

WEST BERKSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL FOSTERING SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE – 2005-2006

Aims and Objectives of the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service exists to provide high quality locally based substitute family care, on either a short or long term basis; to meet the needs of looked after children and young people who are unable to live with their birth parents. The service also supports some children within their families of origin by providing regular periods of family-based short breaks care.

The service is committed to ensuring that the foster care services provided for children and young people and their families value diversity and promote equality. Each child and their family will have access to services which recognise and address their needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality. The service seeks to ensure that foster carers provide care that respects and preserves each child's unique history and enhances the child's confidence and feelings of self worth.

The service aims to provide (either directly or via work with partner agencies) services which meet the individual needs of Looked After Children, as identified through the assessment, care planning and reviewing processes. This includes the identification and provision of necessary additional services and supports e.g. education, health, psychotherapeutic and youth work services. The service aims to maximise young people's life chances by providing them with positive childhood experiences and the opportunity to reach their full potential as they move towards adulthood.

The service is committed to consulting with children, young people, their parents, foster carers and carers' birth children, and to ensuring that the views of all relevant parties are taken into account in both individual care planning and in service development. Wherever possible people within the child or young person's network of family and friends are assessed and supported as their foster carers.

The service regards foster carers as members of the professional care team. It is committed to providing foster carers with the support and training necessary to enable them to offer high quality care to all children and young people who are in receipt of family placement services.

The service meets the National Minimum Standards and Regulations for Fostering Services (2002) as well as recognising the UK National Standards for Foster Care (1999).

The Family Placement Team

The Fostering Service is provided by the Family Placement Team of West Berkshire District Council. Other services provided by the Family Placement Team are:

- The Adoption Service
- Private fostering services
- Supported accommodation (lodgings)
- Identification and oversight of placements with Independent Fostering Providers

The vision of the team is:

That West Berkshire will be regarded as having one of the best family placement teams in the country, offering a range of high quality and innovative services that provide safe and stable placements for children and young people. This will be achieved by a skilled, dedicated and motivated team of staff, carers and adopters working together, in partnership with a range of service providers, to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and young people. The Family Placement Team will be a valuable source of specialist knowledge within Children's Services. It will continually evaluate effectiveness and involve users and carers in planning and development to make sure the highest standards are maintained.

The core values of the team are:

1. That the needs of the children and young people are always paramount
2. That promoting equality and valuing diversity underpins all our practice
3. To work to achieve the highest professional standards
4. To work in partnership

Services and Facilities provided by the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service currently offers:

- Planned and emergency foster care for individual children and sibling groups of all ages, including specialist care for disabled children, across the full range of short and long term placements, and relief care when necessary for established placements.
- Family based day and overnight short breaks care for children and young people and their families including specialist care to meet the needs of disabled children.
- Supported accommodation for young people aged 16+ who are looked after.
- Mother and baby placements.

The Fostering Service supports this by providing:

- Close links with the Department's children and families' teams to ensure integrated planning and provision of services for individual service users and effective service development work.
- Skilled staff with the knowledge and experience to help ensure that the service provided is safe and appropriate for all potential service users.
- Appropriately trained and experienced social work and support staff to provide all foster carers with a named supervising worker. These workers provide ongoing supervision, support, information and advice to foster carers. They also promote foster carers training and professional development needs.
- A proactive recruitment and retention strategy for foster carers that seeks to maximise the number and range of foster carers available locally, and thus ensure that there is appropriate local placement choice wherever possible.

- An effectively administered payments scheme, that covers the financial costs of caring for children and young people.
- A training programme for all new and existing foster carers, including the NVQ social care programme for experienced foster carers.
- Assessments of prospective foster carers that are in line with national standards, including preparatory training in groups and individual assessments of prospective foster carers and their households.
- A properly constituted fostering panel with an independent chairperson, administered in line with regulatory requirements. This panel, which meets at least monthly, considers and makes recommendations to the agency decision maker about:
 - the approval of all new fostering applicants;
 - first reviews after approval
 - requests for changes to the approval status of existing foster carers;
 - matches of children and foster carers for long term fostering placements;
 - allegations, complaints and issues of serious concern relating to foster carers;
 It also considers the approval of supported accommodation carers and the acceptance of private fostering arrangements.
- Annual reviews of the performance, training needs, terms of approval and continued registration of all approved foster carers and their households.
- Access for foster carers to an out of office hours telephone support service in addition to the services of the Berkshire Emergency Duty Team.
- Support and guidance from the Looked After Children's Nurse, the Teacher for Looked After Children, the Youth Worker for Looked After Children and the Assistant Literacy Mentor for Looked After Children.
- Provision for 'child sitting' to enable foster carers to have occasional evenings out.
- Support to the West Berkshire Foster Carers' Association

Management and Staffing Structure – 2005

The Registered Manager of the Fostering Service is the Family Placement Team Manager, Maggie Short, who reports to the Children's Service Manager, Lorna Hunt.

