

Children, Young People & Learning



Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2017-2018

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Children's Social Care
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Accessibility

This document can be made available in large print, Braille, audio or in electronic format.

Copies in alternative languages may also be obtained.

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1 Introduction

- This statement of purpose is a requirement of the Fostering Service National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 and 2011. The statement is intended to provide a clear guide of the service for professionals, the public, council members and external organisation.
- This is a key document against which the Foster Care Service is inspected by Ofsted and is formally reviewed and approved by the Executive Member of Children, Young People and Learning and the Director of Children Young People and Learning on an annual basis.

2 The Management Structure

The Fostering Service is an integral part of the Council's Children's Social Care service sharing the same management structure and located with the majority of the fieldwork teams at Time Square, Market St., Bracknell.

The overall responsibility for the Fostering Service lies with Peter Hodges Head of Service (Looked After Children), who is responsible to the Chief Officer, Children's Social Care. The Head of Service is also responsible for a range of services for looked after children.

The day to day management of the work of the Fostering Agency is undertaken by Rosanne Turner, Team Manager, Family Placement, also located at the Children's Social Care offices at Time Square.

The Agency Decision Maker is Lorna Hunt, Chief Officer, Children's Social Care. However the Head of Service (Looked After Children) takes on this role in respect of non-panel foster home reviews.

2.1 Staffing structure

The team responsible for delivering the fostering service is the Family Placement Team which comprises:

Team Manager Rosanne Turner

Date appointed 4th January 2016

Rosanne has a BSoc Sc in Social Work from the University of Natal, South Africa, post graduate qualification in Managing Health and Social Care from the University of Westminster and PQ child care award part 1. She has 27 years experience in children's social work including 14 years in management. Rosanne was appointed as Team Manager on 4th January 2016, having worked in a neighbouring local authority for a number of years. Rosanne qualified as a social worker in South Africa in 1977 and has worked in a variety of settings within Children and Families Services in the UK since 1993. She has knowledge and experience in all areas of children's services, including child protection, adoption and fostering. Rosanne has also worked in management and as an editor in the IT industry.

Assistant Team Manager Eszter Kovacs (on maternity leave)

Eszter has a social work qualification from West University of Timisoara, Romania, Faculty of Sociology and Psychology in June 2003; Post-graduate Diploma in social work with

children, young people, their families and carers December 2010. Eszter has worked in Romania as a social worker mainly in the non-governmental sector (e.g. promotion of women's rights, protection of children and victims of domestic violence, training and development of foster carers. She has experience of child protection and fostering services as a social worker and manager. Further experience has been gained in the not for profit sector focusing mainly on the development of independent support services for foster carers across UK.

Assistant Team Manager Sam Howard (covering maternity leave)

Sam Howard is a qualified Social Worker and holds a BA Hons. Degree in Social Work obtained in 2008 at Reading University. She obtained the Post Qualifying Consolidation Award in Social Work in April 2010 at Royal Holloway University and the Practice Educators Award in June 2016 at High Wycombe. She has worked at Bracknell Forest Council since June 2000, working initially as a Residential Care Worker for children and young people with disabilities from June 2000 until July 2008. She organised and set up play schemes and clubs for children with additional needs. She has been working in the Family Placement Team at Bracknell Forest Council as a qualified Social Worker since July 2008 and has been in post as Assistant Team Manager since May 2016.

The Family Placement Team

The Family Placement Team provides the full range of family placement services, including fostering, adoption, respite care, supported lodgings; Connected Persons fostering and Special Guardianship; assessing Private Fostering arrangements and the short break scheme for children with disabilities. The team is also responsible for all aspects of placement finding for planned and unplanned needs.

The social workers in the Team are qualified, and the experience across the team is varied and extensive. This includes field work experience in children and families; working with children with disabilities, direct parenting work, training and with young people in supported lodgings. The team has a number of years combined experience in Family Placement. The team also benefits from three family workers who have a range of family based skills which complement and support the work carried out.

The staffing establishment is as follows:

Rosanne Turner	Team Manager
Eszter Kovacs	Assistant Team Manager (on maternity leave)
Sam Howard	Assistant Team Manager (covering maternity leave)
Amanda Loosemore	Post Adoption Social Worker
Dena Charles	Social Worker
Hilary Hart	Social Worker (p/t 26.2 hours)
Michelle Jackson	Social Worker (p/t 28 hours)
Vicky McDonald	Social Worker (p/t 30 hours (maternity leave cover)
Sue Starkey	Social Worker (p/t 22.2 hours)
Tuija Veale	Social Worker

Diane Joel	Family Worker
Emma Churchill	Family Worker
Zoe Zanku	Family Worker
Sarah crawforth	Publicity and Recruitment Officer (p/t 18.5 hours)

3 Services provided by the Family Placement Team

3.1 Core Fostering Services

- A general fostering service, providing planned and emergency foster care for individual children and sibling groups aged 0 to 18 years, in short and long term placements and supported lodgings
- A specialist short break care scheme to support children and young people with disabilities and their families
- Family finding for children who require permanent placements
- External placement finding for children who are unable to be placed with Bracknell Forest carers
- Connected Persons assessments and support under the Fostering Regulations
- Assessment and support of Private Foster Care arrangements
- The team is also responsible for the Bracknell Forest Adoption Service and Connected Persons assessments for permanence as part of care proceedings e.g. Special Guardianship Orders
- Working with the Leaving Care Team to support carers who seek to care for young people beyond their 18th birthday under Staying Put arrangements

3.2 Out of Hours Support

The Family Placement Team provides an Out of Hours telephone support service to foster carers. This service is operated by staff from within the Family Placement Team and operates from 6pm to 11 pm Monday to Friday and from 12 noon to 11 pm at weekends excluding Bank holidays. Carers are also able to contact the Emergency Duty Team when the office is closed.

3.3 Allowances

The Council has a foster care allowance scheme based on the age of children; provides an additional market supplement and a fee for carers who have completed the National Vocational Qualification Level Three or Children and Young People's Workforce Diploma Level 3; it provides incentive payments for all foster carers who participate and complete a requisite 30 hours of learning and development. The Council also provides additional allowances for those foster carers who care for children assessed as having a high level of special needs. Allowances are reviewed and amended each year, and information on the allowances is available on request.

4 Aims and Objectives of the Fostering Service

4.1 Standards of Care

The Service is subject to the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 published under the Care Standards Act 2000 and operates in accordance with the Fostering Service Regulations (2011). It also gives due consideration to the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 & 2013 Miscellaneous Amendments; Children Act 1989, 20; Children and Young Persons Act 2008 and more recent amendments of, The Care Planning and Fostering (Miscellaneous Amendments) (England) Regulations 2015.

4.2 Family Support and Consultation

The primary aim of Children's Social Care is to promote the welfare of children by, wherever possible, keeping them within their own families and helping families to overcome their difficulties. Support for families is provided through a variety of resources which can include short periods of family based substitute care. Where a child cannot remain in his/her birth family the Council will first encourage those with parental responsibility to identify a member of their extended family or social network to care for the child. Where this is not possible the placement decision is based on the child's identified needs. This is usually through providing substitute family care on either a temporary/short-term or long-term basis. For the majority of children who are looked after by the Council, a local foster placement will be most likely to meet their needs.

Before making any decision about the placement of a child the Council will take fully into account the child's wishes and feelings, in accordance with their age and understanding.

The Council will also attempt to ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child's parents, any others with parental responsibility and any persons whose wishes or feelings may be relevant.

4.3 Core Values

In addressing the needs of foster children, the service seeks to:

- ❖ Work in partnership with the child or young person and those with parental responsibility for him/her and his/her carers
- ❖ Intervene in the exercise of parental responsibility only so far as is compatible with safeguarding the child's welfare in accordance with legislation
- ❖ Work in partnership with other agencies, especially those concerned with the child or young person's health and education
- ❖ Ensure that arrangements made to look after children apply to all children or young people in need including those with a disability

4.4 Meeting the Child's Needs in Foster Care

The Council will (other than in very exceptional circumstances) place children with foster carers who are approved under the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

In order to maximise the opportunity for children to retain substantial and meaningful links with family, friends, schools and relevant others, they will be looked after whenever

practicable within reasonable travelling distance of their family.

