



Northamptonshire County Council Fostering Service

# Fostering Service Statement of Purpose June 2015



## **1. Introduction**

In Northamptonshire, 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 Northamptonshire (NCC) can be found on the Council website.

This Statement of Purpose sets out the aims and objectives of Northamptonshire's Fostering Service. This Statement of Purpose is provided in accordance with regulation 3 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, the Care Standards Act 2000 and Standard 16 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011. The Statement of Purpose will be regularly reviewed and formally updated every twelve months as required by the National Minimum Standards.

Northamptonshire's fostering service aims to be an inclusive service, working in partnership within Children Services and with Partner Agencies. These primarily include; the Virtual School, the health authority including CAMHS, residential services, the Children's Disability Team, and the Adoption Team.

The safety and well being of the children in foster care homes is of paramount importance. Rigorous checks on prospective foster carers and their family members take place.

## **2. Values**

**2.1** In Northamptonshire, we believe that all children and young people have the right to be healthy, happy, and safe; to be loved, valued and respected and we have high aspirations for their future.

**2.2** 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.

**2.3** Northamptonshire Fostering Service aims to provide an effective, efficiently managed, high quality foster service within available resources to meet the needs of children as identified through the stages of assessment planning and review to ensure the best possible outcomes for children in foster care.

**2.4** The Fostering Service has a key role in supporting Northamptonshire Corporate Parenting Board as a corporate parent for children who cannot live within their own families and for whom it shares parental responsibility. Where a child or young person cannot live with their family, we aim to provide high quality care in a family setting. Northamptonshire foster carers contribute to children and young people's care, learning, development and safeguarding. They are integral to the professional team supporting children and young people in public care.



**2.5** The Fostering service is compliant with NCC's Equal Opportunities Policy, which is available to all staff via the Council's Intranet service. A copy can be provided to any service user on request.

**2.6** Every child is valued for who they are. This encompasses children and young people's racial, cultural, faith/religious, sexual identity, gender and linguistic backgrounds. Northamptonshire Fostering Service will make every effort to provide children with suitable placements and carers who will support and promote a child's sense of identity and self respect.

**2.7** NCC values and promotes children and young people's right to be listened to and treated equally and fairly. Northamptonshire Fostering Service will actively engage children and young people in decisions affecting them and seeks to obtain their feedback on the general operation of our services.

**2.8** Children's growth and development will be safeguarded within a robust care planning cycle. Foster carers, assessing and supervising social workers, independent reviewing officers, other professionals and children's social workers will work together in partnership to enable children to reach their full potential.

**2.9** NCC values and welcomes prospective foster carers from all backgrounds regardless of ethnic origin, faith, age, sexuality, gender, disability, marital or employment status.

**2.10** NCC Fostering Service ensures that all records are maintained in accordance with Statutory Regulations and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering. All files are held in secure storage. Files that contain personal information are held in lockable, 'fire and flood proof' storage. From October 2014 'Carestore' is being used file electronically. All records are retained in line with statutory guidance on timescales and the Councils Record Keeping and Data Protection Policies.

**2.11** NCC delivers the following services to meet the needs of children requiring foster care:

- The recruitment, assessment, approval, support and training to prospective and approved foster carers.
- A Children's Guide to fostering.
- The assessment, approval, support and training for connected carers for the many children and young people who are looked after and cared for by members of their family or friends network who have been assessed and approved as carers.
- Day care and short breaks for disabled children and young people for children in the community who require a series of short-term breaks to provide support and allow them to remain at home.
- Permanent (long term) foster placements for some children and young people including the assessments for Residence and Special Guardianship Orders.
- Weekly financial support and a paid fee scheme to reward foster carer's skill levels.
- Family finding and matching for children both internally and with external providers if there is no in house resource available.
- Support for the introduction and placement of children with carers.



- A Fostering Panel with an Independent Chair to make recommendations on the suitability of foster carers.

### **3. Aims and Objectives**

#### **3.1 NCC's Fostering Service has the following aims and objectives:**

To provide high quality care in a family setting for those children and young people, who, for whatever reason, cannot be brought up by their parents or other relatives, by providing a range of secure and loving homes for NCC children to develop and reach their full potential.

#### **3.2 Objective A - Children**

- To maximise the choice of placement for children requiring foster care.
- To increase the number of locally based carers to ensure continuity for children.
- To ensure that all children are safely cared for including children with additional needs.
- To ensure that all carers understand and promote children and young people's specific identity needs.
- To place sisters and brothers together.
- To plan the beginnings and endings of all placements whenever possible.
- To promote children and young people to reach their educational potential.
- To promote children and young people's health and well being.
- To provide a smooth transition for young people moving into adulthood.
- To work together with other professionals to deliver a child centred service.
- To work with other Fostering Agencies to provide a range of suitable placements for children and young people from NCC.

#### **3.3 Objective B – Minimum Standards**

- To meet the requirements of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011, Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.
- To meet the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and other good practice standards.
- To meet the Statutory Guidance for Family and Friends Care.
- To meet the requirements of the Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services and Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review.

#### **3.4 Objective C – Recruitment of Carers**

- To have in place a recruitment strategy, which ensures that a sufficient range of foster placements are available to meet the needs of all children requiring foster care and to develop any identified gaps in recruitment.
- To ensure that the recruitment process is respectful, fair, timely and ensures the safeguarding of children.
- To ensure that prospective foster carers receive information and are visited within 2 weeks of contact.
- To ensure that applications to become a foster carer are presented to panel for approval within 6 months.



### **3.5 Objective D – Support and Training for Carers**

- To ensure that the preparation process prepares foster carers for the task of caring for looked after children.
- To ensure all approved foster carers achieve the TSD required standards.
- To ensure that foster carers receive weekly financial support and a fee to recognise their skills and expertise.
- To ensure that all foster carers, including connected carers, are supervised and supported at least every 6 weeks.
- To ensure that foster cares remain integral and contribute to the care planning process alongside the professional team.
- To provide ongoing professional development and training to foster carers to ensure all foster carers meet the requirements of the Children's Workforce Development Councils expectations for professional foster carers.

### **3.6 Objective E – Equality and Diversity**

- To provide a fostering service that is timely, fair and transparent to all who have an interest in the fostering service.
- To promote a service committed to equality and diversity to all Looked after Children by having regard to the ethnicity, faith, sexuality or disability of applicants and children.
- To provide support and training to foster carers to actively promote equal opportunity and anti-discriminatory values within the foster home in line with NCC Equal Opportunities Policy.

### **3.7 Objective F – Staffing**

To maintain a qualified, experienced and skilled staff to satisfy the objectives of the service.

## **4. Structure and Personnel**

**4.1** Alex Hopkins is the Director of Northamptonshire's Children, Families and Education Directorate, based at County Hall in Northampton; the Assistant Director is Satinder Gautam.

**4.2** Northamptonshire Fostering Service is located with the Adoption Service at St John's Centre, St John's Road, Tiffield.

Abigail Marsden is the Strategic Manager for Adoption, Fostering and Regulated Services and has overall responsibility for the Fostering Service. John Heron is the (Interim) Service Manager for Fostering and is responsible for the day-to-day operational management of the fostering service. All staff are suitably qualified and meet the requirements under Fostering Regulations.

**4.3** There are 4 fostering teams; these are:

- Post Approval Team
- Recruitment, Training and Assessment Team who are also responsible for family finding.
- Connected Persons



- Specialist Fostering Team which covers Remand, Family Link, and Long Term Fostering

#### **Post approval Team**

Manager	1
Practice Manager	2
Social Workers	10.6 FTE

#### **Recruitment, Training and Assessment Team**

Manager	1
Practice Manager	1
Social Workers	7.8 FTE
Training Coordinator	0.8

#### **Family & Friends Team**

Manager	1
Practice Manager	2
Social Workers	9

#### **Specialist Fostering Team**

Manager	1
Social Workers	6.3 FTE

**4.4** All staff are registered with the HCPC and meet the requirements of the Fostering minimum standards 2011. There are clear job descriptions and person specifications for all posts within the service. All social workers have access to post qualification training and award schemes.

**4.5** Recruitment is carried out in line with the agency's equal opportunities policy (available to all staff) and recognised good employment practice. The council seeks a balance of gender, and to reflect the local community in its staff establishment. All staff having direct contact with children must undergo enhanced checks with the Disclosure & Barring Service to ensure that they are suitable to work with children.

**4.6** There is a workload management system in place to ensure caseloads are manageable. On occasions independent staff may be used for assessments where demand for this service cannot be met by permanent staff.

**4.7** Social work staff have regular monthly supervision from their managers, and their professional/work competence is appraised annually in line with the Council's staff supervision and staff appraisal schemes.

**4.8** The Fostering Service supports social work education and offers work placements to social work students and support to the Social Work Academy. There is a full and varied in house professional and personal development training programme available to all staff. Members of staff have access to independent counselling and support from Northamptonshire's Employee Assist Service.



## **5. Fostering Panel**

**5.1** NCC has 2 Fostering Panels chaired by 2 Independent Chairs, supported by 2 Independent Vice Chairs. Each panel sits fortnightly, so Northamptonshire effectively have weekly panels. The Panel Chairs and members have been recruited, trained and appraised to meet the requirements of the National Minimum Standards 2011. Core membership of each panel meets the requirements of regulation 23 and 24 and standard 14. The panels are managed by the ASSA/Panel Adviser Team. All members are drawn from a 'central list' of people who have the appropriate qualifications and/or experience to serve as panel members. Each panel includes a County Councillor.

**5.2** The Fostering Panel makes recommendations about suitability and approval of foster carers to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM). The ADM is Maggie Beer who is based at St John's. She has the required qualifications and experience to meet the minimum standards. She is registered with the HCPC. From time to time, the Corporate Parenting Strategic Manager may act as Decision Maker or may delegate this function to another appropriately qualified and experienced senior manager in Maggie Beer's absence.

**5.3** The Panel Chairs provide a 6 monthly report to the executive, which is forwarded to the Corporate Parenting Board in May and October.

**5.4** The Panel is supported by a full-time Panel Coordinator and a 0.8 FTE administrative assistant.

**5.5** The Fostering Panel makes recommendations in relation to:

- Mainstream Fostering applications
- Connected Persons Fostering applications
- Long-term Matches of children with appropriately approved carers
- 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Carer Reviews
- Other annual reviews where deemed appropriate.

**5.6** All applicants, carers and where appropriate children/young people are invited to attend panel and to provide feedback about their experience of attending panel.

**5.7** Panel provides feedback to social workers on the quality of reports presented, to ensure it fulfils its Quality Assurance function. Social workers are also invited to provide feedback to panel about their experience of attending.

**5.8** Administrative support is provided by 3 dedicated support staff.

## **6. Recruitment, Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers:**

### **6.1 Recruitment of Foster Carers**

- The recruitment function of this service works closely with the Communications Team to ensure that we recruit the maximum number of new carers for the service.
- Recruitment outcomes are directly linked to the marketing strategy. These employ a variety of different methods via events within the local community and social media resources.





- Northamptonshire County Council offers a financial reward to existing foster carers who recommend a friend to foster following the approval of the friend as a new carer.
- Recruitment team work closely with Northamptonshire Foster Care Association (NFCFA) on recruitment and retention activities.
- Recruitment campaigns aim to reach all groups within the community in order to facilitate placements that reflect the ethnic, cultural and religious needs of children and young people Looked After by Northamptonshire County Council.
- Recruitment targets are determined by identified gaps within the fostering placement service to ensure placements available are reflective of the needs of our Looked After population, such as placements for older children and sibling groups. This information is gleaned via analysis of referrals from Childcare teams, and statistical information regarding the profiles of our Looked After children's population. In addition there are regular meetings between Recruitment, Post Approval Duty and Commissioning teams.

## 6.2 Open Evening

Every month, Northamptonshire County Council facilitates a Fostering Open Evening. This is organised as an informal 'drop in' service, whereby persons interested in fostering are able to meet with social workers from both the recruitment and post approval team. Approved and experienced foster carers are also present to provide advice, guidance and share their fostering experiences. Workers from the 'Virtual School' and 'Children's Rights' also provide attendee's with information. This event provides a holistic view of the fostering task.

