

**WEST BERKSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
FOSTERING SERVICE**

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2011 – 2012

Aims and Objectives of the Fostering Service

The West Berkshire Fostering Service is run in accordance with the National Minimum Standards which are underpinned by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and the National Care Standards Act 2000. Statutory Guidance for fostering services – Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services, Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review sets out the wider context for local authorities as providers and commissioners of fostering services. It also strives to follow the best practice guidance outlined in the UK National Standards for Foster Care and Code of Practice (1999).

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, pathway planning and reviewing processes. This includes the identification and provision of necessary additional services and support 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. This work is supported by the new Care Planning, Placement and Case Review regulations that came into force on 1st April 2011.

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 in the same way as stranger 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 endorses the Foster Carers' Charter putting foster carers at the heart of arrangements for looked after children.

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
- Post-adoption support services
- Special Guardianship services
- Private fostering services
- 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 and carers 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:

- The needs of the children and young people are always paramount
- Promoting equality and valuing diversity underpins all our practice
- Work is undertaken to achieve the highest professional standards
- To work in partnership with children, birth families and other professionals involved with the care of the children

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.

Planned and emergency family and friends foster care for individual children and siblings of all ages across the full range of long and short term 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.

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 social worker. These social 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 so that children are able to remain close to their home areas.

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, an on-line diploma programme for experienced foster carers and an on-line short course programme designed to enable foster carers to meet the relevant CWDC standards for all foster carers. Foster carers are also encouraged to complete the CWDC standards both as part of the initial approval and in the form of ongoing assessment.

The 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 including family and friends foster care and the approval of connected people
- 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

- Panel also offers advice in relation to safeguarding arrangements to support approved foster carers.
- It also considers the acceptance of private fostering arrangements

Management and Staffing Structure – 2010

The Manager of the Fostering Service is the Family Placement Team Manager, June Kemp who reports to the Children’s Services Manager, Sandra Dopson.

The Agency Decision Maker is the Head of Children and Young People’s Services, Lorna Hunt.

All members of the team work across both the Adoption and the Fostering Services and have other Family Placement Team responsibilities. All Social Workers within the Family Placement Team hold a professional social work qualification i.e. CQSW, CSS, Dip Sw, Social work degree and are registered by the GSCC. In addition to this they have a good understanding of fostering issues and regularly attend additional training events to maintain and extend their knowledge base.

The full establishment of the Family Placement Team is:

1	Team Manager
2	Assistant Team Managers
1	Specialist Post-adoption support social worker
8.5 FTE	Family Placement Social Workers
3.62 FTE	Family Support Workers
1	Publicity and Recruitment Worker
4.09 FTE	Support Services Staff

Staffing Position as at March 2010

Position	Name	FT/PT
Team Manager	June Kemp	FT
Assistant Team Managers	Keith Langley	FT
	Fiona Crute	PT
Social Workers	Alison Hynes	PT
	Lucy Hughes	PT
	Peter Field	FT
	Vacant post	FT
	Claire Sherlock	FT
	Selina Beety	PT
	Trudi Vickery	FT
	Susan Tarrant	FT
Post-adoption Support Social Worker	Mary Heslin	FT
Family Placement Support Workers	Alex Wickens	PT
	Andy Blackwood	FT
	Ann Athawes	PT
	Vera Lizunova	FT
Publicity and Recruitment Worker	John North	FT

Snr Support Services Officer	Helen Benn	PT
Support Services Officers	Andrea Martin	PT
	Amy Wheeler	PT
	Alexandra Steward	PT
Support Services Assistant	Karen Hugo	PT
	Linda Burry	PT

Complaints

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 Complaints and Public Information Manager for Children and Young People's Services. All complaints and their outcomes are monitored by both the Complaints Manager 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 Manager, the Rights for You service and OFSTED. The West Berkshire Independent Visitor's Scheme is available to all looked after children and young people at their own or their social worker's request.

Evaluation

The Fostering Service is inspected by Ofsted. The most recent inspection, in March 2008, rated the service as "outstanding".

