

# Children and Communities

## Policies and Procedures

### Statement of Purpose – Fostering Service

#### 1. Legislative Framework

- 1.1. The Fostering Services: Regulations, Guidance and Standards (2011) provide the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act (2000) for the conduct of fostering services.
- 1.2. The framework is designed to set out the aims and objectives of the fostering agency and the services and facilities which are provided.
- 1.3. Ofsted will undertake inspections of Families and Communities including the Fostering Service and may interview or visit foster families as part of the inspection process.

#### 2. Introduction

- 2.1. The *Statement of Purpose* for Staffordshire County Council's Fostering Service has been compiled in accordance with Standard 16 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011)
- 2.2. The information is intended for a wide audience including children in foster care and their parents, prospective and approved Staffordshire foster families; staff employed by the Fostering Service and in Children and Families, and other agencies and professionals who are interested in, or involved in work relating to the Fostering Service. The Statement of Purpose can be found on the fostering website [www.fosterforstaffordshire.co.uk](http://www.fosterforstaffordshire.co.uk). A copy of the summary is given to parents by the child's social worker when their child comes into our care.
- 2.3. The Children's Guide to the Fostering Service sets out the aims of the service; how a child can access an independent advocate and how they can make. The guide can be found on the website <https://www.fosterforstaffordshire.co.uk/staffordshire-guide-to-fostering-for-looked-after-children.aspx>

- 2.4. Both the Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guide will be reviewed annually and published on the SCC Fostering website. If you would like this information in large print, Braille, audio tape/disc, or any other language, please ring 01785 278426.

### **3. Aims and Objectives of the Service**

- 3.1. Staffordshire Children and Families Services' primary aim is to provide services to promote the health, education and development of children in ways that meet the best interests of the child. For children in our care our aim is to ensure that they achieve their potential by providing and supporting safe, stable and positive experiences of care.
- 3.2. 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.
- 3.3. Our aim is to ensure that children feel secure living with families appropriately trained, supported and capable of providing quality care to meet their needs and maximise their life chances. This will include ensuring that 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. Our aim is to promote outcomes for children by providing safe, secure homes and by being aspirational and ambitious for them.
- 3.4. Choice of families and the stability and effectiveness of foster care are fundamental to children's long-term life chances. The Fostering Service aims to provide and support appropriate family care, either directly, or by commissioning services from other agencies to meet children and young people's assessed needs and being sensitive to differences such as race, religion, culture, language, sexuality, gender and disability.
- 3.5. The fostering service has a strength-based approach and values the relationship it builds with children, parents, families and partners. The Fostering Service works in partnership with children, parents, families, supporting the team around the child to achieve the very best possible outcomes for children.

## 4. Principles and Standards of Care

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

4.2. Key Principles:

- 4.2.1. All applicants to foster for Staffordshire are checked, prepared, assessed, and approved in accordance with the relevant fostering regulations guidance and standards.
- 4.2.2. The Fostering Panel considers all applications to foster; the first annual review of the carer's approval and subsequent reviews where there are significant changes and reports concerning allegations against families.
  - i. A foster carer agreement is signed by all families at the point of approval and reviewed annually following the Foster Carer Review.
  - ii. Approved foster families have a named fostering social worker and are supported and supervised in line with the Fostering Supervision and Support Policy and the requirements of the placement.
  - iii. Placements are carefully matched, taking into account the needs of the child, the experience of the carer and the impact on the fostering household.
  - iv. Foster families are provided with as much information as possible about children, including a comprehensive risk assessment and 'matching' document to support their care.
  - v. Foster carer profiles will be shared with the children prior to placement by the child's Social Worker.
  - vi. Foster families, children in our care and their parents will have access to the County Council's Complaints Service.
  - vii. Children will have access to an advocacy service.

4.3. This Statement of Purpose is underpinned by the principles and standards of expectation set out within:

- I. ['The Staffordshire 'Pledge' to Looked After Children](#)
- II. [The Foster Carer's Charter](#)

## 5. Management Structure and Staffing Arrangements

- 5.1. The Fostering Lead is the Registered Manager of the Fostering Agency and is responsible for the strategic development of the Fostering Service and for ensuring that it meets and complies with statutory requirements and national standards. The Fostering Lead is supported in this task by the Adoption Lead. The Leads are part of the Children Service Management Group and contribute to the wider strategic planning and development of children's services, ensuring that issues relating to fostering are promoted, and any implications considered.
- 5.2. The Fostering Service organises some tasks centrally, but the main responsibility for the delivery of individual support to foster families and children is with **five supervision and support teams**.
- 5.3. All teams are managed by a Team Manager, who each hold a relevant social work qualification and either already have a management qualification or have undertaken management and leadership training.
- 5.4. The Fostering Service Social Workers are registered with Social Work England. Each social worker has a recognised social work qualification (BA (Hons) in Social Work, CQSW, CSS or DipSW). Social Workers either hold or work towards post qualification awards. Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW) undertake a programme of training, supervision and support.
- 5.5. All staff members are experienced in working with children and families and are trained and skilled in undertaking strength-based assessments.
- 5.6. All team members have access to information technology support and a dedicated administrative team. All social workers have access to a mobile-working programme enabling mobile access to the Children's services records management system. Flexible working arrangements are in place.
- 5.7. Team Meetings are held regularly and are used to promote development; to share information, consult and to obtain feedback on issues relevant to the Service.

- 5.8. Service days and Fostering Forums are held at regular intervals to ensure that all staff are involved in discussions about new developments, performance management issues, and key changes in legislation, regulations and innovations.
- 5.9. The Management Team meets on a fortnightly basis to discuss all business relating to the Fostering Service, to ensure the standardisation of service delivery across the teams, consider developments, both internally and nationally, and to review and evaluate the overall performance of the Fostering Service. Managers regularly attend Manager's development forums and the annual Panel Training and Development day.

## Fostering Teams: Roles and Functions

### 6. Management Structure and Staffing Arrangements

- 6.1. The **Fostering Central – Recruitment and Engagement Team** consists of a team manager, senior practitioners (including a Supported Lodgings Senior Practitioner), social workers, and family practitioners, a qualified marketing and recruitment officer and business support staff. The team has countywide responsibility for the following functions:
  - i. Development and implementation of a comprehensive recruitment and sufficiency strategy in order to attract a range of applicants to foster.
  - ii. Development of a comprehensive retention strategy
  - iii. Production of recruitment and publicity material.
  - iv. Responding to initial enquiries about fostering and supported lodgings and undertaking initial assessment visits.
  - v. Delivery of the 'Foundations to Foster' preparation course.
  - vi. Co-ordination and delivery of a comprehensive post approval training package for all foster families.
  - vii. Responsibility for the overview of the Standardization Panel that reviews the Training Support and Development Standards for Foster Families.
  - viii. Managing and chairing the Annual Reviews of foster families.
  - ix. Co-ordination of support groups for foster families.
  - x. Co-ordination of the Countywide Foster Families' Forum

- xi. Support to the Voice of the Foster Families' Group.
- xii. Co-ordination of a support group for sons & daughters of foster families.
- xiii. Production of newsletters for foster families.
- xiv. Organisation of social events, including the summer barbeque, Winter Fayre and long service awards
- xv. Assess and oversee Private Fostering arrangements in Staffordshire
- xvi. Management and oversight of Supported Lodgings arrangements in Staffordshire
- xvii. Maintenance of the website [www.fosterforstaffordshire.co.uk](http://www.fosterforstaffordshire.co.uk)

## 7. Assessment, Supervision and Support of General Foster Families

- 7.1. The **Fostering Central Panel and Approval Team** undertake a county-wide function for the assessment of all applicants wanting to foster (except for Family & Friends families). Additionally, the team undertakes responsibility for the Fostering Panel functions. The fostering panel is convened weekly. The team has a full-time Team Manager and a part time Panel Adviser, Social Workers and Business Support Coordinators/Officers.
- 7.2. There are three general fostering support and supervision teams covering Staffordshire: **Fostering North, Fostering South and Fostering East**. These teams hold responsibility for the supervision and support to task centred and long term approved fostering families including kinship families. These teams are based in Lichfield and Stafford and each has a Team Manager, Fostering Social Workers, Fostering Family Practitioners and business support staff
- 7.3. The teams are responsible for the following fostering activities:
  - i. Providing regular and consistent individual supervision and support to fostering households.
  - ii. Undertaking annual reviews of foster families' continued suitability to foster.
  - iii. Management and development of carer's skills through the implementation of the TSD Standards, Personal Development

- Plans and support of foster families; the aim being to increase the carer's expertise and to improve outcomes for children.
- iv. Promoting the aim of the Payment for Skills appraisal scheme for foster families.
  - v. Contribution to the Placement Service and placement matching.
  - vi. Providing effective fostering support plans, that promotes individual children's placement plans.
  - vii. Support family finding systems to search for appropriate permanent placements for children through in-house resources or external providers.
  - viii. Promoting and supporting carer's attendance at development opportunities and foster families support groups.
  - ix. Provision of essential equipment and developmental aids for families.
  - x. Working to promote a restorative culture.
  - xi. Undertaking support carer assessments.
  - xii. Undertaking long- term fostering and special guardianship assessments of approved foster families.

## 8. The Intensive Fostering and Disability Short Breaks Team

- 8.1. This team consists of a Team Manager, Senior Practitioners, a Mockingbird Liaison Worker, Fostering Social Workers, a Family Practitioner, and a shared business support staff. The team supports placements providing intensive interventions including Disability Fostering including Disability Short breaks (formerly Family Link), Resilience Fostering, Turnaround, Residential 2 Foster and Mockingbird. The team provides a county-wide service and is based in Stafford and can refer to an occupational therapist who supports the placement of Disabled children with foster families.
- 8.2. **Resilience Fostering** whose remit is to recruit fostering families to provide single placements for young people aged 10-15 years, moving from a residential setting into family-based care, or where residential care would be the only other option. Assessment screening is used to identify those best placed to care for these most challenging young people, whilst the young people are screened to identify those who would benefit from the resilience model of care. Families recruited to the project will already have

some relevant professional childcare experience, either as an established foster carer with a proven track record of sustaining and supporting a child with complex needs; or who have worked with children in a professional capacity, e.g. as a residential social worker. Resilience foster families' work with young people usually aged between 10-15 years who are currently placed in a residential setting.

- 8.3. **Residential2Foster** The resource is co-facilitated jointly with the Edge of Care service, the Placement Referrals Team and Big Fostering Partnership. RTF complements the aims of the Resilience Care programme which also supports the transition of children from residential. The Resilience Care programme focusses on providing a solo placement to a younger teenager and identifying families who will support that child into adulthood. The R2F scheme has proven positive outcomes in providing families and stability for older teens transitioning from residential care by providing enhanced support offered to experienced and skilled existing foster families.
- 8.4. **Turn Around** This provision provides a 72-hour short break foster care for children and young people with the objective of promoting stability through better matching.
- 8.5. **Disability Fostering** The Team supports and supervises all long term and task centred Disability Fostering households including households that offer short-term breaks to disabled children. Children are matched with families who have the skills and abilities to meet their individual needs and who offer regular, planned breaks, often over many years. Additionally, the team is responsible for the supervision and support of approved fostering households who are looking after children on a full-time basis and who have a permanent and substantial disability or complex health needs.
- 8.6. Staffordshire County Council has a duty to provide short stay services under the Children & Young Person's Act (2008). These services are available to any person under the age of 18 and who are, therefore legally defined as a child (CA, 1989). Each child must meet Staffordshire's disability eligibility criteria and will therefore have a permanent and substantial disability or complex health needs.

- 8.7. The resource was established to create family-based placements for children, who were most in danger of exclusion from services. Level 5 short stays are based on a single placement at any one time with up to six children being matched, dependent upon their needs and the size of the support package to the child. Some of the households are adapted properties and make use of adapted vehicles. Additionally, the team can refer to a full-time occupational therapist that can provide clinical assessments children referred, as well as assessments of all homes of approved Disability Short Break families. The resource assists with the matching of children and stability of placements .
- 8.8. **The Mockingbird Family Model** is an extended family model that provides sleepovers, peer support, social activities, regular joint planning, and training. Mockingbird will offer significant benefits to children and to the families who care for them under this extended family model. The programme improves the stability of fostering placements and strengthens the relationships between families, children and young people, fostering services and birth families. The project is delivered jointly through the Together4Children Partnership between Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council.

## 9. Stability and Sufficiency Team

- 9.1. The team consists of Team Manager, a Senior Practitioner, a Fostering Social Worker, Family Practitioners and a shared business support staff.
- 9.2. The team provides a county-wide service and is based in Stafford.
- 9.3. The team provides additional support to children and young people in Staffordshire's fostering families that are showing the signs of stress that may impact on the family stability.
- 9.4. This service aims to support those children by providing one to one intervention as well as a diverse range of practical support to the family.

- 9.5. The team monitors and reviews all stability plans and unplanned endings for the service.
- 9.6. The team provides a county-wide service and is based in Stafford.

## **10. The Family & Friends Team**

- 10.1. This team consists of a team manager, team co-ordinator, social workers and family support workers. The team is based in Stafford.
- 10.2. The team offers the full range of fostering services to Family & Friends families; assessment and the supervision and support of approved families where the plan is that they will seek legal permanency for the child. Family & Friends families also access all central activities and support provided by the Recruitment & Training Team.
- 10.3. The team is involved in the care planning process, preparing reports for court and foster/permanence panels and promoting permanence through special guardianship.
- 10.4. The team works closely with relevant teams in the District to provide individual support to families moving onto special guardianship arrangements.
- 10.5. Additionally, the team works closely with Assessment and Staying Together colleagues and is responsible for the assessment and supervision of private foster carer arrangements.
- 10.6. As part of Families and Communities, Children within our Care and Care Leavers Central Functions, the Fostering Service works in close, day-to-day partnership with the following.

## **11. The Fostering Permanency & SGO Team**

- 11.1. This team consists of a team manager, social workers, welfare benefit office and family practitioners. The team is based in Stafford.

- 11.2. The team offer a range of services to support foster families to progress onto legal Permanency via a Special Guardianship Order, whilst also supporting private applications for a Special Guardianship Order in completing these reports and support plans.
- 11.3. The team support families subject to Special Guardianship Orders in a range of ways, often as identified in their support plans. This is in order to assist the families to provide good care to those children they look after but also to prevent breakdown of these arrangements. This support ranges from advice and guidance, signposting, support groups, referrals onto relevant services, support with family time, financial support and access to therapeutic support.
- 11.4. The team works closely with Families and Communities District Teams to provide support to families moving onto special guardianship arrangements, including access to training.
- 11.5. Additionally, the team works closely with Assessment and Staying Together colleagues where required to support and safeguard children in the arrangements.

## **12. The Placement Referrals Service**

- 12.1. This team has one Placement Lead; six Placement Finders and one Senior Team Attached Clark. Their remit is to deal with all emergency and planned requests for new or alternative homes for children. This includes a range of Foster Homes (Task Centred, Long Term, Short Breaks, Disability, Resilience, Turnaround and Residential to Fostering), Supported Lodgings, Supported Accommodation, Residential and Secure.
- 12.2. Homes are sourced through internal resources and also external and independent providers
- 12.3. The team are also responsible for completing match and risk assessments for new homes.
- 12.4. Identify gaps in provision to support future sufficiency planning.

## 13. Fostering Families

- 13.1. Staffordshire Fostering Service offers the following fostering families:
- 13.2. **Task Centred:** These foster families provide emergency (same day) and planned placements arranged by the Placement Team. The placements are carefully matched and are for a time-limited period. The families will
- 13.3. **Permanent and Long-Term:** These families provide permanent or long- term placements with foster families, who are committed to caring for children until they reach independence, and for providing ongoing support into adulthood. The child's permanent match with foster families is made by the Best Interest Panel.
- 13.4. **Resilience:** These families provide single placements for young people aged 10-15 making the transition from residential care into a family setting, until they reach independence.
- 13.5. **Residential Fostering:** These families provide placements to young people that do not require a solo provision making the transition from residential care into a family setting, until they reach independence.
- 13.6. **Family & Friends:** These families provide placements for a child or young person who is a relative or friend, (a 'connected person') and who is approved as a foster carer specifically for them. These foster families have equal access to support and training opportunities.
- 13.7. **Emergency Duty:** These are foster families whose approval is extended to take emergency placements outside office hours for a maximum of 72 hours (excluding bank holidays).
- 13.8. **Fostering Disability Short Break:** These foster families provide a short break for children with a complex health needs who can provide them with short stays on a regular basis. This can be

anything from a few hours a week to a few days a month with the same carer.

- 13.9. **Turn Around:** These are foster families who provide 72-hour short break foster care for children and young people with the objective of promoting stability through better matching. These can be extended.
- 13.10. **Short Break:** These families provide short breaks for children in our care or who are receiving support from the Adoption Support team. The short-term placements are planned to support the aims of the child's Care/Service Plan either for a return home or to support the child's main placement.
- 13.11. **Mother and Baby:** These foster families provide placements to young people in care and their baby. These families will support the needs of both the young person and their baby. The Foster Carer will work in partnership with the young person and the children's Social Workers to provide care, support and assessment, as required
- 13.12. **Supported Lodgings:** provides supported lodgings' placements within families, for 16–18-year-old care leavers
- 13.13. **Support carer's arrangements (back-up families):** These arrangements are assessed and the 'arrangement' is agreed as appropriate to support exiting, approved fostering households. The support families are identified from within the foster carer's support network. The support families can provide short-stays to support a fostering household for anything from day-care through to regular overnight stays and holidays.

## 14. Recruitment

- 14.1. **Sufficiency:** The Fostering Service will continue to recruit more foster families for children in our care to ensure there is sufficient placement choice to enable children to be appropriately matched with foster families, and to ensure that our families reflect the diverse population of Staffordshire.

14.2. The Fostering Service will also ensure that it has sufficient numbers of supervising social workers for foster families; to offer advice, support and supervision. We will ensure that any vacancies are recruited to without undue delay and that interim measures are put in place so that families are supported. The structure of the Fostering service is designed to be flexible and adaptable with staff suitably trained and supported to work across the fostering structure to support families.

14.3. **Recruitment:** The Fostering Service will work alongside the County Council Communications Team to ensure that we have a strong market presence and effective recruitment and campaigning strategy and plans. Our comprehensive and targeted recruitment strategy is supported by:

- i. Dedicated recruitment and marketing officer for fostering.
- ii. A strong web presence.
- iii. An active Facebook site and Twitter feeds.
- iv. Targeted and locality campaigns e.g. shared care week; fostering fortnight, and Staffordshire Day.
- v. Partnership with local commercial initiatives.
- vi. A regional recruitment campaign with neighbouring local authorities.
- vii. Extensive advertising to support campaigns such as google Ad words, backs of buses, and billboards.
- viii. Advertising in professional publications and local newspapers.
- ix. Editorial and articles in local papers.
- x. Sponsorship e.g. locality support , football teams etc.
- xi. Incentive schemes to encourage applications from foster families' own network.
- xii. 'Reggie' the recruitment bus which was designed to address some of the unique recruitment challenges that exist in a large geographic County. This enables recruitment messages to reach all communities in Staffordshire, including those on the extremities of the County.

14.4. **Enquiries:** all initial enquiries are received by the Fostering Central – engagement team. Enquiries can be made via a free-phone number with an answer phone facility out of hours. Enquiries can also be made on the [www.fosterforstaffordshire.co.uk](http://www.fosterforstaffordshire.co.uk) website.

- 14.5. An information pack is sent within one working day potential foster families are asked to complete a detailed information record.
- 14.6. Enquirers will be offered an appointment for a home visit within 5 working days. The visit enables the potential applicant to obtain more information about fostering, after which they will be invited to participate in the Preparation Training – ‘Foundations to Fostering’. ‘Foundations to Fostering’ is made up of an ‘Introduction to Fostering for Staffordshire’ workshop, and then 10 follow-on modules.
- 14.7. In two-carer households, both families will complete the training. After the ‘Introduction to Fostering’ workshop, applicants must complete the ‘Notice to Proceed’ before their ‘Form F’ assessment can start
- 14.8. Approved foster families, who are transferring from another agency, would also complete the ‘Introduction to Fostering for Staffordshire’, although this does not need to be completed prior to their assessment commencing.

## **15. Assessment Process (Not Including Family & Friends Foster Families)**

- 15.1. When a person applies to become a foster carer, the Fostering Service may assess their suitability to foster. There is a two-stage assessment process, and the allocated Social Worker will arrange to visit the applicants within 5 working days from receipt of the notice to proceed.
- 15.2. At Stage 1, Staffordshire Fostering Service will obtain the following information from the applicants:
  - i. The applicant’s full name, address and date of birth.
  - ii. Details of the applicant’s health, supported by a medical report. The applicants will be given (Coram BAAF) Form AH to arrange a medical examination through their GP, the cost of which will be covered by the Local Authority. Completed medicals are sent to

the Medical Advisor for comments about the applicant's fitness, and their suitability to foster.

- iii. Particulars of other adult household members.
- iv. Particulars of children in the applicant's family (whether or not they are members of the household) and any other children in the household.
- v. Particulars of the household's accommodation.
- vi. The outcome of any request or application made by the applicant, (or any member of the applicant's household), to foster or adopt children, or for registration as an early or later year's provider, under Part 3 of the Child Care Act (2006), including particulars of any previous approval or refusal of approval to foster.
- vii. The name and address of any fostering service that the applicant has been an approved foster carer for, in the preceding 12 months.
- viii. Names and addresses of four persons who will provide personal references for the applicants; (three, if a single applicant) and one extended family member for each applicant; who will be asked to
- ix. complete a pro-forma reference and be interviewed by the Assessing Social Worker. The referees must know the applicants well and be able to comment upon all aspects of their lives.
- x. In relation to the applicant and each member of their household aged 16 or over, an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Certificate. Following receipt of a positive DBS check, a manager's positive DBS Disclosure Risk Assessment pro-forma will be completed and considered by the County Manager (Fostering).
- xi. Details of any current and any previous marriage, civil partnership, or similar relationship.
- xii. Consultation with the Local Authority in whose area the applicant lives, if this is different to the Fostering Service.
- xiii. Staffordshire will also request references and will undertake a visit to previous partners with whom the applicant has parented, also any significant partners.

15.3. Stage 1 is completed, 10 days following all the above information becoming available to the Fostering Service. If at any point during Stage 1 of the assessment process, the Fostering Service's Agency Decision-maker (Fostering Lead or Adoption Head of Service), decides that the applicant is not suitable to foster, they must write to the applicant, informing them of this decision and giving full

reasons for it. The applicants will be advised about how to make a complaint.

- 15.4. Stage 2 of the assessment may be carried out in parallel to Stage 1 in order to avoid unnecessary delay. Staffordshire uses the 'Form F' (Coram BAAF) assessment report to present the findings of the full assessment. The assessment requires the full participation of the applicants, and social workers will complete an assessment plan with the applicants and arrange to visit, as required (usually 8-10 visits are needed). The assessment plan and agreement will identify dates for visits and the areas to be covered, including information to be provided by the applicants and a planned date to attend the Fostering Panel.
- 15.5. The assessment will collate information about the applicants and their family's motivation to foster, as well as their capability to foster. The assessment will take into account:
- i. Lifestyle
  - ii. Mental, physical and emotional well-being
  - iii. Ability to be resilient and flexible
  - iv. Understanding of the fostering task and the needs of children in care
  - v. Ability to manage and care for a child in care and to work with birth families and the team supporting the child.
  - vi. Ability to meet cultural, ethnic, religious, health, and educational needs
  - vii. Ability to provide suitable accommodation
  - viii. Impact of fostering on the family
  - ix. Ability to provide safe and stable care
  - x. Ability to understand confidentiality and to keep clear and accurate records.
- 15.6. Preparation training will run in parallel with the assessment. The preparation training marks the start of 'portfolio building' for the 'Training Support and Development Standards for Foster Families' (TSD Standards). All foster families are supported to complete the TSD Standards within 12 months of approval (18 months for family & friends families). Applicants will begin to accumulate evidence for their portfolio during this training and assessment period.

- 15.7. Assessment Form F reports must be completed and have a panel recommendation within eight months from the date of the application. Staffordshire aims to complete the assessment within 20 weeks.
- 15.8. Family & Friends assessments follow a similar process. Applicants will be contacted immediately and a referral for either a 'viability assessment' or a full assessment will be made by the child's Social Worker. A fostering social worker from the Family & Friends Team will also be allocated, and a full assessment is completed within 12 weeks of the referral being received. Family & Friends applicants are given an information pack and guidance on the assessment and approval process.

## **16. Fostering Approval (Including Family & Friends)**

- 16.1. The completed assessment report will be shared with the applicants and presented to the fostering panel with a recommendation whether the applicant is suitable to foster, and what the terms of their approval should be. The recommendation to panel will set out the type of placement, number and age range of children to be placed. Or, approval may be limited to specific children (for example, family & friends approvals).
- 16.2. The Fostering Panel meets on a weekly basis to consider all applications. The fostering panel is made up of children's social care representatives and independent representatives who have a relevant background and experience that support their role (e.g. fostering, care experience, health, education etc).
- 16.3. Applicants are invited to attend the fostering panel with the assessing social worker and if applicable the child's social worker. Written information about the Panel's role and function will be available beforehand and applicants will meet the Chairperson prior to attending the panel meeting.
- 16.4. The Fostering panel will make a recommendation about the suitability of the applicant to foster and the terms of their approval.

- 16.5. The Heads of Service for Adoption and Kinship and Fostering Lead are the Agency Decision Makers and receive the recommendation of the panel. All information including the Panel minutes will be made available to the Agency Decision Maker to enable them to make a considered decision within 7 days of receipt of the recommendation and final set of minutes.
- 16.6. The foster carer or prospective foster carer will be informed orally of the decision within two working days and in writing within five working days, clearly stating the terms of the approval. Families will be required to sign the Foster Carer Agreement before they can take a placement.
- 16.7. In circumstances where the agency decision maker is minded not to approve an applicant, the applicant can either make representation to the agency or through the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) and will be given information regarding the process to be followed.

## **17. Post Approval Support and Supervision**

- 17.1. Approved foster families are able to access the Foster Carer Handbook which sets out the role and responsibility and expectations of families and the service. An electronic version is on the secure part of the website [www.fosterforstaffordshire.co.uk](http://www.fosterforstaffordshire.co.uk) and will be updated at least annually. Carers will be given access to the site which will also hold updated copies of all fostering service policy and procedure.
- 17.2. Newly approved foster families are required to complete the Training, Support & Development Standards for Foster Care. This is part of the framework of induction, core training and continuing professional development that will equip foster families with the essential skills and knowledge to meet the needs of children in their care.
- 17.3. Families will be expected to evidence that they have met the induction requirements by achieving a Certificate of Successful Achievement on completion of a portfolio of evidence of competency within the first 12 months of approval (18 months for Family &

Friends Families). Foster families will be expected to annually update and develop their knowledge and skills through their Personal Development Plan which will contribute to the foster carer review process. Foster Families are required to maintain an ongoing 'portfolio' of training and development which demonstrates how they are meeting the skills required of them by the Fostering Service.

- 17.4. Foster families' personal development plans set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development needs and experience.
- 17.5. The Fostering Panel considers the foster families' annual review and recommends to the agency their ongoing approval, variation or de-registration. Foster carer reviews are independently chaired and involve the foster carer and fostering social worker, who provide written reports. The views of the children and young people in placement and their social workers inform the review. Views of the carer's own children are also invited. The review focuses on the performance of the carer, identifies training requirements and makes recommendations for future approval.

## **18. Post Approval Training**

- 18.1. The Fostering Service has a strong commitment to the ongoing training of foster families, recognising the valuable contribution it makes to their development, helping them to understand the fostering task, increasing their knowledge and skills, and underpinning the safe and appropriate care of children. This has been further reinforced by the TSD Standards' expectations that families continue to engage with, and with core and continuing professional development training and learning opportunities.
- 18.2. The training catalogue is reviewed and updated annually and currently offers an extensive and diverse range of training and development opportunities. The training can be in the form of workshops or courses that take place over one or two days, or more intensive training arranged over a number of weeks. The training covers subjects of a general and also specialist nature. The fostering service also offers a range of e-learning modules to enable families

to access essential information through the internet or via CD/memory sticks.

- 18.3. Foster families are also able to access multi-agency child protection and safeguarding courses and a range of childcare courses, being trained alongside social work staff. Bespoke arrangements have been made available to families to undertake specific, relevant courses, the content of which can then be cascaded to others.

## 19. Support and Retention

- 19.1. Support for foster families is given a high priority in Staffordshire and the services available to families include:

- i. Supervision and support from a named fostering social worker.
- ii. A Mentoring scheme for foster families
- iii. Local support groups who meet either face to face or virtually on a monthly basis.
- iv. Sons and Daughter Support Group
- v. Out of hours support via the Emergency Duty Service.
- vi. Intensive time limited support intervention and out of hours support
- vii. Mentoring scheme for Sons and Daughters
- viii. Membership of the Fostering Network.
- ix. Access to Fostering Network Advice & a Mediation Worker.
- x. Provision of equipment, necessary for fostering.
- xi. Financial support through agreed allowances.
- xii. Additional insurance cover.
- xiii. Interest free loans towards adaptations/extensions to carer's property and for the purchase of larger vehicles to promote the needs of fostering placements.
- xiv. Use of a 'people carrier' for set periods of time to give support to families who require a larger vehicle due to fostering.
- xv. Handbook for foster families.
- xvi. Newsletter for foster families.
- xvii. Up to date information through the website and text and email alerts.
- xviii. The Foster Families Voice – Development Group
- xix. Foster Carer's Forums.

- xx. Thinkwell for Foster Families (fast track service telephone support which aims to meet the needs of individuals who are struggling with their emotional wellbeing).
- xxi. Physiotherapy Service which provide assistance for foster families with musculoskeletal injuries

19.2. In order to improve the life chances for children, the following lists some of the services that are available to children in placements:

- i. CAMHS or Action for Children
- ii. Head teacher of the Virtual School for Looked After Children, and education co-coordinators and mentors, linking into specific education services.
- iii. Named Nurses for Looked After Children.
- iv. Access to drugs advisory workers.
- v. The Voice Project.
- vi. Advocacy Service.
- vii. Access to SOVA mentors.

## **20. Staying Put**

20.1. Staffordshire County Council is committed to preventing social exclusion among care leavers and has developed a 'Staying Put' policy in order to ensure that, when appropriate, they can continue to live with former foster carer(s) after their 18th birthday and make the transition to independent living at a pace that suits their needs.

20.2. The primary aim of the policy is to allow young people to remain with their families past their 18th birthday to promote a gradual transition from care to independent living. This recognises that many young people in care experience delayed maturity, and that their 18th birthday may be an inappropriate point to leave foster care.

20.3. The Staying Put Good Practice Guide 2014 provides information, for practitioners and managers, in making and supporting staying put arrangements. The provision of financial support is available designed to enable a staying put carer to meet the aims and objectives of the arrangement.

## 21. Comments, Compliments and Complaints

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

21.2. There is a complaints procedure which is accessible to all service users and families, and there are three stages to the procedure:

- i. **Stage 1 - Local Resolution:** The complaint is addressed at the point of service delivery by the responsible Team Manager. There is a 10 working day timescale for responding to Stage 1 complaints with the option to extend to 20 working days with the agreement of the complainant.
- ii. **Stage 2 – Investigation:** If the complainant remains unhappy with the Stage 1 outcome they can request to proceed to Stage 2. This must be made to the Head of Customer Feedback and Complaints, advising why they remain unhappy and the desired outcome from the investigation. A Complaints Investigating Officer (CIO) or an external Investigating Officer (IO) will be assigned to the complaint and an Independent Person (IP) will work alongside the CIO to ensure an independent and objective view. There is a 25 working day timescale for completing the investigation although this can be extended to 65 with the agreement of the complainant. A response will be provided by the relevant Strategic Lead following consideration of the reports.
- iii. **Stage 3 - Review Panel:** If the complainant remains unhappy with the outcome of the investigation at Stage 2 they can request an independent Stage 3 Review Panel. The complainant must outline in writing why they remain unhappy and the desired outcome from the panel. The Panel is made up of three independent people who will review the investigation undertaken

## 22. Contact Details for Further Information

For further information contact:

The Fostering Lead

Fostering Service,  
Staffordshire Place 1  
Stafford ST16 2DH

For a complaint or representation re the Fostering Service contact:  
Staffordshire County Council

Complaints and Representations Staffordshire Place 1  
Stafford ST16 2DH  
Tel: 01785 278601

For Ofsted contact: Piccadilly Gate Store Street Manchester  
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