

2019

Fostering Service Statement of Purpose



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1. 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 it provides and the facilities that are provided. This Statement of Purpose gives an outline of those requirements, how the service is managed and its fitness to provide fostering services. It shows the policy and performance framework that underpins our work and shows how the welfare of children will be met and good outcomes achieved for all children in its care. It also demonstrates the systems which we have set in place to recruit, train, supervise and support foster carers.

The Statement of Purpose also links with the Children's and Young Peoples Guides to fostering which is provided to all children, subject to the child's age and understanding at the point of placement.

This statement is available to all members of staff, foster carers, children and birth parents and those with parental responsibility and is publicly available.

2. National Legislative and Policy framework

CCC Fostering Service is run in accordance with the principles outlined in the:

- Children Act 1989
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2013 (Amendments to the Children Act 1989)
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011)
- Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010
- Care Planning and Fostering Regulations (Amendments) 2015
- The Disability and Equality Act 2010
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Children (Leaving care) Act 2000
- Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD) for Foster Carers

3. Policy Statement

CCC Fostering Service believes that every child Looked After should be able to enjoy the same quality of life and opportunities as all children. The Fostering Service works to the vision set out in the CCC Corporate Parenting Strategy. The pledge states: “As corporate parents we will ensure you feel safe, supported and cared for. We will respect and listen to you and involve you wherever possible. This is our pledge and our promise to you”

CCC Fostering Service recognises that a child’s needs are best met by a nurturing family and is committed to placing children who are not able to remain in their own family in an appropriate alternative family placement wherever possible. The first priority will be for children to be placed with family or friends (known as kinship carers) and initially supported under regulation 24 of the Care Planning Regulations where this placement is deemed suitable and the child is looked after. A separate policy is available that considers more widely the Children’s services commitment to family and friends caring for children.

CCC is committed to placing children and young people with our approved foster carers and has developed and invested in a dedicated and comprehensive Fostering Service that actively works to meet the quality standards required and the diverse needs of each child that becomes looked after by CCC.

We are also committed to placing children and young people with Cambridgeshire based foster carers in order for them to maintain contact with families and friends, to continue at the same school and thrive within their community wherever possible.

Each child/young person will have access to services that recognises and addresses their needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality.

Placement decisions will consider the child/young person’s assessed racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic needs and match these as closely as possible with the ethnic origin, religion, culture and language of the foster carer, or the foster carers ability to meet these needs.

Children’s safety and welfare are actively promoted in all fostering placements together with protection from abuse and other forms of significant harm.

4. Aims

The main aim of CCC Fostering Service is to provide safe, high quality foster care 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:

- Ensuring foster carers provide good parenting for all children who are looked after and that children will be consulted and encouraged to actively participate in their care and family life. With a priority focus on the kinship networks of looked after children wherever this best meets their needs.
- Ensuring that foster carers are encouraged to help children and young people to reach their maximum educational ability.
- Respecting the rights and responsibilities of Looked After children and their carers and involve them in all aspects of service delivery.
- Multi- agency working and developing partnerships and protocols with organisations which can progress the needs of our looked after children working at all levels in partnership with Education and Health to promote the wellbeing of children in the care of CCC
- Ensuring that the service offered is based on statutory requirements, sound principles and good practice and works within the principles of value for money for the council

The fostering service also aims to provide a high quality responsive child-centred service in relation to its core functions and to recruit new foster carers from within our diverse community. We prepare applicants through training to be able to deal with the range of issues that foster carers face when looking after children.

The service assesses each applicant comprehensively to ensure that they are suitable and able to carry out their role and to supervise and support carers in order that they promote and achieve the highest standards of welfare, safeguarding and outcomes for looked after children.

5. Objectives

- To ensure that there is a choice of high quality foster care placements available to meet the complex and diverse needs of individual children and young people.

- Each foster carer will have a qualified social worker (supervising social worker) for supervision and support and to assist with identifying and reviewing carer training and development needs as part of a Personal Development Plan
- To promote a safe, stable and enabling environment ensuring that children and young people are listened to and protected from abuse and neglect
- To promote the child's physical, social, emotional and intellectual development by providing each child with the opportunity of developing their full potential, through health care, education and leisure activities that will enhance their life chances
- To have a positive regard for the child or young person's racial, religious and cultural needs. All children should have equal access to local family based care
- The individual child's needs/ wishes and feelings are paramount and are taken into consideration in relation to their placements
- Siblings will be accommodated together wherever possible and appropriate
- To promote contact for the child or young person and his/her birth family throughout their placement, and to encourage and facilitate this as appropriate
- To ensure foster carers make children and young people aware of their rights and the complaints, compliments and advocacy process by providing the relevant information
- To ensure that approved foster carers are clear about their role and that they are supported in their tasks, duties and responsibilities by having adequate support mechanisms in place and as outlined in their terms and conditions, tasks, skills and competencies framework and the foster carer agreement
- The Foster Carer Skills Payment Scheme (model) provides a framework to evidence foster development, experience and training and support their progression through the Skills Levels Matrix. (This system is presently under review)

- Ensure that all practice promotes equal opportunities for all and values diversity of both foster children and carers regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, age, religious beliefs, disability or marital status
- To ensure that any decisions are transparent and fair and that any concerns are addressed and information about the complaints procedure is made available to all
- Ensure that service performance is monitored, assessed with outcomes and measured through a Quality Assurance Framework
- To promote team and personal development and training for both staff and foster carers
- Consult regularly and learn from those that are in receipt of services through comments, compliments or complaints and have regular meetings and consultation with foster carers, senior managers and elected members
- Consult regularly with children who are fostered, using a variety of methods to ensure their voice is heard, for example MOMO
- A commitment to continuous improvement through the provision of wider placement choices for children by pioneering more innovative approaches to foster care that are needs led, delivering flexible packages of support to children in public care
- Where children are able to reside with connected persons and require the ongoing intervention of the Local Authority, Cambridgeshire County Council aims to support and further equip these placements to ensure that they are of high quality allowing children and young people to meet their potential.
- The Fostering Service aims to support the assessments of Regulation 24 Carers to promote children and young people residing with connected persons in good quality safe placements with people whom they have a close pre-existing relationship.

6. Confidentiality and Conflicts of interest

Foster carers are provided with full information about the children placed with them and are expected to observe high standards of confidentiality. As an agency we maintain records on carers and looked after children who are subject to National

Standards and Data protection legislation. Staff and foster carers are expected to declare any potential conflicts of interest.

7. Principles and Standards of Care

CCC Fostering Service is committed to achieving and maintaining the highest standards and offering quality provision. 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 kinship carers.

- The welfare of the child is paramount
- Children who are looked after are consulted regarding their wishes and feelings in regard to all aspects of their care. They will be provided with a Children's Guide to Fostering (see section 8 below)
- Every child who is looked after will have a safe care plan, health plan and a personal education plan
- Every child looked after will be encouraged to participate appropriately in religious and cultural beliefs in accordance with their wishes and feelings and developmental understanding
- Every child looked after will be cared for in an environment free from oppression, discrimination and prejudice, encouraging them to develop a positive sense of their own identity
- The fostering service will support the identified aims and objectives of the child or young person's care plan and work alongside other professionals in the implementation of this
- The fostering service will work in partnership with other professionals to promote contact between looked after children and their family and other significant persons
- Foster carers have a handbook (fact file) which guides their practice and clarifies expectations, responsibilities and standards.
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8. Children's Guide/Young Person's Guide

Subject to the child's age and understanding, the fostering service ensures the child receives the Children's Guide at the point of placement and that the foster carer

explains the contents of the Children's Guide in a way that is accessible. The Children's Guide includes a summary of what the fostering service sets out to do for children, how they can find out their rights, how a child can contact their Independent Reviewing Officer, the Children's Rights Director and Ofsted if they wish to raise a concern.

The Young Person's guide is designed for Young People who can understand and use the guide independently.

9. Services Provided

The fostering service approves foster carers to look after children aged 0-18 years. Many of the children placed have experienced difficulties including abuse or neglect before being fostered. Some children and young people present with very challenging behaviour, special needs or complex health conditions. It does this by assessing, registering, supervising, supporting and training a wide range of carers.

CCC operates a fostering scheme called 'Foster Carer Skills Payments' which incorporates the majority of approved foster carers. All Foster Carers are financially supported via weekly allowance payments (child age related). The Foster Carer Skills Payment scheme currently has five levels linked to Experience, Skills and Knowledge. Weekly fees are paid to carers on levels 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6. (This payment system is currently under review)

The Foster Carer Personal Development Plan framework sets out a list of competencies that foster carers must be able to demonstrate at each level. It also sets out practice requirements, training and development expectations and support group attendance requirements at each level. Each level adds more to the previous level to support progression with Level 6 Carers having 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. Within the levels there are differing areas of specialism depending on carer's skills, abilities and interests. Carers are able to progress up through the Foster Carer Skills levels if evidencing required competencies and skills. The differing types of foster carer approval are:

Short Term:

Time limited placements across all Skills Levels. However, level 6 carers would be expected to undertake assessments on children and young people in their care or undertake specified tasks.

Long Term:

Planned, permanent placements across Skills levels. However, Level 6 carers would be expected to provide permanent placements for children with significantly complex needs or challenging behaviours.

Respite:

Planned, child needs led support for placements and agreed support for carers across Skills levels.

Support Care:

Part of a package of support (including day care and child minding) where carers provide planned time limited support to maintain children with their current foster placements and to prevent placement breakdown.

Children with Disabilities:

Short Term / Short Breaks provision and Long Term (Permanent) placements for disabled children.

Kinship Care & Connected Persons:

The service has a dedicated team which seeks to assess connected persons both pre placement and following a Regulation 24 arrangement. The service acknowledges that where a child is able to remain living with their wider family it is conducive to their welfare interests and as such every effort needs to be made to promote this.

The Team is responsible for assessing children and carers in respect to Special Guardianship arrangements as well as undertaking Kinship Foster Care assessments. The Connected Persons team also provides support to Special Guardians.

PACE:

The Local Authority has duty to provide accommodation to children and young people under the age of 18 who have been arrested and charged in relation to a criminal offence. PACE stands for Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 which placed this duty.

PACE transfers take place in order to limit the amount of time children and young people are required to spend in police custody. The young person is transferred to Local Authority accommodation overnight before being presented to court the following morning.

The PACE foster carers role is to provide overnight care to the child or young person before they attend court the following day. They will receive full training and support and will be paid as per the PACE Foster Carer agreement

Supported Lodgings:

Supported Lodgings provides a young person with a room in a friendly home environment and the support and guidance of an adult living there.

Supported Lodgings carer's offer less intensive support and lower level of supervision in comparison to foster care in order to promote young people's independence skills to prepare them for moving on to their own accommodation following completion of their education/training.

For the carer, Supported Lodgings offers the rewards of supporting a young person to gain the independence skills and confidence that they need as they transition to adulthood and to live independently, supported by a weekly allowance.

10. Children with Disabilities

The Link Team for Children with Disabilities provides a range of high quality inclusive services for disabled children, children with complex needs and their families.

The service promotes the social model of disability and the inclusion of children with a disability in all aspects of family and community life.

The service (together with the mainstream Fostering Recruitment & Assessment Team), training and supports high quality specialist foster carers (including those with nursing experience) to offer a range of placements to disabled children including:

- Short term (including pre-adoptive)
- Short breaks
- Assessment (duration of proceedings, bridging, etc.) Long Term / Permanent foster care placements.
- Foster placements (time-limited, emergency, long-term) for disabled children come under Mainstream Fostering

Within the Link team, the short breaks service recruits, trains and supports short breaks carers reflecting the diverse communities of Cambridgeshire offering a range of short break placements to disabled children and their families.

