



City of
Stoke-on-Trent

FOSTERING

Service Statement of Purpose

2016/17

Children's Social Care,
Children, Adults and Families Directorate
Swann House, Boothem Road
Stoke-on-Trent
ST4 4SY
Tel 01782 235137

Ofsted
Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA
Tel 0300 123 4666

1.0 Aims & Objectives of the Service

Stoke on Trent Fostering Service aims to provide quality, safe and secure, family based care for children and young people who are unable to live with their own families. We also aim to ensure that placements provide a stable base for children and young people to have the opportunity to meet their full potential.

1.1 The service objectives are as follows:

- To provide safe, stable and good quality foster placements for children who are unable to remain living with their parents;
- To recruit, prepare, assess and approve carers who can meet the diverse needs of Stoke-on-Trent children in care;
- To ensure that foster carers are trained, supervised and supported in their role.
- To ensure that foster carers receive clear information about their fostering role and the children and young people they care for.
- To anticipate and, where possible, prevent placement breakdown by identifying vulnerable placements and co-ordinating multi-agency support.
- To provide a skilled and responsive service to placing social workers to achieve the best possible match of child to carer.
- To identify gaps and provide appropriate support where a child's placement is unable to meet all of a child's needs.
- To provide skilled carers who can provide short breaks for children with disabilities.
- To listen to the views of children, parents and carers, as well as other professionals, to develop the service.

2.0 Principles Underpinning the Service

A number of key principles underpin the way in which the service operates, is managed and developed. These are as follows:

- The needs of children in care are paramount.
- Children's views, wishes and feelings are sought and listened to.
- Children should be placed with their siblings unless this does not meet their assessed needs.
- Children are supported to keep in contact with their family and friends.
- Children should be placed within their local communities, where it is safe and in the child's interests.
- Each child's needs will be considered with regard to their gender, race, religion, age, ability, culture, ethnicity, education, sexuality and spirituality.
- All foster carers and foster carer applicants are treated with dignity and respect.
- All decisions regarding a foster carer's approval are clear, transparent and evidence based.
- The needs of foster carers' children are considered and taken into account at all stages

3.0 Equality & Diversity

Stoke-on-Trent City Council is committed to equality of opportunity. *“Our vision puts equality of opportunity at the heart of our approach to policy making, service delivery and employment. We are committed to identifying, understanding and eliminating all barriers that prevent access to services, information and employment”.*

The Fostering Service encourages applicants from all parts of the community and this is reflected in its recruitment activity and literature.

4.0 Agency Decision Maker (ADM)

The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) registered with OFSTED is Sue Hammersley, Strategic Manager Children in Care, based at the Civic Centre, Glebe Street, Stoke-on-Trent.

Sue joined Stoke-on-Trent City Council in 2009. Her qualifications are: CQSW in 1984 and holds a degree in Social Work as well as a Master's Degree in Leadership and Management.

Prior to working for Stoke, Sue has had a number of roles within a social work setting, including significant experience in social care management for children's services.

5.0 Fostering Service Staffing

Stoke on Trent Fostering Service is structured in the following way:

- x1 Principal Manager
- x2 Practice Managers
- x18 Social Workers,
- x2 Social Work Assistants
- x1 Training Coordinator (qualified Social Worker)
- x1 Training Administrator

5.1 All Managers and Social Workers have Social Work Qualifications (either CQSW, CSS, DipSW, BA/MA in Social Work). Social Work Assistants have the opportunity to achieve NVQ3 in Health and Social Care (Children and Young People). A list of current employees and their qualifications is attached in Appendix 2.

5.2 The team is divided into two different areas of responsibility:

- **The 'Recruitment & Assessment Team'**: responsible for the recruitment and assessment of new foster carers.
- **The 'Supervision & Support Team'**: responsible for supervising & supporting approved foster carers.

6.0 Types of Fostering Services Provided

The Fostering Service is an integral section of Vulnerable Children and Corporate Parenting and works closely with the Placement Finding Team. It offers a comprehensive service to social work teams, as well as approved and prospective general foster carers, connected persons and family and friends foster carers as well as foster carers who provide short breaks for children with disabilities.

