



Fostering Service

Statement of Purpose



Working together with Children, Young People and Families



Children's Services, Education & Skills

Children's Social Care

Statement of Purpose: Fostering and Short Break Fostering Services

September 2013

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Aims and objectives

The Fostering Service has been developed and is managed in accordance with the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 and the principles outlined in the National Minimum Standards 2011. These standards apply equally to our connected person foster carers.

The City of York Council's Placement Strategy ensures that there is an adequate supply of placements for children and young people across the range of resources.. The main aim of City of York Council's Fostering Service is to provide safe, high quality foster placements to meet the diverse needs of the children and young people who are unable to be cared for within their own families or where their families need a break.

If a child or young person needs a placement then the first consideration will be to see if there is anyone in their family or friendship network who could

safely care for them. If they are not able to be placed with someone from their family or friendship network, then it is intended that:

- children and young people are placed with foster carers in or around York, when first looked after
- resources for placements of children looked after are efficiently deployed to ensure that placements outside York in foster care or residential care are only made when every stage of local provision and placement has been explored and exhausted
- young people for whom foster care is not appropriate, or who are unable to be placed in foster care, are looked after in good quality children's homes
- children and young people who are not able to return to their families (rehabilitation) are able to live in permanent substitute families through to young adulthood and beyond. For younger children this is likely to be via adoption and for older children via foster care
- Short Break placements are available to support disabled children and their families
- when seeking a placement for a child or young person, their wishes and needs, including their racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic needs, are considered and matched as closely as possible with the foster carers available
- siblings are accommodated together wherever possible and appropriate
- contact is promoted for the child or young person and his/her birth family throughout their placement
- fostering and Short Break placements provide a safe, stable and enabling environment, ensuring that children and young people are listened to and protected from abuse and neglect. They promote the child or young person's physical, social, emotional and intellectual development by providing them with the opportunity of developing to their full potential, through health care, education and leisure and social activities that will enhance their life chances
- as well as promoting health and general well-being, foster carers encourage children and young people to reach their maximum educational ability
- young people are encouraged to remain living with their foster carers when they reach adulthood
- children and young people are informed of their rights and of the advocacy and complaints process

- feedback from those who are in receipt of services, through comments, compliments or complaints, is incorporated into service development
- there are regular feedback meetings between foster carers and senior managers.

The Placement Strategy endeavours to ensure that the need to place children and young people outside York is minimised, and that children and young people who are placed outside York are enabled to return to a York based placement (where appropriate). Locality of service enhances the capacity of other local partners (schools, educational services, child and adolescent mental health services (CAHMS) and the health sector) to support the child or young person in a corporate parenting model.

The Corporate Parenting Board was established in July 2012 and comprises eight elected councillors. The board reviews progress against the Looked After Children's Strategy 2012 – 2015 and the multi-agency pledge to Looked After Children.

Service provided

The Fostering Service provides placements for Looked After Children with varying needs. It is intended:

- For all Looked After Children and young people from York aged 0-18 years
- To meet the need for placements for short stay, medium stay and longer term fostering, where necessary
- To provide for children and young people who may require accommodation under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 or those who are looked after under a Court Care Order
- To be available to young people who may require accommodation due to concerns about youth offending issues.

There is a commitment to ensure that, young people in foster care are actively encouraged to stay on with their foster carers when they approach their 18th birthday. This Staying Put approach has enhanced the future outcomes for many previously looked after young people, who have remained in their foster homes until their 21st birthday.

The Short Break Service provides Short Break foster carers to support disabled children and their families. It is intended:

- for disabled children and young people, aged 0-18 years, who have an identified need for Short Break services

- for short periods varying from a few hours of day care through to overnight stays or weekends
- to provide for children who are physically disabled, learning disabled, on the autism spectrum or medically dependent for some or their entire daily needs
- to provide for children who require a series of short term breaks under the provisions of the Children Act 1989 and duties relating to Short Break care, which came into force in April 2011.

Services provided for children, young people and foster carers can be sought from within Children's Specialist Services and also from many statutory and voluntary organisations including schools, the local authority, CAHMS, the Vale of York Clinical Commissioning Group, the Youth Offending Team etc., with which strong links have been established.

Therapeutic support

The Fostering Service has a referral route to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), which provides therapeutic input for children and young people in foster placements, and consultation with foster carers, social workers and other professionals involved.