## 6.3 Enquiry Process

- We aim to offer a high quality of customer care to people who express an interest in fostering. Ensuring the enquiries are responded to in a timely, professional and inclusive manner.
- On receipt of the fostering enquiry into the service, all enquirer's will be sent an information pack, which provides details of the fostering service, information about financial arrangements and an invite to an open evening.
- The enquirer's details are put onto the main database and an ID is created. Where we already store information about the enquirer, this information will be considered and reviewed with a manager or senior practitioner to decide as to whether an initial visit should take place or further information is required prior to an initial visit.
- All enquirers are contacted by a qualified fostering social worker who will discuss their enquiry in more detail and then arrange to facilitate an initial visit.
- Where enquirers or applicants are not able to proceed, we ensure enquirers are treated with sensitivity, dignity and respect. We ensure that enquirers fully understand why we are not able to proceed.





#### 6.4 The Criteria for Selection of Foster Carers

All prospective foster carers will be rigorously assessed prior to approval to foster for Northamptonshire County Council. Prospective foster carers will be required to meet the following criteria:

- Have a spare bedroom. Including those who wish to foster babies
- To have a satisfactory police record which will be evidenced by an enhanced DBS
- To have a satisfactory social services record
- To be physically and mentally fit to foster children and young people
- To have a satisfactory informal support network of family and/or friends who can provide emotional and practical support within the fostering task
- If working, they must be able to fit working commitments around fostering and be able to retain financial viability when without placements
- If living with a partner, to have an established and secure relationship
- If they have children the youngest must be over one year old
- If siblings are sharing a room, leaving a spare bedroom for fostering they need to have demonstrated that this arrangement is working well for a period of six months

#### 6.5 Initial Assessment process

- If the enquiry criteria is met, the next stage is for a social worker to arrange to visit the enquirer at their home to conduct an initial assessment. This is a detailed visit which considers motivation to foster, childcare experience, family dynamics, lifestyle, work commitments and fostering capacity. During this visit, enquirers will also be provided with further information about the fostering task, and the roles/responsibilities of the fostering service will be discussed. Information will also be given about preparation training, assessment process and post approval support. The need for all members of the household to consent to statutory checks will be explained and information on these checks (including medicals) will also be supplied.
- Following the initial visit, the social worker will discuss the content of the visit with a manager and the team, to establish as to whether the enquirer is able to proceed onto Form F stage one of the assessment processes.
- The enquirer is informed of the outcome of the initial visit. If the enquirer is not able to progress to Form F stage one, they are provided with evidence based reason for this outcome and this is provided verbally and in writing. If the enquirer is able to progress to Form F stage one, they are advised of this and a stage one application pack is sent out.
- The social worker, who facilitated the initial visit, collects the completed stage one pack from the enquirer, to ensure all paperwork is completed appropriately. The applicant is then allocated a social worker who will facilitate the Form F assessment.

#### 6.6 Form F stage one process

When a person applies to foster, the fostering service will assess their suitability in accordance with Regulation 26. Regulation 26 (1A) requires the fostering service to obtain the information on applicants specified in Part 1 of Schedule 3, as below:



- Applicants full name, address and date of birth
- Applicants health, supported by a medical report
- Applicants criminal records for all adult members of the household
- Suitability of accommodation
- Details of current/previous relationships and interviews with ex partners (where applicable)
- Outcome of any previous application made to foster, adopt or other childcare provision by any member of the household
- Reference from any organisation where the applicant has previously fostered or adopted or other child care provision by any member of the household.
- Local Authority Checks
- Written references from 6 personal referees and visits to 4 referees for couple/  
Written references from 4 personal referees and visit to 3 referees for single applicants
- SAFFA checks where an applicant has been in the armed forces
- Employer checks- including reference from any employed positions where an applicant has worked with children or vulnerable adults from the age of 18 years old.
- Overseas check where an applicant has lived abroad for 6 months or more.
- Pet assessment
- School references (where applicable)
- Health Visitor references (where applicable)
- CAFCASS references (where applicable)

Regulation 26 (1B) and (1C) dictates that if in stage 1 it is decided that an applicant is not suitable to foster they should be informed in writing within 10 working days of all the information required that in that stage being received and give full details for it. The applicants has no right to a review of this decision by the independent review mechanism (IRM) or to make representations to the fostering service provider, However if in stage 2 following a brief or full report, it is determined that an applicant is not suitable to foster, the applicant must be informed in writing (within 28 calendar days) that they can seek a review of this determination by the IRM or make representation to the provider.