These carers are subject to the same checks as foster carers and have a competency based assessment which is presented to a fostering panel for approval. Short breaks carers are registered foster carers subject to National Minimum Standard.

11. Management of the Service: Structure as of November 2018

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| Service Director Children's and Safeguarding Lou Williams |
| Assistant Director Children's and Safeguarding Sarah-Jane Smedmor |
| Head of Corporate Parenting Service Fiona Van Den Hout |
| Consultant Lead Manager for Fostering John Heron |
| Lead Manager Corporate Parenting Kate Knight |
| Fostering Service Managers Maureen Cavanagh Despina Kaoura Steve Crossman |
| Fostering Team Managers Fostering Support Team Suki Chumber Recruitment and Assessment Team Julie Broomfield (Acting TM) Connected Person Assessment and Review Team Julie Stainer Specialist Fostering Team Jenny Braddock |
| Fostering Panel Chair currently vacant Vice Chair Sarah Fletcher |

ADM
Sarah Jane Smedmor
With authority to delegate to Heads of Service

ADM for Regulation 24 Decisions:
Sam Howlett- Head of Service Safeguarding South
Jitka Kohoutova – Head of Service Safeguarding North
Fiona Van Den Hout- Head of Service Corporate Parenting

There are four teams in the fostering service; the teams are: a Recruitment and Assessment Team, a Fostering Support Team (supporting and supervising foster carers), a Connected Persons Assessment & Review Team and the Specialist Fostering Team which includes: Supported Lodgings service, Link (Short Breaks for Disabled Children) service and Private Fostering.

Fostering Panel management is currently being shared by a Panel Advisor and Panel Chair Person and Vice Chair Person

The management group share responsibility for developing policy and procedure in line with national regulations and standards to ensure a safe and stimulating environment for Looked after children.

The council appoints elected members to corporately oversee the work of the Children's Social Work Service and delegates certain responsibilities to the Assistant Director who is the responsible individual for financial management, management systems and the safe care of children.

The Assistant Director is the Agency Decision Maker for fostering and can delegate this function to named Head of Service Managers.

12. Staffing

There are currently approximately 46 full time equivalent qualified social workers across the service (including Managers), this includes four alternatively qualified child practitioners with differing responsibilities for and within the fostering teams. There is a wide range of experience among the staff across the fostering service.

All workers hold a social work qualification apart from four fostering child practitioners based across the teams who undertake appropriate tasks supervised by a qualified social worker. There is one senior social worker who leads on the supported lodgings function of the service.

The Connected Person Assessment and Review Team has the established function, of the assessment of carers for kinship fostering including assessments for Special Guardianship Orders.

In addition there is a post with lead responsibility for Foster Carer Training and another for Marketing and Communications.

Members of staff of CCC's Children's Social Work Service can be approved as foster carers within the service. However, this may not always be advisable because of the potential for a conflict of interest and cases will be looked at on an individual basis.

There may be circumstances where it is appropriate to register a member of staff as a foster carer in cases where they are related to the child or for a known child.

13. Protecting children from harm

CCC Fostering Service operates a safe recruitment process for all staff employed by the agency. In addition, there is a rigorous vetting and assessment process undertaken with all potential carers. Enhanced Disclosure and Barring (DBS) checks are repeated every 3 years for all carers and members of their household over 16 years of age.

CCC Fostering Service has policy and guidance underpinning our service on which includes: safe caring & safeguarding; health and safety; bullying, management of behaviour; managing allegations; recording and record keeping, confidentiality, 'e-safety' (safe use of internet and social networking) together with linked carer training and development.

