



Fostering Service

Statement of purpose

1 April 2015

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.

CONTENTS

1. Introduction
 2. Status and Constitution
 3. Aims and Objectives
 4. Management and Staff Structure
 5. Services Provided by the Fostering Teams
 6. Profile of Foster Carers
 7. Profile of Children Placed in Foster Care
 8. Complaints
 9. Allegations
 10. Procedures / Processes for Recruiting, Approving, Training, Supporting and Reviewing Foster Carers
 11. Other Relevant Procedures
 12. Quality Monitoring
 13. The Registration Authority
 14. Contacts
- Appendix A: Structure of the Service

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 be reviewed annually.

This Statement of Purpose is available to children and young people in care, their parents, all prospective/foster carers and anyone working for the purpose of the Fostering Service and is available on the Council website: www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk.

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 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.

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.

<http://centralbedfordshirechildcare.proceduresonline.com>

Aims and Objectives

Our primary aim is to give children and young people the opportunity to achieve their full potential and to live fulfilling lives in the community.

- To do everything possible to ensure safe, stable and consistent placements, free from disruption where children and young peoples needs are understood and met
- To ensure that the ethnic origin, cultural background, religious heritage and language of children are fully recognised, valued and promoted
- To recruit foster carers from a wide range of backgrounds in order to provide appropriate placements for children and young people
- To provide support services that promote and enable the retention of foster carers
- A commitment to the ongoing training and development of Central Bedfordshire foster carers

To ensure that the workforce of managers, practitioners and support staff are appropriately qualified and registered with their professional regulatory councils, as well as being supported in continuous professional development

3. Management and Staff Structure

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

The Assistant Director then gives strategic leadership to Children's Services.

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

The Practice Manager for Fostering is the registered manager in accordance with Care Standards legislation and 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 Fostering Team Managers, the Practice Manager supervises/manages the work of the Recruitment and Training Officer, Recruitment and Training Business Support Officer as well as the Panel Advisers for the Fostering and Permanence Panel. 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 Assistant. As part of the Corporate Parenting Service they work closely with the Recruitment and Training Officer and other teams within the Corporate Parenting Service as well as liaising with the Children with Disabilities Team/Early Intervention Teams and partner agencies.

The Practice/Team Managers and all social workers are professionally qualified and registered with HCPC. Many have post qualifying specialist awards and experience related to working with children and young people in foster care. Staff participate in an annual Personal Development Review (Your Year) and Central Bedfordshire Council's Learning and Development Team provides bespoke training that meets the identified training needs of staff as well as providing more general corporate training. In addition to the Social Workers and Social Work Assistant the team is supported by two FTE administrative staff who are supervised by the team managers. A part time clinical psychologist has been in post since April 2015 and has provided supportive consultations to carers, LAC social workers and supervising social workers. This person has access to external clinical supervision as well as organisational line management from the Practice Manager. 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. 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 Family Link Plus 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.

Staying Put Placements

Staying Put Placements enable Care Leavers aged 18 and above to remain living with their Former Foster Carers until they are prepared for adulthood. It allows them to experience a transition akin to their peers, avoids social exclusion and helps to avert subsequent housing and tenancy breakdowns. Carers will still remain as foster carers if they are caring for other looked after children, if not, although they will no longer need to be approved as foster carers key standards will continue to govern the expectations of the Staying Put arrangement. Fostering allowances cease in these arrangements and payments to the former foster carers will be made under the Staying Put Scheme.

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.
- Local Support Groups for foster carers.
- Support Groups/events for foster carers' children.
- Annual Celebration of Fostering 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.
- Assessment and post support service to Special Guardianship Order carers (S.G.O.'s).