## **6.7 Preparation Training**

Applicants are required to attend preparation training within stage one of the assessment process.

The preparation training is delivered over a three day period and each day comprises of two sessions to provide the applicant with an overview of the different aspects of fostering. Each session is set within an equalities and anti-discriminatory framework and covers the following topics:

- Motivation to Foster
- Safeguarding children
- Safe Care practice in fostering
- Role and Expectations of foster carers
- Child Protection/Children's Rights
- Children Act 1989 & 2004



- Fostering Regulations and national Minimum Standards
- Supportive Networks
- Diversity and Equality issues
- Managing Challenging Behaviours

Following the preparation training, feedback from the trainers on each applicant is provided and this is incorporated into the applicant's assessment.

## **6.8 Form F stage 2 process**

If it is decided to undertake stage 2 of the assessment, then the applicant will be informed in writing of this progression.

Stage 2 assessment information can be obtained, and assessment carried out concurrently with stage 1 of the assessment. However Northamptonshire County Council confers to the two stage process unless the applicant is already approved as a foster carer and is transferring to NCC or they are known to our service as a previous foster carer or adopter. Moreover if the decision maker determines that an applicant is unsuitable to foster more than 10 days after the information required by regulation 26 (2) then the provider must follow the stage 2 procedure and determination must take into account of fostering panel recommendation informed by either a brief report or a full assessment report.

The Assessment of foster carers is unpinning by a competency based approach in all stages of the assessment and approval of foster carers.

The recruitment and assessment team believes that using standard tools such as the BAAF form 'F' and fostering network guidance promotes uniform practice.

All applicants are treated in a professional and respectful manner. User participation is promoted throughout all parts of the assessment process, in order that applicants are able to fully contribute through their assessment journey. This cultivates a culture of working in partnership with other professionals and prepares applicants for the fostering role.

Applicants are required to attend a paediatric First Aid training course prior to attendance at fostering panel.

The fostering service promotes the following values that unpin the competency based approach within the assessment process.

- Safeguarding children is the paramount consideration within assessment
- No applicant is discriminated against on medical grounds, but general good physical and mental health is required to become an approved foster carer
- Individuals are respected
- Differences and diversity are valued
- Confidentiality is maintained
- Equality is promoted
- Discrimination is challenged
- Applicants are enabled and encouraged to demonstrate their competence through their professional and personal experiences
- Reflection from both positive and negative life experiences is encouraged



- Assessments are completed using the BAAF Form F, which is completed and 'quality assured' by the team manager prior to being presented to fostering panel
- Fostering is a very complex task. The Form F is completed in a very comprehensive manner and reflects the applicant's qualities, competence, attitudes and capacity for fostering as these relate to those identified in the Minimum national Standards for Fostering Services. All assessments aim to be completed within 6 months of initial enquiry and any delays are recorded and analysed
- Progression from stage one to stage two of the Form F Assessment process is formalised by a letter sent to the applicant
- On completion of Stage one assessment checks, applicants are allocated a fostering 'Buddy' who is an existing foster carer and tasked with offering the applicant support and advice during the assessment process
- The Assessment service does not exclude smokers as potential foster carers. However smokers can only be approved to care for children over the age of five years old. Moreover they cannot care for children where medical problems may be exacerbated by being placed with foster carers that smoke
- Applicants are encouraged to work closely with their assessing social worker to carefully consider fostering approval category to promote a positive fostering experience for applicants and achieve a good match of child to foster carer
- Assessing social workers endeavour to consider and comprehensively assess the knowledge, skills and capacity as these relate to every area of the fostering task. Moreover development gaps are identified in assessment and a plan to meet the applicant's needs is devised and implemented into the assessment report
- On completion of the assessment process, the assessing social worker will visit the applicants with the allocated post approval fostering social worker. This provides an opportunity to share information and promotes a positive start to the working relationship between foster carer and supervising social worker. It also provides a supported and positive transition for the foster carer from the assessment team into the post approval team.

## **6.9 Approval at Fostering Panel**

All applicants will be asked to attend the fostering panel when their application is being considered. This provides the applicant and the panel with an opportunity to discuss their application in greater detail and promotes participation of the applicant in all areas of the assessment process.

The Fostering Panel consider applicants for approval and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to become a foster carer. It also oversees the conduct of assessments and advises on the effectiveness of the policies and procedures of the fostering service. The panel recommends to Northamptonshire County Council Agency Decision Maker whether or not an applicant is suitable and conditions (if any) that may be attached to the approval.

## **7. Support and Reviewing Of Foster Carers**

**7.1** Northamptonshire Fostering Service recognises that appropriate support for foster families contributes significantly to the overall success of a placement. By identifying the necessary level of support required when a child or young person and foster family are "matched", at the placement planning stage and at the required 72 hour meetings, it is ensured that support is in place, monitored and adjusted throughout the placement.



**7.2** The fostering service aims to provide creative and flexible support arrangements for children and young people and their foster carers. Our support includes:

- Supervision and support from a qualified and suitably experienced supervising social worker.
- Frequent visits and regular telephone contact from the supervising social worker.
- Individual membership of the Fostering Network.
- Access to independent mediation and support via Fostering Network.
- A weekly allowance that covers the cost of caring and a fee paid to some carers. The Fostering Allowances and Other Payments booklet is updated annually and distributed to carers.
- Carers for children with disabilities are offered practical and specialist support, including appropriate equipment, and access to expert advice and services, as needed.
- A 24 hour 'out of hours' support service to all foster carers, consisting of support from their social worker and the team manager during office hours and the emergency duty team operating after office hours, weekends and bank holidays.
- A comprehensive post-approval training programme, incorporating the requirements of Children's Workforce Development Council (TSD).
- Designated training coordinator for foster carers who is responsible for planning, monitoring and facilitating the above training programmes for foster carers.
- Access to respite care when assessed as needed.
- Access to support groups for mainstream foster carers and for Connected Persons carers and for birth children of foster carers.
- Access to assistance from Virtual School Team to support foster carers in negotiating with schools and promoting children and young people's educational needs and achievements.
- Therapists from Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services team and Outreach Support Workers who provide expert guidance and support for foster carers, children and young people who are experiencing emotional difficulties.
- An informal mentoring system whereby new foster carers are linked with an experienced carer.
- Monthly Fostering Newsletter.
- An Independent Fostering Reviewing Officer (IFRO) for annual reviews of foster carers. Pilot scheme due for review.
- Membership of Northamptonshire Foster Carer Association (NFCA) for peer support and access to information.

**7.3** Following approval at the Northamptonshire fostering panel, foster carers are provided with a Foster Carer Handbook. The handbook includes essential information and practice advice on developments in foster care practice, legal requirements, and other relevant matters affecting the care of children in foster care.

**7.4** We welcome the active participation and contribution of our approved foster carers in various aspects of our work and some experienced foster carers are involved in foster carer training with social workers.



**7.5** A representative from the NFCA is a member of Northamptonshire's Corporate Parenting Board. The Foster Carers Association also meet with fostering managers every month to discuss issues and take forward agreed actions.

**7.6** Approved foster carers are able to access the agency on line fostering policies and procedures. A specific out of hours support service 'help line' for foster carers run by NFCA is available.

## **8. Connected Person Team**

**8.1** Northamptonshire is committed to placing their children with family and friends with whom they are already familiar if it is safe to do so. The Children's team identify families and friends of the children from their social network. An initial assessment is carried out, under Regulations 24 of the Children Act 1989, between the Children's Team and a Friends and family Social Worker. Following a successful assessment, a temporary approval can be granted by the Fostering Service Manager/Nominated Officer whilst a full assessment is carried out within the specified timescales up to 16 weeks. This period can be extended to 24 weeks if permission is granted by Panel in certain circumstances.

**8.2** Assessments are carried out either by a member of the Connected Persons Team or by a member of our pool of Independent Social workers. Whilst the prospective carers are undergoing their assessment, they are supported by a Connected Person social worker and the admin team. These reports can be directed from the Courts during Care Proceedings. The final report is then presented to the Fostering Panel where they are approved as Connected Persons (Friends and Family) Foster Carers. The carers are supported by a social worker from the team until they are transferred to the Long term Fostering Team/ Specialist Team.

**8.3** The Connected Team also undertakes other functions including Special Guardian Assessments as directed by the Courts within the specified timescales and Non Agency Step Parent Adoption assessments.

## **9. Specialist Fostering Team**

**9.1** The Specialist Fostering Team works with Family Link carers, Remand carers and Long Term foster carers.

**9.2** Our social workers support Family Link carers to provide Short Breaks within a family setting for children with disabilities providing respite care for them and their families.

**9.3** The Remand Carers Scheme provides fostering placements for children and young people who have been charged or convicted with a criminal offence providing the courts and police with alternatives to remanding children to remands into custody.

**9.4** The Long Term carers provide long term placements for children, ideally into adulthood, giving these children long term stability and positive childhood experiences of family life.

**9.5** The work of the Specialist Fostering Team, in line with NCC Children's Services promotes the welfare of children and supports them in achieving the 5 Outcomes under the Every Child Matters agenda.





## **10. Training for Foster Carers**

**10.1** Foster carers are encouraged to take responsibility for their own professional development. This is supported as part of their supervision sessions and annual reviews. Northamptonshire Fostering Service is committed to provide good quality training that is accessible and relevant to all foster carers. Training is an important element of support to foster carers and comprehensive pre and post approval training is available on an ongoing basis.

**10.2** Northamptonshire Fostering Service has Training Co-ordinator to facilitate a robust in house training programme. Monthly support groups are held and are well attended. Our Training includes:

- Preparing to Foster – to assist the preparation of applicants as part of their assessment.
- The Children's Workforce Development (TSD) Induction standards that all newly approved foster carers must complete within one year.
- The TSD ongoing Standards for Foster Carer Training, Support and Development. These Standards are a national benchmark for the continuing professional development and training, supervision and support of foster carers.
- Supporting carers to understand difference and diversity to establish a family culture that promotes equality of opportunity.
- Supporting foster carers to understand the effect of discrimination in the community and to recognise the impact on the children they care for, many of whom have faced discrimination as part of their everyday life.
- Supporting foster carers to understand and become more competent and confident in safe caring and in protecting children from harm.
- To support foster carers to promote the health and education of children and young people they care for.

CSE training is now included as part of the mandatory training program for all foster carers

**10.3** Foster carers' own children are recognised as playing a crucial role in the success of Northamptonshire's fostering service. We provide a Support group for children whose parents foster.

**10.4** All training for Northamptonshire foster carers is delivered within a framework of equal opportunities, and anti-discriminatory practice, and meets the requirements of standard 20 NMSFS 2011.

**10.5** The Fostering Service provides practical and financial assistance to facilitate foster carer's attendance on training courses. Times, venues, etc. are organised to maximise attendance by its carers.

**10.6** There are also additional events to brief and support carers in new developments and legislation. Children and young people have opportunities to contribute to their carers' annual review by providing feedback and their views about their carers.





## **11. Reviews of Foster Carers**

**11.1** Northamptonshire foster carers are reviewed annually by an Independent Fostering Review Officer who is managed by the Service Manager.

**11.2** The Review considers the development of foster carers in the previous year by discussing all placements made and is also informed by written reports/feedback from the children placed and their social workers, any complaints/allegations made against the carer, and changes of circumstances and/or persons in the carer's household. The carer's training needs analysis is discussed and planned for the following year.

**11.3** The first annual review report will be considered by the fostering panel and the foster carers are invited to attend. Any concerns identified at the review meeting will be subject to a time limited support and training plan and may be presented to panel if concerns remain.

**11.4** Foster carers review will be presented to panel if there are a change in carer's circumstances or if the carers are having a change of approval. Consideration also needs to be given for carers review to be presented to panel following an allegation as part of the safeguarding process. Long term matches and assessments are also presented to panel.

## **12. Payment**

**12.1** All foster carers receive a copy of the NCC Financial Guide that is adjusted annually to reflect any cost of living increases. This also gives details of the fee element paid to some carers to reflect their skills and experience and who then take on children with additional needs, including behavioural and emotional needs.

