

Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2020-2021

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Document Author	Peter Hodges, Head of Life Chances	
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Accessibility

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Please contact:

Policy and Commissioning Officer
Children's Social Care
Bracknell Forest Council
Time Square
Market Street
Bracknell
Berkshire RG12 1JD

Email: sarah.roberts@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Telephone: 01344 351283

Fax: 01344 351521

Minicom: 01344 352020

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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 2011, which form the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000. 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 Peoples Service 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 (Life Chances), who reports to Sonia Johnson, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care. The Head of Service is also responsible for a range of services for Children Looked After including the Children Looked After Team and the Leaving Care Team.

The day to day management of the work of the Fostering Agency is undertaken by Clare Glennerster, Team Manager, Life Chances, also located at the Children's Social Care offices at Time Square.

The Agency Decision Maker is Sonia Johnson, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care. Peter Hodges, Head of Service (Life Chances) is also an Agency Decision Maker.

2.1 Staffing structure

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

Team Manager - Life Chances – Clare Glennerster

This role has management responsibility for the Family Placement, Children Looked and Leaving Care Teams

Clare is a qualified social worker and obtained her BA (Hons) in social work in 2009. She has also achieved a Management Standards award in 2002 and a Registered Managers Award in 2003. Clare started her social work career in Wales, Blaenau Gwent in the Duty and Assessment and then in a Family Placement Team until 2012. Clare has been working for Bracknell Forest since 2012, initially as a senior social worker in the Over 11's team, progressing on to Assistant team Manager in the same Team until 2017. She was then Team Manager of the Leaving Care Service from 2017 until 2019 when she moved to become Team Manager of the Life Chances Service.

Assistant Team Manager Sam Howard

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, respite care, supported lodgings, Family & Friends (Connected Persons) fostering and Special Guardianship and assessing Private Fostering arrangements. 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 many years of 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:

Clare Glennerster	Team Manager
Sam Howard	Assistant Team Manager
Vacant	Senior Social Worker (SGO)
Emma Underdown	Social Worker
Lindsay O'Sullivan	Senior Social Worker (Maternity)
Oliver Harding-Edgar	Social Worker
Helen Thurgood	Senior Social Worker
Katie Lacey	Social Worker (From August 2020)
Hilary Hart	Social Worker (p/t 22.5 hours)
Vacant	Social Worker (p/t 18.5 hours)
Leanne Simonds	Family Worker (p/t 29.6hours)
Clair Norwood	Family Worker
Sarah Crawforth	Publicity and Recruitment Officer (p/t 22.5 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 21 years, in short and long term placements and

supported lodgings

- Recruitment, assessment, training and support of foster carer to meet the needs of children looked after within Bracknell Forest
- Family finding for children who require permanent placements
- Connected Persons assessments and support under the Fostering Regulations
- Special Guardianship assessments and support services
- Assessment and support of Private Foster Care arrangements
- Work in collaboration with Adopt Thames Valley to identify children with a plan of adoption and ensure positive transitions
- 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. The feedback around this service is positive from carers as it provides specialist support from someone they know out of office hours to support with any challenges they may be experiencing.

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; 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, Section 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 children looked after, 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 by an Independent Reviewing Officer.

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 Children Looked After 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 children looked after using the fostering service are provided with written and verbal information about the complaints procedures. It is the responsibility of the 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 or childrens.complaints@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

6 Allegations against Carers

In all circumstances allegations made against Carers are investigated and responded to in accordance with the 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 Participation Officer.

7 Recruitment and retention of carers

The Recruitment and Publicity Officer will plan and co-ordinate recruitment campaigns as part of the Recruitment Strategy and Marketing Strategy. This aims to keep the profile of fostering high within the community as a whole and within specific communities and cultural groups through promotional activity. There is an annual review of 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. This includes monthly meetings between the Foster Carers Association and managers in the service.

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 Coram BAAF 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 Coram BAAF 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 Assessment court report template is used, as this is a requirement of the court and avoids unnecessary duplication.
- The Family Placement Team uses the two stage assessment process for fostering as is the statutory requirement set out in 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 Life Chances agrees progress from stage 1 to stage 2 and also agreement for these to be completed concurrently in exceptional circumstances.
- 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 Assistant Director 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 but are able to utilise the complaints procedure.
- 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 (IRM).
- 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)
or 0113 2022080

Email: irm@irm.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 child looked after 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. Further information around this is contained within the Staying Put Policy.

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 also considers recommendations for the approval and status of foster carers; plans for children aged under 14 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 a monthly basis or more frequently if business requires this. 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, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Head of Service, Life Chances 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 has a central list comprising of:

- An independent Chairperson (legal background)
- A Bracknell Forest Councillor
- Four Social Workers
- Seven Independent Members (including an Education representative, a psychologist (Vice Chair) and a foster carer from another LA)
- LAC nurse
- Children's Participation Officer
- Care experienced person

The panel has access to health advice via the Agency Medical Advisor and legal advice via the Joint Legal Team.

The panel also has the support of two 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.

- 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 takes place annually, offering a guest speaker and workshops on a wide range of subjects. Child care is offered to enable all carers to attend.
- Social events are organised to develop networks with other carers.

In addition:

- At the application stage, prospective carers are offered a mentor (experienced foster carer) to help them through the assessment and approval process, and the early stages of fostering
- All foster carers are provided with full membership of the Fostering Network.
- The Council works with the Fostering 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 were reviewed in 2018 and will be reviewed in 2022.

12 The Registration Authority

The service is inspected by OFSTED. The last Ofsted inspection of the Fostering Service was completed in May 2017. The service for Looked After Children was rated as Outstanding. The report can be found on the Ofsted website www.ofsted.gov.uk/

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
Tel: 0300 123 1231
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

The Office of the Children's Commissioner
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT
Tel: 020 7783 8330
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
87 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8HA
Phone: 020 7620 6400
Fax: 020 7620 6401
Email: info@fostering.net