

Northamptonshire Children's Trust as an Independent Fostering Agency Statement of Purpose 2021-2022



Northamptonshire
Children's Trust
Adoption & Fostering

Touching hearts, changing lives, growing miracles

Summary

This Statement of Purpose outlines how Northamptonshire Children's Trust functions as an Independent Fostering Agency.

Owner: Christine Johnson, Service Manager

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Northamptonshire Children's Trust

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Introduction and Context

The statement of purpose outlines how Northamptonshire Children's Trust functions as an independent fostering agency. The statement of purpose is underpinned by Northamptonshire Children's Trust's sufficiency strategy and vision statement.

It is intended as a useful source of information for:

- Foster carers
- Supervising social workers
- Childcare social workers
- Children and young people as well as birth parents

In accordance with regulations, a copy of the document is available to Ofsted and it can also be viewed on Northamptonshire Children's Trust dedicated website.

Our statement of purpose will be kept under review and updated, where appropriate, at least annually. Northamptonshire Children's Trust is an independent, not-for-profit agency that provides social care and support services to children, young people and families.

The fostering service is situated within the corporate parenting service within Northamptonshire Children's Trust and offers placements to Northamptonshire children. The agency is registered as an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA).

Northamptonshire Children's Trust Fostering Service statement of purpose is prepared in accordance with the requirements of the following legislation:

- Care Standards Act 2000 (CSA) for the conduct of Fostering Services
- The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011
- Fostering Services Regulations 2011
- Care Planning, Placement & Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- Care Planning, Placement & Case Review and Fostering Services Regulations (Miscellaneous Amendments) 2013.
- The Children Act 1989 - Guidance and Regulations
- Volume 4: fostering services (referred to as statutory guidance) 2011

- The Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Children and Families Act 2014
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

Key Service Aims and Objectives

Northamptonshire Children’s 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.



Strategic Framework

Vision

Children, Young People and Families at the heart of all we do - in every action we take and every decision we make.

Our Commitment

(co-produced with children and young people)

What we do today affects your tomorrow, we promise to walk side by side with you

Outcomes Framework



Conditions for Success



To help achieve this, our mission is that we should all be working together to improve the lives of children and young people by protecting, supporting and enabling them to thrive.

Northamptonshire Children’s Trust aims to:

- Deliver the best possible outcomes for vulnerable children and families.
- Ensure children and families remain the focus of everything we do and provide the best possible support to staff, enabling families to develop and flourish.
- To ensure children are fully supported in terms of their individual care plans with particular emphasis on placement stability, educational achievement, social development, health and wellbeing.
- To maintain a child-centred provision offering children and young people the opportunity to live within a twenty-mile radius of their family, community, leisure and educational resources.

The Fostering Service is committed to:

- Respecting every child and young person for who they are. Recognising children and young people's racial, cultural, religious, sexual and linguistic backgrounds.
- Providing children and young people with suitable placements that promote stability and positive outcomes for them by working in partnership with young people, carers, birth families, other professionals and the community.
- Ensuring foster carers and their families receive professional guidance, support and training as appropriate to help them fulfil their roles as effectively as possible.
- Actively engage children and young people in decisions affecting them and seek to obtain their feedback on the general operation of our services.
- Continuing to support children with disabilities within their families of origin through the provision of regular periods of family-based short breaks.

Our objectives for service provision are to:

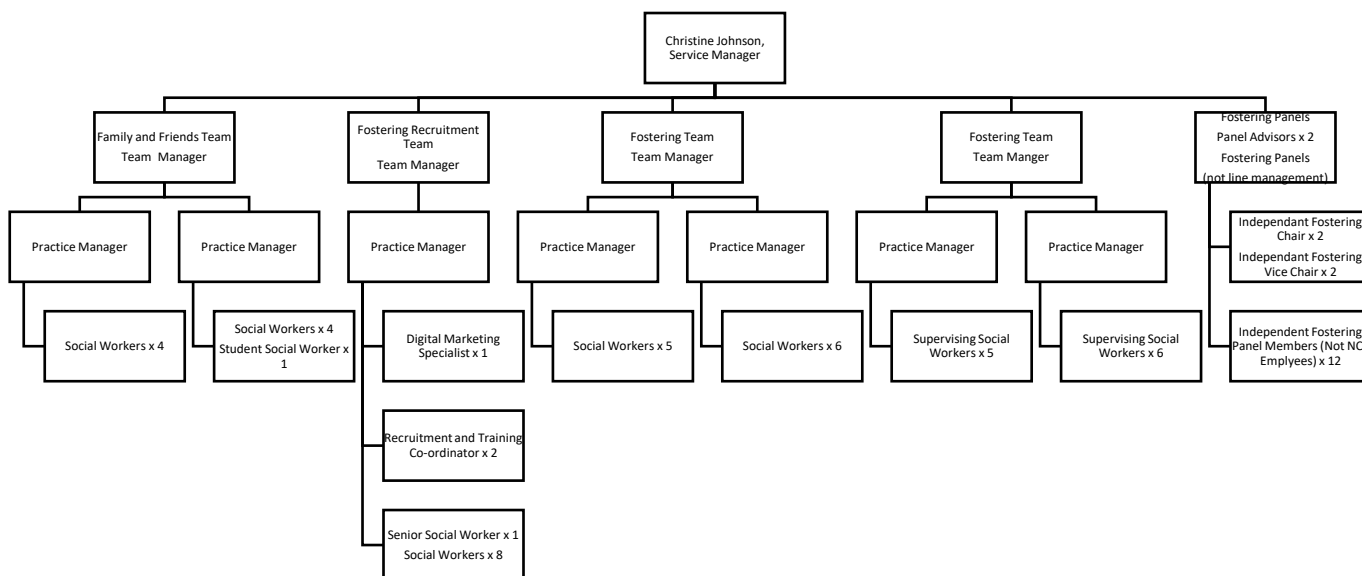
- Recruit and assess a range of foster carers who can provide safe and secure foster placements to meet the needs of Northamptonshire children and young people.
- Recognise and value the diverse nature of the community it serves and proactively engage with the local community to identify potential foster carers.
- Offer a prompt and professional timely response to members of the public who enquire about becoming a foster carer for Northamptonshire Children's Trust.
- To welcome prospective foster carers from all backgrounds regardless of ethnic origin, faith/religious belief, age, sexuality, gender identity, disability, marital or employment status.

- Ensure prospective foster carers are well prepared for the fostering task/role through the provision of high quality preparation training and thorough & robust assessment which focuses upon identifying relevant competencies and evidenced ability to meet the needs of children/young people who are looked after.
- Ensure there is a sufficient range of appropriate placements available for children looked after in Northamptonshire.
- Promote and safeguard children and young people's welfare.
- Actively monitor and supervise all placements to ensure children and young people are safe, their needs are met and that they are making progress to achieve positive outcomes.
- Ensure the views of children, parents and carers are sought and are taken into account, having regard for their age and understanding, in the continuous development and improvement of the service.
- Recognise the importance of, and support appropriate levels of, contact with the children and young people's birth family and community as is consistent with children's welfare and care plan.
- Contribute to and ensure effective multi-disciplinary and partnership working to meet the health, educational and social needs of children and young people in our care.
- Operate within the framework of equality of opportunity and non-discriminatory practice. Children and young people will not be discriminated against on the grounds of race, culture, religion, language, age, gender, sexuality, disability or social class in terms of service provision. Wherever possible children are matched within their own cultural, racial, linguistic and religious communities, and where this is not possible, plans must be put in place to keep the child's culture alive for them.
- Ensure children with disabilities are placed in an environment that recognises and caters for their additional needs and, promotes their social inclusion.
- Ensure staff and foster carers are well trained and competent in delivering a quality fostering service, including opportunities for continued learning and professional development.
- Ensure all staff and foster carers have been subject to appropriate recruitment checks and have a valid DBS.
- Provide all staff and foster carers with support and supervision that demonstrates clear lines of accountability and management.
- Provide each foster carer with a named allocated supervising social worker.
- Work in partnership with the Northamptonshire Foster Care Association (NFCA).

