connected carers will be encouraged and supported to seek a Special Guardianship Order where this is considered to be in the child/ren's best interest; only in exceptional circumstances would connected carers remain connected foster carers once any court proceedings have been concluded, and in these circumstance they will be supported if they wish, to progress through the levels.

Fostering Level	Requirements	Weekly Fee	Weekly Fee 2 nd child	Weekly Fee 3 rd child	Weekly Fee 4 th Child and subsequent children
Level 1	Family and friends who are looking after a child and have had a viability assessment but are not approved connected foster carers	£0 (but child allowance is payable)			
Level 2	All newly approved carers when a child is in placement	£124.74	£93.56 75% of wkly fee	£83.58 67% of wkly fee	£62.37 50% of wkly fee

Level 3	All carers with one year experience, a minimum of 20 overnight stays and completion of the TSD standards	£172.80	£129.60 75% of wkly fee	£115.78 67% of wkly fee	£86.40 50% of wkly fee
Level 4	All carers with at least two year experience and on completion of the TDS (experienced level) and a minimum of 20 overnight stays (in the preceding year)	£218.81	£164.11 75% of wkly fee	£146.60 67% of wkly fee	£109.41 50% of wkly fee

Rutland Foster Carer Fees Policy should be read in conjunction with this document.

3.6 Our Expectations of Carers

Whilst there are specific expectations for each level of carer, there are some expectations that are required of all carers. This is to ensure that RCC provides them with the supervision and development to enable them to care for Children Looked After by Rutland. Some of the expectations are set out in the National Minimum Standards and others are the standards expected by RCC.

The expectations of all carers include:

- 1) All carers will attend monthly supervision sessions with the supervising social worker for a minimum of two hours;
- 2) All carers are expected to attend support groups, either the daytime or evening session
- 3) All carers will complete a Personal Development and Learning Plan(PDLP) every year;
- 4) All carers will attend training as laid out in their PDLP;
- 5) All carers will maintain daily logs for the children placed with them until/if permanence is agreed then weekly logs will be expected;
- 6) All carers will adhere to financial policy, including opening a bank account for each child in placement and saving a minimum amount per week, making evidence of this available.
- 7) All carers to attend panel for their annual reviews
- 8) All carers will complete the child's story whilst they are in placement

It is important that carers adhere to these standards and statutory expectations in order to meet the minimum standards to be re-approved at Panel annually.

A full list of expectations is available for the National Minimum Standards can be found here - <http://www.minimumstandards.org/>

Connected carers are required to follow the expectations above, however when they live some distance from the Local Authority, whilst welcome, they are not required to attend support groups or training in RCC. RCC will endeavour to access groups for Connected Carers within their local whenever possible. Connected Carers are not required to attend skills to foster as part of the kinship carer assessment process.

The supervising social worker will ensure that there is support and training available locally to connected carers and will support carers should they wish to develop further.

The assessing social worker will complete the skills to foster work with connected carers. Connected carers will always be encouraged and supported to seek a Special Guardianship Order should this be the right care plan for the children they are caring for.

3.7 Foster carers who don't have a Rutland child in placement

There are times when Rutland foster carers will not have children in placement; however there are a number of other ways to work with Rutland County Council and the children within the community so a foster carer's skills and experience can be utilised and further developed. This may include for example: providing support to vulnerable families to help them to meet the needs of their children in a safe and nurturing way, and within their family home; supervising contact for children who are looked after; or completing life story work with children.

Carers at Level 4 will also provide support to their fellow carers through a buddy system, to support them as they develop their caring skills further.

Another option available to Rutland foster carers is to provide either respite care, or a placement for children from neighbouring local authorities who are part of the East Midlands Regional Children's Framework, a commissioning framework for carers throughout the East Midlands.

3.8 Providing foster placements to neighbouring Local Authorities

Rutland County Council has a number of foster carers who at any one time may not have a Rutland child in placement, or may have a spare second placement. This is appropriate given the need for sufficient available carers skilled in working with different age ranges/needs/cultures and the careful matching of children and carers when a placement is made. However, our foster carers are highly skilled and motivated to provide care for vulnerable children who are unable to live with their parents or extended family.

Rutland shares a boundary with a number of neighbouring Local Authorities within the East Midlands region. As such, there are a number of Local Authorities who may

at some point need a placement, either because it is in a specific area or because it best meets the needs of a child in their care and they are unable to place the child with their own in-house carers.

As such, Rutland seeks to offer placements to other Local Authorities in the East Midlands region where it is an appropriate match and where we believe we can still maintain sufficient provision for Rutland children who may require care.

Responsibilities of Rutland County Council

We will provide a foster placement and appropriate social work supervision of that placement in conjunction with the child's allocated social worker from the placing Local Authority.

We will provide support to the foster carers in line with the commitment made to foster carers working for Rutland.

We will liaise with the placing Local Authority, passing on any information in respect of the child including the children's log.

We will review the placement at 6 months to ensure that it is right for the placement to continue.

Responsibilities of the Placing Local Authority

They will create an interagency contract.

They will pay the cost of placement plus a charge to cover the cost of managing the placement and supervising the foster carer.

They will provide any additional support for the child when needed, including supervision of contact and child care when needed.

They will make education provision for the child placed in Rutland, holding regular Personal Education Plan meetings.

They will visit the child regularly and within statutory guidelines, seeing the child alone, seeking the views of the child and the foster carer in each visit.

They will arrange a placement planning meeting at least 5 days prior to placement for a planned move and within 72 hours of the placement, inviting the supervising social worker and birth parents where appropriate.

They will provide any transport needed to escort the child to school and contact outside of Rutland County.

They will follow the process of alert our Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Team of a Child Looked After within our area, as per their own procedures.

Cost of placement

The foster carer will receive the same payments as they receive for a Rutland child in their care. (Fostering Allowance for the child and the foster carer fee as set out earlier in this policy.)

In addition to this, the Council will charge a £250 surcharge to cover the cost of maintaining statutory duties pertaining to that placement, such as social worker supervision, so that the placement remains financially neutral.

Placements will be made initially on a 6 month basis to provide the placing Local Authority with 'breathing space' and matching time to find a suitable in-house carer for the child; this also allows for Proceedings to conclude if a child is placed at the beginning of a Court application. Should the placement be agreed at the 6 month review to be considered for permanence, Rutland and the placing Local Authority will have further discussions regarding an increase in the fee as this will have a long term impact on Rutland foster placement sufficiency.

Finally...

We would like to thank all of our carers for their ongoing hard work, commitment and dedication to the children and young people which they have cared for, do care for and will care for in the future.

We feel very lucky to have the carers we have in Rutland and want to continue to develop the fostering service to ensure the needs of our carer's are fully met.