The Agency Decision Maker is the Head of Children's Services.

The full establishment of the Family Placement Team is:

- 1 Team Manager
- 2 Assistant Team Managers
- 7 FTE Family Placement Social Workers
- 2.4 FTE Family Support Workers
- 1 Post-adoption Support Social Worker
- 1 Publicity and Recruitment Worker
- 3.3 FTE Support Services Staff

All members of the team work across both the Adoption and the Fostering Services and other Family Placement Team responsibilities. All social work staff within the Family Placement Team who undertake fostering work have a good understanding of fostering issues and regularly attend additional training events to maintain and extend their knowledge base.

Staffing Position as at 01 September 2005

Position	Name	Hours	Qualifications	Notes
Team Manager	Maggie Short	FT	BA (Hons), CQSW, NVQ 4 Management	
Assistant Team Managers	Alison Hynes	FT	Dip in Applied Soc Studies, PQCCA	
	June Kemp	FT	CSS, PQ1	
Social Workers	Sue Bartlett	30	DipSw, NVQ 4 Social Care	Seconded to another team
	Fiona Crute	30	BA (Hons), DipSw, Post Grad Dip in Counselling, PQ1	
	Clare Evans	18	MSW, BSc (Hons), DipSw, PQ1	Maternity leave
	Lucy Hughes	FT	BA, CQSW, CPE, LPC	
	Keith Langley	FT	DipSw, NVQ 4 in Care	
	Mandy Senior	FT	DipSw, NVQ 4 in Care	
	Cheree Tham	FT	MSW, BSW	Starts 26.09.05
	Vacancy	FT		
Post-adoption Support Social Worker	Vacancy	FT		
Family Placement Support Workers	Kate Coffey	30	BTEC Nat Dip in ChildCare	
	Andy Blackwood	30	Cert in Education Teaching	
	Ann Athawes	30	-	
Publicity and Recruitment Worker	John North	FT	-	
Snr Support Services Officer	Helen Benn	30		
Support Services Officers	Andrea Martin	17.5		
	Peter Clark	FT		
Support Services Assistant	Karen Hugo	13		
	Pat Tillen	29		

Numbers of Foster Carers and Children Placed

As at 9 February 2006 there were:

- 65 approved fostering households plus 8 households offering day care only.
- 65 looked after children and young people placed full time with West Berkshire approved foster carers. (includes 2 from other local authorities), plus 3 young people aged 18+
- 6 children receive overnight short breaks care
- 8 children receive day care only

- 13 looked after children and young people are placed with family and friends carers who have been approved as foster carers.

Number of Complaints and their Outcomes

All foster carers and looked after children and young people and their parents are encouraged to make effective representations about any aspect of the fostering service. They are provided with written information about complaint procedures, including contact details for the Social Services Complaints Officer. All complaints and their outcomes are monitored by both the Complaints Officer and the Family Placement Team Manager.

The Children's Guide to the Fostering Service is given to all children and young people at the start of their placement and foster carers also have copies. This includes contact details for the Complaints Officer, the Rights for You service and the Commission for Social Care Inspection. The West Berkshire Independent Visitors Scheme is available to all looked after children and young people at their own or their social worker's request.

During the last year (2004 – 2005) there were 7 complaints made with a connection to the Fostering Service. All, except one, were successfully resolved informally within the required time scales. The exception was investigated independently. There have been no child protection allegations during the past year.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

The Fostering Service has developed a recruitment and retention strategy designed to maximise capacity, retain foster carers, meet current identified needs, plan for future projected requirements and place children and young people locally wherever possible.

A Publicity and Recruitment Worker has been appointed with the specific objective of raising local awareness of the on-going need for foster carers and supported accommodation (lodgings) carers and of developing and implementing a targeted recruitment strategy. In particular, the placement of children and young people aged 11 years and over for whom there is currently a shortage of placements.

Additionally, in line with the Department's broader strategy of maintaining children and young people within their birth family networks whenever possible, the fostering service works to promote and enable the use of families and friends carers wherever appropriate.

Approval of Foster Carers

The approval process for foster carers meets the requirements of the National Minimum Standards and Regulations for Fostering Services 2002.

Assessments of foster carers follow the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering Form F format. The assessment and approval process involves and considers all members of the applicant's household plus significant others (e.g. birth children living elsewhere) as appropriate.

A range of employment, health and personal references are obtained and verified regarding the applicant's suitability as a foster carer and enhanced Criminal Record Bureau and other government and local authority checks are made. Personal referees are interviewed.

A report is prepared by the assessing Social Worker, with recommendations on the applicant's suitability to be a foster carer(s) and whether s/he should be approved for named children only, or more generally for between 1 and 3 children within a particular age range, sex, area of need etc. having regard to her/his assessed abilities, and experience and the accommodation available.

Applicants are provided with a copy of the non-confidential sections (i.e. everything except the references) of the assessment reports before they are submitted to the Fostering Panel and have the opportunity to make written comments if they wish to do so. The Panel provides information leaflets for new applicants and existing carers whose approval is being considered by Panel, including details of panel membership and processes.

The West Berkshire Fostering Panel considers every application that is presented to it. All applicant(s) are encouraged to attend the Fostering Panel meeting that considers their application, and are informed of the Panel's recommendation and Head of Service's decision both verbally and in writing. A copy of the relevant extract from the Panel minutes is sent to all applicants and carers. A Foster Care Agreement is drawn up and signed with all foster carers

Reviewing of Foster Carers

Reviews of a foster carer's approval take place within the first year of approval and annually thereafter, unless for some reason it is considered appropriate to hold an earlier review. The supervising social worker visits the carer in preparation for the review, and the views of placing social workers, placed children and their families and the LAC Reviewing Officer are also sought. Health and safety checks are repeated annually, and CRB and medical checks are repeated every three years in accordance with regulatory requirements. All reviews are attended by the foster carer(s) and the supervising social worker, and are chaired by a manager from the Family Placement Team. The review form is completed during the review.

The review report, when complete, is read and signed by the foster carer(s) and the supervising social worker, before being signed by the manager who chaired the review. The Registered Person for West Berkshire Fostering Service, (i.e. the Family Placement Team Manager) then considers the report, decides whether the foster carer and their household continue to be suitable and gives the carers written notice of the decision.

The first review after approval is always considered by the Fostering Panel. Subsequent reviews may be referred to the Fostering Panel at the discretion of the Family Placement Team Manager.

If the Fostering Service is no longer satisfied that a foster carer and/or the fostering household continue to be suitable for fostering, the issue is referred for consideration by the Fostering Panel. Following a recommendation by the Fostering Panel to terminate approval, written notice is given to the foster carer(s) that termination of approval is proposed. The foster carer(s) are invited to make representations to the Panel at a subsequent meeting, following which the decision maker, taking into account any recommendation made by the Fostering Panel, makes a decision and written notice is given to the foster carer(s).

Training of Foster Carers

The Department arranges and provides training for all foster carers in order to promote the development of foster carers' skills and knowledge, to help them meet the needs of the children and young people placed in their care.

A new and extensive training programme for foster carers is provided to cover both the basic requirements of new carers, pre- and post-approval, and further training to develop and extend the skills of experienced foster carers, and to address their specific needs relevant to certain situations. Financial incentives have been introduced in order to encourage attendance. Wherever possible training is provided for staff and foster carers together so that learning and understanding is mutually enhanced. Individual training needs are met as far as is practicable within existing budgets. Attendance on this training programme is monitored by supervising social workers via the review process.

Discussion of a foster carer's future training needs forms a key part of the foster carer annual review. Where there are two adults in one household applying or approved as joint carers, both must successfully complete all mandatory training. There is a clear expectation that foster carers will regularly attend training sessions.

Support for Foster Carers

Supervision and support for individual foster carers is provided by the allocated Family Placement Team supervising social worker, who visits the foster carer(s) at regular intervals, and additionally when required (visit or telephone) at other times. Family Placement Team staff liaise closely with placing social workers and their managers. A Foster Placement Agreement is drawn up with all relevant parties at the start of every placement and a safer caring agreement is also made in relation to all placements

A regular newsletter for foster carers is produced and circulated by the Publicity and Recruitment Worker. A telephone support service for all approved foster carers and adopters is provided by members of the team outside of office hours. Additionally foster carers are supported by the work of the placing social workers and their managers; the teacher, the nurse the youth worker and the literacy mentor for looked after children, plus the therapeutic services provided by CAMHS.

Financial support is provided by the Department through the Fostering Placement Allowance Scheme, details of which are provided separately. All foster carers receive payment at rates that are at least the equivalent of the Fostering Network recommended minimum. Financial provision is made to cover the cost of child sitting to enable all carers to enjoy at least one evening out a month.

All foster carers are automatically joined as members of Fostering Network, membership fees being paid by the Department. West Berkshire also actively supports and works in partnership with the local West Berkshire Foster Carers Association.

Documentation

The fostering service has reviewed the Fostering Procedures Manual for Staff and is now in the process of updating the Foster Carers Handbook, to ensure that both meet the requirements of the National Minimum Standards and Regulations for Fostering Services (2002), accurately reflect the statement of purpose and are in line with current expectations of good practice. On completion of this process new manuals will be issued to all foster carers

The statement of purpose will be made available to all staff working for the fostering service; a copy will be given to all approved and prospective foster carers and it will be available upon request to all parents of children and young people looked after by the fostering service.

Maggie Short
Family Placement Team Manager
09.02.06