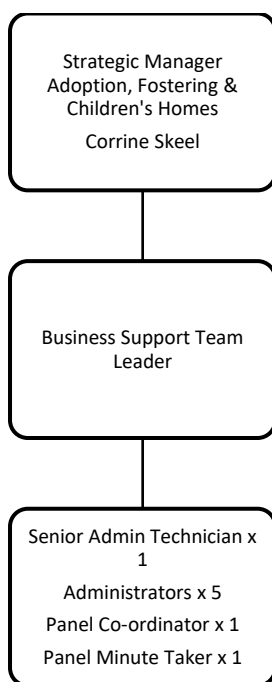
- Work in collaboration with and provide advice on fostering issues to colleagues in Northamptonshire Children’s Trust.
- Operate clear administrative records and financial management systems pertinent to the running of the service, including the maintenance of comprehensive and up-to-date records on all children.
- Ensure all complaints and allegations against foster carers/staff are investigated in line with departmental procedures in a timely manner and lessons learned used to inform future practice and service provision.
- Facilitate the effective operation of the fostering panel, which provides a quality assurance role with regards to the recruitment and review of foster carers, family link carers, family and friends foster carers and foster placements. The panel will ensure the welfare and safety of children is paramount in all decision making.

Staffing

Fostering and Regulated



Fostering Business Support



The registered provider of the fostering service is Northamptonshire Children's Trust.

The strategic manager for Fostering, Adoption and Children's Homes is the responsible individual for the service.

The responsible individual is the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

The service manager is the registered manager.

The four team managers within the service are responsible for the supervision and professional development of the staff within the fostering teams and the day to day management and growth of the service.

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. The workers within the service have a range of post qualifying experiences and are supported by Northamptonshire Children's Trust to add to their academic and professional qualifications to enhance their practice.

Recruitment is carried out in line with the agency's equality and diversity policies and recognises good employment practice. Northamptonshire Children's 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.

Social work staff have regular monthly supervision from their managers, and their professional/work competence is appraised annually in line with Northamptonshire Children's Trust staff supervision and staff appraisal schemes. Social work staff use the signs of safety approach and practice framework.

The Fostering Agency 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 if required.

Services to Children and Young People

The primary purpose of the fostering service is to provide high quality, safe, secure and caring foster families for children and young people who are unable to live with their parents and/or immediate birth families.

Whenever possible and where it is safe to do so, children and young will be placed with someone in their extended family or a close family friend. These arrangements are recognised in legislation as 'family and friend' or 'connected persons' foster placements. Where this is not possible, placements will be found with one of our approved foster carers or a suitable foster carer approved by an independent fostering agency. We aim to clearly identify the particular emotional, physical, cultural and religious needs of a child and to find a foster family who can best meet those needs.

Our aim is always to keep sibling groups together where this meets their identified needs. Other than in emergencies, we plan all placements and promote introductory meetings between the child and the foster carer. Each carer receives a welcome book upon their approval and every child or young person placed will be given a copy of the children's guide in an effort to lessen the anxiety for the child or young person when moving to a new family.

Where a child or young person is placed in an emergency, the child's social worker or the foster carer's supervising social worker will give the child as much information about the foster carers and their household as possible.

The views, wishes and feelings of children and young people are vital to the development of services. Consultations take various forms, either through questionnaires, on line surveys, consultation events, activities and feedback forms for foster carer's annual reviews and children's statutory reviews.

Foster carers' own children are recognised as playing a crucial role in the success of the fostering service. Support group for children whose parents foster, called 'Karing Kids' are available to the children of foster carers and there is a module within the fostering preparation training for children to attend called "My Family Fosters" to support their inclusion and offer support for them to understand the fostering task. Northamptonshire Children's Trust establishes a personal savings account for all children in care, where regular weekly amounts are saved centrally. These savings are accessible to the children and young people when they move placements or onto independence.

Northamptonshire Children's Trust celebrates the achievements of children and young people with an annual awards ceremony.

The voices of all household members (inclusive of children who are members of fostering families) are included within foster carer's annual reviews.

Placement of Children

Our fostering duty team identifies those foster carers who have vacancies and works with the allocated social workers to assess if this is a potentially appropriate placement for the child or young person. Wherever possible, profiles of foster carers and their households are shared with children and young people as well as their social workers. If they agree, the match is proposed to the foster carer/s and the child's social worker who will further consider the match, involving the child or young person as appropriate, and make arrangements for a placement if agreed.

Our matching process aims to ensure that the identified needs of children and young people are considered alongside any additional support that might be required by the foster carer and or fostering household.

We provide the following fostering arrangements:

Northamptonshire Children's Trust operates a sufficiency board which monitors placement activity and an approval panel authorises financial packages to support placement arrangements.

The children's guide has been created to answer some of the questions children and young people may have about being in foster care.

