

FOSTERING SERVICE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE



This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirements of Standard 16 of the Fostering Services Minimum Standards (Care Standards Act, 2000) and Regulation 3 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011. To be presented for approval by the Leicestershire County Council Executive in September each year.

AIMS, OBJECTIVES, STANDARDS AND PRINCIPLES OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

The main aims of the Leicestershire County Council Fostering Service are to:

- Provide high quality and safe care within a family setting for children and young people who have been assessed as requiring a foster placement
- Where it is right to do so, all children will be supported to remain within the care of their families or communities with kinship carers
- Where this is not possible, early permanence with adoptive families or foster carers will be sought to promote a sense of emotional wellbeing and a sense of belonging
- Children and young people's voice will be respected and we will actively seek their engagement in decisions about their needs, their future and the provision of services
- High quality placements and provision of support to parents and carers to meet the needs of children and young people
- Where possible and right to do so, children and young people should be placed within Leicestershire with Leicestershire carers to maintain a sense of connectivity with their community
- Parents and carers are an integral part of the service, to be involved in planning for the child and service provision to ensure that the very best care is provided to our children and young people.

The main service objectives are to:

- Provide a safe and nurturing foster placement with every effort made to achieve good outcomes for the looked after child, within set timescales and to agreed standards.
- Nurture relationships with friends, to ensure (wherever possible) that communities are maintained, that there is continuity of education provision and health care, and cultural and identity links promoted.
- Achieve permanence for all children who are unable to return safely to their families and promote Staying Put for those children who are secure within their foster placement
- Create sufficient placement options to enable choice of placement for looked after children in Leicestershire County Council through the publication of an annual market position statement and marketing/recruitment plan
- To train and support foster carers to provide safe and ambitious care.
- Involve young people and Foster Carers in developing services and building their feedback into service development
- For all Children's Services employees to recognise their contribution to supporting the recruitment and retention of Foster Carers and recognising their value as part of the professional service delivered to our children in care.

The Fostering Service works to core principles, developed with our children and young people:

Children and young people in our care have the right to expect that we will provide them with everything a good parent would provide in order to ensure they reach their full potential. This means Leicestershire County Council will -

- Know our children, their needs, talents and aspirations and promote their interest
- Hold high aspirations for their future and expect the best for and from them
- Take an interest in their success and problems and show our pride in their achievements, celebrating with them
- Listen to their views and ensure they influence policy, plans and practice
- Give them access to services that will enable them to overcome disadvantage
- Ensure they are consulted about their lives and plans
- Recognise, support and respect their identity in all aspects
- Promote their education
- Support their health and emotional wellbeing and resilience
- Support transition to adulthood and promote economic opportunities
- Give them second chances, and third and fourth...

The Fostering Service has set targets to achieve best practice for the following Children's Performance Assessment Framework and National Indicators:

- Stability of placements of looked after children: number of placement moves
- The percentage of children looked after in foster placements or placed for adoption
- Stability of placements of looked after children: length of placement.

Other targets are based on the drive to achieve placement sufficiency:

- Number of mainstream in-house foster carers recruited and retained
- Number of specialist carers recruited and retained
- Number of children achieving permanency.

The Fostering Service Recruitment and Retention Strategy is part of the overall Care Placement Strategy 2018- 2021. It is a dynamic strategy, geared towards supporting the recruitment of new foster carers to meet the assessed needs as determined by the need's analysis; and is integrally linked with other key strategic plans and strategies for the Council:

- Children and Families Departmental Plan 2017 – 2021
- Children & Families Partnership Plan
- Plus, other ones
- Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2017 – 2021
- Permanence and Adoption Strategy 2017 – 2021
- Commissioning Strategy 2018- 2021

It is a dynamic strategy, geared towards supporting the recruitment of new foster carers and also the need to provide robust support to our approved carers.

Other key linked planning documents are:

- Marketing Plan
- Market Position Statement
- Adoption and Permanence Strategy

STANDARDS OF CARE TO BE FOLLOWED BY THE AGENCY

The Fostering Service aims to provide safe, secure and high quality care in family settings for children who need to be looked after away from home. This will be achieved to the standards set out in the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (referred to as the 'Regulations'), the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review regulations (2010) the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011) along with the Code of Practice on the recruitment, assessment, approval, training, management and support of foster carers. These standards will apply equally to family and friends placements. The service complies with the requirements of the Training, Support and Development Standards.

In addition to the above, the following local standards of practice are expected:

- Fostering Recruitment and Assessment - Timely and quality recruitment and assessment journey to Fostering Panel and the final decision on approval by the Agency Decision Maker
- Retention – all foster carers will have an allocated worker, have access to appropriate training and access to a mentor when starting their fostering journey with Leicestershire, peer support through locality hubs and Leicestershire's foster carers will tell us they feel well supported.

The full list of practice standards can be found in the 'Growing Quality in Social Care Practice Standards':

“ When you work here in Leicestershire
you are signing up to a shared vision and
mission for local children and their families ”

PROGRESS AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The performance and progress in recruitment and retention of foster carers will be monitored monthly, through agreed performance reports. The information will be used by managers and teams to review how recruitment, retention and children's outcomes is progressing and to make changes informed by the evidence of their work and actions, to maintain a focus on achieving the targets set.

The same performance information will form part of the reporting data set provided to the Departmental Management Team to inform strategic direction for sufficiency services and provisions will strive to reach our vision:

**Leicestershire is the best place
for children and families**



STATUS AND CONSTITUTION OF THE AGENCY

Leicestershire County Council is an approved Fostering Service provider and will be inspected under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Decision making and arrangements for the management of the service including the appointment of the Fostering Service Manager (Regulation 6) and approval of foster carer registrations (Regulation 27) are delegated to the Assistant Director, Children's Services. This function is delivered by a dedicated Agency Decision Maker on behalf of the Assistant Director.

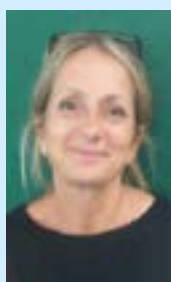
A Fostering Panel has been established in accordance with Regulation 23. A Manager who is independent from the Fostering Service chairs the Panel.

Where Leicestershire County Council needs to use any other fostering agency for the provision of a placement, the Commissioning Team will manage the search and will ensure that the process is managed according to the Council's rules on commissioning.

Leicestershire County Council is a member of the East Midlands Framework and will search for a placement through this process to ensure that collaborative efforts are maintained to source high quality, cost-effective care. If a suitable match is not found, a search 'off-framework' will be made.

The management structure of the Fostering Service

The Fostering & Adoption Service is part of Leicestershire County Council's Children and Family Services. The structure of the service is shown on Appendix A.



The Registered Manager of the Fostering Service is:

Joss Longman, Service Manager

Children and Family Services, County Hall, Glenfield, Leicestershire LE3 8SA

Telephone: (0116) 2323232

Email: Joss.Longman@leics.gov.uk

Qualifications: Dip/HE qualified (1994)

Experience: Joss started to work within children's services as a residential worker in 1986 and a residential training officer and progressed through to being a Team Manager in 1996. In 2012 Joss started working in the Fostering Service as a Team Manager for the kinship team. In 2015 Joss took the leadership of the Fostering Service as Service Manager.

In May 2019 we appointed an Assistant Service Manager to support the Service Manager in the recruitment and retention of Foster carers.

The organisational structure of the Fostering Service

Recruitment Team	Assessment Team	Team Around the Child	Kinship Team	Dedicated Placement Support Team
Recruitment Lead - Denise Lacey	Team Manager - Emily Moss	Team Manager - Heather Hughes	Team Manger - Jane Clamp	Team Manager - Dawna Moffat
Recruitment Enquiry Co-ordinator	Senior Practitioner (1)	Senior Practitioner (1.5)	Senior Practitioner (1.5)	Supervising Social Worker (Specialist Carers)
Initial Visitors (2)	Assessing Social Workers (6)	Supervising Social Workers (5.6)	Assessing Social Workers (4)	Supervising Social Workers - Staying Put and Supported Lodgings (2)
	Assessing Social Worker (Private Fostering)	Training Co-ordinator	Supervising Social Workers (3)	Support Workers (4)
	Panel Advisor	Reviewing Officer		Independent Visitor Co-ordinator (1)

SUPPORTING THE FOSTERING SERVICE

The work of the Fostering Service is delivered through a number of key relationships and support functions which are described below:

The Fostering Service delivers services through five key Teams:

- Recruitment
- Assessments
- Team around the child (supervising social workers)
- The Kinship Team (assessment and support to family and friends carers)
- The Dedicated Placement Support Team.

About the Recruitment Team

This is the first port of call for all potential carers. The team works with the Communications Team to encourage carers to approach Leicestershire. This team has a Team Manager supported by one recruitment support coordinator, 2 FTE initial visit workers and a business support officer.

About the Assessment Team

In April 2015 the Fostering Assessment Team and Adoption Assessment Team integrated. The team currently assesses mainstream foster carers, adopters, step parent adoptions, private fostering assessments.

In July 2019 adoption assessments will separate from the Assessment Team in preparation for regionalisation.

The team consists of one Team Manager, one Senior Practitioner and six assessing Social Workers.

About the Team Around the Child

This Team hold responsibility for supporting all mainstream foster carers to meet the needs of children in their care. The Team Manager also oversees the training and development of all foster carers.

The team consists of one Team Manager and Senior Practitioner, one Training Co-ordinator, one Reviewing Officer and seven Supervising Social Workers.

About the Dedicated Placement Support Team

In June 2016 a new team was established within the service to enable the return of children to family based placements, promote placement stability and to support Leicestershire's specialist carers.

The team consists of one Team Manager, one Supervising Social Worker for Specialist carers, two Supervising Social Workers for Supported Lodgings, four Support Workers and an Independent Visitors Co-ordinator.

The support workers work flexibly to provide support and advice to foster carers, children in placement and parents if the child is returning home.

About the Kinship Team

This team working with family or friends of the child who are putting themselves forward to care for a child or young person who otherwise would be placed in a foster placement. The team completes an assessment of the family member or friend and takes a report to panel with a recommendation about registration as a foster carer for a specific child/ren. The team also provides support to the carers during the assessment (where an immediate placement has been made under Regulation 24) and following the placement.

The team consists of a Team Manager, 1.5 Senior Practitioners, four assessing Social Workers and three supervising Social Workers.

About the Supported Lodgings provision

In addition to our regulated foster care, we also maintain the supported lodgings carers within the service. This ensures greater continuity of care for our care leavers moving onto independence with carers who trained alongside foster carers to ensure they are skilled and supported to meet the needs of the young adults placed with them. The providers are recruited and assessed within the Dedicated Placement Support Team and are approved by a Supported Lodgings Panel.

About Staying Put Arrangements.

In addition to supporting our Supported Lodgings Providers we also support the young people who are remaining with their ex-fosters carers post 18.

This arrangement is for those carers who have resigned from their fostering role to provide post 18 support. This ensures the service continues to support the placement. This involves six monthly supervision visits and annual monitoring.

About our Independent Visitors Scheme

Running an Independent Visitors Scheme is a requirement under the Children Act, which places a duty on all local authorities to provide independent adults to offer support and friendship to children and young people in care.

Leicestershire's Independent Visitors Scheme is supported within the Fostering Service. Applicants come from a variety of backgrounds and offer an invaluable service to our young people in care. An independent visitor is someone the young people can establish a friendship with outside their foster/residential home; they are a consistent figure in the young people's lives. Independent visitors offer a young person support, advice and encouragement during their time in care and often beyond.

Independent visitors also encourage their young person to exercise their right to participate in decisions taken about them, promote their individual needs and support their individual care plan.

All volunteers are recruited subject to DBS check, references and small assessment. Volunteers are offered training and support. The scheme is supported by a dedicated Independent Visitor Co-ordinator.

Out of Hours Service

The Service provides a duty phone line that is managed by rota to offer advice and support to carers. Where there is a critical incident, the matter will be referred directly by the foster carer to the Out of Hours Emergency Duty Team. This team can visit to offer support that find themselves in extreme difficulties and have access to emergency placements.

Within our Out of Hours Service the service we also offer PACE placements to children and young people within the fostering service.

THE WORK OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

Recruitment – Customer Journey

The fostering assessment process is necessary for all potential foster cares. Not every case follows exactly the same sequence, but the following list of stages provides a good insight of what is expected.

First Point of Contact

The Council has invested in a dedicated recruitment team, to enable and enhance the overall recruitment and experience of prospective foster carers.

The priority for this team is to set out a friendly, informative, and welcoming first point of contact with the prospective carer, which meets their needs and impacts on the customer decision to select Leicestershire County Council, over other agencies, for their journey to foster.



Information Events

The service offers 'Find out about Fostering' Information Events for prospective foster carers, which are aimed at providing an overview of what fostering entails and how to start the journey of becoming a foster carer for Leicestershire County Council. Some of our foster carers help at these events and talk about their experiences of fostering with Leicestershire County Council.

All enquirers are encouraged to attend an Information Event, however, should they wish to progress straight to an initial visit, this can be arranged. Currently, Fostering information events are held 3 weekly, in County Hall but will be arranged on the basis of need and demand.

Customer Feedback of those attending events indicates they are a valued part of the information sharing process, and that prospective foster carers are satisfied to wait until they have attended an event.

Initial Visit

Initial visits are completed to allow the service to make an early decision with the prospective carer as to whether it is appropriate to progress the assessment.

The visitor goes through questions to determine:

- The prospective carers understanding of fostering
- What the prospective carer's motivation is and what they hope to achieve as well as their expectation of the fostering process.
- The prospective carers' skills and attributes that will enhance fostering work.



Following the initial visit and assessment by the Initial visit worker, a written record will be provided within two days. A weekly meeting is held to discuss all the initial visits called a 'Decision to Progress to Assessment Meeting'. These meetings are held with the Recruitment Manager, Senior Practitioner and or Team Manager to make a decision to progress to the assessment process.

Collection of paperwork - If it is agreed at the 'Progress to assessment decisions meeting' for a case to continue into the fostering assessment process, then the initial visit worker will arrange for the applicants to complete all of the necessary paperwork. The worker will then collect, upload and submit this information to Business Support to progress with the assessment.

Form F Assessment

The actual assessment (Form F Assessment) starts and will be completed in 16 weeks. This will be completed by an allocated Social Worker. Once a written assessment has been completed and the carer has been approved, this will become the carers fostering portfolio – it will be used to help match the carer with the right foster child.

Panel and Approval

Leicestershire's Fostering Agency has an independent panel with a broad range of knowledge, skills and experience. The Panel will consider the report (Form F) which will make a recommendation whether the carer should be approved as a foster carer. The foster carers are invited to the Panel and will be supported by the assessing social worker. As well as this expertise, members also have access to medical advice if required.

Approval will be confirmed by the Agency Decision Maker within 7 days of the Panel and will be communicated to the Foster Carers by telephone and in writing.

Any applicant that is not recommended to be approved and that decision is ratified by the Agency Decision Maker has the right to appeal the decision either through the Internal Appeal Process or through the Independent Review Mechanism.

SUPPORTING FOSTER CARERS

The service consciously engages in activities that create the kind of relationships and environment that supports our current foster carers to continue supporting children through Leicestershire County Council. Our foster carers tell us that this means:

- Keeping supervising Social Workers' caseloads low so that foster carers have a good level of support and advice
- Ensuring training is relevant to the needs of the children
- Continually listening and involving foster carers in shaping the service.

Leicestershire's Fostering Service is very proud to have carers who have provided a service through Leicestershire County Council for over 40 years. We are immensely proud to work with them.

Fees and Allowances

Payments to foster carers are a significant element of the support and retention plan for fostering.

A review of fees to foster carers commenced in 2017. The Cabinet approved the proposed changes to the in-house fostering fee structure and this was implemented in September 2018. The new payment Structure includes a Fostering Fees Structure with three levels and Specialist Fostering Schemes. We removed the basic 'level 0' payment, to carers who are at the bottom end of the scale, to ensure that all carers, including kinship carers, receive some element of skills payment in compensation for their care of children and young people.

Training

Foster carers are prepared for the role in pre-approval training through the Skills to Foster programme. In the first year following approval for mainstream foster carers, and within 18 months for Kinship Foster Carers and Short Break Carers, there is a requirement to complete the Training and Support Development Standards (TSDS) for Fostering. This is a national requirement.

A strong, training programme has been designed to match the learning and development needs of the foster carer population and NMS.

The programme is reviewed annually with feedback from carers and is seen as an essential part of the Retention package for foster care. The training is relevant for both new and more experienced carers. For 2019/20 the service is developing more training events focussing on therapeutic parenting.

In addition foster carers can access our 'On line training Hub' to book onto courses, undertake on line training and complete their TSDS.

Feedback is given after every event to inform our training programme for the future. We have also secured training venues in a central venue with parking which will enable more carers to access the training.



Locality Support Groups

In Leicestershire we are very fortunate to have several locality based fostering support groups. The groups meet monthly to support both new and existing carers. The groups are very pro-active and run lots of activities to support the carers.

On a quarterly basis we also hold a Foster Carers Forum with the Locality Group Leaders. This forum provides:

- Co-ordinators the opportunity to feed back any concerns, compliments from the carers perspective
- The service to consult with carers on any new policies / initiatives
- Face to face contact with the managers of the Service
- Consultation regarding any future recruitment / retention activities
- Meet with other partners

Respite

Foster carers identify respite care provision as an important support resource. Whilst only a small number of children have the complexity of need means foster carers require respite, Leicestershire County Council acknowledges that respite promotes resilience. Respite may be an arrangement between the foster carer and their family/friendship circle in agreement with the supervising social worker; or afterschool, day care, sports, activities or a more formal provision like overnight stays provided by another foster carer. We recognise that activities like the ones described above, have added benefits for children and young people:



Education and Children in Care

Leicestershire County Council has a specific responsibility to support the educational achievement of Children in Care. Leicestershire's Virtual School promotes positive outcomes for all children and young people in care to Leicestershire wherever they are living or educated and supports schools and colleges to narrow the achievement gap.

The Virtual school works as part of a team to promote higher aspirations and a greater accountability from all those involved in the education and care of Leicestershire's looked after children. The Virtual School will Deliver a range of initiatives which support children, young people and their carers to engage in education, raise aspirations and enable children in care to experience successful transitions.

“ Year 8/9 Art and Design University Day – Our students had lots to say on the day including: “it has made us want to come to uni” and “I definitely want to come back for the residential in June!” Education Blog 15 Jan 2018 ”

CONSULTATION

We believe that our foster carers should be included, involved in and contribute to decision making in relation to the child they care for.

In 2016 we implemented an annual Foster Carer Feedback Survey, this is sent to all our foster carers and asks a range of questions in relation to:

- Support from the fostering service
- Support / contact with Child/children's social worker
- Locality group engagement
- Out of hours Support
- Training and development
- Retention events
- Monthly fostering newsletter

Each year the survey is sent to all our carers.

In 2018 Our foster carers told us:

97% enjoyed our fostering events

91% felt our training was excellent, relevant and useful

94% agreed / tend to agree that they meet with their supervising social worker often enough

97% Agreed / tend to agree that felt they could approach their supervising social worker if they had any worries

81% Felt they were listened to by the fostering service. We have set priority actions for the forthcoming year to ensure the support and consultation we have with our carers continues:

In 2019 we plan to do better by :



COMPLAINTS

The Directorate has a statutory complaints service, the detail of which is contained in the guide for staff 'Handling Comments and Complaints'.

It is a three stage process:

- **Stage 1** - Informal or problem solving
- **Stage 2** - Formal stage at which an independent investigating officer is appointed
- **Stage 3** - A formal review by a panel of independent members, chaired by an independent individual

Complaints can be made by contacting the Complaints Manager - County Hall:

Tel: 0116 305 5875

Or

Complaints Manager

Social Care Service, FREEPOST LE 1779, County Hall, Glenfield, Leicester LE3 8XR

Applicants for fostering and adoption who are turned down by the Fostering or Adoption Panel and/or the Agency Decision Maker are able to ask for their case to be reviewed by the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM), details of which are provided to prospective foster carers and adopters. Representation to the IRM can only take place during stage two of the assessment process.

ALLEGATIONS

Foster Carers can sometimes be the subject of allegations in respect of the care of the children or young people they are looking after. If this occurs the allegation will be investigated in line with the Leicestershire Safeguarding Children Board child protection procedures with all allegations managed by the Local Authority Designated Officer. In addition to the support offered by the Supervising Social Worker, Foster Carers have access to Leicestershire Foster Carer Association which can offer practical and emotional support.

All allegations and other matters are monitored by the manager who ensures that these are retained for agencies to view as appropriate.

ADVOCACY AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

Looked after children or young people are supported by Children's Rights Officers to ensure they are understood, are happy and safe.

A Children's Rights Officer is not a Social Worker.

The children or young person can contact the Children's Rights Officer by:

Phone 0116 3056302 or 07789081528

Email childrensrights@leics.gov.uk

Leicestershire County Council also has a Corporate Parenting Team. This team helps children and young people in care to get the opportunities and support they need to reach their potential. This includes celebrating achievements with the child or young person, getting a computer or laptop, driving lessons and accessing hobbies.

The Corporate Parenting Team can be contacted by:

Phone 0116 3057518

Email corporateparenting@leics.gov.uk



The Children and Young People's Commissioner is Anne Longfield. Her job is to help children and young people understand their rights and to make sure those rights are respected. The advice is impartial and free. The Children and Young People's Commissioner can be contacted by:

Phone 0800 528 0731

Email help.team@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

NUMBERS AND PROFILE OF FOSTER CARERS

On 31st March 2019 there were 217 Foster households of which:

- 125 Mainstream foster carers including EDT/ respite and Parent and Child**
- 82 Kinship / Connected carers**
- 5 Foster for Adoption**
- 5 Specialist Schemes – Pathway, One2One carers**

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The Leicestershire Fostering Service will treat all service users fairly, openly and with respect throughout the fostering approval process.

Applicants wishing to be approved as Foster Carers will be considered irrespective of ethnicity, religion, belief, gender, sexual orientation or disability providing the Fostering Service considers they can safely meet the needs of children throughout their childhood and into independence.

Every attempt will be made to find a placement which meets a child or young person's emotional and developmental needs taking into consideration their ethnicity, religion, language, culture, gender and disability.

The Leicestershire Fostering Service recognises that no child or young person should have to wait indefinitely for the ideal placement.

OFSTED

Ofsted is the single, independent inspectorate for all social care services in England. It is responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting Fostering Services under the provisions of the Care Standards Act, 2000.

The one point of contact for all questions, queries and complaints is Ofsted.

The telephone number is 0300 123 1231. This number manages all general enquiries and will redirect them as necessary; they can also be contacted at enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk or write to:

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Fostering Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually.

The Statement of Purpose and other information are available on the Leicestershire County Council website.

A copy can also be obtained from the registered manager:

Joss Longman, Service Manager

Children and Family Services

County Hall

Glenfield

Leicestershire

LE3 8SA

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Email: Joss.Longman@leics.gov.uk



Leicestershire
**Fostering
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