Our processes and procedures will ensure that any concern is addressed and monitored by the management team and will inform service development and best practice, for example: poor quality of care/breach of foster care agreement; child protection procedures which deal with allegations of abuse against foster carers and through the complaints procedures.

Children are made aware about these procedures through their social worker, fostering supervising social worker and the Children's Guide. They also have access to a Children's rights advocacy service independent of the service.

14. Provision of Therapeutic Services

The Fostering Service has a referral route to the in-house CCC Clinical Support team who provide therapeutic input to children and young people in foster placement, consultation to carers and other professionals. The clinical support team within CCC comprises of clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, child and adolescent mental health practitioners and social workers with expertise in children's mental health.

In addition, the clinical team holds a fortnightly Fostering Surgery which Fostering Support Social Workers can access directly for advice and guidance as well as the monthly clinical supervisions for all four Fostering Teams separately. The key objective of the work is to provide a regular, easy to use guidance and support service to all CCC Fostering Social Workers and to improve placement stability for children in foster care. They also provide training to foster carers, social workers and other professionals.

15. Provision of Health Promotion Support Services

There are two Designated Nurses for Looked after Children and Young People who in conjunction with other nurses within the team oversee Children's Annual Health Assessments and Health Action Plans as well as have input into the health promotion of Young People. Dedicated paediatricians advise the fostering panels on medical issues for applicants who are being assessed to be foster carers.

The icash (integrated contraception and sexual health) team offers training, advice, information and support to Young People and Carers in the field of sexual health and the Fostering Service works with others in children's services to ensure looked after children's needs are addressed.

The Fostering Service is committed to ensuring the health outcomes for young people looked after continually improve.

The team works with our foster carers and the Looked after Children's Nurse to promote healthy living and eating and assists in the tracking of children's dental health and annual health assessments.

16. Provision of Educational Support Services

Specialist educational support is available to foster carers in the fostering service.

There is a virtual head teacher for Looked after Children to look at improving the attainment attendance and exclusion issues and to improve partnerships with schools in Cambridgeshire. There are qualified teachers available to the service (and linked to the Virtual School) providing training, support and advice to foster carers and staff regarding placed children's educational needs.

The CCC fostering service recognises the need to improve Looked after Children attendance at school. The service works closely with the carers in addressing this issue.

Within Children's Services we have an expectation that holidays will not be taken in term time and that children are not routinely taken out of school. We work together with our colleagues to ensure that this only occurs in exceptional circumstances and not as a rule.

The Fostering Service works alongside and supports educational initiatives for looked after children by promoting children's educational needs to our Foster Carers. Carers are expected to attend Personal Education Planning Meetings with children and young people and, where appropriate, the supervising social worker will also attend.

A range of training, resources and materials are available to foster carers and social workers. Schools are also offered training around attachment difficulties and the impact of these.

17. Provision of Leisure, Sport, Cultural and Religious Activity

Foster carer training and supervision promotes the importance of leisure provision for looked after children and young people with the expectation that carers will seek out and support new experiences and activities to enhance children's self-worth, social development and independence.

Information on community play schemes, events, clubs and activities during holidays are provided to carers on a regular basis.

We aim to support all young people in their religious and cultural beliefs and customs. We ensure that information is available to provide understanding of different cultures and religions. We will provide resources that may be needed to ensure young people are able to practice their beliefs and customs.

We are committed to directly challenging racism and ensure that all young people who access our services are aware of our policies in relation to anti-oppressive practice and anti-racism.

We will ensure that all people are treated equally, regardless of age, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, disability or religion. Fostering supervising social workers assist and advise carers with issues such as appropriate placement matching and with transracial placements.

18. Care leavers provision

The Looked After Children's social work teams work closely with the Fostering Service and other professionals to provide an integrated approach to meeting young people's needs. CCC is committed to supporting young people in an arrangement to remain in their foster placement beyond 18 years of age in order to experience normal family life and preparation for independence if this supports them more effectively. The 'Staying Put' policy provides financial and other support for former foster carers making commitments to young people age 18 -21 years or beyond if accessing full time education.

The service has established a supported lodgings scheme for care leavers and other relevant, qualifying young people age 16yrs and above.

19. Recruitment of Foster Carers

The Fostering Service has a recruitment sufficiency strategy which utilises current data regarding the gaps in resource provision. Currently, more places are needed for teenagers; long-term care for children and young people; children with disabilities; sibling groups and children from diverse backgrounds.

There is an ongoing recruitment strategy with funding made available through the transformation fund, leading to improved outcomes for children and Carers. The campaign has been successful in attracting more localised carers. The Fostering Service uses a variety of media to recruit new carers. The strategy is informed by research and analysis on the most successfully employed advertising methods and this is reflected in our current advertising strategy. A distinctive brand has been established which is utilised in all advertising and publicity.

We work closely with the Communications team and the CCC Corporate Communications Team who help us promote the service to the Cambridgeshire public and beyond.

Features on local radio and television, in print media and promotion via social media, community meetings and briefings are all undertaken regularly as part of the strategy. The working partnership with PS Media has enabled the service to develop relationships with local businesses who promote fostering in the Cambridgeshire area and offer a range of benefits and offers for Foster families and their looked after children.

20. Approval and Assessment Process

Persons over the age of 21 may apply to become a Foster Carer (but between the ages of 21 and 25 years we will need to have evidence of relevant transferable skills and / or related experience). Initial responses and advice to enquirers from the recruitment team are welcoming and within set timescales, normally the same working day. There is immediate exclusion of any applicant who has been convicted of any serious offence against a child or adult. Interest is welcomed from all members of the community, regardless of relationship status, employment situation, class, gender, sexuality, culture, ethnicity or religion.

The majority of initial enquiries and registrations of interest about fostering with Cambridgeshire are received via CCC fostering website. The website is regularly renewed to ensure information is up to date, accessible and user friendly. When a person contacts the CCC Fostering Service to express an interest in fostering they will be able to have a discussion with a fostering social worker who will explain the process, take some initial information and offer an initial home visit if appropriate.

At the home visit we will discuss fostering with the enquirers and members of the family, check the home conditions are safe, warm and clean and that there is space for a foster child to sleep, do homework and play and participate as a full family member. If all parties agree that fostering could be suitable for the family, a formal application is made and statutory checks are completed. Once these are completed satisfactorily an invitation to a training and preparation group, is then made.

The preparation training undertaken utilises the Fostering Network 'Skills to Foster' course which includes subject areas on Child Development; Separation and Loss;

Working Together; Safe Care; Moving On.

The service runs approximately six Skills to Foster courses a year, normally at weekends with additional courses run as demand dictates. The training is run by the fostering trainer and qualified fostering assessment social workers, with input from experienced foster carers and includes contributions from care experienced young people.

When preparation training is completed, the applicants begin an assessment that includes the requirements laid down in Schedule 3 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards in Foster Care (2011), Assessment and approval of Foster Carers 2013 (amendments to Children Act 1989) and Schedule 4 of the Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (where children are fostered by relatives and friends). All carers are subject to a number of statutory checks and references:

- Disclosure and Barring Checks on all members of the household over the age of 16
- Child Protection Checks
- Children Young People's Social Care ESCR check
- Department of Health Checks
- Two personal references
- In addition, interviews are conducted with grown up children and children living in the household

Foster carers are additionally asked to undertake:

- A full medical examination with their GP. (Applicants for short breaks are asked to complete a medical questionnaire which is sent to their G.P. for verification / comments)
- A work reference from present or previous employer
- To agree to the department making contact with any schools which their children attend to ascertain the school's view on their involvement / suitability
- To agree to the department making contact with ex partners regarding their application to foster

The majority of foster carers are subject to a competency based assessment. The depth of this assessment will depend on the role for which the carer is being assessed, with appropriateness and proportionality being the measure of this. All potential carers are invited to be fully involved in the assessment and to use self-completion sheets as a tool to look at their competencies. The fostering service uses the Coram BAAF Form F foster carer assessment format for the completion of its assessments.

Kinship foster carers are subject to an alternative assessment taking into account the nature of the task and the requirements of Schedule 4 (Care Planning Regulations 2010). Kinship foster carers are not normally required to produce a portfolio or evidence of experience and skills, however, those approved as kinship foster carers, as opposed to SGO carers are required to complete the relevant TSD Standards.

The assessment of a foster carer would take place in the applicant's home over a period of six to eight visits, plus reference interviews and interviewing other relevant parties. The assessing social worker would ensure that timelines, analysis of significant relationships, the family dynamics and characteristics of the foster carers underpin and inform the assessment.

The assessment focuses on the individual or individuals applying to become foster carers and their family. We make a detailed assessment and analysis of their past and present experiences, the skills and competencies which they would bring to their new role and help them to think about their reasons for applying to become foster carers. The assessor will also use the process to assess the applicant's suitability to foster children with differing needs including disabled children and this is made transparent. The assessments, together with a portfolio of evidence of experience and skills compiled by the foster carer are presented to a fostering panel. Applicants are expected to attend with the assessing social worker.

All information gathered (except references) is shared with the applicant/s. The social worker's assessment is shared with them prior to the panel. There are fortnightly panels in Cambridgeshire. These are independently chaired and comprise of people from a variety of backgrounds. They consider and recommend the approval, or not, of all foster carers.

The recommendation then goes before the Agency Decision Maker who makes a final decision. Any appeals can be made within 28 days and may either make further representation to the fostering panel or have their assessment considered by the Independent Review Mechanism who in turn will make a recommendation back to

the agency.

All foster carers are subjected to an annual review of their status as foster carers. This is a formal review of the work that they have undertaken during the year and includes an opportunity to reflect on achievements and learning. Annual reviews are undertaken by supervising social workers and draw on contributions from the Foster Carer and family, Supervising Social worker, Child's Social Worker, Child / Young Person placed and other professionals involved with the placement.

A report is presented to the fostering panel in the case of all first reviews, significant changes to the carer's registration or cases of concern.

21. Support and Supervision of Foster Carers

All foster carers are linked with a qualified social worker (fostering supervising social worker) who provides supervision and support.

The supervising social worker undertakes a minimum of six weekly supervisory visits per year to approved carer(s) and additional visits as required. They also make at least one unannounced visit per year. All visits and contacts with the foster carer are recorded.

For the children with disabilities short breaks service, the supervising social worker undertakes the same level of supervisory visits.

For instance, if the family is matched to a child who visits twice a year it would be inappropriate for the supervisory social worker to visit more often than the child.

Unannounced visits are made to busy carers but aren't practical for some short breaks placements, which are typically at weekends and where carers frequently take the child out when they are in placement.

The fostering service believes that it is important that foster carers are able to access support and at the time that they need it. During 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. Additionally, every looked after child has an allocated social worker. This person will usually be the first point of contact for the foster carer for any information and advice on issues that relate to the child. If

this worker is not available during office hours, a duty worker is always available to deal with any urgent problems or issues.

If additional support is required outside of these times, foster carers can contact the Out of hours support hotline— a service that operates 24 hours a day providing advice for carers by experienced social workers

CCC fostering service provides an Independent Support Service to foster carers (currently commissioned through Foster Talk) where this is required for mediation purposes or to provide advocacy support for the carer during allegations. Carers are also offered free individual annual membership of the Foster Talk, providing a range of benefits, including independent advice and support.

The fostering service believes that carers should be fully reimbursed for the costs of looking after a child, and provides weekly allowances at Fostering Network recommended rates. In addition, travel and other additional payments are made available to carers together with essential equipment for the task.

Payments in the form of a weekly fee are available to carers who meet specific requirements on the Foster carer Skills level payment scheme.

