

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE COVENTRY CITY COUNCIL FOSTERING SERVICE

This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirements of Standard 16 of the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards.

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1.0 Introduction

It is a requirement of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services that each fostering agency produces a Statement of Purpose, including its aims and objectives, a description of the service and the facilities that are provided.

This Statement of Purpose gives an outline of these requirements, and details how the service is managed and its fitness to provide fostering services. The information in this document applies to all children who are fostered in Coventry. It also provides information on what systems are in place to recruit, train, supervise and support foster carers.

Coventry is committed to placing children and young people with approved foster carers and has developed and invested in a dedicated and comprehensive Fostering Service that actively works to meet the highest quality standards and the diverse needs of the children in care in Coventry. Children's safety and welfare are actively promoted in all fostering placements together with protection from abuse and other forms of harm.

Each child/young person will have access to a service that recognises and addresses their individual needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality. Individuality, difference and diversity are valued, celebrated and children's health, well-being and educational needs are given high priority to ensure that they reach their full potential.

2.0 Aims, objectives and principles

Coventry Fostering Service believes that every child in care should be able to enjoy the same quality of life and opportunities as all children. We recognise that a child's needs are best met by a nurturing family and we are committed to placing children who are not able to remain in their own family in an appropriate alternative family arrangements wherever possible.

2.1 Aim

The main aim of the service is to provide a range of safe, high quality foster placements for children and young people that value, support and encourage them to grow and develop as individuals. As well as promoting their health and general well-being, the service is committed to the following:

- All applications are, checked, assessed and approved in accordance to the relevant legislation, regulations, guidance and standards.
- A Fostering Panel will consider all applications to foster, first annual reviews, all changes of approval, reports concerning allegations of foster carers, long-term matches and resignation/deregistrations
- Ensuring that foster carer approvals are signed at the point of approval and reviewed annually
- Approved foster carers have a named social worker and are supported and supervised in accordance to the regulations
- Placements are carefully matched and consider the assessed needs of the child and the impact on the fostering household
- Foster carers are provided with as much information as possible prior to, at the point of a child moving into and during the time they are with you
- All foster carers have access to the council's complaints procedure
- Children and young people have access to an advocacy service

2.2 Objectives

- Children and young people in local foster placements will maintain relationships with family, friends and community including face to face time together. Continuity of education, health and cultural links and activities is ensured. In instances where it is not possible to achieve this within Coventry an appropriate placement outside of the resources of the council will be sought
- Recruit foster carers who are trained and supported in providing safe care to children who will live with them
- Work with foster carers throughout their fostering journey to explore what sort of age range, backgrounds and behaviors that children coming into care may have and match accordingly, providing support and training as required
- Carry out an assessment of need on every child prior to accommodation. Where possible a safe family member or friend will be the preferred choice
- Match children with foster carers who are able to meet their needs, and respect and promote their heritage, culture and identity and religious practices. If required we will provide additional training for foster carers in this area
- Provide safe and nurturing fostering homes with every effort made to achieve good outcomes for the child in care, within set timescales and to agreed standards
- Wherever possible, children meet with their prospective foster carers prior to moving in and if this is not possible, they receive a foster family profile
- Provide for sibling groups to be placed together when this in their best interests
- 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 the foster placement as they reach adulthood
- Ensure openness and partnership working between all those involved and concerned with the child's welfare
- Maintain enough fostering household in relation to the location, numbers, needs, age range and characteristics of the children in care
- Involve young people and foster carers in developing our services and building their feedback into future service development

2.3 Principles underpinning our service

Coventry Fostering Service is committed to achieving and maintaining the highest quality standards. It has been developed and is managed in accordance with the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 and the principles outlined in the National Minimum Standards 2011. These standards apply equally to our connected persons foster carers.

- The welfare of the child is paramount.
- Children in care are consulted regarding their wishes and feelings about all aspects of their care.
- Recruitment of new foster carers and staff who work within the service, complies with regulations, national standards and good practice.
- Foster carers are vetted, prepared and assessed in line with national regulations and requirements.
- Our foster carers are treated with respect and recognition will be given to the valuable role they play.
- A Fostering Panel will consider all foster carer applications and first reviews of approval.
- Every child placed will be subject to a care planning process.
- All foster carers are provided with the required information to support the placement of the child in their care.
- All foster carers have a named Supervising Social Worker and children in foster care have a named allocated Social Worker.

3.0 Recruitment of foster carers

The Fostering Service uses a variety of media and methods to recruit new carers, our annual recruitment strategy is informed by national research and local evaluation and analytics to ensure that methods utilised reach people interested in becoming foster carers. Recruitment events are held at least monthly in various locations across the city.

Interest in fostering is welcomed and promoted from all members of the community, regardless of relationship status, employment situation, class, gender, sexuality, culture, ethnicity or religion.

4.0 Assessment of foster carers

All applicants are assessed comprehensively to ensure that they are suitable and able to carry out their role. The minimum age for foster carers is generally 21 years. In exceptional circumstances, e.g. with some connected persons carers, the minimum age may be reduced to 18. There is no specific upper age limit.

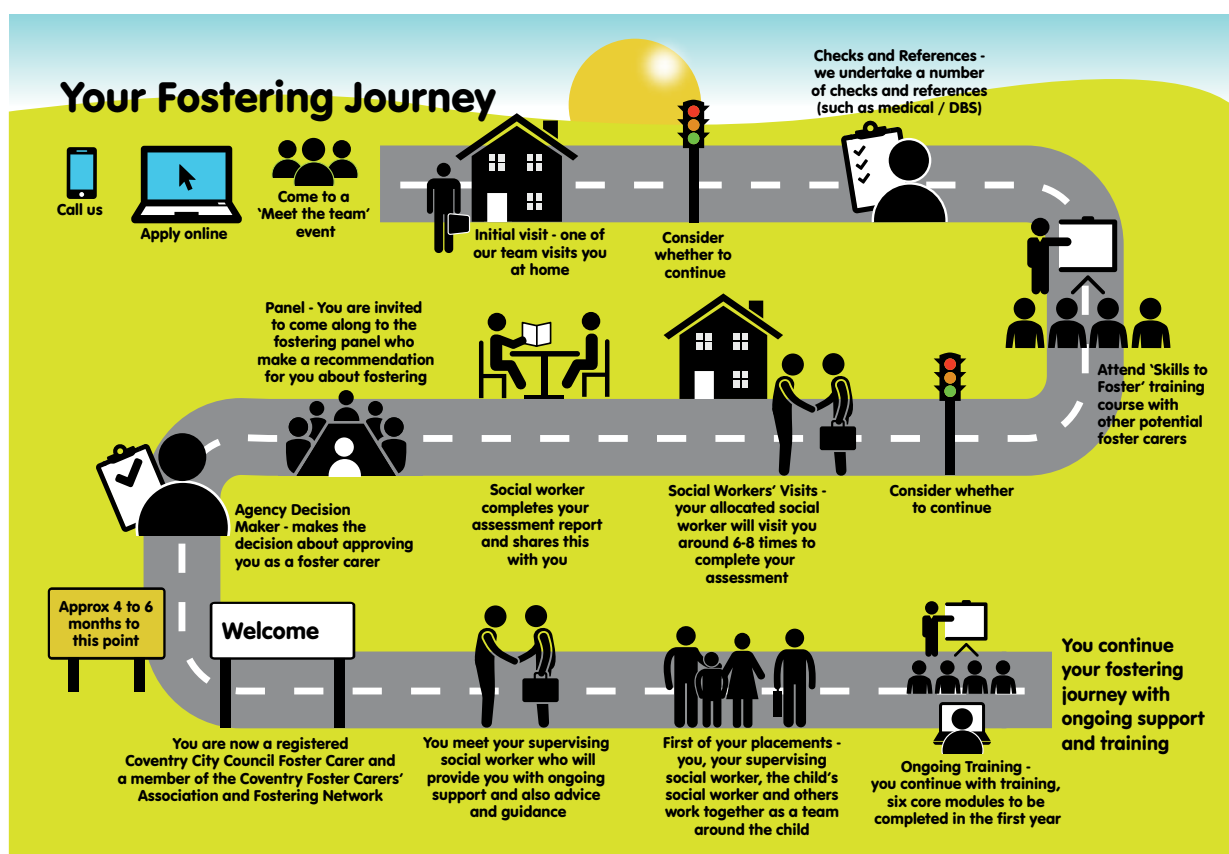
After making an enquiry, all prospective foster carers are provided with an information pack and will have an initial home visit to discuss their interest in fostering in more detail. At the visit we will discuss fostering with the prospective foster carer and members of the family, check the home conditions are safe, warm and clean and that there is sufficient space for a foster child.

- If all parties agree that fostering could be suitable for the family, a formal application is submitted. Whilst checks are in progress, applicants are invited to attend training.
- All applicants have to consent that several statutory and good practice checks and references are completed on them which comply with the requirements of Schedule 3 of the Fostering Services Regulations of 2011. For example:
 - Disclosure and Barring Checks on all members of the household over the age of 18
 - Medical Report from their General Practitioner/health professional
 - Local authority checks
 - Three personal references. In addition, interviews are conducted with grown up children and children living in the household

There is immediate exclusion of any applicant who has been convicted of any 'specified offence' against a child or adult. (Fostering Regulations 2011, 26 (5)).

An assessment of a prospective foster carer takes place in the applicant's home over a period of approximately six to eight visits, plus reference interviews and interviewing other relevant parties.

An assessing social worker ensures that timelines, analysis of significant relationships, the family dynamics and characteristics of the foster carers underpin and all inform an assessment.



5.0 Approval and De-registration of foster carers

A Fostering Panel has been established in accordance with Regulation 23. The Panel is chaired by an independent person with considerable experience of working within Children's Services.

- Once their assessment has been completed, including evidence of their experience and skills in caring for a child, this is presented to the Fostering Panel for recommendation on their suitability
- All information gathered (except references) is shared with the applicant/s prior to the panel for them to add their comments
- Any recommendation made by the Fostering Panel must be approved by the Agency Decision-Maker
- The Fostering Service approves foster carers to look after children aged 0-18 years. Coventry's Fostering Service will inform all prospective foster carers in writing of their approval and any conditions such as the age range and number of children that the carers are approved to care for
- All approved foster carers will be required to sign the Supervision Agreement and the Foster Care Agreement which outlines expectations of the Fostering Service and commits to caring appropriately for children in care
- The Fostering Service can recommend to the Fostering Panel the termination of approval of any foster carer if it is no longer satisfied that the foster carer/s or the household are suitable. This is discussed at a Foster Carer Review and a recommendation is made from this meeting which is then presented at the Fostering Panel
- When foster carers decide to retire or resign from the fostering service, then the Fostering Panel are provided with notification of this

6.0 Allowances and fees foster carers receive

Foster Carers receive weekly allowances according to the age of the child. Coventry operates a Skills Fee scheme which incorporates all approved foster carers. All foster carers are financially supported via weekly allowance payments (child age related). Weekly allowances are paid at above Fostering Network recommended rates.

The Skills Level fees operate at three levels which sets out practice requirements, training and development expectations and expectations of support to the service. Within the levels there are differing areas of specialism depending on carer's skills, abilities and interests, e.g. parent and child placements and out of hours' placements.

A specialist fostering scheme (Next Steps) is in place targeted on harder to place children. Next Steps Carers have the highest level of skills and competencies and have a more demanding range of tasks that they must undertake, in return they are paid the highest level of fee.

7.0 Matching children with foster carers

- The children's needs are at the heart of our matching process. As far as possible children are placed within the Coventry area so that contact with family and friends, continuity with school and leisure pursuits can be maintained and links to services can be kept
- Where Coventry City Council needs to use another fostering agency for the provision of placements; the commissioning section of the Council will be contacted to ensure that the process is managed according to the Council's rules on commissioning
- The Fostering Service keeps information about children who need foster carers. The team managers for Fostering Support ensure that there are matching discussions about children who are awaiting a foster home and foster carers availability is discussed within the Fostering Team
- A placement matching form is completed prior to matching children which details the reasons for the match and any issues in matching that may need further consideration

8.0 Support, Training and Development for our Foster Carers

Coventry City Council's support and training package places the child at the centre of everything we do, we recognise that foster carers are a crucial part of the 'team around the child'. We take our applicants through training to be able to deal with the range of issues that foster carers face when looking after children.

8.1 Support for our foster carers

The service believes that it is important that foster carers have access to support as and when they need it.

All foster carers are linked with a qualified social worker (fostering supervising social worker) who provides supervision and support. The supervising social worker undertakes monthly visits to approved carer(s). This includes a minimum of at least one unannounced visit per year. All visits and contacts with foster carers are recorded.

During normal office hours if a foster carer is unable to contact their own supervising social worker they can contact a duty supervising social worker for advice and support. The supervising social worker will usually be the first point of contact for the foster carer and be able to offer support, advice, guidance and supervision regarding most matters relating to fostering and the care of the child.

There are foster carer support groups across the city, and mentoring is available from more experienced carers.

We operate a 24/7 duty line, staffed by our own team to help with any emergency issues should they arise. All foster carers are provided with an electronic link to a 'Fostering Handbook' which gives information which they need to know about the service and to perform their role. This includes key information and guidance on safe care; allegations; education; medication; recording and record keeping; the role of social workers and key policies and procedures. Policies and procedures are also available to carers online via the Department's children's procedures manual.

All members of the wider council have signed up and agreed to support foster carers through the Foster Carers Charter. This sets out how foster carers should be treated and the respect the role has within Children's Services.

8.2 Training and development of our foster carers

The Fostering Service offers a wide range of training, covering pre-approval training to potential applicants, induction training for newly approved carers and post-approval training.

A comprehensive rolling programme of training is available and reviewed regularly, meeting the on-going professional development of foster carers throughout their fostering career. Connected persons foster carers are also provided with targeted training opportunities more suited to the fostering task of caring for family members or friends' children.

The Fostering Service believes that a comprehensive training programme for both staff and foster carers is key to their personal and professional development. Training provides people with the required skills and knowledge, necessary in providing a high-quality service. It is also key to safeguarding children, foster carers and their families by informing them of how to care for children safely.

The 'Skills to Foster' Training programme which is pre-approval training and compulsory for mainstream applicants during their journey to become approved foster carers. The training is led by our team and is jointly delivered with people who have a wealth of different experiences in fostering, including existing foster carers and young people who have been fostered.

The skills to care training is an additional offer for connected persons foster carers focusing on the particular features of that role.

Training is an opportunity for all foster carers to acquire new skills, assist with personal and professional development and explore new ideas via peer support and group discussion.

8.3 Approved Foster Carers

Newly approved foster carers must complete the Training Support and Development Standards for foster carers. It is part of a framework of induction and continuing professional development that will equip foster carers with the essential skills and knowledge to meet the needs of the children in their care. It is expected that carers will be able to evidence that they have met the induction requirements by achieving a Certificate of Successful Achievement on the completion of a portfolio of evidence of competency within the first 12 months of approval (18 months for Connected Persons carers).

Evidence can be identified from a range of sources such as training and development sessions, distance or web-based learning packages, direct observation of their practice, peer witnessing and reflective practice.

9.0 Monitoring the quality of our service

Each foster carer is subject to an annual review and contributions are sought from our independent review officers (IRO's), social workers, all (foster) children within the fostering household and other professionals if relevant.

The Operational Lead for Fostering monitors a range of matters identified in the National Minimum Standards 2011 (regulation 35 (1)), to ensure that standards are adhered to and that the service is developing to meet the needs of a range of children.

Regular quality audits are completed by staff from the Fostering Service at key stages in a foster carer's career. These are to ensure compliance with procedures and policy and evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention of the Supervising Social Worker.

10.0 My Care Journal – The Children's Guide

Subject to the child's age and understanding, the fostering service ensures the child receives a copy of our 'My Care Journal' at the point of placement and our foster carers explain the contents of the guide in a way that is accessible. There are two journals for two different age groups which children can individualise.

The journal includes a summary of what coming into care involves, explains the roles of the different professionals like social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers and provides children with contact information of the Children's Commissioner, CAMHS and Ofsted if they need help or advice.

11.0 The structure of our Fostering Service

The Fostering Service is managed by the Operational Lead for Fostering Services. There are six team managers who manage dedicated fostering teams that work out of a centrally located city centre office.

The Recruitment and Assessment Teams are responsible for mainstream fostering recruitment and assessment, the two connected persons teams assess and support connected persons foster carers and special guardians, the three support teams provide ongoing support to mainstream foster carers.

In addition to these teams, the service includes a dedicated fostering panel advisor and a fostering service development coordinator.



11.1 Different forms of fostering

There are a range of different forms of fostering which enables the Fostering Service to meet the varying needs of children in care:

- **Connected Persons:** When a family member, friend or connected person comes forward to offer care to a child they already know, the fostering service assesses, approves and provides support to the carers.
- **Short-term fostering:** This can mean anything from an overnight stay to a period of several months or years. Short-term foster carers provide a temporary place to stay until the child can return home to their own family or achieves permanence.
- **Long-term placements:** Sometimes children will not be able to go back to live with their own families and the plans becomes long-term fostering. This is intended to be throughout childhood, whilst maintaining contact with their birth family.
- **Out of hours.** Foster carers are available on a rota basis to care for children who come to our attention outside the working day.
- **Short-stay (respite) carers:** This is planned care for short periods of time, which could be to give the child's family, or main foster carer, a break. Short-stay care can be for a few hours a day, a weekend, the duration of a school holiday, or for a defined period. Some short stays take place on a regular basis e.g. one weekend per month on a regular basis.
- **Parent and child placements:** Foster carers offering parent and child placements will provide support to a parent to help them to provide appropriate care for their child.
- **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC):** Young people, who have travelled alone to the UK, need support and advice to help them come to terms with their previous experiences and to adjust to life in the UK. Foster carers are approved for general short-term fostering but will receive additional support or training to meet the needs of these young people.
- **Next Steps:** Our specialist scheme supports children with complex trauma and/or needs in a family home setting. It is a career opportunity for people who want to work from home as part of a team with social workers, health and education professionals.
- **Staying Put:** Enables fostered young people to remain living in the foster carer's home post-18 years whilst developing further independence skills and managing the transition to adulthood.

11.2 Special Guardianship

A Special Guardianship Order is an order granted by the courts which gives the carer the majority of the parental responsibility. It takes the child out of the looked after system which means that the carer and the child will no longer have a social worker involved in their lives.

Most local authorities prefer this option for children as it provides them with a permanent stable home with loving families whom they often already know.

Special Guardians can still access advice and support from Coventry City Council.

12.0 Complaints and Compliments

Coventry City Council is committed to putting local people and their needs at the heart of what it does. We want to ensure that people have a positive and trouble-free experience with us in all transactions and interactions. However, sometimes things go wrong. When things go wrong, we encourage people to speak up, so that we can make things right.

Local Authorities are required by law (Children Act 1989), plus subsequent changes including the Local Authority Social Services Complaints Regulations (1990) because of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003), to have a system for receiving representations made by, or on behalf of, children who use the social care services they provide or commission.

These include: social work services, residential care, fostering, adoption and the provision of support to families, children with disabilities and young people in trouble with the law. Representations are defined as comments, compliments and complaints.

The purpose of the comments, compliments and complaints system is to ensure that:

- The views and experiences of people who use services are heard
- Positive feedback is used to develop services and acknowledge good practice
- Things that have gone wrong are put right
- The organisation learns from both positive and negative feedback and
- The organisation sustains its focus on service users / customers / citizens.

Local authorities are also required by law to appoint a complaints officer to oversee all aspects of the procedure and there is a nominated officer specifically assigned to the management of representations from children and others who present feedback on children's services.

The complaints process, which is independent of the Fostering Service, is accessible via Coventry City Council's homepage.

It is the role of the child's social worker to inform foster children how to make complaints and pass on compliments and to inform them of the Role of the Children's Rights Service.

The child can also make their views known through the review system and they are given a consultation form about the placement prior to the foster carer review.

You can make a comment, compliment or complaint in any of the following ways:

- Write to the Children's Complaints Officer
- Phone the Children's Complaints Officer
- Email the Children's Complaints Officer
- Talk to a Children's Rights Officer who will help you make your complaint.
- Telephone a Children's Rights Officer on 0800 0272 118.
- Fill in our online comments, compliments and complaints form as a child or young person
- Fill in our online comment, compliments and complaints form on behalf of a child or young person

Contact details can be found on page 20 of this document.

13.0 Allegations

All allegations in relation to foster carers are investigated and actioned through the Coventry Safeguarding Children Service, reporting to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) on behalf of the Coventry Safeguarding Children's Partnership under the procedures for Investigating 'Allegations against Adults Caring for Children'.

The LADO works on behalf of Coventry City Council and the Coventry Safeguarding Children Partnership to address, advise and manage allegations and concerns against staff, carers and volunteers by addressing matters of safety and wellbeing of children and young people. The LADO is involved from the initial phase of the allegation through to the conclusion of the case and will:

- Be involved in the management and oversight of individual cases.
- Provide advice and guidance to employers and voluntary organisations
- Liaise with the police and other agencies
- Monitor the progress of cases to ensure that they are dealt with quickly and fairly.
- Coventry Safeguarding Children Partnership policies and procedures are followed.
- Foster carers are offered independent support during this process which can be accessed via their supervising social worker.

14.0 Monitoring our performance

The performance of the service will be monitored at several levels and in the following ways:

- Ofsted inspects the service regularly to ensure that it complies with legislation and standards.
- Reporting annually to the council's Executive Board
- Report quarterly and annually to corporate level (Elected Members)
- Quarterly monitoring by the Children's Leadership Team
- Report monthly on service performance to the Strategic Lead for Corporate Parenting
- Activity will be monitored at a strategic level against the objectives, performance indicators and tasks as contained in the Service Improvement Plan
- In addition to the above, a Quality Assurance and Performance framework monitors the Fostering Service key requirements

15.0 Equality and Diversity

The Fostering Service works to Coventry City Council's Equality and Diversity Policy. The service treats 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. Coventry City Council's Fostering Service recognises that no child should have to wait indefinitely for a placement.

16.0 Contact Details

Coventry City Council

Fostering Service
Broadgate House
Coventry, CV1 5RR

Tel: **024 7683 2828**

Email: **CSCFostering@coventry.gov.uk**

Website: **www.coventry.gov.uk/fostering**

Children's Complaints Officer

Customer Service Centre
Broadgate House
Coventry, CV1 1FS

Tel: **08085 834 333**

Email: **CLYPCustomerRelations@coventry.gov.uk**

OFSTED

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester, M1 2WD

Tel: **0300 123 1231**

Email: **enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk**

Website: **www.ofsted.gov.uk**