



Staffordshire County Council

Children and Lifelong Learning Directorate

Fostering Service Statement of Purpose

1. Legislative Framework

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards for fostering services provide the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of fostering services.

The framework is designed to increase accountability and define responsibility for all actions and practice undertaken within the service.

The Commission for Social Care Inspection will undertake an annual inspection of the Fostering Services and may interview or visit foster carers as part of the inspection process.

2. Introduction

The Statement of Purpose for Staffordshire County Council Fostering Service has been compiled in accordance with Standard 1 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2002.

The information contained is intended for a wide audience including children in foster care and their parents, prospective and approved Staffordshire foster carers, staff employed by the Fostering Service and in the Children & Lifelong Learning Directorate, and other agencies and professionals who are interested in or involved in work relating to the Fostering Service. The Statement of Purpose will be placed on the web site and a copy of the summary given to parents by the area social worker when their child becomes looked after.

The Children's Guide to the Fostering Service, 'What's this fostering thing all about' sets out the aims of the service, how a child can access an independent advocate and how to complain. There is an interactive Children's Guide which is more accessible and user friendly for all children, including children with disabilities. The guide is one of a number of documents given to children and young people upon becoming looked after.

The Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guide will be reviewed annually and following any revision a copy will be given to each child, to each foster carer and will also be placed on the web site.

3. Aims and Objectives of the Service

Staffordshire Children & Lifelong Learning Directorate's primary aim is to provide services to children and families to promote the health, education and development of children in ways that meet the best interests of the child.

The Local Authority believes that children are best cared for by their own family. Where this is not possible or not in the best interests of the child, we believe that children should be able to experience family life in a suitable family, on a temporary or permanent basis whenever possible.

The aim is to ensure that children feel secure in their placements with carers capable of providing quality care to meet their needs and maximize their life chances. This will include ensuring the child has a secure identity, making the most of educational opportunities as well as ensuring the child is healthy, emotionally well and enjoys a network of social relationships within which the child feels valued.

Placement choice and the stability and effectiveness of foster care placements are fundamental to children's long term life chances. The Fostering Service aims to provide and support appropriate family placements either directly or by commissioning services from other agencies, to meet children and young people's assessed need, being sensitive to issues of race, religion, culture, language and disability.

The Service works in partnership with parents and all those involved and concerned with the child's welfare.

4. Principles and Standard of Care

Staffordshire Fostering Service offers a wide range of placements for children and young people of all ages.

Key Principles

- All applicants to foster for Staffordshire are checked, prepared, assessed and approved in accordance with the relevant fostering regulations and standards
- The Fostering Panel considers all applications to foster, the annual review of the carer's approval and all allegations against carers
- A foster carer agreement is signed by all carers at the point of approval and following the foster carer review
- Approved foster carers have a named family placement social worker and are supported and supervised in line with the Department's Supervision Policy, according to their experience and requirements of the placement
- As far as possible placements are matched, recognizing the needs of the child and experience of the carer
- Foster carers are provided with as much information prior to placement including a comprehensive risk assessment, and LAC documentation to support the placement

- Foster carer profiles will be shared with the children prior to placement by their social worker
- Foster carers, looked after children and their parents have access to the Department's Complaints and Representation Service

5. Management Structure and Staffing Arrangements

The arrangements for delivery of services provided have been reviewed and a number of changes have been implemented. The fostering and permanency service has been brought in line with the four geographic areas of Staffordshire, reflecting the requirements and challenges presented by a large Shire County. The Fostering Service organizes some tasks centrally but main responsibility for delivery of individual support to foster carers and children is placed with the four locality teams.

The Principal Child Care Manager, Fostering Service, is responsible for the strategic development of the service ensuring that it meets and complies with statutory requirements and national standards. As a member of Children's Services Management Team contributions are made to the planning and decision making concerning Children's Services, ensuring that issues relating to fostering, adoption and permanence are raised and any implications considered.

The Child Care Development Manager offers support to the Principal Child Care Manager, deputizing in her absence. The main responsibility is the development of the fostering services, including Family & Friends Scheme, Family Link and Treatment Fostering. This involves collaboration with area teams, residential services, educational colleagues in the Children and Life Long Learning Directorate and also colleagues in the health services. Regular meetings are held with the four Fostering & Permanency Managers and staff to ensure consistency in the delivery of the fostering service. The manager attends meetings of the West Midlands Family Placement (Fostering) Consortium to link into regional developments and share good practice.

The Fostering Service consists of five teams.

All the teams are managed by a Children Service Manager and, if applicable, an Assistant Children Services Manager. The managers hold a relevant social work qualification and either already have or are in the process of completing, an appropriate management qualification

The Fostering Service social workers each have a recognized social work qualification (CQSW, CSS, DipSW). 5 social workers hold the full PQ Award and 3 are in process of obtaining it. All staff members are experienced in working with children and families and are skilled in assessment.

Fostering Services

Recruitment Team

The Madford Team consists of ten social workers and has countywide responsibility for the following functions:

- Development and implementation of a comprehensive recruitment strategy
- Production of recruitment and publicity material
- Responding to initial enquiries about fostering and adoption and undertaking initial home visits
- Delivery of 'skills to foster' preparation course
- Co-ordination and delivery of a comprehensive post approval training package for all foster carers.
- Responsibility for the NVQ Award and delivery of training which underpins the award
- Contribution to the Countywide duty service
- Independent reviewing system for foster carers
- Co-ordination of support groups for foster carers, including specialist groups for carers of teenagers, male foster carers and children with disabilities.
- Development of a support group for sons & daughters of foster carers
- Production of quarterly newsletters for foster carers and for foster children
- Organization of social events, including the summer B-B-Q, Christmas party and awards evenings
- Development and maintenance of a toy library and 'tool kits' for foster carers
- Development and maintenance of the website

Fostering & Permanence Teams

There are four fostering and permanency teams which are aligned with the four areas of Staffordshire. Two teams are based in Lichfield, two in Uttoxeter and each has four/five fostering social workers, permanency social workers and a family support worker. The teams are responsible for the following fostering activities:

- Assessment of prospective foster carers
- Individual support and supervision of foster carers
- Management and development of carer's skills through a competency approach, resulting in the production of portfolios of evidence, use of supervisory visits and the Annual Review process
- Contribution to the fostering duty service and placement matching
- Family finding systems to search for appropriate permanent placements for children through in-house resources or advertising
- Contribution to the countywide training programme

Each team has permanency social workers whose primary task is to promote early planning for looked after children age 12 and under, to eliminate case drift,

and to prepare children for permanent placements, either through adoption or fostering. This requires close working with fostering social workers and foster carers. Where the goal is permanence the planning and decision-making is actively managed and progressed in accordance with the National Adoption Standards and Court Protocols.

There is a countywide **Family Link Scheme** comprising three social workers offering short-term breaks to disabled children. Children are matched with carers who have the skills and abilities to meet their individual needs and who offer regular, planned breaks often over many years. Future development will include extending the short breaks service to include children in need. The scheme is managed by the Newcastle Team Manager.

The countywide **Remand Carers Scheme** has two social work posts and is managed by the Burton/Tamworth Manager who also has responsibility for social work support to the recently established **Intensive Fostering Scheme**, for the Youth Justice Board. The Burton/Tamworth team has a social worker whose remit is the recruitment and support of carers from the black and ethnic minority communities.

Family & Friends Project has recently been set up to develop the full range of fostering services to family & friends carers. There is a project co-ordinator and four social workers, managed by the Lichfield/Cannock Team Manager.

The **REACH Project** consisting of an Assistant Children's Services Manager and three family placement social workers is managed by the Stafford Manager. The role of the project is to provide an overview and audit of all young people currently in placements outside Staffordshire's own resources. The team's remit is to collate information such as the length of time young people have been in external placements, their legal status, care plan objectives and the views of the young person themselves, and to consider the appropriateness of the placement.

Both in-house and IFA options will be explored but it may also be appropriate to recruit or develop specific resources to meet the needs of the young person. These may be resources such as 'contract' foster carers or the development of support packages which would enable potential carers within the young persons own network to become a foster carer for them.

All the teams have access to PCs, e-mail facilities and are supported by a dedicated administrative team.

Meetings are held regularly, with the fostering & permanency teams holding team meetings and specialist meetings on a rota basis. The meetings are used to allocate work, to share information, consult and to obtain feedback. Service days are held at regular intervals within the Family Placement Service to ensure that all staff are involved in discussions about new developments,

performance management issues and key changes in legislation, regulations etc.

The Management team meets on a fortnightly basis to discuss all business relating to family placement services, to ensure standardization in service delivery across the teams, consider developments both departmentally and in the National arena, consider the overall performance of the service and progress on action plans.

6. Conflict of Interest

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002, Part 111 under Section 20(6) sets out the circumstances relating to individuals working and fostering for the same agency.

Employees of Staffordshire Children and Lifelong Learning (vulnerable children) Directorate or a member of their household, who works for the department, cannot be registered foster carers for Staffordshire nor can they care for Staffordshire looked after child.

Equally foster carers or a member of their household cannot be employed by Staffordshire Children and Lifelong Learning (vulnerable children) Directorate for more than five hours per week.

Employees of Staffordshire Children and Lifelong Learning Directorate, other than in the vulnerable children service may apply to become foster carers as may other employees of the County Council.

This regulation does not apply to arrangements that were in force on 1st April 2002.

7. Services Provided

Staffordshire Fostering Service offers the following placements:

Task Centred Foster Care

Provides emergency (same day) and planned placements through the duty service with foster carers for a time limited period. The carers will contribute to the assessment of the child's long term needs and be involved with preparation for moving on, in line with the permanency plan agreed for the child at the second looked after review

Long Term Foster Care

Provides permanent placements with foster carers who are committed to caring for children until they reach independence; providing ongoing support into adulthood.

For children aged 12 and under the match is through the Adoption/Permanence panel.

The Foster Panel can recommend permanency for children aged 13 plus, where it corresponds to the child's care plan.

Family Link

Family Link Scheme links disabled children with carers who can provide them with short breaks on a regular basis. This can be anything from a few hours a week to a few days a month with the same carer.

Remand care

Provides foster care placements for children who are remanded or bailed to reside through the courts.

Intensive Foster Care

Provides foster placements for young people aged 10-17, who are persistent offenders and would otherwise receive a custodial sentence.

Family & Friends

Provides placements for a child or young person with a relative or friend, who is approved as a foster carer specifically for them. Placements can be made on an emergency, short or long term basis and carers have equal access to support and training opportunities.

Emergency Duty Service

Carers whose approval outside working hours is extended to take emergency placements for a maximum of 72 hours (excluding bank holidays)

8. Services provided to Foster Carers

The services offered to Staffordshire foster carers are as follows:

Recruitment, Approval and Review of Foster Carers

The flag ship of the strategy since August 2003 has been 'Reggie' the recruitment bus which was designed to address some of the unique recruitment problems that exist in a county such as Staffordshire. This enabled recruitment messages to reach those communities on the extremities of the county which relate more closely to neighbouring local authorities than with Staffordshire.

The recruitment strategy includes:

- 48 sheet poster sites around the county
- Extensive advertising on radio
- Purchased advertising in Yellow Pages, professional publications
- Sponsorship of rugby and football teams
- Partnership with local commercial initiatives.

Staffordshire continues to attract significant numbers of enquiries and the TV campaign in 2004 specifically increased the County's profile and that of the Midlands in general.

Since October 2001 the Service has promoted the professional status of foster carers through the 'Payments for skills' scheme. The scheme recognizes the skills of carers through a competency approach beginning with the assessment to become foster carers, through the production of a carer's portfolio and the use of training and support group opportunities. It provides 'fostering' career opportunities for new carers.

All initial enquiries are received by the Madford team. There is a free phone number with a 24 hour enquiry line with answer phone facility out of hours. Information is also held on the Staffordshire County Council Website. An information pack is sent out within two working days and invitation to attend an information meeting. Following the information meeting, if potential foster carers are still interested, they are asked to complete a detailed information sheet which includes permissions for statutory checks and details of referees.

Enquirers will be contacted within 10 working days to arrange an initial visit. The visit enables the enquirer to obtain more information about fostering and for social worker to assess their basic suitability to move on to the next stage. At this stage the ID for Enhanced CRB check and other statutory checks is completed (CRB will be applicable to other adult members of the household and significant others).

Enquirers are invited to the next 'Skills to Foster' preparation course, a six session course run over evenings, weekends or weekdays. A further session is planned for sons and daughters of foster carers.

Upon receipt of the 'intention to proceed' form a qualified family placement social worker will be allocated to complete the home study assessment using BAAF Form F1 plus competencies. An assessment plan setting out each session is completed and signed by all parties. It is at this stage that the applicants will begin to identify and collect evidence for their portfolio. All evidence should be valid, relevant and current.

In accordance with National Standards the completed assessment report will be presented to the fostering panel with a recommendation within 6 months of receipt of the 'intention to proceed' form. The recommendation to panel will set out the type of placement, number and age range of children to be placed, or may be restricted to specific children. The Panel meets on a fortnightly basis to consider all applications and in addition to recommending approval status may make recommendations regarding training.

Applicants are invited to attend the fostering panel with the assessing social worker. Written information about the Panel's role and function will be available beforehand and applicants will meet the Chairperson.

The Principal Child Care Manager receives the recommendation of the panel and makes the decision about approval on behalf of the agency.

The decision on approval will be given verbally within 24 hours and in writing

within 15 days clearly stating the terms of the approval. Carers will be required to sign the Foster Carer Agreement. Where approval has not been agreed applicants will be given the reasons and the representation process explained.

Following approval carers will receive the Foster Carer Handbook which sets out the expectations of and relationship with the department.

Panel also considers the annual review of all approved carers and recommends to the agency the ongoing approval, variation or termination. Foster carer review meetings are independently chaired and involve the foster carer and family placement social worker, who provide written reports. Views of the carer's own children are invited. Comments are received from the placing social worker and children in placement through the Consult8 process. The review focuses on the performance of the carer, identifies training requirements and makes recommendation for future approval.

Training

The Fostering Service has strong commitment to the ongoing training of foster carers, recognizing the valuable contribution it makes to their development. It helps carers to understand the fostering task, increases knowledge and skills and is crucial to ensuring safe and appropriate care of children.

The training catalogue is reviewed and updated annually and currently offers 27 titles, providing approximately 600 places to carers. Courses take place over one or two days and cover subjects of a general and also specialist nature.

Foster carers are also able to access departmental child protection courses, being trained alongside area and family placement staff. Funding has also been given to carers undertaking specific, relevant courses, the content of which can then be cascaded to others.

There has been specific joint training on National Minimum Standards which foster carers, area social workers and family placement workers have attended.

Post approval training is an integral part of the 'Payments for skills' process and also underpins the learning for NVQ Level 3.

Support

Foster carer support is given high priority by Staffordshire and the services available to them include:

- Supervision and support from a named family placement social worker
- Local support groups meet on a monthly basis – there are 9 groups

across the county

- Men in Foster Care Group
- 24 hour telephone support from a dedicated service provided by foster carers, backed by appropriate managers (currently weekend only)
- Education Officer for Looked After Children linking into specific teachers in education services
- Membership of Fostering network
- Access to Fostering Network Advice & Mediation Worker
- Provision of equipment necessary for fostering
- Financial support through agreed allowances
- Additional insurance cover
- Interest free loans towards adaptations/extensions to carer's property and for the purchase of larger vehicles
- Booking of a people carrier for set periods of time to give support to carers who require a larger vehicle due to fostering
- Access to 'Annie the Van', static caravan - for carers and service users not only for holiday use but as respite from what can be a stressful environment. The van has been adapted for use by children or carers with a disability
- Computers in households where there are children aged 10 and over
- Handbook for foster carers
- Newsletter for foster carers and foster children
- Information through the website

Services available to children in placements are as follows:

- SUSTAIN: aim is to provide a timely response to the needs of children and young people looked after and their carers, whose placements are under stress or in danger of disruption
- Education Officer for Looked After Children linking into specific teachers in education services
- Nurse for looked after children
- Permanency social workers, where appropriate
- Dedicated leaving care worker
- Connexions service
- Access to drugs advisory workers and teenage pregnancy service
- Children's Voice Project and Viewpoint
- Independent Children's Advice and Representation Service
- Newsletter for foster carers and foster children
- Celebration of achievements evening

9. Number of Approved Foster Carers and Children Placed

There are currently 253 foster carers approved by Staffordshire County Council, looking after 405 children.

10. Comments, Compliments and Complaints

Staffordshire welcomes feedback on the services it provides to children, birth parents and foster carers, to enable improvements to be made.

There is a complaints procedure which is accessible to all service users and carers. There are 3 stages to the complaints procedure:

Stage 1

The complaint will be dealt with by the appropriate member of staff or manager to see if the problem can be sorted out informally.

Stage 2

If the complainant is not happy with the response at Stage 1 the matter can be formally investigated at Stage 2. Some concerns are immediately dealt at this stage.

An investigation will take place and a complaints officer will prepare a report, which is presented to the senior manager of the service concerned, for them to make response to the complainant.

Stage 3

If the complainant is still unhappy about the outcome the complaint can be heard by an independent Complaints Review Panel.

At all 3 stages of the procedure the service will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 5 working days and respond fully in 28 days. If this is not possible the complainant will be kept informed of the progress.

In circumstances where the agency decision maker is minded not to approve an applicant the applicant can make representation to the agency and will be given information regarding the process to be followed.

11. Complaints about the Service and their Outcomes

Since April 2005 there has been 1 complaint at Stage 1 relating to the fostering service which was satisfactorily resolved. There were 8 compliments made relating to the fostering service during the same period.

12. Contact Details for Further Information

For further information contact

Principal Child Care Manager, Fostering Service
Children and Life Long Learning Directorate
Walton Building

PO Box 11
Martin Street,
Stafford
ST16 2LH

To make a complaint or representation about the Fostering Service contact:

Staffordshire County Council
Complaints and Representations
Walton Buildings
PO Box 11
Martin Street
Stafford
ST16 2LH

The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) can be contacted at:

CSCI
Stafford Office
Dyson Court
Staffordshire Technology Park
Beaconside
Stafford
ST18 0ES