6. Profile of Foster Carers

On 31 March 2015 the Fostering Teams had 105 fostering households which included 7 Family Link households, 6 specific respite households, 6 Youth Care households and 28 Family and Friends households, the remaining 58 households were carers offering a mixture of short term/long term and emergency care. Of the 105 households this equated to 192 foster carers. Out of the 192 foster carers 169 described their ethnicity as White/British, 2 as White/Irish, 1 as White/European, 5 as White/Other, 4 as Black/Caribbean, 5 as Black/African, 3 as Asian/Indian, 1 as Mixed/Black, 1 as White/Black and 1 as Other.

7. Profile of Children Placed in Foster Care

On 31 March 2015, there were 106 children placed with Central Bedfordshire foster carers. The Family Link Scheme was providing short breaks for 10 children with disabilities with 4 children and 1 adult being linked to the salaried family link fee based carers. There were 8 children placed in Youth Care placements.

In terms of ethnicity of the children placed 78 were described as White/British, 4 as White/European, 1 as White/Traveller, 1 as White/Black Caribbean, 1 as White/Asian, 2 as White/Other, 1 as Asian, 3 as Asian/British, 3 as Asian/Pakistani, 1 as British/Black Caribbean, 4 as Black/African, 1 as Black/British, 1 as Eritrean, 1 as Iranian, 2 as Kurdish

and 2 as Mixed race.

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 1 April 2014 and the 31 March 2015 there were 6 complaints made about the Fostering Team (2 from a birth parent/family member, 3 from existing foster carers and 1 from a prospective foster carer. Out of these complaints the overall outcomes were that 2 complaints were upheld and 4 were partially upheld.

8. 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 1 April 2014 and the 31 March 2015 there were 4 allegations of misconduct made against foster carers. One Section 47 enquiry was made in May 2014 regarding C.B.C. Family and Friends Foster Carers living in Wales in relation to 2 children aged 7 and 6. The concerns were in relation to emotional and physical abuse. The children were removed and the outcome of the Section 47 enquiry was that the allegations were substantiated and the foster carer's approval was terminated. The 3 other allegations made were referred to the L.A.D.O (Local Authority Designated Officer) but did not reach the threshold for investigation.

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

The Fostering Teams have procedures which cover:

- Fostering and Permanence Panel
- Persons Disqualified from Fostering
- Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers
- Exemptions and Extensions/Variations to Foster Carers Approval
- Supervision and Support to Foster Carers
- Review and Terminations of Approvals of Foster Carers
- Allegations against Foster Carers

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, Recruitment and Retention Strategy which informs the recruitment and marketing activities within the teams and is overseen by the Practice Manager.

Foster Carer Assessment and Approval

Prospective foster carers are assessed in line with the two Stage Assessment Process which includes attending the '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 including Family and Friends (Connected Persons) assessments. 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 every six weeks (this may be less if the carers provide infrequent respite or do not have any children in placement). 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 'Celebration of Fostering' 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. This support is also offered to experienced carers when they need additional support, for example, if an allegation has been made against them.

Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) also pay for all in house foster carers to have individual membership with Fostering Network, allowing them access to an unlimited and extensive range of independent support services.

Foster carers are currently provided with Max cards which provide discounts on a range of attractions and family friendly activities both nationally and locally.

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 social workers) to meet the T.S.D. standards and complete their portfolios.

The Fostering Teams 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 carers' 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 Practice Manager of the Fostering Teams for a decision about ongoing approval.

The foster carer review officer sits within the Professional Standards Service providing independent scrutiny and challenge to the service.

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.

10. 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. All these policies are accessed by staff and foster carers at <http://centralbedfordshirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/>

11. Quality Monitoring

The quality of all work produced by the Fostering Teams is monitored at all levels. Staff receive regular supervision where their work is discussed and cases monitored. Manager's quality assure all assessments/reviews/reports that have to be presented to panel or court. In addition, the Panel Professional Adviser, the Fostering and Permanence Panel and the A.D.M. provide a quality assurance role for all cases that are presented to panel. Regular peer and external audits of foster carers' files are undertaken. Feedback from various parties is also provided as part of the Foster Carer Review process, from Child Care Reviews and via the complaints/comments/ compliments process. The Registered Manager for the Fostering Agency (Practice Manager) completes a monthly monitoring check (highlight report), which includes collating notifications, concerns and complaints and sampling records.

