

Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering Service

Statement of Purpose

April 2020 – March 2021



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1. Introduction and Policy Context

Sandwell Children's Trust is an independent not-for-profit company that provides social care and support services to children, young people and families. The Fostering Service offers placements to Sandwell children, but is no longer part of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. Therefore, to continue to provide fostering services, the agency is registered as an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA), and its fostering arm is called Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering.

In Sandwell, we believe that all children and young people have the right to be healthy, happy, and safe; to be loved, valued and respected; and to have high aspirations for their future. We would wish all children to have secure relationships with family, friends and carers, be eager, excited, curious and engaged in learning, have self-confidence, be able to co-operate and communicate socially and have the best possible health and development.

The Fostering Service is one of many services provided for children that help to achieve this vision. More information about children's services in Sandwell Children's Trust can be found via – www.sandwellchildrenstrust.org

This Statement of Purpose has been produced in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2001. It sets out the core aims and objectives of Sandwell Children's Trust and the range of services provided.

It sets out the core aims and objectives for Foster Carers, Fostering Social Workers, Child Care Social Workers, children, young people and any person with parental responsibilities.

2. Aims and Objectives

Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering is committed to providing high quality placements to meet the assessed and diverse needs of looked after children and young people. The cultural background, religion and language of looked after children and young people and the needs of disabled children are fully recognised and promoted when placement decisions are made. Our vision is for Sandwell's children and young people to have the best start in life and for them to be nurtured and supported by those who care for them so that they will develop into healthy, socially responsible and achieving adults who, in turn, show the same level of care when raising their own families.

The Fostering Service also aims to provide high quality services and support to foster carers by employing experienced and qualified staff.

To achieve these aims the Fostering Service has the following objectives:

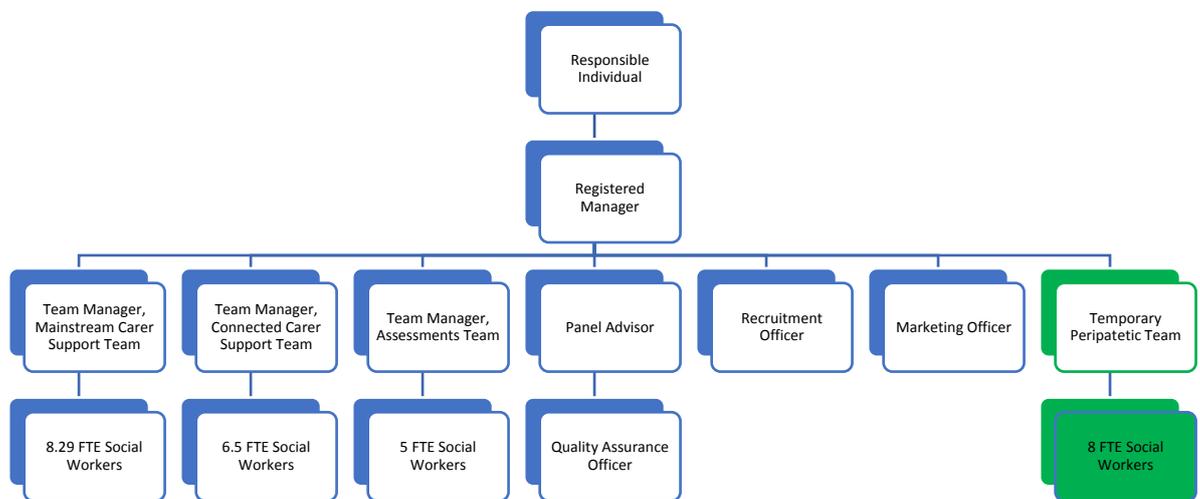
- To have an annual recruitment and publicity strategy which focuses on recruitment of foster carers who can meet the needs of looked after children in the borough.
- The recruitment strategy will also focus on increasing the number of approved foster carer households.
- To maintain a wide range of support services including independent support from Foster Talk to ensure that approved foster carers are valued as part of the Fostering Service and their services as carers are retained.
- To produce an annual training plan which is needs led so that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care.
- To promote the educational achievements of looked after children and young people by ensuring that foster carers are supported and can provide opportunities for children to achieve.
- To provide foster placements for children who need to be placed in a suitable home on an emergency or planned basis, whether this is with mainstream foster carers or family and friends (connected persons carers).
- Services are offered to children on the principle that their needs and welfare are best met within a caring and nurturing environment.
- To provide a high-quality Fostering Service to children, their birth parents, foster carers and social work colleagues.
- To provide foster placements that meet the needs of children requiring such a placement.
- To ensure safe, stable and consistent care for every child placed in foster care.
- To ensure that the ethnic origin, cultural background, religious heritage and language of children are fully recognised, valued and promoted.
- To recruit a range of Foster Carers from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds to meet the needs of children needing placements.
- To promote positive emotional and physical health of looked after children and young people by ensuring that foster carers help children and young people placed with them maintain good health and are encouraged to engage in recreational activities.
- To ensure that staff employed by the service have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to carry out their duties. Each member of

staff has a personal development plan, which supports opportunities for training and developing their skills. Staff are regularly supervised, and their work monitored.

- There is a bi-monthly support group held and this forum is used to disseminate information and consult on service development. Support groups also offer opportunity for foster carers to meet other foster carers, receive informal training and support from supervising social workers.

3. Management and Staff Structure

Fostering Service structure:



The ultimate responsibility for the Fostering Service rests with Sandwell Children’s Trust.

The Trust then gives strategic leadership to the Fostering Service. The Independent Fostering Agency only recruits foster carers to meet the needs of children known to Sandwell Children’s Trust.

The Group Head for Placement Provision co-ordinates the activities of the fostering service and promotes partnership working across the Trust and with partner agencies.

The Operational Manager for Fostering (Registered Manager) provides operational management, quality assurance, performance and budget management, and co-ordinates the work of the fostering teams. The Operational Manager also manages the work of the marketing and recruitment officer. The Operational Manager also reports to Senior Managers on service activities and issues of concern.

Team Managers are responsible for the day to day management of social workers, recruiting, assessing and supervising foster carers, matching of

children to available carers, dealing with complaints and representations and producing activity reports and statistical returns.

Team Managers will provide regular supervision to their respective team of workers. The Team Managers will work closely with the marketing, recruitment and training support officers and all other teams within the Children's Trust.

All Managers and Social Workers within the service are professionally qualified with commensurate social work experience.

4. Services Provided to Children

Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering recruits, trains, assesses, supervises, supports and reviews all foster carers within the Trust.

The primary purpose of the fostering service is to provide high quality, safe secure and caring foster families for children who are unable to live at home. Where ever possible and where safe to do so, children will be placed with someone from their extended family or a close family friend. These arrangements are recognised in legislation as "friends and family" foster placements. When this is not possible, placements will be found with one of our approved foster carers or a suitable agency. We aim to clearly identify the emotional, physical, cultural and religious needs of a child and find a foster placement that can meet their needs.

Except in emergencies we plan introductory meetings between the child and the foster carer/s to lessen the anxiety for the child moving to a new family.

When a child or young person needs to be looked after and family or friends (connected persons) come forward to undertake this task, we will carry out appropriate assessments depending upon the length of the placement required and monitor, supervise and support the placement under the Fostering Services Regulations.

There are a range of placements provided through the Fostering Service which include the following:

- **Short-term placements:** Foster carers undertaking short-term placements do so in a variety of circumstances until an agreed permanence plan can be implemented for the child.
- **Long-term placements:** When children cannot return home and when adoption is not the best permanence option, then long term fostering provides an alternative form of substitute care until independence.
- **Emergency placements:** Foster carers offering emergency placements can be contacted at short notice to accept unplanned placement of children requiring care.

- **Respite carers:** This is planned care for short periods of time, which could be to give the child's family, or main foster carer a break. Respite care can be for a few hours a day, a weekend, the duration of a school holiday or for a specific period.
- **Parent and child placements:** Foster carers offering parent and child placements will provide support to a parent to help them to provide appropriate care for their child.
- **Family and friends (connected persons):** When a family member, friend or connected person comes forward to offer care to a child they already know, the fostering service assesses, approves and provides support to the carers.
- **Staying put:** Enables fostered young people to remain living in the foster carers home post 18 years whilst developing further independent skills and managing the transition to adulthood. The case is overseen by the Leaving Care Service.

Children will be visited in placement by both their own social worker and the foster carer's supervising social worker. Children will be encouraged to express their wishes and views about the foster placement and will be invited to provide written feedback about their placement for the Foster Carer's Annual Review. The children of Foster Carers are invited to provide written feedback regarding their parents Foster Carer's Annual Review.

5. Matching

Full information is taken about the child's placement needs to assist in the matching process. As far as possible we aim to place children within Sandwell so that contact with family and friends, continuity with school and leisure pursuits can be maintained and links to services can be kept.

If agreed the match is proposed to the Foster Carer(s) and the Child's Social Worker who will further consider the strengths and vulnerabilities of the placement, involving the child as appropriate, and then decide for the placement if agreed.

The Fostering Service keeps information about unmet placement needs of looked after children. The Placement Officer monitors unmet placement need for the Fostering Service.

When a placement is not available within the Trust then placements with independent fostering agencies may be commissioned.

The fostering service keeps information about unmet placement needs of looked after children. The Team Manager for fostering support ensures that there is a weekly matching discussion about children who are awaiting placements and foster care availability within the fostering team meeting. Information is used to inform the sufficiency strategy.

A placement matching form is completed prior to matching children which details the reasons for the match and any issues in matching that may need further consideration.

An emergency list of foster carers is provided for use by out of hours services.

6. Children's Guide

A children's guide is provided to all children in care, when placed, when they are of sufficient understanding to be able to benefit from the information obtained in the guide.

The aim is to provide information about what it means to be fostered, what social workers do and what children can do if they are not happy in their foster home or if they have any worries or concerns. The guides are reviewed annually, and a copy is sent to Ofsted and all the Trust's foster carers.

7. Recruitment and Assessment of Prospective Foster Carers

The Fostering Service works to a recruitment and retention strategy which is updated annually. The strategy recognises the need to recruit local foster carers who will be able to meet the diverse needs of the children requiring foster homes.

Sandwell Children's Trust will recruit and assess a diverse range of foster carers who are able to meet the needs of children in care.

All members of the public who make an initial enquiry in relation to becoming a foster carer will be referred to the fostering service. All enquiries will be treated as a potential resource and given a prompt response. They will be contacted, to gather further information and for general discussion about fostering.

An initial enquiry form will be completed gathering basic information about the application/household in addition a check will be carried out in relation to applicants and all members of their household on Children's service records. This forms Stage 1 of the process.

All applicants will be sent an information pack and letter. Where the applicant or member of the household is known, the enquiry will be passed to the registered manager for a decision on how to proceed. At this early stage, it may be appropriate to advise applicants against pursuing fostering if they clearly do not meet the criteria to foster. The manager's decision will be communicated to the person concerned with reasons given, the decision will be recorded.

Where the decision is to proceed the applicant will be invited to a planned information event and an initial visit to the applicant's home will be arranged. The purpose of this visit is to discuss fostering in more depth and to allow the social worker to assess the suitability of their accommodation. An application form is left with the applicant to complete and once returned the assessment process will commence.

The two-stage assessment process will be fully explained to applicants and will be thorough and fair. The fostering service will work in partnership with applicants at all stages. Checks and references are undertaken in Stage 1, these include:

- DBS
- Written personal references
- Employment references
- Local Authority Checks
- Medical Checks
- School references (for children already within the family)
- Pet assessment

Preparation training (Skills to foster) is provided and all applicants are expected to complete the required training programme.

If the fostering service came to a view that an application will not succeed at Stage 1 applicants will be given reasons. Some information for the assessment is provided in confidence therefore there may be some occasion where it may not be possible for reasons to be fully explained.

If the registered manager decides that the prospective foster carers can proceed to stage 2, the case will be allocated to a social worker to complete the assessment and consider the suitability to foster. The report and decision as to the applicant's suitability to foster should be completed within eight months of the application being accepted.

Once the assessment is completed this will be presented to the fostering panel for a recommendation.

8. Fostering Panel

The fostering service has a fostering panel constituted in accordance with regulations 23 of the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011. The

service maintains “a central list” of panel members. The Panel Chair and Vice Chair are independent people with professional experience of fostering.

All panel member’s annual appraisals are conducted by the panel chair and panel advisor. The panel chair’s annual appraisal is conducted by the Panel Adviser and the Registered Manager.

Sandwell Children’s Trust has one established Fostering Panel that meet on a regular basis. Detailed minutes are kept of all panel meetings.