6.1 The Fostering Service provides placements for children in care as follows:

- Task centred placements on a planned and unplanned basis (including placements out of office hours) for children of all ages needing immediate care
- Short breaks for disabled children of all ages
- Respite care offering time-limited breaks to birth families and foster carers needing

respite

- Long term placements for children and young people who cannot return to their birth families and when legal permanence is not possible.
- Connected carer (subject to Regulation 24) and family and friend placements to enable children to remain within their extended family, usually until legal permanence is obtained through a Special Guardianship or Residence Order, or if this is not possible, through long term foster care

6.2 All placements of children and young people are made and monitored in accordance with the Fostering Service Regulations 2011.

- All foster carers are approved, reviewed and have a signed Foster Care Agreements.
- All placements of children and young people admitted to the looked after system are made using Stoke on Trent's Looked After Children Documents, ensuring that accurate and reasonable information is available to the foster carer.
- The Placement Agreement is completed within 5 days of a planned placement and 3 days of an unplanned placement being made to ensure full information is provided to the foster carers.
- Wherever possible, pre-placement planning is undertaken, including introductions between foster carers and children. Children will have access to the foster carers 'picture profiles' before a placement is made.

7.0 **Number of Approved Foster Carers as at 1st April 2016**

The numbers give relate to approved fostering households, not individual carers. The total number of carers does not correlate with the carer type as some foster carers will have a dual approval:

General (Task Centred/Long Term) **165**

Connected/Family & Friends **51**

Short Breaks **11**

Total Number of Fostering Households 227

8.0 Recruitment and Approval and Review of Foster Carers

8.1 Initial Enquiries

Telephone and email enquiries are received by a duty fostering recruitment Social Worker or Social Work Assistant who undertakes initial screening to ascertain basic facts such as age, bedroom capacity, ethnicity, experience and any other relevant information. Personal callers are referred to a recruitment Social Worker for a preliminary discussion. An initial home visit is offered to meet with the enquirer. Alternatively, an invitation is extended to the enquirer to attend the next available information evening, depending on their preference.

8.2 Initial Home Visit

The purpose of the initial home visit is to provide information about the fostering task, application and assessment process. The Social Worker is also able to obtain more information about the enquirer(s), undertaking something of an 'initial assessment' of their potential suitability to foster.

8.3 An application pack is left with the enquirer, if the Social Worker has the confidence that they are likely to be able to offer a resource. The application pack contains an expression of interest form, a consent form (to enable the fostering service to obtain employment references), a health consent form (to start the process of fostering medical checks) and dates of forthcoming Pre-Approval Training (Skills to Fostering) for the applicants to book onto. DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) forms are also completed with all applicants at this stage.

8.4 Once an expression of interest form is completed and returned by the applicants an assessing social worker will be allocated. When the assessment is allocated, a Fostering Panel date is identified for the applicants to be presented to, within 16 weeks of allocation.

8.5 Pre-approval training

A written invitation to the Pre-Approval Training is sent to prospective applicants. This training provides potential carers with the opportunity to learn more about fostering and the children who are likely to be placed with them. The courses are run at least 6 times per year by qualified and experienced social workers from the Fostering Service along with input from our approved foster carers. Courses are offered during weekdays, evenings and also at weekends to allow for flexibility. The venue is also accessible for disabled applicants.

8.6 Pre-Approval Training is based on the Fostering Network's 'Skills to Foster' training programme. All prospective applicants are expected to attend all the pre-approval training, regardless of the type of foster care they wish to provide (including connected or prospective family and friends carers). This forms part of the assessment of their suitability as foster carers. In the case of couples, both must attend unless there are exceptional circumstances which have been agreed by a fostering manager.

8.7 Assessment

The assessment of potential carers is an on-going, comprehensive and transparent process. It determines the applicant's capacity to meet the needs of any child or young person likely to be placed with them.

8.8 The assessment is completed by a suitably qualified social worker using the Training Support and Development (TSD) Standards and BAAF guidance. Applicants are encouraged to undertake a self-assessment during the process as well as an initial 'homework pack' to compile basic information that does not require the involvement of a social worker. Applicants are always given regular feedback throughout the process, so that there should be no surprises at the end of the process.

8.9 Stoke on Trent Fostering Service aims to complete all assessments within four months from receipt of the fostering application, unless there are extenuating circumstances.

8.10 The assessing Social Worker will commence the assessment by completing an agreement with the applicants about their responsibilities and expectations within the assessment process. Each applicant and their family members are encouraged to actively participate in the process. Couples are assessed together, whether married, in a civil partnership or cohabiting. Both parties need to be in full agreement that they wish to become foster carers.

