



Central Bedfordshire Council
and Bedford Borough Council
working together

Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2009/2010

**Authors : Carol Noble and
Stephanie Bishop**

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in large print and in other languages**

Statement of Purpose – Bedfordshire Fostering Service

This Statement of Purpose arises from Regulation 3 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and Standard 1 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2002.

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1. Background / Context / Status of the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service, together with the Adoption Service, forms the Adoption and Fostering Service, which is part of the Children, Families and Learning Directorate of Central Bedfordshire Council. The Fostering Service is a shared service between Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough Councils. It is hosted by Central Bedfordshire Council. The Fostering Service is based in Franklin Court in Bedford. Within the Fostering Service there are five fostering sections:

- Recruitment and Assessment
- Supervision and Support
- Recruitment and Retention
- Youth Care
- Family Link

2. Aims and Objectives

- To provide a high quality Fostering Service to children, their birth parents, foster carers and social work colleagues.
- To provide foster placements that meets the needs of children requiring such a placement.
- To ensure safe, stable and consistent care for every child placed in foster care.
- To ensure that the ethnic origin, cultural background, religious heritage and language of children are fully recognised, valued and promoted.
- To recruit a range of foster carers from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds to meet the needs of children needing placements.
- To provide support services that promotes and enables the retention of foster carers.
- To ensure that, at all times, the services provided are effective and that practices are clear, open, honest and fair to all Service users.
- To ensure that foster carers are enabled to promote positive outcomes for children placed with them
- To actively promote and support training opportunities for all foster carers.
- To ensure that the Fostering Service meets Fostering Regulations, National Minimum Standards and best practice.

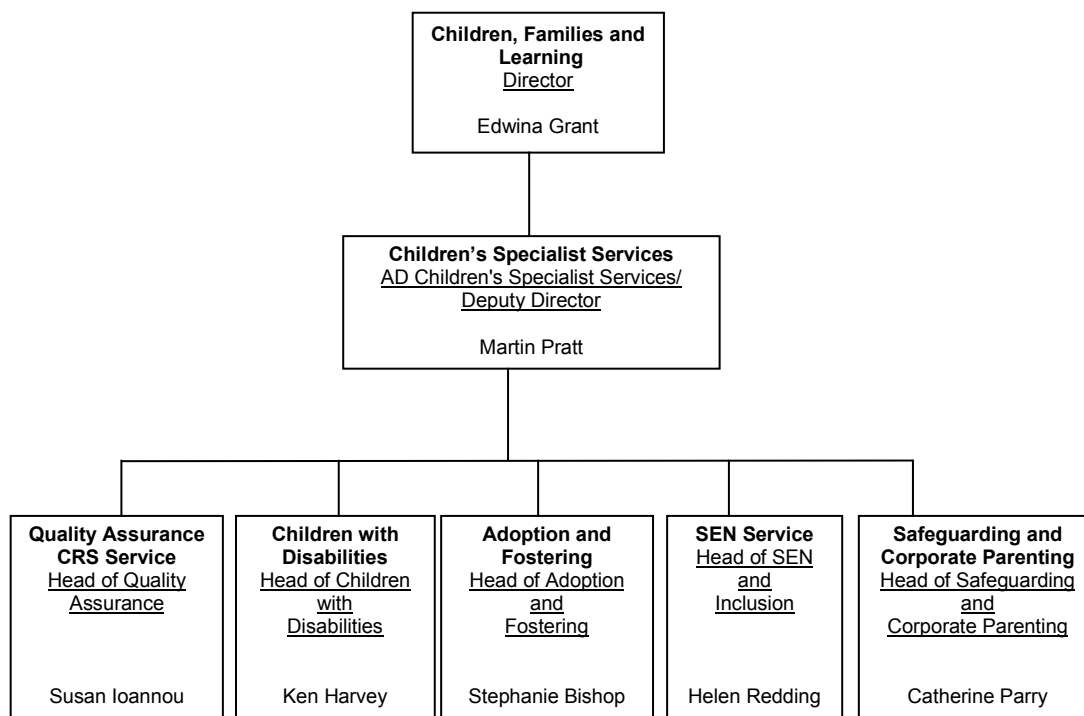
The Fostering Service actively endorses the five outcomes published by the government in 'Every Child Matters':

- Being Healthy
- Staying Safe
- Enjoying and Achieving
- Making a Positive Contribution
- Economic Well-being.

3. Management and Organisational Structure

Ultimate responsibility for the Fostering Service rests with the Councillors. The Adoption and Fostering Service forms part of Central Bedfordshire Council's Children's Services for which the Director of Children, Families and Learning is responsible. The Assistant Director with overall management responsibility for the Fostering Service is the Assistant Director - Children's Specialist Services.

On a day to day basis management responsibility sits with the Head of the Adoption and Fostering Service. The Recruitment and Assessment Team, the Supervision and Support Team, Family Link and Youth Care are managed and supervised by the Team Manager and Deputy Team Manager, who in turn supervise the fostering social workers. Recruitment and Retention has a dedicated Manager. The Panel Professional Adviser is managed and supervised by the Head of Adoption and Fostering.



4. Fostering Services Provided by Central Bedfordshire Council

The **Fostering Service** provides the following services:

- Recruitment, assessment, approval, ongoing training and support of foster carers
- A matching / placement service for the locality teams
- The provision of emergency, short-term and permanent foster placements
- Approval and support as foster carers of family or friends, where this is deemed to be in the best interests of the child
- Support groups to foster carers
- Support groups for foster carers children
- Annual reviews of foster carer's approval
- A Remand Fostering Scheme
- The Family Link Service, offering respite care to families with a disabled child
- The Respite Care Scheme which provides respite care to families with non-disabled children
- An out-of-hours telephone Support Service for foster carers
- An Advice Service to colleagues, other professionals and members of the public on fostering issues

The **Youth Care Team** provides a specialist scheme for teenagers and difficult to place children. They provide placements with foster carers who receive a fee of £385 per week in addition to the expenses for the child. The foster carer and young person also receive 24 hour support, and specialist professional support services. .

The **Family Link Scheme** provides respite care for children with a disability with matched carers who are identified as able to meet their needs. Children are cared for for various amounts of time from day care to overnights or week-long periods.

5. Staffing

In addition to the Head of Service, there is one Team Manager, a Deputy Team Manager, ten senior practitioners and seven social workers, two social work assistants, one graduate trainee and one duty officer staff within the Fostering Service (full and part time). The managers and social workers are all professionally qualified with commensurate social work experience. All staff have a Personal Development Review and have an identified training plan for which training will be provided on a bespoke basis or from Central Bedfordshire Council's comprehensive Learning and Development Programme. The professionally qualified social work staff are supported by a dedicated duty worker who is responsible for taking all initial enquiries and liaising with social workers to process referrals for children or young people requiring a foster placement. In addition, there is a social work assistant, a graduate trainee and four administrative staff.

There is a Recruitment and Retention Manager who supervises a team of three staff who support the recruitment, retention and training function of the Service.

The Service also has a Panel and Agency Adviser who supports the Fostering, Adoption and Permanence Panels.

6. Profile of Foster Carers

On 31 March 2009 the Fostering Service had 126 approved foster carers across the County, including 9 Family Link Carers, 11 Respite Carers, 15 Youth Carers and 1 Remand Carer. Some of the Family Link and Respite Carers also provide short-term or long term foster care. 10 of the approved foster carers were friends and family providing placements for specific named children. Of the 126 carers, 15 households were from black and minority ethnic groups.

7. Profile of Children Placed in Foster Care

On 31 March 2009 , there were 118 children placed in foster care provided by the Fostering Service. In addition children were placed with foster carers approved by other local authorities or independent fostering agencies. The Family Link Scheme currently provides respite care for 17 children with disabilities and the Respite Care Scheme provides care for 7 children.

Successful recruitment of foster carers has enabled Bedfordshire to place children within its own foster homes and the children placed with external agencies are those who were already settled in placement and for whom continuity of placement has been supported.

8. Complaints – Procedures, Numbers & Outcomes

The Fostering Service uses the Children's Services Complaints Policy and Procedure, for dealing with and monitoring complaints by foster carers, birth parents and relatives, staff and other parties with a relevant interest about the Fostering Service.

Complaints and their outcomes are recorded by the Customer Relations Department of the Council, but a central record is also kept within the Fostering Service. This is for statistical purposes and to enable the Service to respond and learn from complaints made. The Council is developing a database which will in future enable customers to make and track a complaint via the Council's website.

Complaints by children are dealt with under the Children's Services Children Act Complaints Procedure, which means a shorter time for responding to children's complaints and the provision of independent advocacy for complainants.

The Complaints Procedure has several stages: Stage 1 applies to local resolution but if this is not achieved, there are two more stages. Information on these further stages is available from the Fostering Service or from Central Bedfordshire's Customer Relations Department.

Complaints About Foster Carers

Complaints about foster carers are also subject to the Children's Services Complaints Procedure. All foster carers, subject to any allegation or complaint, are offered independent support from The Fostering Network's Advice and Mediation Service.

Allegations against Foster Carers

Allegations against foster carers are dealt with in accordance with procedures for managing allegations and concerns about Bedfordshire Foster Carers.

Complaints / Allegations from April 2008 – March 2009

No complaints about the Fostering Service were made concluded during the period. There were six allegations which were investigated under Child Protection Procedures.

9. Procedures / Processes for Recruiting, Approving, Training, Supporting and Reviewing Foster Carers

The Fostering Service has procedures which cover:

- Advertising and Recruitment
- Foster Carer Training, Assessment and Approval
- Ongoing Support and Training
- Reviewing the Approval of Foster Carers
- Appeals Against Refusal or Termination of Approval.

Advertising and Recruitment

Advertisements are placed in relevant publications on a regular basis and preparation courses for people interested in fostering are held every two months.

The Service has a Recruitment and Retention Strategy which is implemented and overseen by the Recruitment and Retention Manager.

Foster Carer Training, Assessment and Approval

Prospective foster carers undergo 'Preparation to Foster' training over four days. Assessments are undertaken by specialist fostering social workers and a written report, using the BAAF Form F, is then presented to the Fostering Panel or Permanence Panel for approval. The Fostering Panel deals with all short term and respite fostering, and the Permanence Panel deals with carers who offer permanent fostering and in addition some fostering work (*see Appendix A for the roles and functions of the Fostering and Permanence Panels*) Prospective foster carers are encouraged to attend the Panel when their application is being discussed. It is the aim of the Fostering Service to complete this process for each applicant within twenty weeks of application.

Ongoing Support and Training

Following approval, all foster carers are allocated a supervising social worker from the Fostering Service, who has contact with the carer at least every six weeks, whether or not they have a child placed with them. Out-of-hours telephone support is also available to all foster carers. The Service has re-instated the Foster Carer Forums, where foster carers have the opportunity to meet and exchange views with senior managers. In addition, the Fostering Service provides two annual social events for foster carers and their children, and recognises the dedication and commitment of their foster carers with annual Long Service Awards. Ongoing training is provided by the Fostering Service, either directly or by encouraging foster carers to attend courses provided by Children's Services.

New carers are offered induction training and a professional mentoring scheme, whereby they receive support and guidance from an experienced foster carer.

The Service also arranges monthly support groups for foster carers and regular events for the children of foster carers.

Reviewing the Approval of Foster Carers

The approval status of all foster carers is reviewed annually or whenever there is a change of circumstances. First annual reviews and those where there is a change of the terms of approval, where there has been a complaint, or allegations, are presented to the Fostering Panel for

agreement to any changes. Foster carers are invited and encouraged to attend Panel for their review.

All other reviews are presented to the Head of Service for a decision about ongoing approval.

Appeals Against Refusal or Termination of Approval

Prospective foster carers who have their application turned down by the Decision Maker, following Panel, or existing foster carers who have their approval withdrawn, or reduced following a review, have the right to appeal against such decisions. The Fostering Service leaflet for carers and prospective carers attending Panel, explains the appeal and independent review process. Applicants can ask panel to reconsider their case or alternatively can ask for an independent review from the national Independent Review Mechanism.

10. Other Relevant Procedures

The Fostering Service also has procedures relating to:

- Child Protection
- Safer Care
- The Establishment, Function and Operation of the Fostering Panel
- Fostering Allowances
- Confidentiality and Security of Information
- Equal Opportunities
- Health and Safety

In addition, there are a number of policies used across all Children's Services as well as Local Children's Safeguarding Board Policies.

11. The Children's Guide

Central Bedfordshire Council produces a 'Living Away From Home' guide for all children who are looked after, including those in foster care. The guide is given to all children over 12 years old, and who are of sufficient understanding to be able to benefit from the information contained in the guide. A copy of the guide is also given to all foster carers. The guide explains what foster care is, a summary of what the Fostering Service sets out to do for children and about children's rights. There is a separate guide for children under 12 years and for children with disabilities. Copies of both these guides can be obtained from the Fostering Service Admin Team, by telephoning 0300 300 8090 or in person from Unit 5, Franklin Court, Priory Business Park, Bedford.

12. Quality Monitoring

The quality of the work of the Fostering Service is monitored at all levels through the staff supervision system. In addition, the Panel Professional Adviser and the Fostering Panel provide a 'quality control' for foster carer assessments, and feedback from consumers comes via foster carer reviews, child care reviews and the complaints procedure.

13. Reviewing the Statement of Purpose

This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually, but may be amended at any time, in the light of major legislative or policy changes. This review will be carried out by the Head of Service of the Adoption and Fostering Service and the Team Manager for Fostering. Any changes to the document will be formally approved by the Children's Specialist Services Senior Management Team and will be notified to the Registration Authority within 28 days.

This statement of purpose will next be reviewed in April 2010.

14. The Registration Authority

The Registration Authority is:

Ofsted
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

Tel: 08456 404040
E-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

The Fostering Service has until now been inspected every year and inspection reports are available from the Fostering Service or on www.ofsted.org.uk

Following the last Ofsted inspection of the service in January 2008 when it was judged "outstanding", it is anticipated that the service will not be inspected until 2011.

15. Contacts

For more information about Fostering in Bedfordshire please contact:

The Adoption and Fostering Service
Unit 5
Franklin Court
Priory Business Park
Stannard Way
Bedford

Tel: 0300 300 8090

For copies of the Children's Guide, the Complaints Procedure or further copies of this Statement of Purpose, please contact the Fostering Service on the contact details above.

If you wish to comment on this Statement of Purpose, on the Fostering Service or make a complaint, please contact:

Head of Service, Adoption and Fostering Service
Tel: 0300 300 8090



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and Bedford Borough Council
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Fostering Service Statement of Purpose

Reviewed April 2009

Approved:

Signed.....

**Edwina Grant
Deputy Chief Executive and
Director of Children, Families and Learning**

Dated.....

Signed.....

**Cllr Mrs Anita Lewis
Portfolio Holder for Children's Services**

Dated.....

APPENDIX A FOSTERING PANEL

The Fostering Panel makes recommendations to the Fostering Service Provider on the following matters:

- to consider each application for approval and recommend whether or not the applicant(s) are suitable to be approved as a foster carer(s);
- where it recommends approval, to recommend the terms on which that approval is given; e.g. ages and number of children;
- to consider all first reviews of foster carers;
- changes to the terms of an approval or termination of approval, following a review;
- consider any representations made by foster carers concerning any change to or termination of their approval;
- to note any exemptions to the usual fostering limit;
- to advise on the procedures under which reviews are carried out and to periodically monitor their effectiveness;
- to oversee the conduct and quality of the assessments carried out by the agency;
- and, to give advice and make recommendations on such other matters or cases as the fostering service provider may refer to it.

PERMANENCE PANEL

The Permanence Panel makes recommendations to the Local Authority and fostering service provider on the following matters:

- to consider whether permanence through fostering is in the best interests of a child under the age of 13 or a child aged 13 plus who is part of a sibling group, including younger children;
- to consider each application for approval and recommend whether or not the applicant(s) are suitable to be approved as permanent foster carer(s);
- where it recommends approval, to recommend the terms on which that approval is given; e.g. ages and number of children;
- to consider whether a prospective foster carer would be a suitable permanent foster carer for a particular child under the age of 13;
- changes to the terms of an approval or termination of approval, following a review;
- to consider any representations made by foster carers concerning any change to or termination of their approval following a review;
- to consider any exemptions to the usual fostering limit in relation to permanent placements;
- to advise on the procedures under which reviews are carried out and to periodically monitor their effectiveness;
- to oversee the conduct and quality of the assessments carried out by the Fostering Service Provider;
- and, to give advice and make recommendations on such other matters or cases as or the fostering service provider may refer to it.

DECISIONS

The Head of Quality Assurance in Central Bedfordshire Council makes decisions on approvals and reviews of all carers and on plans and 'matches' for Central Bedfordshire Children based on the recommendations of the Fostering and Permanence Panels. These decisions are made within 7 working days of the panel meeting. For plans for permanence and "matches" for children for whom Bedford Borough Council is responsible these decisions, based on the recommendations of the Permanence Panel, are made by the Assistant Director Vulnerable Children, in Bedford Borough Council.