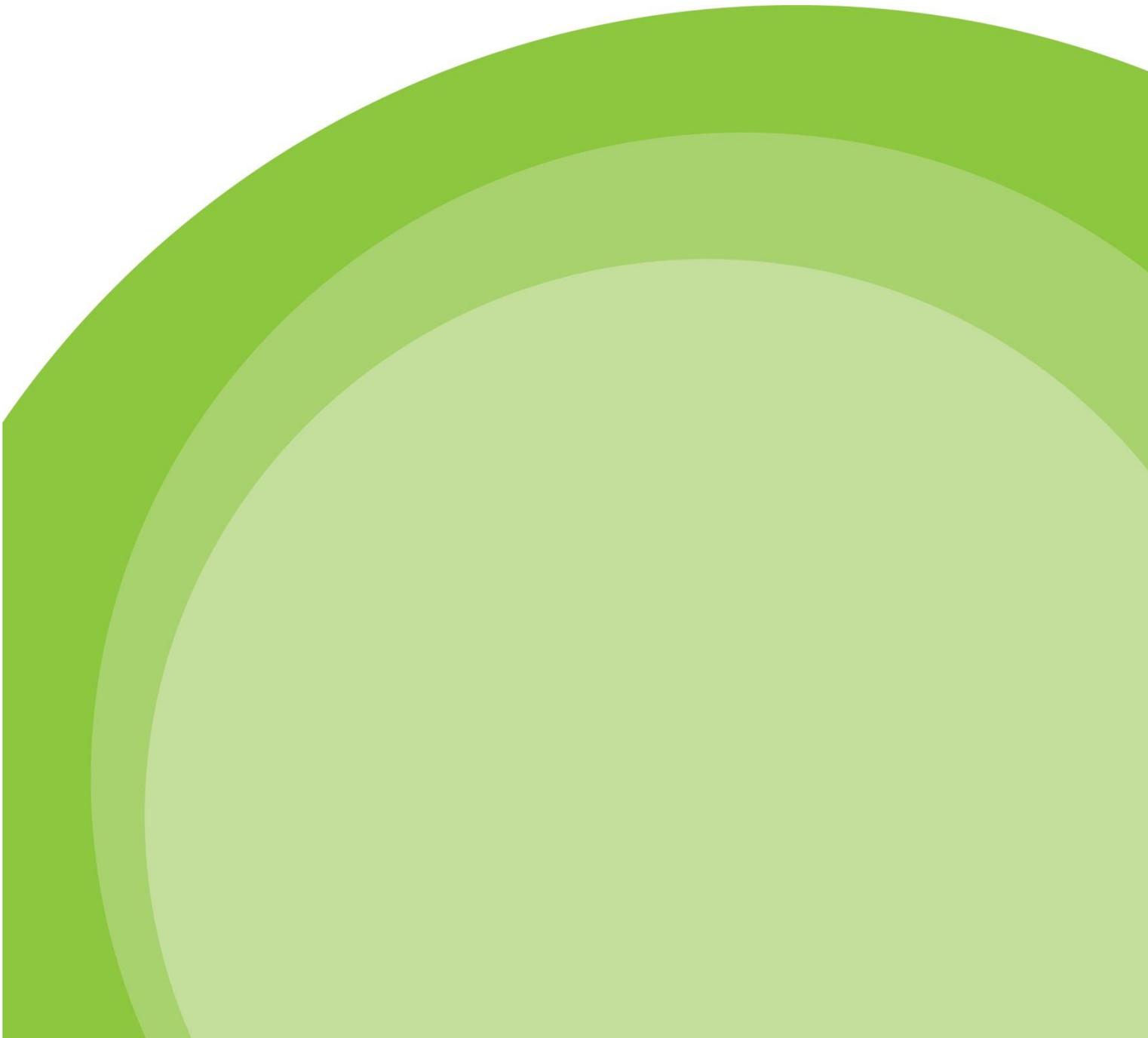




Appendix B

**Fostering Service
Statement of Purpose
2014/15**



Statement of Purpose – Central Bedfordshire Fostering Teams

This Statement of Purpose arises from Regulation 3 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and Standard 16 of the Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011.

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1. Introduction

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and the Fostering Regulations 2011, issued by the Secretary of State under section 23 and 49 of the Care Standards Act 2000, govern the work of fostering service providers throughout England.

Standard 1 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and Regulation 3(1) of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 require a fostering agency to produce a Statement of Purpose which contains a range of detailed information as set out in Standard 1.4. This Statement of Purpose has been prepared in accordance with these arrangements.

The National Minimum Standards (1.3) also requires the registered provider (in the case of a local authority, the elected members) to formally approve the Statement of Purpose of the Fostering Service. The 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 Corporate Parenting Service and Managers in the Fostering Teams. Any changes to the document will be formally approved by elected members and will be notified to the Regulatory Authority within 28 days. This Statement of Purpose will next be reviewed in July 2015.

This Statement of Purpose is available to all foster carers, prospective foster carers, parents and anyone working for the purpose of the Fostering Service and is available on the Council website: www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk. A copy of the Statement of Purpose is also made available to Ofsted, who will also be notified within 28 days of any revisions of the Statement of Purpose.

A Children's guide is available to all children in care, when placed, who are of sufficient understanding to be able to benefit from the information contained in the guide. A copy of the Children's guide is also given to all foster carers. The guide is provided in different formats to meet the needs of different groups of children and sets out to explain what foster care is, it includes a summary of what the Fostering Teams set out to do for children, how a child can secure access to an Independent Advocate and how to complain.

Some of the statistical information included in this Statement of Purpose relates to activities undertaken in the previous year 2013/2014. During 2013 Central Bedfordshire Council's hosted a Fostering Service as a shared one on behalf of Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council. The statistical information included in this report, therefore, reflects the activities of the joint service up until 31 December 2013. As of the 1st January 2014 Central Bedfordshire Fostering Teams operated as a single agency.

2. Status and Constitution

Central Bedfordshire Council's Fostering Teams are part of the Corporate Parenting Service within Children's Services and comply with its policies and procedures. Policies and procedures specific to fostering comply with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, the Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011 and the Children Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations: Volume 4:Fostering Services. Procedures cover the recruitment, training, approval, support and review of foster carers and the operation of the Fostering Panel. All policies/procedures are accessible to foster carers and staff via Tri-ex and accurately reflect the Statement of Purpose.

3. Aims and Objectives

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

4. Management and Staff Structure

The ultimate responsibility for the Fostering Teams rest with the Elected Members.

The Assistant Director gives strategic leadership to Children's Services and is one of the Agency Decision Makers for the Fostering Panel.

The Head of Corporate Parenting Service co-ordinates the activities of the Fostering Teams with those of Children in Care social work and Adoption Team, and promotes partnership working across Children's Services and partner agencies

The Practice Manager for Fostering provides operational management, quality assurance, performance and budget management and co-ordinates the work of the two Fostering Teams. In addition to supervising the work of the two Fostering Team Managers, the Practice Manager also supervises/manages the work of the Marketing and Recruitment Officer and Training Officer whose work covers both fostering and adoption.

The Panel Adviser for the Fostering and Permanence Panel is supervised by the Adoption Practice Manager. The Practice Manager also reports to senior managers on service activities and issues of concern.

Team Managers are responsible for the day to day management of Social Workers recruiting, assessing and supervising foster carers, matching of children to available carers, dealing with complaints and representations and producing activity reports and statistical returns.

Both Team Managers provide regular supervision to their respective team of Social Workers/Social Work Assistants. As part of the Corporate Parenting Service they work closely with the Marketing and Recruitment Officer and the other teams in relation to Resources/ Adoption/ Children in Care/ Court/ Leaving Care as well as liaising with the Disabled Children's Team/Early Intervention Teams and partner agencies.

The Practice/Team Managers and all social workers are professionally qualified with commensurate social work experience. All staff have a Personal Development Review (P.D.R.) and have an identified training plan for which training will be provided on a bespoke basis or from Central Bedfordshire Council's Learning and Development Programme. In addition to the Social Workers and Social Work Assistants the team is supported by two FTE administrative staff. A structure of the service is attached in Appendix A.

5. Services provided by the Fostering Team

In line with the Fostering Teams aims and objectives, a range of services are provided to children, young people and foster carers.

Services provided include:

Short term placements

Central Bedfordshire Fostering Teams provide placements for children from 0-18 years, to meet the needs of both emergency and planned admissions following referrals from Early Intervention or Children in Care Teams. Short term placements may last from a few days, up to two years and may be used to work towards a child's return home or to complete care proceedings and put in plans for permanence. Foster carers receive an allowance to cover the cost of caring for children in their care as well as a fee. The fee carers receive depends on which tier they are on and this is determined by length of service and whether they have completed their Training, Support and Development Standards (T.S.D.'s).

Respite Placements

Respite foster carers are approved foster carers who choose to offer placements on a very time-limited basis only. This may be through choice or because of limitations in their availability. Most respite carers have full or part –time jobs.

Respite carers offer placements to parents or carers of children living in the community where their assessed needs indicate a benefit from respite care away from their family. This may be to relieve family stress, or to do some direct work with a challenging young person.

Respite carers also offer respite care to children cared for by other foster carers.

Family Link Placements

The Family Link Scheme provides short breaks for children with a disability with matched carers who are identified as able to meet their needs. Children are provided with care for various amounts of time from day care to overnights or week long periods. Family link carers are approved foster carers. They receive general and specific information and training regarding their role as a family link carer in one to one sessions and workshops. They are provided with specific information about the disability of the child they are linked to. Opportunities to gain experience through visits to other services for disabled children's departments are offered where appropriate. Guidance from relevant health professionals is offered in relation to specific health needs of the child e.g. specialised nurses and occupational therapists.

Family Link carers are matched to a specific child or children and planning meetings are held with the parents to make all the arrangements for the nature of the short break e.g. whether day care, or overnight, and to share information about the child's needs.

Short breaks may be offered for up to 75 days per year, but the normal maximum does not exceed 48 days. Typically, the scheme offers one weekend a month, day care and additional sessions during the long summer months.

The Service also has a number of self employed carers who are available full time to care for up to 7 children on a rota basis; these carers receive an enhanced fee to care for these children.

Youth Care Placements

Youth Care foster carers provide specialist placements for 10-18 year olds who may have complex needs and are difficult to place. As well as receiving an enhanced fee to general foster carers they receive specialist and more frequent supervision, support groups and other support services.

Family and Friends Care (Connected Persons) Placements

It is an underlying principle that children should be enabled to live within their families unless this is not consistent with their welfare. Children's Services, therefore, work to maintain children within their own family, and facilitate services to support such arrangements, whenever this is consistent with the child's safety and wellbeing. When children cannot live within their immediate family and the Local Authority is considering the need to look after the child, social workers will make strenuous efforts to identify potential carers within the child's network of family or friends who are able and willing to care for the child, whether this be in an emergency situation or in a planned way.

Although the assessment process and timescales are different for family and friends carers (connected persons) these carers still receive similar levels of support to general carers albeit more specialist.

In addition to the services outlined above the Fostering Teams also provide the following services:

Recruitment, assessment, approval, on-going training, supervision and review of foster carers

- A matching/placement service for the social work teams in Central Bedfordshire Council.
- Support Groups for foster carers, including a Family & Friends Support Group.
- Support Groups for foster carers' children.
- Annual awards event and other social events.
- Mentoring Scheme for newly approved foster carers or those requiring additional support e.g. following an allegation.
- 'Talk time' forum – an opportunity for foster carers to meet with senior managers regarding fostering issues.
- 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.

6. Profile of Foster Carers

On 31 March 2014 the Fostering Teams had 95 fostering households which included 7 Family Link households, 7 Respite households, 6 Youth Care households, 9 households offering long term care and 27 Family and Friends households, the remaining 46 households were carers offering short term/emergency care. Of the 95 households this equated to 156 foster carers. Out of the 156 foster carers 137 described their ethnicity as white, 11 were Black/Caribbean, 6 were Black/African 1 described themselves as Black Other and the remaining 1 described themselves as Mixed/Other.

7. Profile of Children Placed in Foster Care

On 31 March 2014, there were 96 children placed with Central Bedfordshire foster carers, which included 14 children from other Local Authorities (13 from Bedford Borough and 1 from Luton Borough). The Family Link Scheme was providing short breaks for 10 children with disabilities. There were 4 children placed in Youth Care placements.

In terms of ethnicity of the children placed 81 were described as white, 12 were described as being from a mixed ethnic group and 3 were described as black/other.

8. Complaints

The Fostering Team 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 way fostering services are provided.

Complaints and their outcomes are recorded by the Customer Relations Department of the Council, but a central record is also kept within the Fostering Team. This is for statistical purposes and to enable the Team to respond and learn from complaints made.

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 against Foster Carers

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

Between 01 April 2013 and the 31 March 2014 there were 4 complaints made about the Fostering Team (1 from a child, 2 from foster carers and 1 from another professional). Out of these 4 complaints 3 were either upheld or partially upheld).

9. Allegations against Foster Carers

Allegations against foster carers are dealt with in accordance with Local Safeguarding Children's Board procedures for managing allegations and concerns about Foster Carers. All foster carers, subject to any allegation, are offered independent support from the Fostering Network's Advise and Mediation Service.

Between 01 April 2013 and the 31 March 2014 there were 7 allegations of misconduct made against foster carers. None of these required reporting to the Independent Safeguarding Authority and no Section 47 enquiries were made involving allegations against foster carers.

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

The Fostering Teams have procedures which cover:

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

Recruitment and Marketing

Recruitment and marketing activities have taken place throughout the year and have included adverts/stories in the press, use of on-line recruitment/marketing and face-to-face recruitment events.

The Teams have a Marketing and Recruitment Strategy which informs the recruitment and marketing activities within the teams and is overseen by the Team Manager.

Foster Carer Assessment and Approval

Prospective foster carers are assessed in line with the two Stage Assessment Process which includes attending in depth 'Skills to Foster' preparation training. Assessments are undertaken by fostering social workers and a written report, using the BAAF Form F, is then presented to the Fostering & Permanence Panel for a recommendation about approval. The Panel deals with all short term, respite and permanent fostering. Prospective foster carers are encouraged to attend the Panel when their application is being discussed. It is the aim of the Fostering Teams to complete this process for each applicant within twenty weeks of application.

The Fostering and Permanence Panel

Central Bedfordshire Fostering Teams are compliant with the Fostering Service Regulations 2011. According to these regulations, all fostering services have to set up a Fostering Panel to carry out the following duties:

- To consider applications and to recommend whether or not applicants are suitable to be approved as foster carers.
- Recommend the terms on which fostering approval is to be given (i.e. the number of children/young people, types of placements).
- Consider foster carer annual reviews: The first review of newly approved foster carers will be presented to the panel and any subsequent reviews referred to it by the fostering team.
- To give advice and make recommendations regarding any other matter referred to them by the fostering team.
- To oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering team.

Ongoing Support and Training

Following approval, all foster carers are allocated a supervising social worker from one of the Fostering Teams, who has supervision 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 Teams have quarterly Foster Carer Forums ('Talk Time'), where foster carers have the opportunity to meet and exchange views with senior managers. In addition, the Fostering Teams provide periodic social events for foster carers and their children, and recognises the dedication and commitment of their foster carers with an annual Awards event. Ongoing training is provided by the Fostering Teams, 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 additional support and guidance from an experienced foster carer.

Foster carers have access to the Foster Carers Handbook which contains useful information for foster carers in relation to fostering issues

Foster carers are required to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards (T.S.D.'s) within the first 12 months of being approved. The Fostering Teams provide the necessary support to foster carers (via regular workshops and meetings with supervising asocial workers) to meet the T.S.D. standards and complete their portfolios.

The Teams also arrange various monthly support groups for foster carers and regular events for the children of foster carers.

Foster carers also run their own Foster Care Association which is supported by Central Bedfordshire Council.

Reviewing the Approval of Foster Carers

The approval status of all foster carers is reviewed annually or whenever there is a change of circumstances or concern about the standard of care. First Annual Reviews and those where there is a change in carer's terms of approval or where there have been a complaint or allegation are presented to the Fostering and Permanence Panel for consideration. Foster carers are invited and encouraged to attend Panel for their Review.

All other Reviews are presented to the Manager of the Fostering Teams for a decision about ongoing approval.

Appeals against Refusal or Termination of Approval

Prospective foster carers whose application to foster is not approved by the Decision Maker following Panel, or existing foster carers who have their approval withdrawn, or amended following a Review, have the right to appeal against such decisions. The Fostering Teams leaflet for carers and prospective carers attending Panel, explains the Appeal and Independent Review Mechanism process. Applicants can ask Panel to reconsider their case or alternatively can ask for an independent review from the national Independent Review Mechanism.

Connected Persons (Family & Friends carers)

The Fostering Teams also assess, approve and support Connected Persons in line with the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2013. The Fostering & Permanence Panel recommends suitability following the Temporary Approval assessment as well as the full (Connected Persons) fostering assessment. Once a Connected Person has been approved as a Foster Carer, they receive a similar level of support and supervision as mainstream foster carers (although, more specialist), including access to the Family & Friends Support Group and a Foster Carer Mentor.

11. Other Relevant Procedures

The Fostering Teams also have a range of procedures including:

- Child Protection & Safeguarding
- 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.

12. Quality Monitoring

The quality of the work of the Fostering Teams are monitored at all levels through the staff supervision system. In addition, the Panel Professional Adviser and the Fostering and Permanence Panel provide quality control' for foster carer assessments, and feedback from consumers comes via Foster Carer Reviews, Child Care Reviews and the complaints procedure. There are regular audits of case records. The Registered Manager for the Fostering Agency (Team Manager) completes a monthly monitoring check, which includes collating notifications, concerns and complaints and sampling records

13. The Registration Authority

The Regulatory Authority is:

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

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

The Fostering Teams are subject to regular inspection and inspection reports are available from the Fostering Teams or on www.ofsted.org.uk

14. Contacts

For more information about Fostering in Central Bedfordshire please contact:

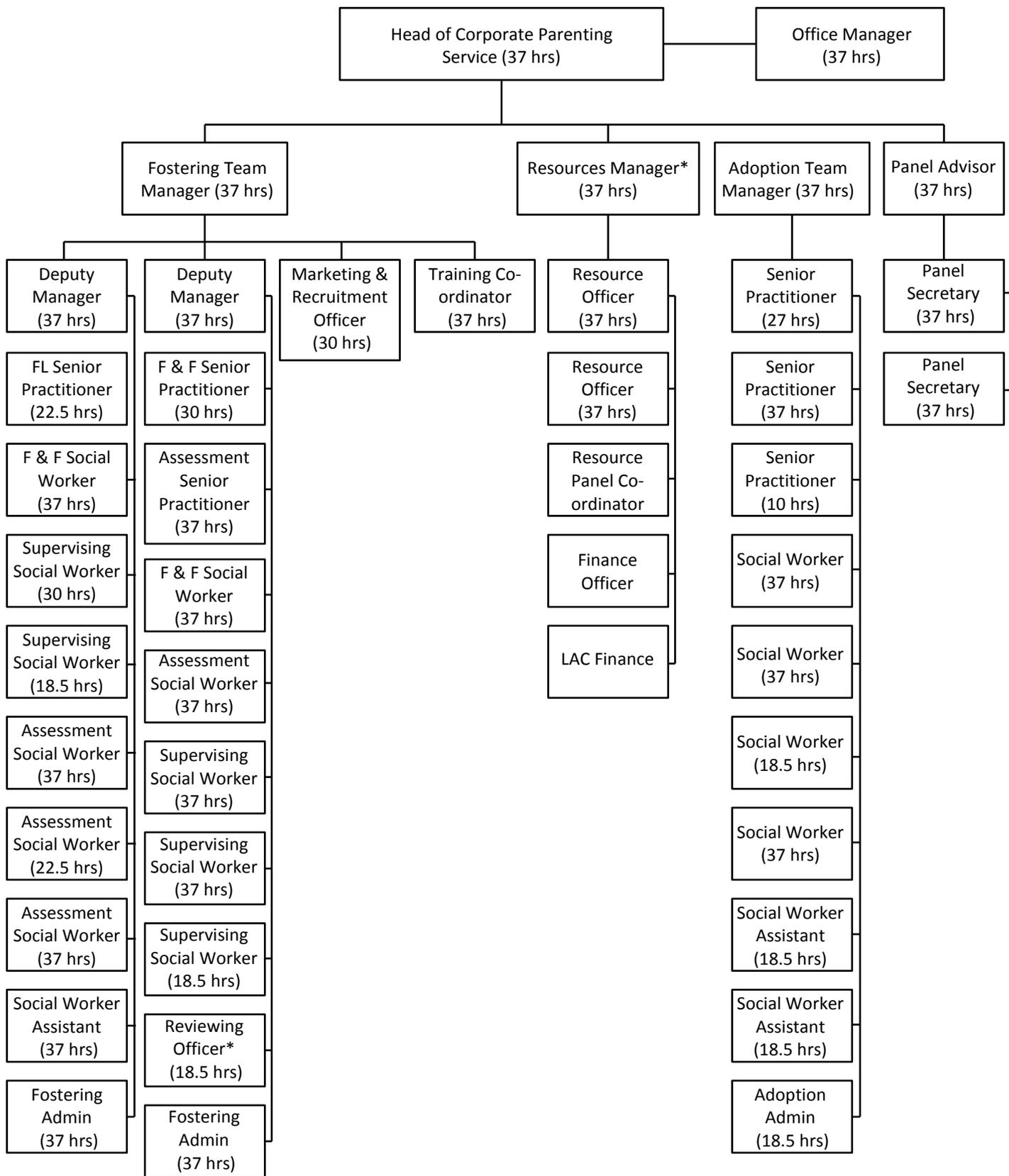
Fostering Team
Corporate Parenting Service
Central Bedfordshire Council
Unit 16 Stephenson Court
Fraser Road
Priory Business Court
Bedford MK44 3WJ

Tel: 0300 300 8090

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

If you would like further information or wish to comment on this Statement of Purpose, please do not hesitate to contact the Fostering Team, in writing or on the phone using the contact information outlined above. Your interest and comments are welcome.

Appendix A – Structure of the Service



* Vacant post
 F & F Family and Friends
 FL Family Link



Fostering Service Statement of Purpose

2014 - 2015

Approved:

Signed.....

**Sue Harrison
Director of Children's Services**

Dated.....

Signed.....

**Cllr Mark Versallion
Executive Member for Children's Services**

Dated.....