Support in education

There is a 'virtual' head teacher for Looked After Children to look at improving attainment issues and improving partnerships with schools. Foster carers are expected to attend Personal Education Planning meetings with the young people and to go to parent's evenings and other events. There is an expectation that holidays will not be taken in term time and that children are not routinely taken out of school.

Provision of leisure, sport, cultural and religious activity

Foster carer training and supervision promotes the importance of leisure provision for Looked After Children and young people, and the expectation that foster carers will seek out and support new experiences and activities to enhance children's self-worth, social development and independence.

Looked After Children and young people and their foster carer families are able to access the MAX card, which gives free access to a range of leisure activities throughout the Yorkshire region. Information on community play schemes, clubs and holiday activities are provided to foster carers on a regular basis through newsletters and information sharing events.

We aim to support all young people in their religious and cultural beliefs and customs, and we ensure that information is available to provide understanding of different cultures and religions. We will provide resources that may be needed to ensure young people are able to practice their beliefs and customs.

We aim to ensure all young people are given appropriate support in line with their individual needs and background (in accordance with the duties of the Equalities Act 2010).

Children and young people's guide and pledge

Subject to a child's age and understanding, the Fostering Service ensures they receive a Young People's Guide at the point of placement. The guide includes details about foster care and being looked after, and provides information on useful contacts. Young people are given a copy of the council's pledge to children and young people in care, which outlines what they can expect from the council when they are looked after. Children and young people also receive information about how they can consult with the Children's Rights worker.

Young people aged 15–19 are invited to join the 'Show me that I Matter' group that meets every month with City of York councillors and senior managers. Those aged between 11–14 years are invited to join 'I Matter 2', a group of young people who meet on a monthly basis to talk about their experience of being looked after by the City of York Council and how they think things can be improved. Their views are then shared with York's Children in Care Council (the 'Show Me That I Matter' panel), which is able to raise these issues with senior managers and Elected Members.

Connected people and family/friends foster carers

Temporary approval can be made for some immediate/emergency arrangements with members of a child or young person's family or friendship network, when the child or young person becomes looked after by the council. Temporary approval as a foster carer lasts for 16 weeks (with a possible extension for a further 8 weeks), whilst more thorough assessments and arrangements are considered. Depending on the care plan for the child, this period could involve completing an assessment to become a foster carer beyond the temporary approval period.

Residence Orders (RO) and Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) are legal orders that provide the opportunity to secure permanent family placements for children and young people who are placed with connected persons, so that they are no longer looked after by the local authority.

Recruiting foster carers and Short Break foster carers

Criteria for Assessment

An application to become a foster carer is accepted on the basis of the suitability of the applicant's circumstances and capacity to offer appropriate care to Looked After Children and young people, and to support their background, race, culture, language, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age or ability.

Enquiry

Anyone who is resident in York, or within reasonable travelling distance, can enquire about becoming a foster carer or Short Break foster carer. Employees of City of York Council's Children's Specialist Services must have the permission of the assistant director before their application is considered. All enquirers will be contacted by a fostering supervising social worker or Short Break social worker who will give information about what being a foster carer or Short Break foster carer involves. If the enquirer wishes to proceed, and there are no obvious barriers to doing so, a home visit will be arranged so that further information can be exchanged and the process of approval more fully explored. From this meeting the social worker will make a recommendation, based on their initial assessment, as to whether or not the enquirer has the potential to be a foster carer or Short Break foster carer.

If the recommendation is positive the enquirer will be offered a place on a "Skills to Foster" preparation course or Short Break preparation course. If the recommendation is not to proceed with an assessment, the reasons for this will be explained to the enquirer along with what action they can take if they are unhappy with the outcome.

Preparing and assessing applicants

Preparation course

The "Skills to Foster" preparation course is jointly run by supervising social workers and experienced foster carers, with input from other professionals involved with Looked After Children – education workers, police, psychologists etc., and young people who have been fostered. On completion of the course, one of the supervising social workers will discuss with each candidate how their enquiry will progress. If suitable, enquirers can then make an application to be assessed as a prospective foster carer.

Training is a requirement for every prospective and approved foster carer, and foster carer's training needs are reviewed annually. Each foster carer will complete a Professional Development Plan with their supervising social worker to identify their developmental aims and objectives for the following year.

Short Break foster carer's "Skills to Foster" preparation is facilitated by Short Break social workers, parents of disabled children using the service and other relevant professionals. Assessments can be started before the preparation training commences and can also run concurrently.

Assessments

A thorough assessment of the applicant's eligibility and suitability to become a foster carer is undertaken. The assessment will focus on competences and qualities in relation to their ability to care for children and work with parents and the agency. The assessment is undertaken in two parts which run concurrently. Stage 1 of the assessment establishes whether there is any information likely to impact on the suitability of the applicant in line with fostering regulations.

All foster carer applicants, members of their household over 16 years of age and any adults who are likely to have regular or unsupervised contact with the children placed are required to apply for an enhanced Disclosure and Barring check. Checks are also made with the NSPCC, SSAFA, NHS Trust and current and previous employers. For applicants with birth children, checks with schools, nurseries, health visitors, school nurses and the local authority Child Protection Register are also carried out, along with proof of identity and employment checks.

A standard medical examination and report is requested from each applicant's doctor and is commented on by the local authority Medical Adviser. Written references are sought from at least three personal referees, each referee is visited and a written record made of their comments regarding the applicant's suitability to become a foster carer.

If the applicant is aware of any medical issues that may impact on fostering, these should have been discussed, along with any other potential prohibiting information, at an early stage. Any prohibiting information received within the first stage of the assessment process must be explored, and if there is a recommendation not to proceed, this must be shared with the applicant and presented to the Agency Decision Maker within a period of ten days of receipt.

The full assessment is undertaken over a series of visits to the applicant's home. The stage 2 process includes a personal profile of the applicant's own experiences, relationships (past and present), parenting capacity and experience and understanding of issues facing Looked After Children and their families. Any children of the applicant will be interviewed and involved in the assessment process according to their age and understanding. If the applicant has had significant previous relationships, contact is usually made with previous partners, particularly if there are children from the relationship.

All of the information and analysis from stages 1 and 2 are shared with the applicant in a written report (with the exception of the references and other checks or third party information). The applicant is invited to comment on the accuracy of the information prior to a formal presentation to the Fostering Panel.

The completed assessment will be taken to the Fostering Panel with a recommendation as to whether or not the applicant should be approved. The applicant is encouraged to attend panel and is welcome to be present for the part of the panel discussion relating to their application.

Approving foster carers and Short Break foster carers

Fostering Panel and Approval of Prospective Foster Carers

The Fostering Panel meets monthly to make recommendations on fostering applications, reviews and de-registrations of foster carers. The chair of the panel is suitably qualified and independent of the council. Following consideration of the information provided, the panel makes a recommendation and a verbal outcome is given immediately to attending applicants. Panel's recommendations are considered by the agency decision maker, who then

makes the decision as to whether or not the applicant is approved as a foster carer or Short Break foster carer.

All applicants will receive formal written notice within ten days of the decision maker's final decision. An appeal can be made within 28 days and applicants may either make further representation to the foster panel or have their assessment considered by the Independent Review Mechanism.

Once approved a foster carer or Short Break foster carer's agreement will be completed. This is the agreement between the foster carer and the agency regarding the terms and conditions of the partnership between them. This must be signed before the first placement is made.

Review of approval of foster carers and Short Break foster carers

Requirements for the review of foster carers are set out in the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and accompanying Statutory Guidance.

Regulations require that a foster carer's approval is reviewed within the first twelve months and, thereafter, at intervals of not more than a year. The report relating to the first review is presented to the Fostering and Short Break Foster Carers' Panel.

The purpose of the review is to enable the authority to check that the foster carer and the household circumstances continue to be suitable for the placement of children.

Early review of approval may also take place when:

- ◆ there is a significant change in the foster carer's circumstances; or
- ◆ there are issues concerning the foster carer's approval arising from a disruption meeting; or
- ◆ allegations have been made about the foster carer.

Foster carers are reviewed every year. A range of information is collated for a review meeting, which is chaired by a Fostering Reviewing Officer. The review will address the previous year's experiences of the foster carer, as well as any issues regarding quality of care and support, past and future training, health and safety or safe care issues. The review process is an opportunity to acknowledge a foster carer's achievements and to identify their strengths and areas for further development.

The review meeting will also explore whether the terms of the foster carer's approval is suitable or should be recommended for change. All recommendations of changes of approval through the review process will be presented to the Agency Decision Maker. The foster carer will have 28 days to make representations if changes are recommended to their approval terms.

Training for foster carers and Short Break foster carers

A requirement of the assessment and approval process is that each foster carer is expected to attend initial core training within the first 12 month induction period.

Following the pre-approval training course 'Skills to Foster', all foster carers are required to progress to the post approval core training programme within their first year of becoming a foster carer. They are expected to complete the Training Support and Development Standard training work book within 12 months, or 18 months for connected person foster carers.

Foster carers will be offered continual training and development opportunities during their time with the Fostering and Short Break Foster Carers' Service, and will be expected to attend certain key training events. Alongside specialist training for foster carers and Short Break foster carers, usually organised by the Fostering and Short Break Foster Carers' Team, foster carers and Short Break foster carers have access to all the training provided for children's social care staff.

In partnership with York St John University, accredited training on Trauma, Attachment and Loss is being offered specifically for foster carers. Training and developmental needs for the maintenance or progression of the foster carer's skills level are identified in collaboration with the supervising social worker. These are recorded in a Professional Development Plan (PDP) and discussed at the annual foster carer/Short Break foster carers' review. Training needs identified during individual reviews are used to develop the training programme.

Support for foster carers and Short Break foster carers

The first line of support for foster carers is their supervising social worker, who will:

- support and work with the whole family
- act as the link between the service and the foster carer
- facilitate professional supervision with the foster carer
- consult with foster carers regarding the children in their care, in line with approval range and skills level.

The supervising social worker will visit regularly, usually on a four weekly basis or as agreed with the carer. There will also be at least one unannounced visit each year, and telephone contact and correspondence at other times. Due to the nature of Short Break foster care (i.e. occurring for short periods, intermittently) the supervising social worker will visit the Short Break foster carer at a frequency agreed on an individual basis. Support for the foster carer or Short Break foster carer is also available from the social workers of children placed in the foster home.

Out of hours, there is a dedicated telephone support line for foster carers and Short Break foster carers, operated by social workers. Any crises in respect of children and young people in placement will be dealt with by the emergency duty team.

Foster carer support groups are held regularly in various locations around the city. These groups discuss a variety of topics and some are attended periodically by guest speakers.

Foster carers can also access the City of York Council's staff benefits, as described in the Foster Carers' Benefits Booklet.

Allegations against foster carers and Short Break foster carers

All allegations in relation to foster carers are investigated and reported to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). Investigations are carried out on behalf of the City of York Safeguarding Children's Board under the procedures for investigating allegations against professionals. Foster carers are offered independent support during this process.

Registered provider, registered individual and the manager

The registered provider of the Fostering Service is the City of York Council, Children's Services, Education & Skills, Children's Specialist Services, West Offices, Station Rise, York, YO1 6GA.

The registered individual is Eoin Rush, the Assistant Director for Children's Specialist Services, and the Director of Children's Services, Education & Skills is Jon Stonehouse, both of whom are based at the above address. Children's Specialist Services is a division of Children's Services, Education & Skills.

The Fostering Service is part of the Resources group, which is managed by Howard Lovelady, Head of Service, based at: City of York Council, Children's Services, Education & Skills, Children's Specialist Services, West Offices, Station Rise, York, YO1 6GA. The service manager with responsibility for the Fostering Service on a day to day basis is Debra Lane, and the service manager with responsibility for Short Break foster carers for disabled children on a day to day basis is Jenny Bullock, both of whom are based at the above address.

The National Minimum Standards for fostering require that the people involved in managing the service:

- possess the necessary knowledge and experience of child care law and practice
- have management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively
- ensure that it is run on a sound financial basis and in a professional manner.

Jon Stonehouse, Eoin Rush, Howard Lovelady, Debra Lane and Jenny Bullock have extensive experience and knowledge to fulfill each of the requirements outlined above.

The National Minimum Standards for fostering require that the manager has:

- a professional qualification relevant in child care
- a qualification at level 4 NVQ in management
- at least two years of experience of working in a child care setting, within the past five years.

Debra Lane has a professional qualification (Diploma in Social Work) and has extensive experience of child care work.

Organisational structure

Children's Specialist Services has responsibility for services to children in need, children who require protection, children looked after and care leavers. It is divided into "Safeguarding" and "Resources".

The Fostering Service and the Short Break Foster Carers' Service are located in the "Resources" arm of Children's Specialist Services. The Head of Service for Resources has an oversight of both services. The service manager for fostering manages the Fostering Service, and the Short Break Foster Carers' Service is line managed by the service manager, Short Breaks. The service manager, fostering and the service manager, Short Breaks are both accountable to, and supervised by, the head of service, resources.

Within the Fostering Service there is one service manager, six placement workers, one advanced practitioner and one newly qualified social worker, and within the Short Break Service there is one service manager, five placement workers and one advanced practitioner.

These two teams comprise qualified social workers and a registered nurse. Many have significant post qualification experience in a range of children's social work services, as required in the person specification.

Complaints and outcomes

The directorate of Children's Services, Education & Skills has an established system for dealing with complaints from children and adults who are not satisfied with any aspect of the service that they have received.

All children and young people who are looked after in foster care or by Short Break foster carers are advised about the complaints procedure by their social worker and independent reviewing officer, and are given contact details for the complaints manager.

Complaints from parents and carers of Looked After Children would also be directed to the complaints manager.

Foster carers and Short Break foster carer are informed about the complaints procedure and the role of the complaints manager. This enables them to advise children and young people who may wish to complain, and also to consider and raise any concerns of their own.

Child protection matters are immediately referred to the service manager responsible for the child.

Any child, young person, parent or foster carer can make a complaint directly to the social worker or service manager who is providing the service. This will be passed to the complaints manager who will determine how best to proceed

with their complaint. The emphasis will always be to ensure a prompt discussion, and the approach will always be to solve the problem promptly and to the complainant's satisfaction.

Children, young people, parents and foster carers are also advised that they can make their representation directly to the complaints manager. Children can also make a complaint on a free telephone number (0800 138 0133).

If a complaint cannot be resolved at the problem solving stage, stage 1, or it is deemed to be sufficiently serious, it will be jointly investigated by a manager from another part of the service and an independent person (stage 2). The recommendations of such a stage 2 complaint are passed to a senior manager for a direct response to the customer.

If the customer remains unhappy with the response at stage 2, they can ask the complaints manager for their complaint to be considered by the director, or a member of staff acting on the director's behalf. This is stage 3 and the final stage of the council's complaints procedure, after which the customer could approach the Local Government Ombudsman if they still feel unhappy with the outcome.

The Children's Specialist Services management team, led by the assistant director, considers the lessons to be learnt more generally at the conclusion of all stage 2 and stage 3 Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 complaints. The responses are considered in the Fostering and Short Break Foster Carers' Teams when a complaint relates to these services.

Complaints against foster carers are managed in line with the general complaint process and policies, or by the Safeguarding Children's Board (LADO), as previously noted on page 10.

Availability of statement of purpose

The original statement of purpose for City of York was agreed by the Executive Member with responsibility for Social Services in 2003 and has been reviewed annually. The fostering agency's policies, procedures and any written guidance to staff reflect the statement of purpose.

This statement of purpose is posted on the council's website and can be made available in a format that is appropriate to the physical, sensory and learning impairments, communication difficulties and language of children, parents and staff. City of York will make arrangements for those who are unable to understand the document to have it read, translated or explained to them.

The statement of purpose is made available to all staff via the council's intranet.

Statement of Purpose: July 2014

This statement of purpose was reviewed in September 2013 and updated in July 2014.

Registration authority

Ofsted inspects local authority Fostering Services and can be contacted at:

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk
Address: Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Telephone: 0300 123 1231
E-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Copies of Ofsted inspection reports for the City of York Fostering Service can be read on the Ofsted website.

Customers can make complaints directly to Ofsted.

Roger Morgan, Children's Rights Director for England, can be contacted directly by young people at:

Office of the Children's Rights Director
Ofsted
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE


Free phone 0800 528 0731
Telephone: 08456 404040
Website: www.rights4me.org

This information can be provided in your own language.

我們也用您們的語言提供這個信息 (Cantonese)

Ta informacja może być dostarczona w twoim
własnym języku. **(Polish)**

Bu bilgiyi kendi dilinizde almanız mümkündür. **(Turkish)**

 **01904 551550**

If you would like this information in an accessible format (for example in large print, on CD or by email) or another language please telephone: 01904 555354 or email: debra.lane@york.gov.uk