The functions of the panel are to consider:

- Applications for approval and to recommend whether a person is suitable to act as a Foster Carer
- To review newly approved carers and any subsequent reviews referred by the Fostering Service
- To oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the Fostering Service
- Advise on and monitor the effectiveness of the procedure for undertaking reviews of Foster Carers
- Give advice and make recommendation on any cases referred to the Fostering Panel by the Fostering Service
- The termination of approval or change of terms of approval of a foster carer
- Applicants and existing foster carers are invited and encouraged to attend panel when their application or review is presented to panel.
- The panel consists of a wide range of professional experiences with a good understanding of children and young people.
- The recommendation of panel is conveyed verbally to the applicant on the day of panel. The draft panel minutes are forwarded to the panel chair, panel advisor, panel members and social workers who attended panel. The chair approves and finalises the minutes before they are passed to the ADM.
- The ADM reaches a decision in relation to any application within seven working days of receiving the final panel minutes and this is conveyed to the applicants verbally within two working days and in writing within five working days, in line with statutory requirements.
- When the ADM decides not to propose approval then a Qualifying Determination Letter is sent to the applicants and they have 28 days to make representations to Sandwell Children’s Trust panel or the IRM. The decision following panel will then be made by the ADM.
- The panel has a quality assurance role and monitors the standards of reports presented to it and feeds back any concerns to the ADM.
- Sandwell Children’s Trust Fostering Service will inform all prospective foster carers in writing of their approval and any conditions such as the age range and number of children that the carers are approved to care for.

- The foster carers then sign a foster carer agreement with Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering Service which sets out a range of terms and conditions about being a foster carer.

9. Foster Carer Charter

Sandwell Children's Trust Foster Carer Charter can be found on our website: www.sandwellchildrenstrust.org

The Fostering Service is committed to providing and promoting safe, stable and nurturing placements where the outcomes and life chances for looked after children are positive. To achieve this, it is important to have a working relationship which is based on trust and respect between all those involved in the care of the child.

10. Support and Supervision of Foster Carers

- All foster carers receive a fortnightly allowance and foster carers are advised about what the allowance should cover in caring for the child or young person. Additional allowances are paid on completion of the foster carer training, support and development standards.
- All foster carers have an allocated supervising social worker from the Fostering Service who visits, supports and supervises the carer. The supervising social worker will visit six-weekly or more frequently if required. They will work in conjunction with children's' social workers.
- All foster carers have access to the on-line foster carer handbook which contains useful information for foster carers in relation to fostering issues.
- All foster carers have an annual review, chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer. The first review after approval is presented to the Fostering Panel. In addition, Fostering Panel will also consider the reviews of foster carers where there have been specific and significant complaints, allegations, or issues about standards of care or other major changes in circumstances.
- The Fostering Service have bi-monthly support groups for foster carers. Foster carers are encouraged to attend, and this is set out as an expectation in the Foster Carer Agreement.
- Whilst foster carers might be involved in providing transport for children or in contact arrangements there is also support provided for some children to be transported to school and contact if required and to supervise contact.

- All approved foster carers are members of Foster Talk, who can provide support on several areas which include legal and financial matters. This organisation also provides independent support to foster carers who are subject to allegations.
- The Fostering Service provides regular updates for foster carers through the fostering newsletter, foster care forum and support groups.
- Foster carers can access out of office hours support from Sandwell Children's Trust Emergency Duty Team.
- Sandwell Children's Trust fostering holds bi-monthly support groups for foster carers along with regular coffee mornings. Foster carers are encouraged to attend support groups, and this is set out as an expectation in the Foster Carer Agreement.
- All approved foster carers have support of external advice who can provide support on several areas which include legal and financial matters. This gives them access to a support line around fostering, financial issues and where appropriate to an advisor. This organisation also provides independent support to foster carers who are subject to allegations.
- The fostering service provides regular updates for foster carers through the fostering newsletter, foster care forum and support groups.

11. Reviewing the Approval of Foster Carers

The approved status of all Foster Carers is reviewed annually or whenever there is a change of circumstances or concern about the standard of care. First Annual review and those where there is a change in carers "terms of approval" or where there have been a complaint or allegation are presented to the fostering panel for consideration. Foster carers are invited and encouraged to attend panel for their review.

All other reviews are presented to the agency decision maker for a decision about ongoing approval.

Foster care reviews are carried out by Independent Reviewing Officers who are based in the quality assurance service.

The Fostering Service can recommend to the Fostering Panel the termination of approval of any foster carer if it is no longer satisfied that the foster carer/s of the household are suitable. This is discussed at a foster carer review and a

recommendation is made from this meeting which is then presented at the fostering panel.

Following any proposed decision not to approve applicants of a foster carer by the Agency Decision Maker, the applicant/carer has the right to make representation to Sandwell Children's Trust Panel or to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) Panel. The decision following panel will then be made by the ADM. Information on the IRM will be provided by the Fostering Service.

When foster carers decide to retire or resign, the fostering panel are provided with notification.

12. Training and Development for Foster Carers

As part of the assessment process foster carers are expected to attend the Skills to Foster Training programme.

Once approved all foster carers are expected to undertake a range of training to update their skills. Training will be identified in their supervision with their supervising social worker and reviewed regularly. Learning may be through formal training or through Artemis online training offered by Sandwell Children's Trust. Development can also include reflections from reading in supervision or through informal support from professionals.

Foster carers are expected to complete their Training, Support and Development Standard Portfolio within 12 months of approval and are supported to do this through workshops that are provided by the Fostering Service. The national training, support and development standards provide a framework for training for the first year of a foster carer role and sets out what foster carers should know, understand and be able to do.

Family and Friends (Connected Persons) Carers are expected to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD) within 18 months of approval.

The standards include:

- Standard 1: understand the principles and values essential for fostering children and young people.
- Standard 2: understand your role as a foster carer.
- Standard 3: understand health and safety and healthy caring.
- Standard 4: know how to communicate effectively.

- Standard 5: understand the development of children and young people.
- Standard 6: safeguard children and young people (keep them safe from harm)
- Standard 7: develop yourself

Supervising Social Workers discuss foster carers' training needs as an integral part of the supervision process and the annual foster carer review will address carers' training and development needs through a review.

Foster carers are expected to provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children in their care. Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering equips carers with the knowledge and strategies to identify and address bullying, whether in the foster home or outside it.

13. Complaints

All Local Authorities are required to ensure a complaints process is provided under the Children Act 1989. All prospective foster carers, birth families and where appropriate family members of children who are in foster care are provided with written information about the Trust's complaints procedure.

All young people who are in care and who are of an appropriate age and understanding are likewise informed of the complaints procedure and are also informed about accessing advocacy services via the IRO Service.

All complaints and queries will be dealt with in a manner that meets Sandwell Children's Trust local and national standards.

Complaints by children are dealt with under the Children's Trust complaints procedure, which needs a short time for responding to children's complaints and the provision of independent advocacy.

Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering staff are fully conversant with the complaints procedure.

The Corporate Complaints Manager provides intervention, problem solving, independent investigation and mediation.

The Corporate Complaints Manager may be contacted by telephone on: 0121 569 7867 or by writing to: -

Customer Focus Team
Sandwell Council House
Freeth Street
Oldbury

B69 3DE

Online, via the following link: [here](#)

Via email: cs_firmstep@sandwell.gov.uk

Information about the complaints procedure can be provided in large print, Braille, audio tape or in another language on request to the Complaints Manager.

14. Allegations

Allegations against Foster Carers are dealt with in accordance with the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB), procedures for managing allegations/concerns about Foster Carers. All Foster Carers subject to any allegation are offered independent support from the Foster Talk.

15. Fostering Panel Complaints

Any complaint about the Fostering Panel should be directed to the Panel Advisor and Chair to assist in resolution. If the matter cannot be resolved at Stage 1 then the usual complaints procedure for Sandwell Children's Trust will be used.

16. Quality Monitoring

The quality of the work of the fostering service is monitored through staff supervision which is linked to an appraisal system, six weekly recorded visits to foster carers including unannounced visits, annual reviews, feedback from training sessions, case recording and peer/management audits.

The panel agency advisor provides scrutiny and feedback as does the fostering panel chair person. Team Managers monitor data about incidents of concern in foster care including; restraint, allegations, complaints and unauthorised absence. The Registered Manager (Operational Manager) monitors the schedule 6 and 7 requirements of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011.

The information gathered thoroughly annual reports, audits, inspectors and customer feedback is constantly evaluated by the managers of the fostering service to judge its on-going effectiveness and make changes where necessary.

In addition, the service is subject to inspection by Ofsted.

17. Arrangements for the Revision and Circulation of the Statement of Purpose

The Registered Manager will keep under review, where appropriate, revise the statement of purpose and will notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days. Staff and Foster Carers will be consulted on proposed revisions as appropriate.

The statement of purpose will be available to all staff via the Trust's intranet and to members of the public via Sandwell Children's Trust website.

18. Details of the Registration Authority

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
E-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

19. Details for the Children's Commissioner for England

Anne Longfield OBE
Children's Commissioner for England
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT