

RESTRICTED

FAMILIES FIRST

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Statement of Purpose – Fostering Service

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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 First including the Fostering Service and may interview or visit foster carers 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 carers; staff employed by the Fostering Service and in Families First, 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
A copy of the summary is given to parents by the child's social worker when their child becomes Looked After.
- 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 a complaint.

The guide can be found on the website www.fosterforstaffordshire.co.uk

<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 Families First Services' 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. For children looked after, 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 in their placements with carers 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 placements and by being aspirational and ambitious for them.
- 3.4 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 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, carers and partners. The Fostering Service works in partnership with children, parents, carers, supporting the team around the child to achieve the very best possible outcomes for children in care.

4. Principles and Standards of Care

- 4.1 Staffordshire Fostering Service offers a wide range of placements for children and young people of all ages.
- 4.2 Key Principles:
 - All applicants to foster for Staffordshire are checked, prepared, assessed and approved in accordance with the relevant fostering regulations; guidance and standards.
 - 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 carers.

- A foster carer agreement is signed by all carers at the point of approval and reviewed annually following the Foster Carer Review.
- Approved foster carers 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.
- Placements are carefully matched, taking into account the needs of the child, the experience of the carer and the impact on the fostering household.
- Foster carers are provided with as much information as possible prior to placement, including a comprehensive risk assessment and 'matching' document to support the placement.
- Foster carer profiles will be shared with the children prior to placement by the child's Social Worker.
- Foster carers, children in care and their parents will have access to the County Council's Complaints Service.
- 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:

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

5. Management Structure and Staffing Arrangements

5.1 The County Manager (Fostering) 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 County Manager is supported in this task by the County Manager (Adoption and Kinship Care). County Managers are part of the Families First Looked After 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 carers and children is with **six fostering 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 the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC). 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 (NQS) 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 Families First 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 is 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 in nationally, and to review and evaluate the overall performance of the Fostering Service. Managers regularly attend Looked After Children Managers development forums and the annual Panel Training and Development day.

Fostering Teams: Roles and Functions

6. The Adoption and Fostering Recruitment, Training and Reviewing Team:

- 6.1 This team consists of a team manager, social workers, and senior family support workers, a qualified marketing and recruitment officer and business support staff. The team has countywide responsibility for the following functions:
 - Development and implementation of a comprehensive recruitment strategy in order to attract a range of applicants to foster.
 - Development of a comprehensive retention strategy
 - Production of recruitment and publicity material.

- Responding to initial enquiries about fostering and adoption and undertaking initial assessment visits.
- Delivery of the 'Foundations to Foster' preparation course.
- Delivery of preparation training for prospective adopters.
- Co-ordination and delivery of a comprehensive post approval training package for all foster carers.
- Responsibility for the overview of the Standardization Panel that reviews the Training Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers.
- Managing and chairing the Annual Reviews of foster carers.
- Co-ordination of support groups for foster carers, including additional groups for male foster carers.
- Co-ordination of the Countywide Foster Carers' Forum held twice a year.
- Support to the Foster Carers' Advisory Group.
- Support to the Foster Carers Association
- Co-ordination of a support group for sons & daughters of foster carers.
- Production of newsletters for foster carers and for children in the foster home – one edition per school term.
- Organisation of social events, including the summer barbeque, Winter Fayre and individual awards events for foster carers and fostered children.
- Maintenance of the website www.fosterforstaffordshire.co.uk

7. **Assessment, supervision and support of general foster carers**

The **Fostering Central Team** undertakes a county-wide function for the assessment of all applicants wanting to foster (except for Family & Friends carers). 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 team coordinator, social workers and business support coordinators/officers.

- 7.2 There are two general fostering teams covering Staffordshire **Fostering North** and **Fostering South**. These team hold responsibility for the supervision of support to approved foster carers including kinship carers. These teams are based in Lichfield and Stafford and each has a team manager, social workers, family support workers and business support staff. Additionally, the teams each have a full-time Team Co-ordinator whose role and function is to promote stability and sufficiency by working alongside both managers and social workers to enhance the supervisory function developmentally and individually, as required

7.3 The teams are responsible for the following fostering activities:

- Providing regular and consistent individual supervision and support to fostering households.
- Undertaking annual reviews of foster carers' continued suitability to foster.
- Management and development of carer's skills through the implementation of the TSD Standards, Personal Development Plans and support of foster carers; the aim being to increase the carer's expertise and to improve outcomes for children.
- Promoting the aim of the Payment for Skills appraisal scheme for foster carers.
- Contribution to the Placement Service and placement matching.
- Providing effective fostering support plans, that promotes individual children's placement plans.
- Support family finding systems to search for appropriate permanent placements for children through in-house resources or external providers.
- Promoting and supporting carer's attendance at development opportunities and foster carers support groups.
- Provision of essential equipment and developmental aids for carers.
- Working to promote a social pedagogical perspective and culture.
- Promoting the use of the social learning model (Keep and Keep Safe) with carers
- Undertaking support carer assessments.
- Undertaking long- term fostering and special guardianship assessments of approved foster carers.

8. The Intensive Interventions Team

8.1 This team consists of a team manager, one full time and one-part time team coordinator, social workers, senior family support workers, and business support staff. The team supports placements providing intensive interventions including Fostering Disability Short break (Family Link). The team has access to an occupational therapist who supports the placement of children with foster carers. The team provides a county-wide service and is based in Stafford and Lichfield.

This team includes:

8.2 The **Resilience Project** whose remit is to recruit and assess foster carers to provide single placements for young people aged 10-15 years, moving from residential care into a family setting, 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. Carers recruited to the scheme 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 carers' work with young people usually aged between 10-15 years who are currently placed in a residential setting.

- 8.3 **Turn Around** This program provides 72-hour short break foster care for children and young people with the objective of promoting the stability.
- 8.4 **Wrap Around Support.** The support is delivered by a team coordinator, a social workers and senior family support workers with diverse skills and experience including, a family therapist, specialist education, youth offending and residential experience. WRAP offers support to existing fostering households (including Family & Friends and where appropriate Independent Providers) who are experiencing challenging and difficult placements. The Team Co-ordinator is responsible for chairing stability meetings which may lead to a referral path to WRAP for time-limited (up to 12 weeks) focussed and identified work. The WRAP Programme uses the model of Social Learning Theory Intervention and strength-based approach.

Disability Fostering (Family Link)

- 8.5 The Team offers 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. 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 team works closely with Independent Futures (children with disability service). Referrals to the service for short stays are processed through the Disability Resource Panel which meet monthly and are

managed by Independent Futures. Time limited or emergency placements can be agreed by the IF Team Manager.

- 8.9 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 has access to a full-time occupational therapist that can provide clinical assessments children referred, as well as assessments of all homes of approved family link carers. The resource assists with the matching of children and stability of placements.

9. The Family & Friends Team

- 9.1 This team consists of a team manager, team co-ordinator, social workers and family support workers. The team is based in Stafford.
- 9.2 The team offers the full range of fostering services to family & friends carers; assessment and the supervision and support of approved carers where the plan is that they will seek legal permanency for the child. Family & friends carers also access all central activities and support provided by the Recruitment & Training Team.
- 9.3 The team is involved in the care planning process, preparing reports for court and foster/permanence panels and promoting permanence through special guardianship.
- 9.4 The team works closely with Families First's Targeted Services to provide individual support to families moving onto special guardianship arrangements.
- 9.5 Additionally, the team works closely with specialist safeguarding colleagues and is responsible for the assessment and supervision of *private foster* carer arrangements.
10. As part of Families First, Looked After Children & Disability Service, the Fostering Service works in close, day-to-day partnership with the following:
- **The Placement Service:** This team has two service coordinators; placement officers and clerical support. Their remit is to deal with all emergency and urgent requests for new or alternative foster placements, including the search for placements through the independent sector and for ensuring all placements are risk assessed and matched, as far as is

possible. The Fostering Service works as part of the Placement Service to make effective use of internal and external resources.

- **Supported Lodging:** The recruitment, assessment and training of these placements is undertaken by the Fostering and Adoption Recruitment and Training team. Central Throughcare support and supervises the placements. The aim is to match 16-18-year-old care leavers with suitable households to support them to develop independence skills, before they move into their own accommodation.

11. Conflict of Interest

11.1 The Children Act (1989) Guidance & Regulations Vol. 4 (4.12) allows for foster carers, or for a member of their household to work for the Fostering Service; however, care is taken to avoid any actual or perceived conflict of interest.