Services Provided

The fostering service currently provides:

- A duty system supporting requests for internal placements from Northamptonshire's Children's Trust's placements and commissioning service.
- A general fostering skills scheme, consisting of a pool of registered foster carers, providing planned and emergency foster care for individual children, young people and sibling groups of all ages, across the full range of short term, longer term placements. There are three tiers to this scheme recognises the need to encourage foster carers to continue to develop their skills.
- A specialist family-based short break scheme to support children and young people with a range of disabilities and their families, offering regular breaks during the day/evening and overnight stays with an identified foster carer.
- Staying put provision for young people in care and care leavers aged 16–21 to remain living with their previous foster carers. Northamptonshire Children's Trust has a staying put policy, which is applied if it meets the young person's needs and is part of their pathway planning.
- A recruitment and assessment service for prospective foster carers, which is responsive, professional and customer focused.
- A fostering panel constituted and administered in line with regulatory requirements, which considers and makes recommendations about the approval of all prospective new carers, reviews of foster carers and matching children to long-term placements.

How Northamptonshire Children's Trust Fostering Services Operate

Recruitment, Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers

Recruitment of Foster Carers

The recruitment, training and assessment team work closely with the communications team to develop marketing and recruitment campaigns to fulfil the sufficiency needs of the service.

The service operates a financial reward scheme which 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) to support recruitment and retention activities. Alongside this, the service work closely with the children in care council.

Fostering information event are regularly held as an informal 'drop in' service, whereby people interested in fostering are able to meet with social workers from the recruitment team. Approved and experienced foster carers are also present and share their fostering experiences.

The 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.

The team operates a duty system, from Monday to Friday, to ensure that any potential applicant is able to have an immediate response to their enquiry and to answer any general queries they may have.

On receipt of the fostering enquiry into the service, all enquirers are contacted by the recruitment officer or duty social worker within a working day, who will manage the enquiry and arrange a visit as soon as possible.

Online enquirers are automatically sent an information pack, which provides details of the fostering agency and information about financial arrangements.

Applicants are able to access the service website and can gain general and local information regarding fostering alongside accessing key information including our statement of purpose and an online initial enquiry form.

We welcome enquiries from applicants who seek to become Northamptonshire Children's Trust foster carers regardless of their gender, marital status, sexuality, ethnicity, disability, religion, culture or employment status. This assists our opportunity to be able to provide a broad range of placements to children who present with a broad range of need and who are from a broad range of backgrounds.

Following receipt of an initial enquiry to become a foster carer, an initial home visit will be arranged and this provides an opportunity to have an honest, two-way discussion about fostering and to assist both the service and the applicant to consider whether fostering will be right for the applicant.

Assessment Process

Stage One Process

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.

The assessing social worker will assist the applicant in completing all relevant statutory check forms including the DBS checks and forms relating to personal and employer references and forms required for the purposes of a medical with their GP.

The assessing social worker will agree a schedule of visits to complete the assessment.

Within stage one of the assessment process, applicants are required to attend preparation training, namely skills to foster preparation training or connected person's induction and training in connected persons.

Stage Two Process

All assessments aim to be completed within six months of initial enquiry and any delays, and the reasons for them, are recorded.

Progression from stage one to stage two of the assessment process is formalised by a letter sent to the applicant.

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.

The fostering service promotes the following 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.
- 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.

The assessment report will be presented to Northamptonshire Children's Trust's fostering panel by the assessing social worker and is quality assured by the management team prior to this being presented to our panel members

The stage two assessment can be carried out concurrently with stage one of the assessment when applicant is already approved as a foster carer and is transferring to Northamptonshire Children's Trust from another agency, or they are known to the service as a previous foster carer or adopter

Fostering Panel

The fostering service has a fostering panel constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (amended 2013).

The service maintains a 'central list' of panel members. The panel membership is diverse in terms of ethnicity & culture alongside a breadth of experience and a variety of backgrounds, including, health, social care, fostering and there is a dedicated panel advisor in post.

The panel meets weekly. Detailed minutes are kept of all panel meetings including the decisions made and the basis for these.

The functions of the fostering panel are to consider:

- Each application and recommend whether or not a person is suitable to be a foster carer or a family and friends foster carer and the terms of their approval.
- The first annual review of each approved carer and any other review as requested by the fostering service.
- The termination of approval or change of terms of approval of a foster carer
- permanent fostering plans for children.

Following approval, 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.

Support and Supervision

The fostering service supervises, reviews, trains and supports all Northamptonshire Children's Trust approved foster carers.

All approved foster carers will be allocated a supervising social worker that will visit the foster carer at a minimum of once every 6 weeks to undertake supervision and offer support to them and any children in placement.

Carers are expected to maintain daily logs and provide monthly reports and these are retained for the purpose of care planning, monitoring of child development, and as a method of monitoring the placement and performance of foster carers for all children placed in their care.

The service will undertake a minimum of one unannounced visit to foster carers' homes per year.

The fostering service aims to provide creative and flexible support arrangements for children and young people and their foster carers.

Our support includes:

- 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 person's 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.
- Monthly fostering newsletter.
- Membership of Northamptonshire Foster Carer Association (NFCA) for peer support and access to information.

Foster Carers Review

Northamptonshire foster carers' approval is reviewed annually by the management team and agreed by the Registered Individual, acting as ADM.

The review considers the development of foster carers in the previous year, by discussing all placements made and is 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.

Connected Persons Team

Northamptonshire 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. 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.

Full 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. 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.

The connected persons team also undertakes other functions, including special guardianship assessments as directed by the courts within the specified timescales.

Training for Foster Carers

The fostering service is committed to providing varied and quality training that is accessible and relevant to all foster carers.

There is a robust in-house training programme, as well as access to e-learning, webinars, virtual reality and other 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 programme for all foster carers.
- Access to virtual reality to inform and reflect upon: early childhood trauma; therapeutic approaches; grooming and CSE/gangs.

Payment

The fostering agency pays all foster carers a weekly maintenance allowance to cover the expenses of caring for a child. This is calculated 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 inland revenue and their household insurance company of their registration as a foster carer.

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.

All foster carers receive an annual financial statement.

Placements and Commissioning Service

There is a dedicated placements and commissioning service within Northamptonshire Children's Trust which works closely with the fostering team.

The placements and commissioning service have responsibility for managing all requests for fostering placements, placements for children and young people in residential units and semi-accommodation services for 16 plus children or with independent fostering agency carers (if a suitable NCT alternative cannot be identified).

Complaints/Allegations

All foster carers and children and young people in care using the fostering service are provided with written information about complaints procedures, including contact details if they wish to make a complaint. The service manager of the fostering service, along with strategic manager for fostering, adoption and residential homes monitors all complaints received in respect of any aspect of the work undertaken by the fostering service. 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. Information about how to complain is also included in the children's guide to fostering.

Any allegations of abuse will be dealt with in accordance with Northamptonshire Children's Trust's safeguarding procedures. We will ensure that Ofsted is kept informed of the progress and outcome of any investigation.

Monitoring and evaluation of the service

Monitoring

An annual report is written by the service manager for fostering, providing the corporate parenting board and senior leadership team of Northamptonshire Children's Trust with statistical data in relation to the agency's activity. The senior leadership team also receives regular reports to consider, including the statement of purpose which is updated annually and/or as change is required.

Other monitoring includes staff supervision linked to the appraisal system, monthly recorded visits to foster carers, annual reviews, the fostering panel and feedback from training sessions and case recording and practice audits. The team managers monitor data about incidents of concern in foster care, including: restraint; allegations; complaints; unauthorised absence.

The registered manager monitors the Schedule 6 and 7 requirements of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011. The fostering service collects data surrounding the meeting of service requirements alongside KPIs to ensure the monitoring of performance.

Evaluating the Service

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

The fostering service is also subject to formal inspection by Ofsted and inspections as an IFA will take place annually.

Arrangements for the Revision and Circulation of the Statement of Purpose

The registered manager overseen by the responsible individual is responsible for the annual revision of the statement of purpose. Revisions may occur at other times if necessary. Staff, stakeholders and foster carers will be consulted on proposed revisions as appropriate.

The revised statement of purpose will be presented to the senior leadership team and corporate parenting board for their consideration and will also be sent to Ofsted annually and when any significant changes have been made.

The statement of purpose will be available to all staff via Northamptonshire Children's Trust intranet and to members of the public via Northamptonshire Children's Trust website. Paper copies can be provided to children in care and their parents on request.

Details of Registration

Northamptonshire's Children's Trust Limited – Company Number 12430084

The fostering service is registered as an Independent Fostering Agency – URN: 2615433, One Angel Square, Northampton, Northamptonshire, NN1 1ED