Recruitment of Foster Carers

The Fostering Service has 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. This strategy is reviewed annually.

There is a Publicity and Recruitment Worker within the team who has specific responsibility for raising local awareness of the on-going need for foster carers and supported accommodation (lodgings) carers and developing and implementing a targeted recruitment strategy. In particular this focuses on 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. To achieve this the fostering service takes into account the pre-existing relationships inherent in family and friends fostering arrangements and recognises the particular contribution that family and friends foster carers can make. These factors are taken into account in the assessment process whilst ensuring adherence to the

fostering minimum standards and that care planning, placement and review regulations are maintained.

Approval of Foster Carers

The approval process for foster carers meets the requirements of the National Minimum Standards and Regulations for Fostering Services 2011.

Assessments of foster carers follow the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering Prospective Foster Carers 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 references are obtained and 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 or 4 if siblings within a particular age range, sex, area of need etc. having regard to her/his assessed abilities 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 both at initial approval and following any changes to their approval.

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.

An 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. This training programme is reviewed annually and foster carers are asked, via contact with their supervising social workers and via the review process to identify training which they would like the agency to incorporate into

its annual programme. There are financial incentives 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.

CWDC the Training, Support & Development Standards for Foster Care are being implemented by the service. The Standards are accompanied by a Guide for Foster Carers, a Workbook and Guidance for Managers, Supervising Social Workers and Trainers. The fostering team is implementing the standards and has developed a tool for assessing competency and planning appropriate training for carers in conjunction with an independent contractor. A review of the placement plan is currently in process to ensure that it meets the care planning, placement and review regulations 2010.

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 (visits or telephones) 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 and risk management 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 in addition to the Berkshire Emergency Duty Team. Foster carers are also supported by the work of the placing social workers and their managers; and the members of the multi agency Life Chances Team for Looked After Children.

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 one and a half times 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 enrolled 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.

Foster carers' children are also offered support from workers within the Family Placement Team and meet together on a regular basis to offer support to each other

and to have some fun. They have named their group COTS (Carers of Tomorrow). Foster carers have access to an out of office hours telephone support service operated by the family placement team, in addition to the services of the Berkshire Emergency Duty Team.

There is support and guidance from Members of the Life Chances Team for Looked After Children and Young People. This is a multi agency team which includes staff whose job is either working full time with Looked After children or where part of their role is allocated to this work. Membership includes a nurse, teachers, a youth worker, education welfare, an educational psychologist, YOT, CAMHS, Family Resource Service, the Family Placement Team, Connexions, early years and the locality teams.

Financial assistance for 'child sitting' is provided to enable foster carers to attend training and have occasional evenings out.

The department supports 'back up' care to assist carers attending training and meetings.

There is support from and close liaison with the West Berkshire Foster Carers' Association.

Reviewing of Foster Carers

All approved foster carers have annual reviews of their performance, training needs, terms of approval and continued registration of their approval as foster carers and their households.

Reviews of a foster carer's approval take place within the first six months 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 completed review report is signed by the supervising social worker and the review chair before being passed to the Registered Person for West Berkshire Fostering Service, (i.e. the Family Placement Team Manager) who considers the report and decides whether the foster carer and their household continue to be suitable. The carers are notified in writing of this decision which is attached to the review report and forwarded to the carers to sign and add their comments.

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 and as directed by the regulations.

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).

Prospective foster carers who are not being recommended for approval and foster carers whose approval is being recommended for termination or variation, are able to **either** make representation to the fostering agency **or** the Independent Review Mechanism.

Documentation

The Fostering Service regularly reviews the Fostering Procedures Manual for Staff and the Foster Carers Handbook to take account of updates in practice issues and legislative changes where appropriate. Both meet the requirements of the National Minimum Standards and Regulations for Fostering Services 2011, accurately reflect the statement of purpose and are in line with current expectations of good practice.

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.

Members are regularly appraised of performance via annual reports at the Corporate Parent Panel where membership includes two foster carers.

Details of the Registration Authority

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

Tel 08456 404045

June Kemp
Family Placement Team Manager
April 2011