11.2 In general terms, anyone working within the Fostering Service **will not** be considered as a foster carer. Staff working within the County Council in areas that have traditionally been referred to as Children's Social Care; will also normally not be considered, as a conflict of interest may occur. However, all cases will be considered on an individual basis and judged on merit and in the child's best interests by the County Managers for Fostering and Adoption and Kinship Care.

12. Placements

12.1 Staffordshire Fostering Service offers the following placements:

Task Centered: These foster carers 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 carers will contribute to the assessment of the child's long-term needs and be involved with preparing and supporting a child to return home or move to a permanent placement, in line with the Permanency Plan agreed for the child at the 2nd Statutory (Looked After) Review.

Permanent and Long-Term: These carers provide permanent or long-term placements with foster carers, 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 carers is made by the Best Interest Panel.

Resilience: These carers provide single placements for young people aged 10-15 making the transition from residential care into a family setting, until they reach independence.

Family & Friends: These carers 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 carers have equal access to support and training opportunities.

Emergency Duty: These are foster carers whose approval is extended to take emergency placements outside office hours for a maximum of 72 hours (excluding bank holidays).

Fostering Disability Short Break: The team provides a 'family link' for children with carers 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.

Short Break: These carers provide short breaks for children in 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.

Mother and baby: These foster carers provide placements to young people in care and their baby. These carers 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.

Supported Lodgings: provides supported lodgings' placements within families, for 16-18 year old care leavers

Support carer's arrangements (back-up carers). These arrangements are assessed and the 'arrangement' is agreed as appropriate to support exiting, approved fostering households. The support carers are identified from within the foster carer's support network. The support carers can provide short-stays to support a fostering household for anything from day-care through to regular overnight stays and holidays.

13. Recruitment

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

13.2 The Fostering Service will also ensure that it has sufficient numbers of supervising social workers for foster carers; 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 carers are supported.

13.3 **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:

- A dedicated recruitment and marketing officer for fostering and adoption.
- Staff being trained in a cultural value modes marketing model
- A strong web presence.
- An active Facebook site and Twitter feeds.
- Targeted and locality campaigns e.g. shared care week; fostering fortnight, and Staffordshire Day.
- Partnership with local commercial initiatives.
- A regional recruitment campaign with neighbouring local authorities.
- Extensive advertising to support campaigns such as google Ad words, radio, backs of buses, and billboards.
- Advertising in professional publications and local newspapers.
- Editorial and articles in local papers.
- Sponsorship e.g. locality support , flower beds etc.
- Incentive /sponsorship schemes to encourage applications from foster carers' own network.
- '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.
- Open, twice monthly recruitment information meetings.

13.4 **Enquiries:** all initial enquiries are received by the Recruitment & Training 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 website. The team also takes initial enquiries regarding the Foundations Scheme.

13.5 An information pack is sent **within one working day** with invitations to attend an **Information Meeting**. Information meetings are held fortnightly and following the meeting, if potential foster carers are interested they are asked to complete a detailed *information record*. The information meeting are open to the public without invitation and information about this is published on the website and through social media.

13.6 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.

- 13.7 In two-carer households, both carers will complete the training. After the 'Introduction to Fostering' workshop, applicants must complete the 'Notice to Proceed' before their 'Form F' assessment can start.
- 13.8 Approved foster carers, 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.

14. Assessment Process (not including family & friends foster carers):

- 14.1 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.
- 14.2 At **Stage 1**, Staffordshire Fostering Service will obtain the following information from the applicants:
- The applicant's full name, address and date of birth.
 - 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.
 - Particulars of other adult household members.
 - Particulars of children in the applicant's family (whether or not they are members of the household) and any other children in the household.
 - Particulars of the household's accommodation.
 - 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.
 - The name and address of any fostering service that the applicant has been an approved foster carer for, in the preceding 12 months.
 - 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

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.

- 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).
- Details of any current and any previous marriage, civil partnership, or similar relationship.
- Consultation with the Local Authority in whose area the applicant lives, if this is different to the Fostering Service.
- Staffordshire will also request references and will undertake a visit to previous partners with whom the applicant has parented; also any significant partners.

14.3 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 (County Manager), 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.

14.4 **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.

14.5 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:

- Lifestyle
- Mental, physical and emotional well-being
- Ability to be resilient and flexible
- Understanding of the fostering task and the needs of children in care
- Ability to manage and care for a child in care and to work with birth families and the team supporting the child.

- Ability to meet cultural, ethnic ,religious, health, and educational needs
 - Ability to provide suitable accommodation
 - Impact of fostering on the family
 - Ability to provide safe and stable care
 - Ability to understand confidentiality and to keep clear and accurate records.
- 14.6 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 Carers’** (TSD Standards). All foster carers are supported to complete the TSD Standards **within 12 months of approval (18 months for family & friends carers)**. Applicants will begin to accumulate evidence for their portfolio during this training and assessment period.
- 14.7 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**.
- 14.8 **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.
- 15. Fostering Approval (Including Family and Friends)**
- 15.1 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).
- 15.2 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.)
- 15.3 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.

- 15.4 The Fostering panel will make a recommendation about the suitability of the applicant to foster and the terms of their approval.
- 15.5 The County Managers for Fostering and Adoption and Kinship 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**.
- 15.6 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. Carers will be required to sign the Foster Carer Agreement before they can take a placement.
- 15.7 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.

16. Post Approval Support and Supervision

- 16.1 Approved foster carers will receive a hard copy of the **Foster Carer Handbook** which sets out the role and responsibility and expectations of carers and the service. An electronic version will be placed on the secure part of the website 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
- 16.2 Newly approved foster carers 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 carers with the essential skills and knowledge to meet the needs of children in their care.
- 16.3 Carers 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 Carers). Foster carers 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 Carers 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.

- 16.4 Foster carers' 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.
- 16.5 The Fostering Panel considers the **foster carers' 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.

17 Post Approval Training

- 17.1 The Fostering Service has a strong commitment to the ongoing training of foster carers, 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 carers continue to engage with, and with core and continuing professional development training and learning opportunities.
- 17.2 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 carers to access essential information through the internet or via CD/memory sticks.
- 17.3 Foster carers are also able to access multi-agency child protection and safeguarding courses and a range of child care courses, being trained alongside social work staff. Bespoke arrangements have been made available to carers to undertake specific, relevant courses, the content of which can then be cascaded to others.

18. Support and retention

- 18.1 Support for foster carers is given a high priority in Staffordshire and the services available to carers include:
- Supervision and support from a named fostering social worker.
 - A Mentoring scheme for foster carers
 - Local support groups who meet on a monthly basis – there are

- nine groups across the county as well as locality network groups
- 'Men in Foster Care' Support group.
- Sons and Daughter Support Group
- Out of hours support via the Emergency Duty Service.
- Wrap intensive time limited support intervention and out of hours support
- Mentoring scheme for Sons and Daughters
- Membership of the Fostering Network.
- Access to Fostering Network Advice & a 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 to promote the needs of fostering placements.
- Use of a 'people carrier' for set periods of time to give support to carers who require a larger vehicle due to fostering.
- Handbook for foster carers.
- Newsletter for foster carers and foster children.
- Up to date information through the website and text and email alerts.
- A Foster Carers Advisory Group
- Foster Carer's Forums.

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

- SUSTAIN Plus (CAMHS specialist service for children in care): whose aim is to provide a timely response to the needs of children and young people looked after and their carers, and whose placements are under stress, or in danger of disruption.
- Head teacher of the Virtual School for Looked After Children, and education co-coordinators and mentors, linking into specific education services.
- Named Nurses for Looked After Children.
- Access to drugs advisory workers.
- The Voice Project.
- Advocacy Service.
- Access to SOVA mentors.
- 'Celebration of Achievements' events
- Teenage Pregnancy Support.

19. **Staying Put**

19.1 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.

- 19.2 The primary aim of the policy is to allow young people to remain with their carers 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.
- 19.3 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.

20. Comments, Compliments and Complaints

- 20.1 Staffordshire County Council welcomes feedback on the services it provides to children, birth parents and foster carers, to enable improvements to be made.
- 20.2 There is a complaints procedure which is accessible to all service users and carers, and there are three stages to the procedure:

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.

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.

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:
County Manager Fostering Service,
Looked After Children Services (Families First)
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
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M1 2WD
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk