

# **EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**

## **DONCASTER METROPLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **Due Regard Statement Template**

How to show due regard to the equality duty in how we develop our work and in our decision making.

## **Due Regard Statement**

A **Due Regard Statement** (DRS) is the tool for capturing the evidence to demonstrate that due regard has been shown when the council plans and delivers its functions. A Due Regard Statement must be completed for all programmes, projects and changes to service delivery.

- A DRS should be initiated at the beginning of the programme, project or change to inform project planning
- The DRS runs adjacent to the programme, project or change and is reviewed and completed at the relevant points
- Any reports produced need to reference "Due Regard" in the main body of the report and the DRS should be attached as an appendix
- The DRS cannot be fully completed until the programme, project or change is delivered.

<p><b>1</b></p> <p><b>Name of the ‘policy’ and briefly describe the activity being considered including aims and expected outcomes. This will help to determine how relevant the ‘policy’ is to equality.</b></p>	<p><b>Foster Carers Financial Policy</b></p> <p>Foster carers are a valuable resource, increasing the number of in-house foster carers is essential to delivering our Future Placement Strategy and reducing our costs. In order to achieve this ambition the foster carer payment arrangements need to be commensurate and comparable to others. A benchmarking exercise has identified that the current offer is the lowest of the neighbouring local authorities and is not competitive with the Independent Fostering Agencies.</p> <p>The last review of foster carer skills payments was in 2016 when the emphasis was on skills progression with enhanced payments. This proposal removes the enhanced payments and introduces a flat rate of payment for all carers irrespective of the age of child they are fostering.</p> <p><b>Level 1</b> - Currently a skills payment is not awarded when a foster carer becomes approved by the Fostering Service irrespective of whether they are connected persons foster carers or mainstream. All other local authorities provide a Level 1 payment. This payment is to reflect that being a foster carer carries with it additional tasks and responsibilities which includes the completion of the Training &amp; Development Standards within 12 months of approval, completion of mandatory training, attendance at children’s meetings and their CLA Reviews as well as making themselves available for supervision with their Supervising Social Worker.</p> <p><b>Level 2</b> - Currently Level 2 payments are linked to the age of the child which is not felt appropriate as a premature baby who requires oxygen can be argued to be more challenging than an older child. The proposal is to bring this in line with private providers, and most local authorities, and pay a flat fee of £150pw per child. In order to move from Level 1 to Level 2 the foster carer will need to provide a portfolio of evidence which will be</p>
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	<p>appraised by senior managers. Under the new proposals, if a Level 2 carer does not continue to meet the criteria for the skills payment at their Annual Review, they will be given six months to complete the outstanding work and if they fail to do so they will be removed from Level 2 and placed at Level 1.</p> <p><b>Level 3</b> - Currently Level 3 payments are linked to the age of the child which is not felt appropriate for the reasons outlined above in Level 2. The fee of £267 per week currently only paid for carers who take 16+ children is competitive. Our proposal is to have this as a flat fee as if a Level 3 foster carer has worked hard to gain the skills, knowledge and experience to gain Level 3 skill payments then this should not be linked to any age of child but to the needs of the child. It is understood that the more challenging children will be placed with Level 3 foster carers. In order to move from Level 2 to Level 3 the foster carer will need to provide a portfolio of evidence which will be appraised by the Service Manager and Assistant Director. Under the new proposals, if a Level 3 carer does not continue to meet the criteria for the skills payment at their Annual Review, they will be given six months to complete the outstanding work and if they fail to do so they will be returned to Level 2 or even Level 1 if the shortcomings are serious enough. By being clearer about the expectations of becoming a Level 3 foster carer, the Service can better manage compliance in this regard.</p> <p><b>Creation of Level 4</b> – this level develops specialist foster carers for two schemes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Parent &amp; child assessment placements (3 placements)</li><li>- Emergency 28 day placement scheme (5 placements)</li></ul> <p>Currently these placements are commissioned from external providers at high cost. The service is confident that it can develop these two schemes which allow career progression for all foster carers. Entry will be via submission of expression of interest from all foster</p>
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	<p>carers who are available on a full time basis and have skills, experience and knowledge to provide excellent care for children and their parents.</p> <p><b>Payment Structure</b></p> <p>All foster carers will receive a flat fee which is dependent upon the skill level they have been assessed against. A clear training pathway is being developed and will be published at the end of July 2022. The training pathway will include evening, day time and on-line events and workshops to ensure that those carers who are in full time work can still access training courses needed to progress up to the next skill level. Whilst some training is mandatory, the training programme allows for individual interest with a vast range of on-line courses available to all foster carers. For foster carers who have difficulty in reading and writing or for whom English is not their first language, the on-line courses are undertaken with their Supervising Social Worker present, usually at their home, who will aid their comprehension of the topic. Face to face training courses are held jointly with the staff from the Fostering Service who provide discreet support to carers who need extra help with the course work.</p> <p>All foster carers receive a weekly allowance for the child/ren in their care which is above the Government's recommended minimum allowance, with the skill fee for the foster carer rewarding their commitment to developing their skills and experience. In addition our proposals will provide all foster carers the following payments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Four weeks children's allowance each year broken down to one week for birthdays, one week for Christmas and two weeks for the summer holidays to ensure that all children have a holiday with their foster carer every year</li><li>• Mileage at the rate of 40ppm will be paid after the first 50 miles per child is deducted from the claim</li><li>• A start up grant available to newly approved foster carers of £350 to buy equipment, toys, books and bedding prior to children being placed with them</li></ul>
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2	<b>Service area responsible for completing this statement.</b>	Doncaster Children's Services Trust – Fostering Service
3	<b>Summary of the information considered across the protected groups.</b>  <b>Service users/residents</b>  <b>Doncaster Workforce</b>	<p>The key deomographics of the Trust's Independent Foster Agency provided from the Mosaic Foster Carer Register are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Number</b> – There are currently 134 Primary Foster Carers on the Register</li> <li>• <b>Age</b> – The age range of the current foster carer cohort is between 27 years and 74 years with the average age of 51.5 years and 86 Foster Carers being aged 50 or above (64.2%).</li> <li>• <b>Gender</b> – The Primary Foster Carer cohort is predominantly female 126 carers (94.1%) with only 8 males identified (5.9%)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sexual Orientation</b> – This is not formally collected. However, under new arrangements the information will be collated and reported upon.</li> <li>• <b>Ethnicity:</b> 121 Primary Foster Carers identify as White British (90.1%) with a further 6 identifying as White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish (4.4%). 1 Foster Carer identifies as a White Traveler (Level 1 as newly approved in January 2022), 1 as Black British (Level 2 as approved for two years) and 1 as White and Black Caribbean (Level 3 as approved 5 years+). The remaining 2 Foster Carers are undeclared / not known.</li> <li>• <b>Religion and Belief</b> - This is not formally collected. However, under new arrangements the information will be collated and reported upon.</li> <li>• <b>Marriage/Civil Partnership</b> – This is not formally collected. However, under new arrangements the information will be collated and reported upon.collected</li> </ul> <p>We currently don't collect this data by skills level, although there will be the ability to collate and analyse this additional information, following full implementation of the improvement monitoring currently being developed.</p> <p>Ongoing consultation and feedback from Foster Carers through regular supervision meetings have identified that all primary foster carers remain unhappy with some aspects of the current financial offer, citing that there has been no increase in skill fees for many years, nor recognition for rising inflation. There is therefore no gender, age, sexual orientation or ethnicity bias on the finding.</p> <p>Feedback from Foster carers has identified their feeling of not being valued based upon the financial reward they receive under their contract and have suggested a financial proposal based on skills level. All foster carers are in full agreement on the areas discussed and support the proposals.</p>
4	<p><b>Summary of the consultation/engagement activities</b></p> <p>Ongoing feedback from Primary Carers is fed back through Supervising Social Worker Supervisions. Supervisions take place 6 weekly with all Foster Carer families.</p>

		<p>On 14 June 2022 a focus group of 9 Carers was held which consisted of potential foster carers in assessment, newly approved foster carers under 1 year and carers at levels 1-3 to enable quality feedback to be gathered on the proposed financial changes. The Focus Group consisted of women aged between 26 to 64 years with white British and Black British Foster Carers represented. 7 of the 9 Foster Carers were either married / co-habiting with 2 foster carers identifying as single. In terms of feedback, all foster carers provided positive feedback on the financial proposals and the skills based payment levels.</p> <p>The proposals to increase the payment for skills and additional allowances applies to every foster carer irrespective of gender, age and ethnicity. No concerns were raised by foster carers in relation to gender, age and ethnicity and the proposals were warmly welcomed by all foster carers who attended the focus group.</p>						
5	<p><b>Real Consideration:</b></p> <p><b>Summary of what the evidence shows and how has it been used</b></p>	<p>Benchmarking has been undertaken and is provided in the report.</p> <p>The Trust's current financial offer for Foster Carers is the lowest of the neighbouring local authorities and is not considered competitive with the Independent Fostering Agencies.</p> <p>There is evidence Foster Carers are submitting intentions to leave the Trust which will have a significant financial impact, thus highlighting the need to review and update the current payment arrangements.</p> <p>The proposals also create two new schemes which all mainstream foster carers will be able to apply for as long as one of them is available all day. Interviews will be undertaken by the Service Manager and Team Managers to ensure foster carers understand the expectations of them. Initial discussions with foster carers have resulted in positive feedback with some foster carers stating they would apply for these schemes.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Issue</th><th>Resolution</th><th>Satisfaction with response</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Portfolio route rather than an informal interview for</td><td>All foster carers under these proposals will prepare their own portfolio</td><td>All foster carers were satisfied</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Issue	Resolution	Satisfaction with response	Portfolio route rather than an informal interview for	All foster carers under these proposals will prepare their own portfolio	All foster carers were satisfied
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		progression through the skill levels	and gather their own evidence prior to presenting this to senior managers by way of a formal interview	Foster carers reported they preferred this approach which will evidence good outcomes for children
		Training programme to be available which is challenging and interesting	Training programme is currently being developed and will be published by end of July 2022. The programme will include specialist training courses as well as a three day PACE attachment based training for all foster carers to attend	All foster carers were satisfied
		Mandatory training for all secondary foster carers	Mandatory training for all primary and secondary carers with refresher training being undertaken every year required to remain on their current skill level.	All foster carers were satisfied
		New payment for Level 2 foster carers – what is the catch?	It is expected that more foster carers will be assessed as Level 2 foster carers than any other skill level. There is no catch and the same process for all levels applies, in that the training pathway for each level needs to be undertaken and refreshed	All foster carers were satisfied and stated they 'loved' this Level

		every year to maintain Level 2 status	
	Paying tax and national insurance	All foster carers need to submit an annual return to HRMC and a large percentage of their fostering payments will be exempt from tax. Foster carers are self employed and are advised to take financial advice. Fostering Network provide specialist accountants who will be invited to foster carers support groups to explain their services and undertake a Q&A session	All foster carers were satisfied

The proposed changes to the Financial policy are based on all Foster carers having equal access to skill payment progression which is based purely on skills, experience and knowledge attained and the training will be available to all approved foster carers. A training record is kept and all foster carers have an individual Personal Development Plan which is reviewed annually by an Independent Fostering Reviewing Officer. Analysis is undertaken to ensure that everyone has equal access to opportunity and any findings will be addressed as part of the supervision meetings with foster carers as well as the Annual Report of the Fostering Service which is presented to the Corporate Parenting Board and also submitted to Ofsted.

Ethnicity: The proposed changes to foster care payment arrangements apply to all foster carers irrespective of ethnicity. No foster carers raised ethnicity as an issue during the consultation.

		<p>Gender: The proposed changes to foster care payment arrangements apply to all foster carers irrespective of gender. No foster carers raised gender as an issue during the consultation.</p> <p>Age: The proposed changes to foster care payment arrangements apply to all foster carers irrespective of age. No foster carers raised age as an issue during the consultation.</p>
<b>6</b>	<b>Decision Making</b>	<p>Senior representatives from DCST have met regularly with the Doncaster Foster Care Association (an independent organisation that represents the interests of Doncaster foster carers) who are in favour of the proposals.</p> <p>The focus group undertaken on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2022 resulted in all foster carers welcoming the proposals.</p> <p>The final decision in regard to the financial review of foster carers payments will be taken by Cabinet, DMBC.</p>
<b>7</b>	<b>Monitoring and Review</b>	<p>Additional monitoring information will be maintained in the future which will enable more effective monitoring at both individual and supervisory level. It is expected that this information will be regularly reviewed by the Service Manager Permanence &amp; Sufficiency and Assistant Director of Children in Care &amp; Permanence on a regular basis as well as through the Parenting Board on an exception basis. The Annual Report of the Fostering Service which is required to be submitted to Ofsted will provide an overview of the movement between the skill levels.</p> <p>The foster carer review process will consider whether the foster carer should remain at their level, progress to the next level or revert to a lower level. It is not expected that many foster carers will revert to lower levels but some may choose to do so. Expectations at level three will be high and some carers may decide to revert to level 2 and take less challenging placements. Foster carers who continue to meet expectations within their level will remain on that level.</p>

8	<b>Sign off and approval for publication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• By signing this statement off as complete I am confirming that I have examined sufficient information across all the protected groups and used that information to show due regard to the three aims of the general duty. This has informed the development of the activity.</li><li>• I acknowledge that this statement accompanies a cabinet paper and will be published as part of the cabinet report publication process.</li><li>• I acknowledge that the any Statement accompanying the cabinet report will also published on the Council website</li></ul> <p>Signed: <u>Rebekah Pearson</u>      Dated: <u>20/06/22</u></p> <p>Interim Head of Service Corporate Parenting</p>
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