

Title:

FOSTERING SERVICES – STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Date of Issue: 01/07/22

Effective Date: Immediate

Sector: Children, Families and Education

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Purpose

This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirement of the Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011 (Standard 16) and The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 (Regulation 3).

Scope

This policy and guidance applies to Heads of Service, Service Leaders, Team Leaders, Social Workers, and all PCC support staff engaged in the provision of service to children, families, and foster carers.

PORTSMOUTH CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

Fostering Service

Statement of Purpose

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1. Introduction

This statement has been produced in accordance with the Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011 and associated Regulations.

The statement outlines Portsmouth's Fostering Service vision, aims and objectives, principles, and values. It also describes the services that are provided and how we monitor these services and manage our performance against these objectives. This statement is reviewed annually.

2. Our Children in Care Pledge

The quality of care we provide children is strongly influenced by what they tell us about the care they want and the relationships we form with them

The Children in Care Council has written a Pledge, in partnership with wider partners, that everyone working with children in Portsmouth is expected to use as a benchmark for all interactions with children and young people. We invite children, young people, family members and colleagues to call us to account against the Pledge if they do not feel we are adhering to its promises.

Within the initial recruitment stage, prospective foster carers will be introduced to the Pledge and asked to make a commitment to the principles by signing a copy.

The Pledge is attached to the Statement of Purpose

3. Aims and Objectives

Our overarching aim is to provide caring and nurturing homes to children who cannot live with their own families. This will be provided through:

- Highly competent and motivated staff, providing safe and secure family-based care to meet the assessed needs of children in care, balancing costs, and outcomes, and achieving best value.
- Working with service users, carers, the wider community, and partner agencies to promote the welfare of children we care for and improve their life chances by providing services which cares for children in a safe, sensitive, warm, and loving way.
- Working with and supporting families to provide stable, safe, and effective alternative care at the right time and for the right length of time
- Being responsive to individual needs, circumstances, and choice
- Listening to and taking into account children's feedback about what they want from a foster home.

We will work to recruit, assess, train, manage and support foster carers of sufficient numbers and diversity to provide placement choice for children we care for which meet or exceed the Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011 and The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and in accordance with the principles of the Foster Carers' Charter.

The key objectives in providing quality placements are:

- To provide warm, kind, and safe care where children feel loved and can flourish as part of a family
- To provide placement choice so we can identify suitable carers to match with a child/ren and we ensure their experiences and needs are understood and accepted
- To have carers near to the child's home, family, friends and school, where it is safe to do so
- To identify carers within the child's family and friends' networks wherever possible
- Ensuring brother and sisters are placed together wherever possible. Where they do live apart, they will be placed with carers who support their ongoing relationship
- Ensuring carers proactively meet children's health and dental care needs
- To maximise educational opportunities and achievements for children
- Ensuring we have planned beginnings and endings of placements
- Promoting positive family and friends time together
- Ensuring we understand a child's identity and meet their needs
- Promoting a child's interests and aptitudes
- We will continually review whether children can return to the care of their family or wider network
- Listening to children, co-producing plans with them and involving children in decisions about them and their lives
- Working with parents and forming meaningful relationships so they can continue to be a core part of their child's life
- Promoting strong relationships so children have stable fostering families minimising moves for children
- Minimising the time delay between a child coming into our care and moving to their permanent family where this is required
- Ensuring we prepare children for independence and have successful transitions into adulthood, supporting children in a way that meets their individual needs
- Ensuring all staff and carers supporting children who have experienced trauma are provided with training and learning opportunities to ensure a comprehensive understanding with the trauma informed model of care that underpins our care and interventions

4. Principles, Values and Objectives

Children come first and we will do everything to ensure that this runs through all our work and decision-making, planning and communication. Our primary responsibility is to help children live happy fulfilling and fun lives, where they can recover from trauma and maintain relationships with every person who is important to them.

Our objective is to provide trauma informed quality care in a range of well supported and matched fostering families to meet the identified needs of children who require care outside their own family.

To achieve our primary aim we recognise and are committed to the following principles and values:

- That receiving a child into our care is a significant life decision for a child. The decision to do this should only be made after all other options for a child to remain with their family are exhausted and, a full assessment is completed.
- Children's attachment to their primary caregivers is a key element in a child's ongoing development to enable them to feel safe and build relationships as they grow and develop. Carers will be equipped with knowledge and skills to promote children's attachments in their care.
- We implement the Department of Education Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards for foster care and support carers in achieving the standards.
- We promote the value, skill and commitments required of foster carers and treat them, their families and homes with respect and care. Carers are regarded as members of the team around the child/ren they care for and as such they are fully included in the matching, introductions, and care planning-working with our partners in health and education.
- Foster carers caring for children are supported to enhance their knowledge and skills enabling them to care for children who have experienced trauma. Foster carers skills, experience and commitment to children is recognised through the skills level rewards.
- That many children will have experienced trauma prior to placement in care, as well as the effects of separation and loss. Their mental health needs may be complex and their need for access to therapeutic input (where needed) is essential.
- That foster carers, caring for traumatised children will encounter unknown situations every day and their own needs as a carer will continue to be assessed and, a range of support and care will be in place for them.
- Children with disabilities are children first and they will have access to support they need to meet their unique needs.
- The transition into adulthood is a major step requiring positive daily living support and enhanced connections with the adult world of opportunity and responsibility. A flexible range of accommodation and support options to meet different levels of need will be a factor in the services for young people leaving care.
- We will facilitate young people to remain with their foster carer into early adulthood, wherever possible, under 'Staying Put' arrangements

5. Services Provided for Children

Foster Care for children needing:

- Family and Friends care
- Mockingbird Model of care - (peer support community of carers)
- Long term care
- Planned Respite Care
- Emergency and short stay care
- Parent and Child placements
- Staying put arrangements
- Family link for Children with Disabilities

Health Services:

- Children we care for medical adviser and nurses
- CAMHS Start
- Trauma Informed Model of Care (TIMOC) support

Education:

- Virtual School
- Special Educational Needs Department
- Enrichment activities
- Pupil Premium

Housing:

- Staying Close
- BOOST accommodation
- Direct nominations for foster carers/ special guardians/care experienced young adults for local housing
- External providers within the city
- Supported lodgings
- Staying put
- Young persons' pathway

Children in Care Council (CICC)

CICC -children's voice - led by children we care for, contributing to the development of services for our children

6. Services to Foster Carers

Recruitment

Applications to foster will be welcome from anyone age 21 and over who has the time, space and commitment to offer a warm, nurturing home to a diverse range of children.

We pride ourselves on how we assess and support new carers and we have written Portsmouth's Fostering Service recruitment strategy based on inclusion, equality, and openness and most importantly, what we know about the children we care for and their needs so that we get the best people to care for them. The recruitment strategy is reviewed annually

We are always in search of new carers and foster carers are recruited through a variety of methods and using different mediums including, drop-ins, personal recommendation and media campaigns highlighting a particular area of need. Social media, newspapers and magazines, radio, posters, leaflets, shows, fetes, and recruitment events are used to raise the profile of fostering and the need to recruit more carers. Our own carers are strong advocates for fostering and we reward those who recommend friends and family to become foster carers.

Specific groups are targeted at different times to meet the identified needs of the children we care for. Members of the public who are interested, are invited to contact the Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team in person, by telephone, email or social media. The 'FosterPortsmouth' website offers more information and an opportunity to contact the service online.

Anyone wishing to talk about fostering to see if their personal situation fits can have an informal discussion with our recruitment team and with experienced foster carers. An information booklet about the service is sent out within 24 hours. Applicants are offered a home visit to discuss their interest further. Prospective carers are then assigned their own dedicated social worker and invited to attend a series of preparation and assessment sessions. Fostering Preparation Training is based upon the nationally recognised Skills to Foster Course.

Assessment of Foster Carers

We develop good working relationships with those wishing to foster to get the best information. We can then give the right support from the earliest point.

As a team we want foster carers to have a good experience from the moment they approach us, and we will make the assessment process as seamless as possible. Foster carers are assessed by qualified social workers, using the nationally recognised Form F developed by Coram BAAF. This document requires detailed information and a wide range of evidence in respect of the carer's background, current relationships, family lifestyle, support networks and parenting capacity to inform the assessment. We will make it as uncomplicated as possible

All children need to go to safe, loving homes and the assessing social worker has a duty to verify the information they are given. They will do this by taking up a number of references – including enhanced DBS, Health, GP, Education, local authority in which they currently live and formerly lived, as well as contacting a number of personal referees, former partners, and adult children. This forms Part 1 of the fostering assessment. Applicants are required to successfully complete Part 1 of the assessment before they can progress to Part 2, which comprises the potential carers history, family, relationships, skills, experience and capacity to care.

We really want to get to know our foster carers and the assessment is designed to help the carers and the assessing social worker to identify the carer's experience, skills, and potential, to identify the type of caring which will fit in with their lifestyle, their own wishes and the age, gender and needs of the children they would wish to care for.

We aim to get all assessment of new foster carers completed within six months, carers transferring from another agency should expect an assessment completed within a maximum of four months.

Approval

Prospective foster carers views and opinions will be key to the information in the assessment document. The assessing social worker will make an analysis of the strengths in the application They will make recommendations in respect of the number of children, age range, gender and level of need and type of care needed relating to a child. All prospective foster carers contribute to and see the complete assessment report and can suggest changes and make their own comments. They are then invited to sign the completed document. This is a collaborative process based on an openness and transparency, to ensure a full and robust assessment.

Panel approval and the agency decision maker

The assessment will be presented to the Fostering Panel which makes a recommendation to the Portsmouth Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who in turn considers the approval of all prospective foster carers. The ADM is a member of the senior management team within Children, Families and Education Service.

The Panel is chaired by an independent person who has professional and/or personal experience related to Fostering and children in care and as with all panel members, meets the criteria in accordance with the National Minimum Standards for Fostering and the associated regulations. Panel members are made up of professionals from Children's and Families Services, elected members and independent members who have experiences relating to foster care. The Panel also has access to legal, medical and educational advice as needed.

All prospective carers seeking approval are invited to attend the Panel meeting. The Panel Members can put questions to them, and applicants can address the Panel. The assessing social worker supports the applicants at Panel.

If in the unlikely circumstances that a prospective foster care application is not recommended by panel, they have the right to have their application reconsidered by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) and information regarding the IRM is made available to all prospective foster carers.

Birth family time and return home

A child's birth family will always be important to them and when children come into care the department will be working with the child's family to enable the child to return to live with parents where it is safe to do so. In parallel, the department will also explore the child's family and friends to ascertain the potential for the child to live within them. Foster carers play a key role in supporting children in maintaining relationships with their family and friends.

The Fostering Service Connected Persons Team has the responsibility for assessing any wider family or friends who a child could potentially live with. This assessment is to consider whether they can be recommended as a connected family and friends

foster carer. This assessment is presented to the Fostering Panel and Agency Decision Maker for approval. Formally approved family and friends' carers receive the service of all foster carers by way of having an allocated supervising social worker and being supported with their ongoing learning and development as set out in the National Minimum Standards.

The Connected Persons Team is also responsible for assessing and supporting family members and friends for the child as special guardians to be agreed by the court. They also assess those connected persons in private fostering arrangements informally made by the family and stepparents wishing to adopt the child of their partner.

Supervision and Support for Foster Carers

We want foster carers to feel supported so that they can give children the secure base loving and caring family environment they need. We know that supervision and support for carers is vital. It is important that carers' work is recognised as providing the major component in meeting the needs of the children we care for in Portsmouth.

To enable carers to provide stable and nurturing family homes to children, carers are supported to access a wide range of training, including both face to face and online training and workshops. Carer satisfaction and retention is essential for a vibrant and successful fostering service. The Fostering Support Team provides support and supervision to all types of foster carer including staying put arrangements and supported lodgings carers for children over 18 or 'care experienced young adults' who no longer have a social worker but a Personal Advisor, (PA)

Carers develop strong relationships with their supervising social worker (SSW) who visits regularly to look at standards of care provided, assist the carer to play their part in the child's care plan, identify any training needs and supports carers to deliver safe care. Carers are encouraged and supported to achieve the TSD Standards within required timescales and access ongoing training.

The fostering service provides an out of hours duty system for emotional support and advice for all foster carers should this be required. There is also the 24 hour Children and Families Emergency Duty Service for crisis support.

Foster Care Reviews

Foster Carers are reviewed annually where their approval details, their skill development and training needs are examined along with any issues they wish to raise. A review will also be arranged if there is a significant change to fostering family household. Reviews are undertaken by a designated Reviewing Officer, who does not have any supervisory role for the carer or their supervising social worker. The first year review is presented to Fostering Panel and the Agency Decision Maker and subsequent reviews regarding approval are presented direct to the Agency Decision Maker.

Types of Support Available:

The Mockingbird Model of Care

Introduced in January 2021 Mockingbird comprises a small network of carers led by a home hub carer with the overarching premise of carer peer support. Portsmouth currently has four Mockingbird constellations and will be developing more. Research by the Fostering Network shows Mockingbird promotes a high level of support through the strong relationships developed with a home hub carer who leads in

developing a network of carer support. The strong network of support within Mockingbird promotes placement stability and improves outcomes for children they care for. The Mockingbird Model development, supervision and support is led by one Team Leader.

Supervising Social Workers

Each foster carer is allocated a Supervising Social Worker, who visits regularly to provide support and supervision. They monitor standards of care and help the carer consider ways of dealing with issues that may arise. This is achieved through a strengths based approach, and we build on what's working well and are aspirational for our children and ensure challenges can be addressed through the team around the child. They are also available for telephone consultation and liaise with the Social Worker for the child.

Payments to Foster Carers

Foster Carers receive a standard fostering allowance in line with the Government National Minimum Southeast Fostering Allowance Rates and a skill fee according to their skills level. The Fostering, Staying Put, Family Link and Supported Lodgings Policy is reviewed annually and circulated to all carers. Carers are paid on a weekly basis. Carers can apply to progress to a higher skill level which encourages carers to develop their skills.

Foster Carers Liaison Group

Foster carer representatives meet with managers on a bi-monthly basis to discuss and listen to areas of mutual interest, developments, and any learning.

Independent Support

Portsmouth commissions a service to provide independent advice and mediation to foster carers subject to a serious complaint or allegation. Foster Carers are also able to use the Local Authority's confidential Employee Assistance Programme.

Respite Care

Caring for children is both rewarding and demanding and sometimes carers and children need a break. Respite care can be arranged to support the carers and child and promote placement stability. In the first instance family/friends of the foster carers can be approved as relief carers, alternatively, approved respite carers can support primary carers.

Support Groups for Foster Carers

A number of support groups are organised for carers providing specialist speakers on matters of interest and an opportunity for carers to meet other carers to share their knowledge, expertise and experiences.

Foster Carer Mentoring Scheme

Available to newly approved foster carers and carers wishing to have additional support from more experienced carers

Newsflashes

All carers are kept informed of developments within the service, activities, learning events, through regular Newsflashes distributed electronically.

Foster carer lunches

All carers are invited to attend foster carer lunches arranged quarterly as an opportunity to meet other carers, members of the Fostering Service and other members of Children and Families Service

Foster Care Agreement

A written agreement between foster carers and Portsmouth City Council has been implemented formalising expectations on both sides. This should be read alongside the Foster Carers Charter.

The Foster Carers' Charter

The Foster Carers' Charter is a shared agreement which sets out what carers and Portsmouth City Council can expect from each other and demonstrates our joint responsibilities to children and young people in our care.

Fostering Out of Hours Service

The fostering support team provides its own out of hours service after until midnight every day and 9.30 am until midnight on weekends and bank holidays. This is to ensure that foster carers can contact team members at key times out of hours when they need advice and support. This is a separate support service that runs alongside Hampshire out of hours' service that deals with emergency situations.

Child Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)

The Clinical Team provides consultation, advice and support for foster carers -known as START.

Trauma Informed Model of Care (TIMOC)

TIMOC training and consultation is embedded within the CAMHS Start Team, to enable and support carers caring for children who have experienced trauma in their early lives by providing bespoke training to foster carers and/or offering consultation appointments to carers.

Virtual School

Each child we care for has an assigned virtual school education worker and the Virtual School provides consultation, advice and support for foster carers on education matters. They are also instrumental in the delivery of many of the training programmes.

Children we care for nurses

The nurses provide consultation, advice and support for foster carers and will liaise with carers to support them in ensuring children in care access the range of health services they need.

Strengthening Families and Family Time and Returning home

All children we care for will be supported by Portsmouth Council to maintain their family and friends' relationships. Foster carers are key to enabling children to maintain and strengthen those relationships. Arrangements for children to keep in contact with their family members vary and can change according to the child's needs.

Foster carers are supported by the supervising social worker to promote children's relationships with family members. Monthly drop-in sessions at Battenburg Family Centre are available for carers to support and advise carers in promoting family relationships.

Wide-ranging working groups have been established with good attendance from foster carers and input from the Family Rights Group and the Centre of Family Safeguarding Practice. This is supporting and developing the returning home of our children where it is safe to do so. It is extending on and building networks for children where they are unable to return home.

Training for Foster Carers

Portsmouth is committed to the ongoing learning and development across all children services and in recognition of this a comprehensive learning and development offer is provided to carers. A foster carers learning journey begins during their assessment with the Skills to Foster Course through to completing their Training Development Standards (TSDs). There is core training and specialist training offered through the annual training calendar and other learning opportunities as they arise.

The rolling programme of training is provided to foster carers to develop their higher skill level in line with the National Minimum Standards and to meet the expectations for progression on the foster carer skills development structure. Carers can progress from Level 1 to 2 to 3 based on their experience, training attended, skill development and the services they can provide.

Staying Put Arrangements

Not all (or many) children are ready to leave home at 18 and 'Staying Put' is actively encouraged and the preferred option, when the young person and carer agree that they are not ready or wanting to leave home and family they may well have known for many years, There is a worker within the team who specialises in Staying Put and Supported Lodgings arrangements and support foster carers transferring to those arrangements and those carers will continue to be supported as they prepare young people for moving into independence.

Access to Resources

The Fostering Support Team includes the Access to Resources Team (A2R). This team has the responsibility in finding and matching carers for all children needing to be cared for within Portsmouth City Council resources and in external provision. The team work closely with colleagues from education and health services to ensure that they have the right provision to support the child and carers. The team is supported by a placement commissioning officer to identify external carers and residential placements that may be needed for children and, ensures those providers are suitable. Contracts are in place and reviewed regularly for all children and young people placed with external providers.

7. Structure and Staffing Fostering Service

Structure

The Fostering Service is part of Portsmouth City Council's Children, Families and Education Directorate.

The Interim Head of Looked After Children is responsible for the placement of children and fostering services. Day-to-day operational management of the service is the responsibility of the Fostering Service Lead and Team Leaders.

Staff in the Fostering Service

The staff of the Fostering Service are recruited and managed following the principles of positive selection, supervision, induction, and appraisal processes of Portsmouth City Council and incorporating practice as required by the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011. Each team is managed a team leader.

There are 3 teams within the Fostering Service:

- The recruitment and assessment team,
- The connected persons team
- The fostering support and A2R team

The Service Lead ensures the teams work together and provide a cohesive service.

There are social workers and social services assistants within each team supported by a team of business support officers working across the Fostering Service.

All staff are suitably qualified and experienced and are subject to Portsmouth City Council's corporate standards for continuous professional development.

Section 10 provides the Fostering Service staffing structure

Procedures and Processes

The procedures and processes, which guide the Fostering Teams for recruiting, approving, training, supporting, and reviewing carers are contained within:

- Marketing Strategy
- Fostering online policies and procedures
- Children in Care Online Policies and Procedures
- Panel Policy and Function Terms of Reference
- The Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards (2011 and 2013)

8. Monitoring, Evaluation and Management of the Service

Performance and Statistical Information

The Fostering Service gathers a range of statistical data to assist with monitoring and evaluating performance. This information is portrayed in the annual reports of the Fostering Service, The Panel Chair's annual report and the Ofsted dataset.

9. Complaints

Wherever possible, complaints are dealt with informally. Where appropriate and in the first instance, any complaint by or against a foster carer will be dealt with on a solution focused basis. There is a written procedure about managing concerns, complaints and allegations against foster carers which is given to all foster carers. The Council has both corporate and Children Services complaints procedures that operate if no resolution can be achieved at the problem-solving stage.

Where a complaint against a foster carer constitutes a safeguarding allegation, this is dealt with as safeguarding enquiry under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 and is investigated under safeguarding procedures.

Our Children's Guide is specifically designed for children and young people which advises them what to do if they have a complaint.

Regular monitoring reports on the numbers and outcomes are presented to the Senior Management Team and Corporate Operational Parenting Board.

10. Contacting the Regulator

Ofsted is responsible for inspecting the Fostering Service. They will also receive and investigate any complaints about the Fostering Service. Significant incidents are also reported to them. The contact details are Ofsted Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD.