

Annex 1

**Fostering Service
Statement of Purpose
2014-2015**

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Accessibility

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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 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 the 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. This role is held by Sheila McKeand until 30th June 2014. and will transfer to the newly appointed person after this time.

The day to day management of the work of the Fostering Agency is undertaken the Team Manager, Family Placement, also located at the Children's Social Care offices at Time Square. The current Team Manager Helen Fenton will leave post at the end of May 2014 and Kim Harris will assume this role on a temporary basis until further notice.

The Agency Decision Maker is Lorna Hunt, Chief Officer, Children's Social Care. The Head of Service (looked After Children) takes this role in respect of applications to foster and foster home reviews.

2.1 Staffing structure

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

Team Manager	Helen Fenton
Date appointed	1 st June 2009
Qualifications	BSc in Psychology and Social Biology, Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW), 1989; Certificate in Family Therapy, 1995; Post Qualifying Practice Teaching Award, 2007 and CMI: Diploma in Management and Leadership Level 5 2010
Relevant Experience	Helen qualified as a social worker in 1989 and has worked in a variety of settings within Children and Families Services. She has extensive knowledge and experience in the areas of child protection and work with children with disabilities. Helen has worked as an Assistant Team Manager for five years and as a social worker within a Family Placement team for six years.

Assistant Team Manager: Kim Harris

Kim was appointed as Assistant Team Manager in October 2011. Kim has 17 years experience working in Family Placement social work and in particular with fostering services. Kim has a Bsc (hons) in Health and Community Studies, Diploma in Social Work, Management Qualification, PQ child care award part 1, NVQ Assessor's Award and NNEB qualifications. She also has 10 years experience as team manager and service manager.

Assistant Team Manager: Karen Wood

Karen Wood was appointed as full time Assistant Team Manager in June 2012. Karen has more than twenty years experience of children and families social work. She has particular knowledge about adoption having worked for seven years in an Adoption and Permanency team.

The Family Placement Team

The Family Placement Team provide the full range of family placement services, including fostering, adoption, relief care, supported lodgings, Connected Persons fostering and permanent care, assessing Private Fostering arrangements and the short break scheme for disabled children. The team is also responsible for all aspects of placement finding for planned and unplanned needs.

All the social work staff 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 and with young people in supportive lodgings. The team have a number of years combined experience in Family Placement.

The staffing establishment is as follows:-:

Helen Fenton:	Team Manager
Kim Harris:	Assistant Team Manager
Karen Wood:	Assistant Team Manager
Amanda Loosemore:	Post Adoption Worker
Marisa Tredoux	Social Worker (p/t)
Dena Gambrill:	Social Worker
Emily Osgathorp:	Social Worker
Hilary Bush:	Social Worker (p/t)
Michelle Jackson:	Social Worker (p/t)
Sam Howard:	Social Worker
Nikki Douglas:	Social Worker
Diane Joel:	Family Worker
Emma Churchill:	Family Worker
Marie Sullivan:	Publicity and Recruitment Officer (p/t)

3 Services provided by the Family Placement Team

3.1 Core Fostering Services

- A general fostering scheme, providing planned and emergency foster care for individual children and sibling groups aged 0 to 18 years, in short-term 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 adoptive and permanent placements and post adoption support.
- Placement finding for children with external providers
- 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. This includes working jointly with colleagues in Children and Families teams to undertake viability assessments of prospective connected person carers.

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 outside working hours.

3.3 Allowances

The Council has a foster care allowance scheme which has an increments based on the age of children; provides an additional fee for carers who have completed the National Vocational Qualification Level Three or Children and Young People's Workforce Diploma Level 3; and provides incentive payments for all foster carers who participate and complete a requisite number of hours of learning and development. There is an additional allowance for those foster carers who care for children assessed as having a high level of special needs. Allowances are reviewed and amended each year according to the recommendation of the Fostering Network national organisation. Details of the allowance are 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 published under the Care Standards Act 2000 and operates in accordance with the Fostering Service Regulations (2011).

4.2 Family Support and Consultation

The primary aim of Children's Social Care is to promote the welfare of children by, wherever possible, supporting them to remain safely within their own families. Support for families is provided through a variety of resources, including short periods of family based substitute care. Where a child cannot remain in their 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 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-care 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 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 that can 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 would 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 staff who have 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, Seymour House, 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 plans and co-ordinate recruitment campaigns. The Recruitment, Retention and Communications 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 Retention 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 Forest 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 the 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
- Carers are assessed in accordance with the British Association of Adoption and Fostering recommended Form F format. The Authority also incorporates the use of competencies drawn up by BAAF and by the Children's Workforce Development Council. Is this still the case?
- The BAAF Form C is used to prepare reports for connected persons as this format is suitable for approval as foster carers and also meets the requirements of the court for Special Guardianship reports.
- The Family Placement Team have 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 6 months of completion of Stage 1. The Head of Service for Looked After Children is responsible for agreeing to 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.
- The applicants' birth, marriage, divorce, nationalisation certificates and passports where applicable 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.
- 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(s).
- 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 Forest's Agency Decision Maker, the Chief Officer Children's Social Care who makes the decision on behalf of the Council. The assessing social worker informs the applicants of the Agency Decision Maker's decision verbally. The Team Manager then writes to the applicants to inform them of the decision formally.
- 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 One of the application process, the applicant will be notified in writing 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.
- Following the implementation of The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Regulations (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013, The Decision Maker can issue a Qualifying Determination to amend terms of approval.
- Where applicants and current foster carers are given a Qualifying Determination concerning their approval as foster carers which they disagree with, they have the option of applying to the Independent Review Mechanism or of making a complaint within 28 days of the Agency Decision Makers' Decision. This would most often occur following presentation of information about the prospective or current carers has been presented 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 review is undertaken around six months after 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 give up fostering for Bracknell Forest, their approval will be terminated and their name removed from Bracknell Forest's Registrar 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 care 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 carer and ensure the placement is appropriate in the future.

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; special guardianship 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.

Appraisal of the Panel Chair is conducted by the Agency Decision Maker, Chief Officer, Children's Social Care, on an annual basis.

10.2 Membership of The Central List

The panel currently has eleven members comprising of:

- An Independent Chairperson
- A Bracknell Forest Councillor
- Three Social Workers
- Two Independent Members (education background)
- An Education representative (Vice Chair)
- A Foster Carer

- Looked After Children's nurse

The Panel has access to health advice via the Agency Medical Advisor and legal advice via the Joint Legal Team. At the time of writing there continues to be a need to increase the membership of the central list, to allow greater flexibility. In particular there is a need to recruit a member with care experience, to directly represent the interests and needs of looked after children and young people. There is also a need to appoint a Panel member who can reflect the diversity of the local population.

The Family Placement Team Manager is the professional advisor to the Panel and a regular administrator manages 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. From April 2008 the Agreement has included a Personal Development Plan based on the achievement of the relevant competencies set out in the Children's Workforce Development Council Standards for Foster Care.
- Every carer has their own supervising social worker who provides support and supervision in accordance with the National Standards
- 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.
- In 2011 a system of Learning and Development was introduced for Bracknell Forest 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.
- One day workshops with a range of topics were 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 three in January 2011.
- Every Carer is given support and guidance to complete the Fostering Standards (developed by CWDC) 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 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.

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 and provides funding for the 'Fostering4Bracknell' Association. This allows for the organisation of social events each year for Bracknell foster carers, fortnightly coffee mornings and other mutual support.
- A newsletter for carers is published quarterly
- There is a bi-annual award ceremony for foster carers.
- The Life Chances Team, set up in October 2011 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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SW1P 3BT33

Tel: 020 7783 8330
Email: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

OTHER ORGANISATIONS AND USEFUL LINKS

The British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF)

Saffron House

6-10 Kirby Street

London

EC1N 8TS

Email: mail@baaf.org.uk

Tel: 020 7421 2600

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