At times, all children can have accidents that cause damage. When such damage occurs, carers are initially asked to claim on Cambridgeshire County Council Corporate Insurance.

The Fostering Service provides a range of foster carer support groups, assisted by supervising social workers. The groups generally involve numbers of geographically based carers and take place in the daytime at a variety of venues across the county. There is also a fostering support group specifically for level 6 foster carers with clinical input as well as a group for male carers. CCC fostering service also provides a mentoring scheme of support to newly approved carers.

22. Foster Carers Handbook (Fact file) and Diary

Foster Carers once approved are provided with a hard copy handbook (fact file) which gives factual 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 Departments Children's procedures manual and key fact file and other information can be accessed

on the CCC fostering website.

23. Training and Development

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.

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.

The Fostering Service has a clear training strategy, covering pre-approval training to potential applicants, induction training for newly approved carers and post approval training which incorporates the required Training and Development Standards (TSD) certification.

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

Training is linked to the Foster Carer Skills Payment Scheme levels. Foster carers can also access specialist training courses, including those caring for disabled children. Please see Cambs county council fostering service Training Brochure 2018-2019.

Training courses are evaluated with carers providing feedback. Feedback is collated and used to inform future practice and courses offered. Within the support groups there may be a training component at some sessions. The support groups have various speakers across the year to compliment the training programme and have included the following topics:

Sexual health; welfare benefits; the role of the Clinical Team and CAMHS service; legal briefings; tax and benefits information; life story work; Special Guardianship Orders; Internet safety; Staying Put, the role of the IRO as well as other relevant topics

24. Complaints Procedure

CCC's Children's Social Work Service operates a complaints service which is independent of the Fostering Service. Foster Carers are given a Complaints and Compliments leaflet, detailing the process if they wish to make a complaint when they sign the Foster Carer Agreement.

Birth Parents are given a copy of the Complaints and Compliments Leaflet in the Information Pack for Parents which is provided by social workers of children in placements.

It is the role of the child's social worker to give them the complaints leaflet for looked after children and to inform them of the Role of the Children's Commissioner Service. The child can also make their views known through the review system and they are sent a consultation form about the placement prior to the foster carer review. Details of how to complain and how to contact Ofsted are available in Appendix 1.

It is acknowledged that many disabled children cannot access the complaints process in this form because of their learning and communication difficulties. An independent advocate can be appointed for the child where this is appropriate.

25. Allegations

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

The Cambridgeshire Safeguarding policies and procedures are followed. Foster carers are offered independent support during this process which can be accessed via their supervising social worker.

26. Monitoring performance

The performance of CCC Fostering Service will be monitored at a number of levels and in a number of ways:

- Report monthly on service performance to Head of Service for Corporate Parenting
- Report quarterly and annually to Corporate level (Elected Members)

- Complete the annual report for fostering to be available to the wider organisation.
- Ofsted will inspect regularly to ensure that the CCC Fostering Service complies with legislation and standards

Activity will be monitored at a strategic level against the objectives, performance indicators and tasks as contained in the Fostering Service Improvement Plan.

Appendix 1 - Contact details

The management of the Fostering Service is based at: Scott House 5 George Street
Huntingdon, PE29 3AD

Information about our Fostering Services can be accessed via:

Phone: 01480 372680

Website: www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/fostering

Email: fostering@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Cambridgeshire County Council – Customer Care Team
Children’s Services
FREEPOST Box SH1215
Shire Hall
Cambridge
CB3 0AP

Phone: 01223 699664 or 01223 714765 (or 0345 045 5203)

Text: 07795 092404

Email: Childrens.ServicesFeedback@Cambridgeshire.gov.uk

OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills)

Ofsted checks the work of the social workers and fostering services

Phone: 0300 123 1231 **Email:** Enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Ofsted National Business Unit
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

IRM

Email: irm@irm.org.uk

Phone: 0845 450 3956 or 0113 2022080