

STOKE-ON-TRENT FOSTERING

Statement of Purpose (2022)

Updated June 2022



1.0 **Aims & Objectives of the Service**

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

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

2.0 **Principles Underpinning the Service**

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

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

3.0 **Equality & Diversity**

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

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

4.0 **Agency Decision Maker (ADM)**

The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) registered with OFSTED is Sarah Havill, Strategic Manager Fostering & Adoption, based at the Civic Centre.

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

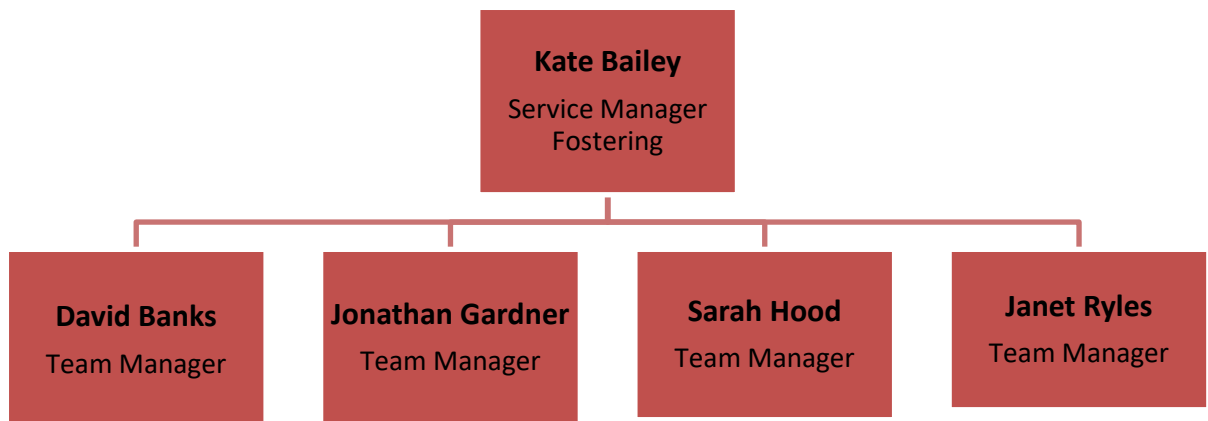
- x 1 Strategic Manager – Fostering & Adoption
- x1 Service Manager
- x 4 Team Manager
- x 2 Fostering Reviewing Officer
- x 25.5 Social Workers
- x1 Social Work Assistants
- x1 Recruitment Officer
- x 1 Panel Advisor (part time)
- x 1 Mocking Bird Liaison Worker

5.1 All Managers and Social Workers have Social Work Qualifications and are registered with Social Work England.

5.2 The fostering service consists of 4 teams, all having access to the corporate marketing officer, recruitment officers, business support, assessing social workers and supporting social workers. This improved model will give Stoke-on-Trent greater control and flexibility in how it develops and implements its foster carer recruitment plan, keeping a close eye on the changing demographics of the borough and its children looked after (CLA) population.

- **The ‘Assessing Social Worker’**: responsible for the recruitment and assessment of new Foster Carers, including connected person carers.
- **The ‘Supervising Social Worker’**: responsible for supervising & supporting all approved Foster Care households and temporary approved connected person carers (Regulation 24 and 25).

- 5.3 Aside from the Agency Decision Maker role, the Management Structure of the Fostering Service is as follows:



6.0 **Recruitment, Approval and Review of Foster Carers**

6.1 **Initial Enquiries**

Telephone, online and email enquiries are received by a member of the fostering service who undertakes initial screening to ascertain basic facts about an individual, with their consent. Personal callers are referred to a recruitment Social Worker for a preliminary discussion. An initial home visit is offered to meet with the enquirer. Alternatively, an invitation is extended to the enquirer to attend the next available information evening, depending on their preference.

6.2 **Initial Home Visit**

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

- 6.3 If appropriate, an application pack is left with the enquirer which contains an application form, along with a clear consent form to statutory checks and dates of forthcoming pre-approval Training (known as 'Skills to Foster').

- 6.4 Once an application form is completed and returned by the applicants, an assessing social worker will be allocated, the statutory checks will be requested and the invitation to training is confirmed.

6.5 **Pre-approval training**

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

6.6 Pre-Approval Training is based on the Fostering Network's 'Skills to Foster' training programme. All prospective applicants are expected to attend all the pre-approval training. Connected persons or prospective connected persons are also invited to pre-approval training, written specifically for connected carers (Skills to Care). This forms part of the assessment of their suitability as foster carers.

6.7 **Assessment**

The assessment of potential carers is an on-going, comprehensive and transparent process. It determines the applicant's capacity to meet the needs of any child or young person likely to be placed with them. There are 2 stages in the assessment process: Stage 1 and Stage 2, and these can be completed concurrently.

6.8 The assessment is completed by a Qualified Social Worker. Applicants are encouraged to undertake a self-assessment during the process as well as an initial 'homework pack' to compile basic information which is explored further during the assessment process. Applicants are always given regular feedback throughout the process.

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

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

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

6.12 **Discontinuing the Assessment**

At any point during Stage 1 of the assessment process, if it is decided that the assessment does not continue, the applicants are informed in writing of the decision and are offered an explanation in relation to the reasons why they are considered to be unsuitable. At the latest, the decision about whether or not the applicant has successfully completed stage 1 is reached, and the applicant informed, within 10 working days of all the stage 1 information being received. If, within this timeframe, it is decided not to continue with an assessment because of information collected as part of stage 1, the applicant is informed that they can complain via the fostering service's complaints process if they are unhappy with the way in which their case has been handled.

The complaints process will address whether or not the applicant's case has been handled in a reasonable way, rather than the question of the applicant's suitability to foster.

A Stage 2 assessment that has been started will be completed, unless:

- the assessment is terminated following a brief report;
- the applicant withdraws from the process;
- the applicant is deemed unsuitable as a result of stage 1 of the assessment (where stages 1 and 2 have been carried out in parallel); or
- it becomes apparent that the applicant or an adult member of their household has been convicted of, or cautioned for, a specified offence (defined in regulation 26(6)).

6.13 If information comes to light before Stage 2 of the assessment process is completed, which indicates that the applicant is unlikely to be suitable to foster, a 'brief report' is compiled setting out details of the assessment done and the reasons for considering the applicant unsuitable. The applicant is notified that the brief report will be presented to the fostering panel and are provided with a copy of the brief report. The applicants are given 10 working days from the date of the notification to send their observations to the fostering service. The brief report is then presented to the fostering panel for consideration, along with any observations submitted by the applicant and any other relevant information. The decision maker's determination about whether to terminate the assessment following a brief report must take account of the recommendations of the fostering panel.

7.0 Fostering Panel

When the assessment is allocated, a Fostering Panel date is identified for the applicants to be presented to, within 16 weeks of allocation.

7.1 Panel membership is set out in the Fostering Regulations Guidance 2011. Stoke on Trent's Fostering Service has a central list of persons whom it considers suitable to be a panel member.

The statutory functions of a Fostering Panel are to:

- Consider applications for approval and to recommend whether or not a person is suitable to act as a foster carer, and if so the terms on which they should be approved (e.g. number and age of children to be placed).
- Consider the first review of newly approved foster carers, and any subsequent reviews referred to it by the fostering service, and recommend whether or not the foster carers remain suitable to act as such, and if the terms of their approval remain appropriate.
- Oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the fostering service.
- Advise on, and monitor the effectiveness of, the procedures for undertaking reviews of foster carers.

Applicants are expected to attend Fostering Panel, supported by their assessing Social Worker. This provides an opportunity for both the Panel and the applicants to discuss and clarify the reasons for wishing to foster and any other matters that either party considers relevant to the application.

- 7.2 The information provided to Fostering Panel includes:
- Social Worker's Fostering Assessment/Review Document
 - The report on interviews conducted with the prospective carer's referees
 - Full information about all the statutory checks
 - The Medical Advisor's report
 - Other reports as deemed appropriate
 - Views of the Young People's Panel

- 7.3 At the Panel Meeting, the information is presented by the Assessing Social Worker. The applicant's Family Book is also presented to Panel for members to view.

The Panel will consider the reports together with all the supporting documentation, and make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker regarding the suitability of the applicant for fostering.

The recommendation, with reasons, will be recorded in writing and, where approval is recommended, the category of fostering, any limitations of the approval to named children (for example in the case of Connected Persons) or conditions as to the age range or number of children to be placed in the foster home will also be specified.

8.0 Agency Decision

The ADM (Agency Decision Maker, see paragraph 4.0) makes a formal decision about the applicant's suitability to foster following Fostering Panel, within 7 working days of receipt of the recommendation and final set of panel minutes. The applicant is informed by the assessing Social Worker verbally of the decision within two working days of the ADM's decision and written confirmation of the decision, signed by the ADM, are sent to the foster carer within five working days of the decision being made.

- 8.1 If the ADM proposes not to approve an applicant, the applicant must be given a written determination which is a notice that the decision maker proposes not to approve them as a foster carer or to amend their terms of approval, together with the reasons for this and, where the fostering panel made a recommendation, a copy of this. This is defined as a 'qualifying determination' by section 4 of the Independent Review of Determinations (Adoption and Fostering) Regulations 2009. The applicant is advised that they may, within 28 days of the date of the notice, either submit written representations to the decision maker or apply to the Secretary of State for a review of the determination by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). The option to seek a review by the IRM does not apply if the applicant is considered unsuitable in accordance with regulation 26(7), where the foster carer or any member of their household age 18 or over has been convicted or cautioned in respect of a specified offence.

If, within 28 days, no representations are received and no application is made to the IRM, the decision maker makes a decision on whether or not to approve the applicant as a foster carer.

A determination to change a foster carer's terms of approval is not a qualifying determination if, following a review of the carer's approval under regulation 28:

- the Fostering Service provides the Foster Carer with a written statement setting out whether they consider the Foster Carer's household, including any children placed there, to have additional support needs as a result of the change, if so what these support needs are and how they will be met; and
- the Foster Carer provides their written agreement to the change. Foster carers must not be pressured to accept changes to their terms of approval.

8.2 The IRM can be contacted as follows:

Contact Details:
Contract Manager
IRM
Unit 4 Pavilion Business Park
Royds Hall Road
Leeds West
Yorkshire
LS12 6AJ

Tel: 0845 450 3956 / 0113 202 2080

Email: irm@irm.org.uk

Website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/independent-review-mechanism

9.0 **Supervision & Support**

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

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

- To ensure that carers understand how they contribute to the overall plan for children and young people in their care
- To provide monitoring and feedback on Foster Carers' work and ensure that they are appropriately supported in their role. Such support can include access to training, information, and the provision of advice and guidance.

9.2 Supervision sessions should take place at a minimum of once every 12 weeks, though Stoke on Trent Fostering Services ensure that Foster Carers have a face to face meeting with their Supervising Social Worker at least every 6 weeks.

- 9.3 Dates for supervision sessions should be agreed beforehand, allowing them to take place in a planned way. Foster Carers are encouraged to contribute to an informal agenda, flagging any particular issues that they wish to discuss with their Supervising Social Worker, beforehand, where possible.
- 9.4 When a child is placed, all foster carers are paid a Fostering Allowance, which is detailed in the Fostering Payment Scheme.
- 9.5 General Foster Carers and Connected Persons Carers are able to access the Payment for Skills scheme, which rewards carers for their experience and skills acquired through training.
- 9.6 Aside from their Supervising Social Worker, services specifically available to foster carers include:
- Membership of Fostering Network.
 - Independent Advice and Mediation provided by the Fostering Network
 - Out of Hours support through the Emergency Duty Team.
 - Respite care, if agreed as part of the child's care plan.
 - Access to educational support services through the virtual school.

10.0 Foster Care Training and Support Groups

The Foster Carers' personal development is continuously reviewed via supervision and formally planned on an annual basis as part of a review of personal and professional development. This is then recorded in a Personal Development Plan (PDP).

- 10.1 There is an expectation that all approved foster carers attend mandatory training courses as prescribed in the fostering service 'guide to payment for skills' document.
- 10.2 A comprehensive catalogue of training courses is available to each fostering household online via Artemis. Foster carers are expected to attend a specified level of training to maintain their Skills Payment in addition to attending two support group meetings and three Quarterly Catch-ups.
- 10.3 All new Foster Carers are expected to meet the TSD standards within one year of their first placement, although Connected Persons carers can take up to 18 months as per the regulations and guidance.

11.0 Foster carer reviews

All foster carers are reviewed in line with the Fostering Services Regulations. All reviews are completed by an Independent Reviewing Officer and first reviews are presented to panel. Feedback is sought from children in placement and those who have lived with the carers in the previous year, children's' Social Workers and Foster Carers birth children. All Post-allegation/Cause for concern reviews are also presented to panel. All Foster Carers are reviewed at least annually.

12.0 Complaints and Compliments about the Service

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

- 12.1 A formal complaint can be made through the complaint's procedure. This can be done in a number of different ways. Contact the Complaints Officer at the Customer Feedback Team by telephone on 01782 234234, or write a letter to:

Customer Feedback Team

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

For further information go to: www.stoke.gov.uk

13.0 Advocacy Services

Stoke on Trent have a contact with Change Grow Live (CGL) Ltd who provide advocacy and independent visitor services for children in care.

Contact: 07809 587007

The Fostering Service

Children's Social Care,
Children and Family Services
Civic Centre,
1st Floor,
Glebe Street,
Stoke-on-Trent,
ST4 1HH

Tel 01782 235137

Ofsted

26-32 Store Street,
Manchester,
M1 2WD,

Tel 0300 123 1231