**12.2** Northamptonshire Fostering Service pays all foster carers a weekly maintenance allowance to cover the expenses of caring for a child. This is worked out according to the age of the child or young person. All foster carers are classed as self employed and have a duty to inform the tax office and their Insurance Company of their registration as a foster carer.

## **13. Monitoring and Evaluation of the Service**

**13.1** The performance of NCC's Fostering Service is measured to monitor how well we are doing, and this contributes to the evaluation of the Council's performance as a whole. Overall responsibility for Children's Services rests with the Lead Member for Children's Services, and the links between the service and the executive are important in ensuring effective service delivery. The Fostering Service is an important part of delivering the corporate strategy to provide security, care and stability for children who require fostering.

**13.2** There is a continuous cycle of recruitment for new foster carers, but Northamptonshire's fostering service has, at any one time, an average of 170 mainstream carers and 60 family and friends approved foster carers.

**13.3** At an operational level the following monitoring systems are in place:

- All approved foster carers are formally reviewed annually by senior social workers and advanced social work practitioners.
- The Independent Reviewing Officer reviews the progress of all children in placement.



- Staff within the Children's Services and their partners will supervise and monitor the placement.
- The Fostering panel has an overall quality assurance role to uphold best practice.
- There is a well established supervision policy, which is available to all members of staff on the Council's Intranet, and a performance management review system for all members of the service.
- The Service Manager will consider all complaints, concerns in standards of care, and any allegations against carers to ensure lessons learnt can be incorporated into improved practice.

**13.4** The Panel monitors and gains feedback from all attendees. This information is analysed and reported in the annual service report. Where necessary the information is used to improve the service. This monitoring includes:

- Applicants' feedback on attendance at preparation courses.
- Feedback on attending panel.
- Feedback on written information at time of placement.
- Feedback from children who have been placed via the placement feedbacks and the Looked After Children Review process.

## **14. Complaint Procedures**

**14.1** Northamptonshire Corporate Parenting Board welcomes suggestions or representations about the services we deliver. From the point of enquiry all prospective foster carers are made aware of the NCC complaints process and provided with copies of the complaints procedure and encouraged to invoke it if unhappy with the services provided.

**14.2** Northamptonshire has a 'whistle blowing' policy/procedure for staff and carers.

**14.3** Complaints about the Fostering service also provide useful feedback and are used to improve future services. Complaints are dealt with under the Customer Feedback Complaints Procedure but specific complaints and compliments are monitored and managed by the Fostering Managers in the following way:

**Stage 1:** Any complaint will initially be looked at by a member of staff, usually the Team Manager who will contact the service user to see if things can be resolved. Once investigations are complete, the Manager will then write to explain what they have found and what action they propose to take. If the service user is not happy that the problem has been resolved they can ask for their complaint to move to

**Stage 2:** A formal investigation led by an Independent Complaints Officer. A leaflet is available with details of the procedure. If the person making the complaint is still dissatisfied they can ask for the complaint to be heard at

**Stage 3:** A Review Panel. This panel will consist of three people, two who are independent of Children's Social Care and a third who is a Senior Manager from the department but who has not been involved in previous stages. The Corporate Director of Children's Services will send a letter to advise the person making the complaint of the outcome of this stage.

**14.4** The complaints procedure is accessible to people with a sensory impairment and to those whose first language is not English.



**14.5** Service users are advised what independent sources of support are available to help them make a complaint and advocate on their behalf if they do not feel confident making a complaint by themselves, including access to independent support through the Fostering Network and/or the Children's Rights Service. Members of the public can complain to the local Ombudsman at any time. However the Ombudsman will usually want the Council to have a chance to investigate the complaint first. Information about how to complain is also included in the Children's Guide to Fostering.

**14.6** Information about the complaints process can be found by going to the Council website: [www.northamptonshire.gov.uk](http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk)

## **15. Ofsted**

**15.1** NCC Fostering Service is registered as a Fostering Agency and inspected by Ofsted in accordance with the Fostering Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards 2011. Inspection reports are public documents and available on the Ofsted website. Ofsted will also investigate any complaints about Northamptonshire Fostering Service. The OFSTED data return is submitted annually. Regulation 35 (including notifiable incidents) are reported to the Registered Manager on a monthly basis.

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