To promote contact with family and relevant others the Council will make available, where necessary, staff and resources to facilitate or supervise contact between child/parent/previous caregiver. For all children looked after by the Council a written care plan will be established which will be reviewed at regular intervals.

In recognition of the sensitivity and complexity of situations with which caregivers must cope and the stress this can generate, the Council will make available consultancy services and administrative support along with appropriate training.

In placing a child in foster care via another agency the Council will seek adherence to the same principles.

5 Complaints and Representations

Children and young people, their foster carers, and other people who have links with Looked After Children are able to make effective representations, including complaints, about any aspect of the Council's fostering services whether they are provided directly by the Council or by a contracted Independent Fostering Agency.

All foster carers and looked after young people using the fostering service are provided with written and verbal information about the complaints procedures. It is the responsibility of the Family Placement Team Manager to monitor complaints and, in conjunction with the Complaints officer, provide information for the annual report.

Any person who is unhappy with the service that they have received from the Fostering Service should first speak to the member of staff who has been working with them or their manager. However, if they feel unable to speak to them, or believe that they have not dealt with their concern satisfactorily, they should contact the Complaints Manager at Bracknell Forest Council, Time Square, Bracknell. Other useful contacts for complaints are the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Local Government Ombudsman.

6 Allegations against Carers

In all circumstances allegations made against Carers are investigated and responded to in accordance with the current Berkshire Child Protection Procedures and the Bracknell Forest Council Fostering Service Policy and Procedures.

Bracknell Forest informs all children and young people placed in foster care of how they can make a complaint and access advocacy services through the Child Participation Development Officer.

7 Recruitment and retention of carers

The Recruitment and Publicity Officer will plan and co-ordinate recruitment campaigns. The Recruitment and Publicity Strategy aims to keep the profile of fostering high within the community as a whole and within specific communities and cultural groups through promotional activity. The Recruitment and Publicity Policy includes reviewing allowances and other support offered to foster carers. The Council has also promoted the development and provides support for the association for Bracknell foster carers, 'The Fostering4Bracknell Association'.

The recruitment strategy is designed to attract prospective carers who are able to meet the identified needs of the children and young people who require placements, based on their age, ethnicity and cultural needs.

The Council must be satisfied that the placement of any child is the most suitable to ensure that the child's needs relating to racial, cultural and linguistic origin and background, religious observance and any disability will be met as far as practicable, so the recruitment and selection of carers will be undertaken accordingly.

The recruitment strategy ensures that there is engagement with and feedback from all those who come into contact with the service.

8 Process of assessment and approval of carers

- Foster carers are approved in line with standards set out in the Fostering Services : National Minimum Standards 2011. The CoramBAAF Form F is used to assess families . The Authority also incorporates the use of competencies drawn up by the Training Support and Development Standards, which is completed post approval.
- The CoramBAAF Form C is used to prepare reports for connected persons as this format is suitable for approval as foster carers. However if the assessment is required for Care Proceedings, the Special Guardianship court report template is used, as this is a requirement of the courts.
- The Family Placement team has introduced a two stage assessment process for fostering as per The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Regulations (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013. The Family Placement Team aims to complete Stage 1 of the process within two months and Stage 2 within 4 months of completion of Stage 1. The Head of Service for Looked After Children agrees progress from stage 1 to stage 2.
- In accordance with the Standards and Regulations all relevant statutory checks are made, including enhanced Disclosure and Barring Scheme checks for all adults in the household including young people over the age of 16 years.
- The applicants' birth, marriage, divorce, nationalisation certificates and passports are seen.
- Employers' references are obtained and three personal referees are interviewed in person, however one may be interviewed via the telephone if it is not possible to visit in person. At least two of the personal referees should not be family members.
- Each applicant receives clear information about the process of assessment along with details about fostering allowances.
- The assessment and approval process involves all members of the applicant's household.
- The assessment is carried out by an appropriately qualified social worker.
- The assessment report is prepared by the social worker; it includes a clearly evidenced recommendation on the applicant's suitability as a foster carer and the types of placement appropriate to the applicant.
- Each applicant sees a copy of the non-confidential sections of the assessment

report before a decision on approval is made and has the opportunity to make written comments if they wish to do so.

- All applications are considered by the Bracknell Forest Foster Panel. Prospective carers are invited to attend the panel that considers their application.
- The recommendations of the Foster Panel are considered by Bracknell's Agency Decision Maker, the Chief Officer Children's Social Care who makes the decision on behalf of the Council. The assessing social worker verbally informs the applicants of the Agency Decision Maker's decision. The Agency Decision Maker writes to the applicants to formally inform them of the decision. All foster carers are approved for a specific age range, number of children and type of care they can offer. This is called a Qualifying Determination.
- On approval the applicants are asked to enter into the Foster Care Agreement with the Council. They are also provided with a handbook and any necessary equipment.
- Where the agency decides not to proceed with an application at the end of Stage 1 of the application process, the applicant will be notified in writing within 10 days with reasons given for the decision. The applicant has no right to make representations to the fostering service provider or have their case reviewed under the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for fostering.
- However if the assessment continues onto Stage 2 and a decision is then made to cease the assessment following a report presented to the fostering panel, the applicant has the right to either make their representations within 28 days to the fostering provider OR have their case reviewed under the Independent Review Mechanism.
- Following the implementation of The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Regulations (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013, the Agency Decision Maker can issue a Qualifying Determination to amend terms of approval.
- Where applicants and current foster carers disagree with a Qualifying Determination concerning their approval as foster carers, they have the option of applying to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) or of giving their views in writing within 28 days of the Agency Decision Makers' Decision. This would most often occur following presentation of information about the prospective or current carers to Foster Panel. Applicants and current foster carers will be assisted through the process if they wish to pursue this. The IRM may be contacted at :

Contract Manager,
Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)
Unit 4,
Pavilion Business Park,
Royds Hall Road,
Wortley,
LEEDS
LS12 6AJ

Tel No: 0845 450 3956 (charged at local rate)

Fax: 0845 450 3957

Email: irm@baaf.org.uk

9 Reviews of foster carers

A foster carer's first review is undertaken around six months after initial approval and is presented to the Foster Panel within 12 months of approval. A review is undertaken annually thereafter or more frequently in the event of a complaint, allegation or other issue. The review will be brought to panel if there has been an allegation or there is a significant change in circumstance of the carers.

Termination of Approval

If a foster carer makes the decision to cease fostering for Bracknell Forest, their approval will be terminated and their name removed from Bracknell Forest's Register of Foster Carers.

If a carer is no longer suitable either following review or because of an incident that causes serious concerns, the matter will be taken to Panel for consideration and recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker. Any decision, whether to terminate foster carer approval or not, will be set out in writing, along with any recommendations for action if required. If the foster carer does not agree with the proposal to terminate their approval, they can present written representations to the Fostering Service up to 28 days from receipt of the review.

Alternatively the foster carer has 28 days to appeal against the decision either by contacting the Independent Review Mechanism or by making a complaint – as described in Section 8 above.

In all cases, the panel will consider how to safeguard and protect the interests of the children placed with the carer and ensure the placement is appropriate in the future.

Staying Put

There may be occasions where a looked after child may choose to remain in foster care beyond their 18th birthday. This can only be in agreement with their foster carer who wishes to become a Staying Put carer. Where this takes place the foster carer's status will change to that of Staying Put carer and they will receive support from the Leaving Care Team. If the foster carer is not approved for additional foster placements, they will need to resign as foster carers but will continue to receive financial support. A Staying Put arrangement cannot continue beyond a young person's 21st birthday.

10 The Bracknell Forest Foster Panel

10.1 General

The Bracknell Forest Foster Panel operates under the terms of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Regulations (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013. The Panel considers applications from Bracknell Forest Council only. This panel was established in March 2012 and replaces the previous tripartite arrangement with another Berkshire unitary authority and an independent fostering agency.

The Foster Panel considers recommendations for the approval and status of foster

carers; plans for children aged under 13 years where the plan is long term fostering; the matching of children to long-term placements; connected persons applications and support plans; the suitability of private foster carers and all other significant matters relating to the assessment and review of the Service's carers.

The panel meets on the second Monday of each month at the Bracknell Forest Offices, Portman Close, Bracknell. The panel also holds a business meeting between panel members and agency managers every six months.

The appraisal of the Panel Chair is conducted by the Agency Decision Maker, Chief Officer, Children's Social Care, on an annual basis. Panel members also receive an annual appraisal by the Panel Chair and Panel Advisor.

10.2 Membership of the Central List

The panel currently has fourteen members comprising of:

- An independent Chairperson (legal background)
- A Bracknell Forest Councillor
- Six Social Workers
- Three Independent Members (including a foster carer and a care leaver)
- An independent Education representative (Vice Chair)
- LAC nurse
- Children's Participation Officer

The panel has access to health advice via the Agency Medical Advisor and legal advice via the Joint Legal Team, although the chair has legal knowledge on which she can draw. At the time of writing there continues to be a need to monitor the membership of the central list, to include members who can reflect a better gender balance and diversity of the local population. We were pleased to have been able to appoint a former Care Leaver to Panel, although she is currently on maternity leave. In addition to the independent chair and other members, the panel is supported at each meeting by a professional advisor. The Family Placement Team Manager takes this role.

The panel also has the support of three administrators who manage the administration of each meeting.

10.3 Foster carer support and Training

The Council recognises that carer support and retention is critical to the maintenance of a fostering service that is able to meet the needs of the local community. There are also legal requirements, to ensure that all approved foster carers are supported to develop their knowledge and skills to meet the needs of individual children.

- All Foster Carers sign a Foster Care Agreement and have a copy of the requirements of foster carers, supervising social workers and the child's social worker. The Agreement includes a Professional Development Plan based on the achievement of the relevant competencies set out in the Training, Support and Development

Standards for Foster Care.

- Every carer has their own supervising social worker (SSW) who provides support and supervision in accordance with the National Minimum Standards. The SSW will visit the foster carer monthly in their home, support them at meetings and ensure the child's care needs are met.
- Carers begin their learning and development before they are approved in that they attend a preparation group in which they are introduced to the fostering task and the work of the agency in relation to looked after children and their families.
- Bracknell Forest has a system of Learning and Development for foster carers, which recognises the value of a variety of learning mediums and materials. These include reflective summaries and discussions about written or video material as well as training undertaken outside of the Fostering Service such as in the foster carer's workplace.
- Workshops in the day and evenings with a range of topics by various agencies are arranged specifically for foster carers, with crèche/activities for children to enable attendance.
- Carers have the opportunity to complete the new Children and Young People's Workforce Diploma Level 3, which replaced the NVQ level 3.
- Every Carer is given support and guidance to complete the Fostering Standards Training and Development Standards within the first year of approval.
- Foster Carers are able to access the Council's staff training programme. Additional training is offered by the Family Placement Team and/or invited speakers. The training is offered at a time convenient to most carers, i.e. at weekends and in the evenings.
- A fortnightly support group is run by carers for carers and the children they are caring for.
- A foster care conference is offered once a year, offering workshops on a wide range of subjects. A crèche is offered to enable carers to attend.
- Social events are organised to develop networks with other carers e.g. cheese and wine evening, Christmas party for carers and children etc.

In addition:

- Once approved and a placement made carers are linked to a more experienced carer for advice and support.
- All foster carers are provided with full membership of the Fostering Network.
- The Council works with the 'Fostering-4-Bracknell' Association to organise up to three social events each year for Bracknell foster carers.
- Carers are provided with information and service updates via newsletter and secure e-mail.
- There is a bi-annual award ceremony for foster carers.
- The Life Chances Team provides co-ordinated support for placements of looked after children and has a dedicated family worker to offer practical and timely responses for foster carers.

- The Children's Participation Officer liaises with foster carers to ensure that children and young people are involved in decisions about their future and can express their views about the service provided to them.

11 Policies and procedures

The Bracknell Forest Fostering Service Policy and Procedure was updated in February 2014.

12 The Registration Authority

The service is inspected by OFSTED. The last Ofsted inspection of the Fostering Service was completed in July 2011. The service was rated as Good. The report can be found on the Ofsted website www.ofsted.gov.uk/

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The Office of the Children's Commissioner

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Email: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

OTHER ORGANISATIONS AND USEFUL LINKS

Coram BAAF Adoption and Fostering Academy

Coram Campus
41 Brunswick Square
London WC1N 1AZ
Tel: 020 7520 0300.
Email: advice@corambaaf.org.uk

The Fostering Network

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