

Statement of Purpose

Independent Fostering Agency

Children's Trust: Fostering

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How is this Document Organised?

This document is for staff and public and provides the principles which govern how the Children's Trust Northamptonshire works with children and families. It brings together and consolidates good practice and incorporates values and principles that underpin the work of the Trust.

1 INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Children's Services Trust believes 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 want 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. Our Fostering Service is one of many services provided for children that help to achieve this. More information about our Children's Services can be found on the Trust's [website](#).

This Statement of Purpose sets out the aims and objectives of the **Northamptonshire Fostering agency**. This Statement of Purpose is provided in accordance with [regulation 3](#) of the [Fostering Services \(England\) Regulations \(Fostering Regulations\) \(2011\)](#), the [Care Standards Act \(2000\)](#) and Standard 16 of the [Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards \(NMS\) \(2011\)](#). The Statement of Purpose will be kept under review, revised and distributed in line with regulations 3 and 4 of the Fostering Regulations (2011).

The Fostering Service aims to be an inclusive service, working in partnership with the **Children's Trust**, the Local Authority and with partner agencies. These primarily include the Virtual School, the health authority (including the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)), residential services, the Children's Disability Team (CDT), and the **Adoption Agency**.

The safety and wellbeing of the children in foster care homes is of paramount importance. Rigorous checks on prospective foster carers and their family members take place in line with statutory requirements.

2 VALUES

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 To support the **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.
- 2.3 To be compliant with the Trust's Equality and Diversity Policies.
- 2.4 To respect every child and young person for who they are. This encompasses children and young people's racial, cultural, religious, sexual and linguistic backgrounds. The Fostering Service will make every effort to provide children

- with suitable placements and carers who will support and promote their sense of identity and self-respect.
- 2.5 To promote the right of children and young people to be listened to and treated equally and fairly. The Fostering Service will actively engage children and young people in decisions affecting them and seek to obtain their feedback on the general operation of our services.
- 2.6 To safeguard the growth and development of children and young people within a robust care planning cycle. Foster Carers, Social Workers, Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) and other professionals and will work together to enable children to reach their full potential.
- 2.7 To welcome prospective foster carers from all backgrounds regardless of ethnic origin, faith/religious belief, age, sexuality, gender identity, disability, marital or employment status.
- 2.8 To ensure that all records are maintained in accordance with Statutory Regulations and the Fostering Service NMS (2011). All files are held in secure storage. Files that contain personal information are held in lockable, fire and flood proof storage. In addition to physical files, case management software is used to securely store files electronically. All records are retained in line with statutory guidance on timescales and the Trust's Record Keeping and Data Protection Policies.
- 2.9 To undertake the following activities and provide the following services to meet the needs of children requiring foster care;
- The production of a Children's Guide to fostering;
 - The recruitment, assessment, approval, support and training to prospective and approved foster carers;
 - 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;
 - 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
 - Weekly financial support and a paid fee scheme to reward foster carers' skill levels;
 - 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

Our Fostering Agency has the following aim and objectives:

3.1 Aim

To provide high quality care in a family setting for those children and young people, who, for whatever reason, cannot live with their parents, by providing a range of secure and loving homes for children and young people to develop and reach their full potential.

3.2 Objective A – For children

- To maximise the choice of placements for children and young people requiring foster care;
- To increase the number of locally based carers to ensure continuity for children and young people;
- To ensure that all children and young people 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 siblings 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 wellbeing;
- 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 where necessary.

3.3 Objective B – Minimum Standards

- To meet the requirements of the Fostering Regulations 2011, [Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services \(2011\)](#), [Children \(Leaving Care\) Act \(2000\)](#), [Care Planning, Placement and Case Review \(England\) Regulations \(2010\)](#) and [Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers \(2015\)](#);
- To meet the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services;
- To meet the requirements as set out in the [Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities \(2011\)](#).

3.4 Objective C – Recruitment of Carers

- To have in place a Sufficiency Strategy (and action plan), which ensures that a range of foster placements are available to meet the needs of all children and young people requiring foster care. This should be supported by a Marketing Strategy which maximises opportunities across a variety of channels to meet the needs of the target demographics;
- To ensure that the recruitment process is respectful, fair, timely and prioritises the safeguarding of children and young people;
- To ensure that prospective foster carers receive information and are visited within two weeks of contact;

- To ensure that applications to become a foster carer are presented to panel for approval within six 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 [Training Support and Development \(TSD\) Standards](#);
- To ensure that foster carers receive weekly financial support and a fee that recognises their skills and expertise;
- To ensure that all foster carers, including family and friend carers (Connected Person carers), are supervised and supported in line with the [Supervision and Support of Foster Carers procedure](#);
- To ensure that foster carers remain integral and contribute to the care planning process as part of the professional team;
- To provide ongoing professional development and training to foster carers to ensure all foster carers meet the needs of children and young people.

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 fostering;
- To promote a service committed to equality and diversity to all children, young people and foster carers by having regard to the ethnicity, culture, faith/religion, sexuality, disability or individual needs;
- To provide support and training to foster carers to actively promote equal opportunity and anti-discriminatory values within the foster home.

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 [Northamptonshire Fostering Service](#) and its managers

Located at One Angel Square,
4 Angel Street, Northampton, NN1 1ED.

[Responsible Individual, Registered Manager, Chief Executive/ Director](#)

All staff are suitably qualified and meet the requirements under Fostering Service Regulations (2011).

4.2 The Three Fostering Teams

- Post Approval and Support Team
- Pre-Approval, Recruitment and Assessment and Fostering/Adoption Training Team
- Connected Persons Team

(a) Post Approval and Support Team

Manager 2
Manager Practice 4

Social Workers 20 FTE

(b) Recruitment, Training and Assessment Team

Manager 1
Practice Manager 1
Social Workers 8.4 FTE
Training Coordinator 0.6
Digital Marketing Specialist

(c) Connected Person Team

Manager 1
Practice Manager 2
Social Workers 10 FTE

(d) Panel Advisors 1.5 FTE

5 FOSTERING PANEL

5.1 There are two Fostering Panels chaired by two independent Panel Chairs. The Panel Chairs and members have been recruited, trained and appraised to meet the requirements of the Fostering Service NMS (2011). Core membership of each panel meets the requirements of Standard 14 of the NMS (2011) and regulation 23 and 24 of the Fostering Service Regulations (2011).

The panels are managed by the Registered Manager and Panel advisor. All members are drawn from a central list of people who have the appropriate qualifications and/ or experience to serve as panel members.

The Fostering Panel makes recommendations about suitability and approval of foster carers to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM). The ADM, operating on a rota system, has the required qualifications and experience to fulfil the role and is registered with the Health and care Professions Council (HCPC). An independent ADM, who is suitably qualified and experienced, is available to cover leave.

- 5.2 Administrative support is provided by the Business Support Team.
- 5.3 All social work staff are registered with Social Work England and meet the requirements of the Fostering Service NMS (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.
- 5.4 Recruitment is carried out in line with the agency's Equality and Diversity policies and recognises good employment practice. The Trust and Fostering Agency seek a diverse workforce that reflects the community that they serve. All staff having direct contact with children must undergo enhanced checks with the Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) to ensure that they are suitable to work with children.
- 5.5 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.
- 5.6 Social work staff have regular monthly supervision from their managers, and their professional/ work competence is appraised annually in line with the Trust's staff supervision and staff appraisal schemes. Social work staff use the Signs of Safety approach and practice framework.
- 5.7 The Fostering Agency 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.

6 RECRUITMENT, ASSESSMENT AND APPROVAL OF FOSTER CARERS

6.1 Recruitment of Foster Carers

The Recruitment, Training and Assessment Team in the service works closely with the Communications Team in developing campaigns and ensuring that the maximum number of new carers are recruited for the service.

Recruitment outcomes are directly linked to the marketing, recruitment and sufficiency strategies. These employ a variety of different methods via events within the local community, ongoing digital campaigns and social media resources.

A financial reward is available to existing foster carers who recommend a friend to foster following the approval of the friend as a new carer. The Recruitment, Training and Assessment Team work closely with the Northamptonshire Foster Care Association (NFCA) on recruitment and retention activities.

Recruitment campaigns aim to reach all groups within the community in order to facilitate placements that reflect the demographic of children and young people in the care of the Local Authority.

6.2 Open Evenings

Every month, a Fostering Open Evening is held. This is organised as an informal 'drop in' service, whereby people interested in fostering are able to meet with social workers from both the recruitment and post-approval teams. Approved and experienced foster carers are also present to provide advice, guidance and share their fostering experiences.

6.3 Enquiry Process

We aim to offer a high quality of customer care to people who express an interest in fostering, by ensuring that enquiries are responded to in a timely, professional and inclusive manner.

On receipt of the fostering enquiry into the service, a worker visits or contacts the enquirer as soon as possible. Enquirers will be sent an information pack, which provides details of the Fostering Agency, information about financial arrangements and an invite to the next open evening.

The enquirer's details are put onto the main database and an ID is created. Where information is already stored about the enquirer, this information will be considered and reviewed with a Team or Practice Manager 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 within a working day, who will manage the enquiry and visit as soon as possible.

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.

Prospective foster carers will be required to meet the following criteria:

- Have a spare bedroom – this includes those who have expressed a wish to foster babies;
- Have a satisfactory Police record which will be evidenced by an enhanced DBS check;
- Have a satisfactory social services record;
- Be physically and mentally fit to foster children and young people;
- Have a satisfactory informal support network of family and/ or friends who can provide emotional and practical support with 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 within and responsibilities of the Fostering Service will be discussed. Information will also be given about preparation training, the 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 team or practice manager to establish as to whether the enquirer is able to proceed onto 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 Stage One, they are provided with an evidence based reason for this outcome. Feedback is provided verbally and in writing. If the enquirer is able to progress to Stage One, they will be advised of this and a Stage One application pack will be sent out.

The social worker who facilitated the initial visit, collects the completed Stage One application 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 Stage One Process

The Fostering Agency believes that using standard tools such as the Coram BAAF Form F and fostering network guidance promotes uniform practice.

When a person applies to foster, the Fostering Service will assess their suitability in accordance with regulation 26 of the Fostering Service Regulations (2011). Regulation 26 (1A) requires the Fostering Service to obtain the information on applicants specified in Part 1 of Schedule 3, this includes:

- Applicant's full name, address and date of birth;
- Applicant's health, supported by a medical report;
- Criminal records for all adult members of the applicant's 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;
- SSAFA checks where an applicant has been in the armed forces (Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association);
- Employer checks - including a 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 assessments (where applicable);
- School references (where applicable);
- Health Visitor references (where applicable);
- CAF/CASS references (where applicable).

Regulation 26 (1B) and (1C) (Fostering Service Regulations (2011)) dictates that if in Stage One 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 being received and give full details for it. The applicant 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 Two, 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 decision by the IRM or make representation to the provider.

6.7 Preparation Training

Within Stage One of the Form F assessment process, applicants are required to attend preparation training, namely Skills to Foster Preparation Training or Connected Persons Induction and Training in Connected Persons.

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 and young people;
- Safe Care practice in fostering;

- Role and expectations of foster carers;
- Child Protection and Children's Rights;
- Children Act (1989) (2004);
- Fostering Regulations and National Minimum Standards (NMS);
- Supportive networks;
- Diversity and equality issues;
- Managing challenging behaviours;
- TSD Standards.

Care Leavers also attend one session to provide their feedback of experience in care.

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 Two Process

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

Stage Two assessment information can be obtained, and assessment carried out concurrently with Stage One of the assessment. However, the Service adheres to the two stage process unless the applicant is already approved as a foster carer and is transferring to the Agency, or they are known to our service as a previous foster carer or adopter. Moreover, if the ADM 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 Two procedure and determination must take into account the Fostering Panel recommendation, informed by either a brief report or a full assessment report.

All applicants are treated in a professional and respectful manner. User participation is promoted throughout all parts of the assessment process so that applicants are able to fully contribute to 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 the Fostering Panel.

The assessment and approval of foster carers is underpinned by a competency based approach. The Fostering Service promotes the following values that underpin the competency based approach within the assessment process:

- Safeguarding children and young people 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 Coram BAAF Form F, Quality Assured and signed off by the Team Manager prior to being presented to the 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 Fostering Service NMS. All assessments aim to be completed within six months of initial enquiry and any delays are recorded and analysed.

Progression from Stage One to Stage Two of the 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. The Buddy is tasked with offering the applicant support and advice during the assessment process.

The Fostering 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 unless within exemptions explained in the [Smoking Policy](#). 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 placement match.

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 incorporated 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 Recruitment, Training and Assessment Team into the Post-Approval and Support 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 considers applicants for approval and recommends 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 the ADM whether or not an applicant is suitable and conditions (if any) that may be attached to the approval.

7 SUPPORT OF FOSTER CARERS

7.1 The 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 Placement Planning 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 (in line with the [Supervision and Support of Foster Carers](#) procedure);
- 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 – see [Finance Guidance: Foster Carers, Allowances, Fees and other Financial Support](#);
- Carers for children and young people 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, during weekends and bank holidays;
- A comprehensive post-approval training programme, incorporating the requirements of TSD;
- A Training Co-ordinator in the Team to support the Recruitment Team Manager in 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 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 achievement;
- Therapists from the Looked After 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;
- Membership of Northamptonshire Foster Carer Association (NFCA) for peer support and access to information.

7.3 Following approval at the 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 The Fostering Service welcomes 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 and recruitment activities with the Recruitment Team.

7.5 A representative from the NFCA is a member of Northamptonshire's Corporate Parenting Board. The NFCA also meet with fostering managers and the Strategic Lead for Looked After Children every month to discuss issues and take forward agreed actions.

7.6 Approved foster carers are able to access the agency online fostering policies and procedures.

8 CONNECTED PERSONS TEAM

8.1 The Children's Trust is committed to placing 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 Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placements and Case Review Regulations (2010), 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 Registered 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 the Fostering Registered Manager/ Nominated Officer in certain circumstances.

- 8.2** Assessments are carried out by a member of the Connected Persons Team. Whilst the prospective carers are undergoing their assessment, they are supported by a Connected Persons Social Worker.

These assessments are often directed from the Courts during Care Proceedings. The final assessment is then presented to the Fostering Panel where they are considered for approval as Connected Persons (Friends and Family) Foster Carers. The carers are supported by a social worker from the Connected Persons Team until they are transferred to the Post Approval Fostering Team

- 8.3** The Connected Persons Team also undertakes other functions, including Special Guardianship Assessments as directed by the Courts within the specified timescales.

9 POST-APPROVAL AND SUPPORT FOSTERING TEAM

- 9.1 The Fostering Team works with Family Link carers, Remand carers, Connected and Recruited Short and Long Term foster carers, whilst also developing a Resilience Foster Carers scheme. The team also support Parent and Child foster placements.
- 9.2 Our social workers support Family Link carers to provide Short Breaks within a family setting for children and young people 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 and young people into custody.
- 9.4 Long Term carers provide long term placements for children and young people, ideally into adulthood and beyond where appropriate (Staying Put), giving these children long term stability and positive childhood experiences of family life.
- 9.5 The work of the Post Approval and Support Fostering Team, in line with NCC Children's Services promotes the welfare of children and young people and supports them in achieving their full potential.

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. The Fostering Service is committed to provide varied and 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** The Fostering Service Recruitment, Assessment and Pre-Approval Team Manager and Training Admin Co-ordinator facilitate a robust in-house training

programme, as well as access to e-learning and online resources. Our Training includes:

- Preparing to Foster – to assist the preparation of applicants as part of their assessment.
- The TSD Standards are a national benchmark for the continuing professional development and training, supervision and support of foster carers. All newly approved foster carers must complete the Standards within a year of approval;
- 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 and young people 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 and young people from harm;
- To support foster carers to promote the health and education of children and young people they care for;
- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Missing training is now included as part of the mandatory training program for all foster carers.

10.3 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 of the Fostering Service NMS (2011).

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

10.5 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.

10.6 Foster carers' own children are recognised as playing a crucial role in the success of the Fostering Service. We provide a support group for children whose parents foster, called 'Karing Kids'. The children are also offered Session 7 of the Preparation Training, "My Family Fosters". This is offered 2 to 3 times a year.

11 REVIEW OF FOSTER CARERS

11.1 Northamptonshire foster carers' approval is reviewed annually.

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 and development plan is discussed and planned for the following year.

11.3 The first annual review report will be considered by the fostering panel that 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 is a change in the carer's circumstances or if the carers are having a change of approval. Consideration also needs to be given to a 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 Financial Guide and allowances are 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 take on children with additional needs, including behavioural and emotional needs.

12.2 The fostering agency 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.

12.3 All foster carers receive an annual financial statement.

13 MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE SERVICE

13.1 The performance of the Fostering Service is measured to monitor how well we are doing, and this contributes to the evaluation of the Trust's performance as a whole. Overall, responsibility for Children's Services rests with the Lead Member for Children's Services in the Local Authority, 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 and young people who require fostering.

13.2 There is a continuous cycle of recruitment for new foster carers, however the Fostering Service has, at any one time, an average of 200 mainstream carers and 110 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;
- The Independent Reviewing Officer reviews the progress of all children in placement;

- Staff within the Children's Trust and their partners will supervise and monitor the placement;
- The Fostering Panel has an overall quality assurance role to uphold best practice;
- Adherence to supervision and appraisal policies 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 six-monthly Service Report. Where necessary, the information is used to improve the service.

The Fostering Service is integrated into the Trust's Quality Assurance Framework. 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;
- An annual disruptions report including analysis and evaluation of learning, completed by the panel advisor;
- Compliance and quality of the service is tracked by Service and Team Managers to ensure statutory requirements and children's needs are fully met.

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 Local Authority's and the Trust's 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 'whistleblowing' policy 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 complainant 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 Independent report and its findings 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 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 Government and Social Care Ombudsman at any time. However, the Ombudsman will usually want the Trust or 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 clicking [here](#).

15 OFSTED

15.1 The Fostering Service is registered as a Fostering Agency and inspected by Ofsted in accordance with the Fostering Service Regulations (2011) and Fostering Service NMS (2011). Inspection reports are public documents and available on the Ofsted website. Ofsted will also investigate any complaints about the 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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