12. The Registration Authority

The Regulatory Authority is:

Ofsted
Ofsted National Business Unit
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M12 WD

Tel: 0300 123 1231
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

13. 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

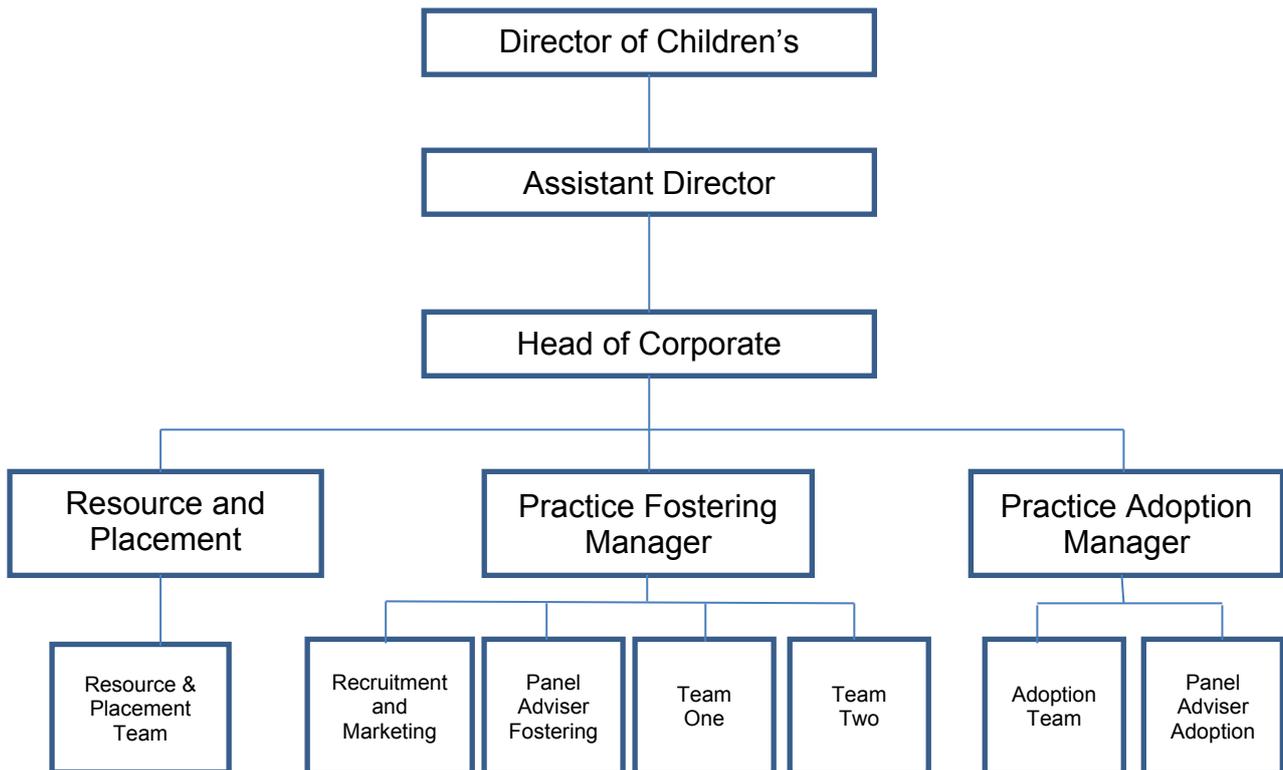
Tel: 0300 300 8090

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 Teams, in writing or on the phone using the contact information outlined above. Your interest and comments are welcome.

This document can be supplied in large print and in other languages.

Appendix A – Structure of the Service





Fostering Service Statement of Purpose

April 2015

Approved:

Signed.....

Susan Harrison

Director of Children's Services

Dated.....

Signed.....

Cllr Carole Hegley

Executive Member for Children's Services

Dated.....