8.11 As part of the assessment process all applicants are interviewed by a young people's panel made up of young people in care who have undertaken training in interviewing, formulating appropriate questions and feeding back on candidates they meet.

8.12 Discontinuing the Assessment

In the event that information obtained during an assessment leads to the conclusion that the applicant may not be suitable to foster, the assessing social worker discusses their concerns with the applicants and seeks advice from their manager. If it is decided that the assessment does not continue, the applicants are informed in writing of the decision and are offered an explanation in relation to the reasons why they are considered to be unsuitable.

8.13 Applicants can withdraw from the assessment process at any time. If the applicant does not withdraw their application and the Fostering Service remains of the opinion that the applicants are not suitable to proceed, the assessing Social Worker completes the Form F with the information obtained. The report is submitted to the Fostering Panel and the applicants invited to attend the Panel when the report is considered.

9.0 Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel is an experienced and friendly group of people who have professional or personal experience of fostering. It is their job to reach a recommendation about whether to approve prospective Foster Carers. Applicants are expected to attend fostering panel, supported by their assessing Social Worker. This provides an opportunity for both the Panel and the applicants to discuss and clarify the reasons for wishing to foster and any other matters that either party considers relevant to the application.

9.1 The information required for Fostering Panel includes:

- Social Worker's Fostering Assessment
- The report on interviews conducted with the prospective carer's referees
- Full information about all the statutory checks
- The Medical Advisor's report
- The report from the applicant's local authority (if applicable)
- Other reports as deemed appropriate
- Views of the Young People's Panel

9.2 At the Panel Meeting, the information is presented by the Assessing Social Worker. The applicant's Family Book is also presented to Panel for members to view. The Panel considers the written report, together with all the supporting information and any additional information presented verbally, in order to make a recommendation about the suitability of the applicants to foster.

10.0 Agency Decision

The ADM (see paragraph 4.0) makes a formal decision about the applicant's suitability to foster following Fostering Panel, within 7 working days of the panel taking place. The applicant is informed by the assessing Social Worker verbally of the decision within one working day of the ADM's decision. Written notice of the decision and the terms of the approval, signed by the ADM, are sent to the foster carer within 7 working days of the Panel's recommendation.

10.1 Carers' notice of approval includes:

- The type of fostering
- Number of children they may foster
- The age groups of the children
- The gender of the children

10.2 If, following a panel recommendation, the ADM is minded not to approve an applicant, the applicants receive written notification within 7 working days of the panel recommendations, including its reasons and a copy of the fostering panel's recommendation.

10.3 The applicants are invited to submit their views and any additional information to the ADM within 28 days of the date of the letter before a final decision is made.

10.4 If the decision is not to approve, the applicants have the right of appeal within 28 days of notification of rejection of their application. The appeal has to be made in writing to the ADM. Alternatively they may apply to the Independent Review Mechanism, which also must be made in writing within 28 days of the notification.

10.5 The IRM can be contacted as follows:

IRM Head Office
Dolphin House
54 Coventry Road
Birmingham, B10 0RX
Telephone: 0121 7668086
Fax: 0121 766 8557
E-Mail: irm@baaf.org.uk

10.6 Supervision & Support

Following a successful recommendation by Fostering Panel and approval by the Agency Decision Maker (ADM), all Foster Carers will be allocated a Supervising Social Worker from the Support & Supervision Team to provide them with guidance, support and regular supervision.

10.7 Supervision of Foster Carers by is undertaken by a series of appointments and meetings between Foster Carers and their Supervising Social Worker. The main objectives are:

- To ensure that carers understand how they contribute to the overall plan for children and young people in their care
- To provide monitoring and feedback on Foster Carer's work and ensure that they

are appropriately supported in their role. Such support can include access to training, information, and the provision of advice and guidance.

- 10.8 Supervision sessions should take place at a minimum of once every 12 weeks, though Stoke on Trent Fostering Services ensure that Foster Carers have a face to face meeting with their Supervising Social Worker every 6 weeks.
- 10.9 Dates for supervision sessions should be agreed beforehand, allowing them to take place in a planned way. Foster Carers are encouraged to contribute to an informal agenda, flagging any particular issues that they wish to discuss with their Supervising Social Worker, beforehand, where possible.
- 10.10 When a child is placed, all foster carers are paid a Fostering Allowance, which is detailed in the Fostering Payment Scheme.
- 10.11 Recruited foster carers are able to access the Payment for Skills scheme, which rewards carers for their experience and skills acquired through training.
- 10.12 Aside from their supervising Social Worker, services specifically available to foster carers include:
- Membership of Fostering Network.
 - Independent Advice and Mediation provided by the Fostering Network
 - Out of Hours support through the Emergency Duty Team.
 - Respite care, if agreed as part of the child's care plan.
 - Insurance cover where damage is not covered by the carers' own insurance.
 - Support from the Placement Support Team (where assessed as required).
 - Access to psychology services to support the emotional wellbeing of children, when assessed as required.
 - Access to educational support services through the virtual school.
- 11.0 Foster Care Training and Support Groups**
The foster carers' personal development is continuously reviewed via supervision and formally planned on an annual basis as part of a review of personal and professional development. This is then recoded in a Personal Development Plan (PDP).
- 11.1 There is an expectation that all approved foster carers attend mandatory training courses:
- Child Protection Level 1
 - Contact and Working with Birth Families
 - First Aid
 - Introduction to Attachment
 - Child Development
 - Valuing Diversity
 - Behaviour Management
 - Moving Children on
- 11.2 A comprehensive catalogue of training courses is available to each fostering household online via Artemis. Foster carers are expected to attend a specified level of training to maintain their Skills Payment in addition to attending three support group meetings.

11.3 A variety of support groups are also available, of which foster carers must attend a minimum of x2 per year. All foster carers have the opportunity to work towards a Diploma. All new foster carers are expected to meet the TSD standards within one year of their first placement.

12.0 Foster carer reviews

All foster carers are reviewed in line with the Fostering Services Regulations. All reviews (following the first review which is presented to Fostering Panel) are completed by an Independent Reviewing Officer.

12.1 Recruited foster carers are reviewed at least annually. Connected Person/Family and Friends foster carers are reviewed within a year of their first approval and at least annually thereafter.

13.0 Complaints and Compliments about the Service and their outcomes

Where people are not satisfied with the service they have received, they should, in the first instance contact the manager for the service, who will try to resolve the concern on an informal basis.

13.1 A formal complaint can be made through the complaints procedure. This can be done in a number of different ways. Contact the Complaints Officer Customer Access (Corporate Services) by telephone on 01782 234234, or write a letter to:

Customer Feedback Team
Stoke-on-Trent City Council
Floor 2, Civic Centre
Glebe Street
Stoke-on-Trent
ST4 1HH

13.2 Full details of the Complaints Procedure can be obtained by contacting The Complaints Officer at the telephone number above. For further information go to: www.stoke.gov.uk

13.3 At any stage, a complainant may contact their Councillor, MP or consult a solicitor. If dissatisfaction remains at the end of these procedures, contact can be made with the Commissioner for Local Administration in England (the Ombudsman).

13.4 The Commission for Local Administration in England
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH
0845 602 1083 or 024 7682 1960

14.0 Children's Guide

Every child who is fostered through the service is given a copy of "Being in Care - What's it all about". The booklet is given to children on placement by their Social Worker. Foster Carers also have a copy. The Children's Guide identifies how children can access NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service) and gives information about Independent Visitors.

14.1 The children's guide is provided in different formats to meet the needs of individual children. It contains information on how a child can access an independent advocate through contacting NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Services). The "Speak Up Speak Out" leaflet is available to children who wish to make a comment, complaint or a compliment about the service.

14.2 **NYAS** - Phone: 0808 808 1001 (National Youth Advocacy Service)

FOSTERING TEAM

| Full Name | Qualifications | Role | Accountable to whom? |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Dave Keeping | BA (Hons) Social Work, 2007. PQ Award/PG Dip Children's Social Work, 2010. Dip Leadership & Management 2011. Joined Fostering in 2013. | Principal Manager, Fostering Service | Sue Hammersley, Strategic Manager for Children in Care Services and ADM. |
| Karen Armitage | BA (Hons) in Social Work, 2007. Post Grad Diploma in Children's Social Work, 2010. Graduate Certificate in Practice Assessment, 2010. Diploma in Leadership & Management, 2012. Joined the fostering service in 2007. | Practice Manager, Recruitment & Assessment Team | Dave Keeping. |
| Katie Jones | MA Social Work 2008, Grad Certificate in Practice Assessment, 2014. Joined the Fostering Service in 2012. | Practice Manager, Supervision & Support Team | Dave Keeping |
| Emma Bickley | MA Social Work 2012, BSC Forensic Science and Criminology 2007, PG Certificate Systemic Practice with Children and Families, 2013 | Acting Practice Manager, Supervision & Support Team. | Dave Keeping |
| Sarah Hood | Diploma in Social Work, 2001. Joined the fostering service in 2010. | Practice Manager, Contact Service & Short Breaks | Dave Keeping |
| Alice Mashanga (nee Coates) | BA (Hons) Social Work 2010, Joined the fostering service in 2011. | Social Worker | Emma Bickley/Dave Keeping |
| Anne Kessel | Diploma in Social Work, 2002. PQ award in Social Work, 2010. Joined the fostering service in 2007. | Social Worker | Emma Bickley/Dave Keeping. |
| David Banks | BA (Hons) 2010, Joined the fostering service in 2011 Joined the Fostering Service in 2012. | Social Worker | Emma Bickley /Dave Keeping |
| Gill Edge | Diploma in Social Work 2003. Joined the fostering service in 2008. | Social Worker (18.5 hours per week) | Emma Bickley /Dave Keeping. |
| Heather Whalley | Diploma Social Worker 2001. Joined the fostering service in 2008. | Social Worker | Emma Bickley /Dave Keeping. |
| Helen Daddy | Diploma in Social Work, 2000. PQ Level 1, Social Work, 2004. Joined the fostering service in 2015. | Social Worker | Emma Bickley /Dave Keeping. |
| Leanne Dudley | MA in Social Work, 2010. Joined Fostering in 2014. | Social Worker | Emma Bickley /Dave Keeping. |
| Janet Ryles | BA (Hons) Social Work, 2011. Joined the fostering service in 2011. | Social Worker | Karen Armitage/Dave Keeping |
| Jayne Knapper | CQ Social Work, 1991. Post Graduate Certificate in Adult Learning, 2012. Joined Fostering in 1993 | Social Worker for Fostering Training. | Dave Keeping |

| Full Name | Qualifications | Role | Accountable to whom? |
|--------------------|--|--|-----------------------------|
| Karen Cope | MA Social Work 2004, Joined the fostering service in 2006 | Social Worker | Emma Bickley /Dave Keeping. |
| Kathryn Grocott | Joined the Fostering Service in 2008. | Social Work Assistant/ Contact Co-ordinator | Sarah Hood |
| Lianne Whitehurst | MA Social Work 2007, PQ award/PG Dip Children's Social Work 2012, Joined the fostering service in 2011. | Social Worker | Karen Armitage/Dave Keeping |
| Louise Heathcote | Diploma in Social Work, 2000. Joined the fostering service in 2006. | Social Worker. | Emma Bickley /Dave Keeping. |
| Lynda Hyde, | Diploma in Social Work, 2001. PQ award in Social Work, 2004. Practice Educator Award, 2014. Joined the fostering service in 2009. | Social Worker | Emma Bickley /Dave Keeping. |
| Margaret John | Diploma Social Worker, 1997. Joined the fostering service in 2004. | Social Worker | Emma Bickley /Dave Keeping. |
| Marie Plant | BA (Hons) Business Studies, 2010. | Fostering, Training Co-ordinator. | Dave Keeping |
| Sam Newton | BA (Hons) Social Work, 2013. Joined the fostering service in 2014. | Social Worker. | Emma Bickley /Dave Keeping. |
| Sharon Capel-Evans | Diploma in Social Work, 1996. BA (hons) Social Work, 1997. Joined the fostering service in 2007. | Social Worker | Emma Bickley /Dave Keeping. |
| Sue Davis | Post Grad Diploma in Marketing Management, 1994. Cache Diploma in Children's Workforce, Level 3, 2012. | Social Work Assistant, Recruitment & Assessment Team. | Karen Armitage |
| Sarah Griffin | NVQ Level 3 in Children's Workforce, 2010. Joined the Fostering Team in 2008. | Social Work Assistant, Supervision & Support. | Emma Bickley |
| Victoria Hughes | BA hons in Social Work, 2010. Child Care & Education Diploma, 2007. | Social Worker, Supervision & Support. | Emma Bickley /Dave Keeping |