WEST SUSSEX FOSTERING SERVICES
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE
2018-2019

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1. Introduction

It is a requirement of the Fostering Services England Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services is that each fostering agency has a ‘Statement of Purpose’ which provides a clear description of how the welfare of the children in its care will be met and how good outcomes will be promoted and achieved. Integral to the statement of purpose is the agencies staffing, policy and performance structures as well as the systems in place to recruit, train, supervise and support its foster carers.

The Statement of Purpose sets out the Service’s vision for its children, carers and staff and is clear in its aims and objectives as well as in the values and principles that underpin them. The document is therefore intended to provide information to a wide audience including –

- West Sussex County Council Staff.
- Our current foster carers and prospective foster carers.
- Our foster carers birth children.
- Children and young people placed in the care of our foster carers.
- Other Local Authorities / health and social care trusts which place, have previously placed or are considering placing children with West Sussex foster carers.
- Our colleagues from other social care agencies.
- The General Public.

2. National Legislative and Policy Framework

The work undertaken by the Fostering Service is done so within the prescribed parameters of legislation, policy and guidance – these are listed below.

- Children Act 1989
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2013 (Amendments to the Children Act 1989)
- 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 (TSDS).

3. Vision Statement

West Sussex Fostering Service believes that every child has the right to be raised and supported by people who care about them and that every child should be actively encouraged to build lives of opportunity and choice. Children also have the right to high hopes and positive aspirations and we recognise that it is our duty to
provide the nurture and care needed to make these hopes achievable. The provision of a ‘Secure Base’ is integral to this and essential if our children are to overcome the disadvantages they have faced before coming into care. West Sussex Fostering Service will strive to ensure that each child looked after has a sense of stability and belonging and is able to take positive memories of their time in our care with them into adulthood.

We recognise that children’s needs are best met in a nurturing family environment and are committed to achieving this for all our children. When children are not able to be placed within their own immediate families our priority is to explore potential extended family and friends/ Kinship options as we recognise this is less disruptive for the child. If this is not possible West Sussex Fostering Service is committed to placing children in high quality fostering households where, wherever possible contact with birth families and attendance at the same school can be maintained. Fostering Households will also be expected to meet each child’s needs in respect of their - gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability, and sexuality. Placement decisions will be predicated on matching criteria and every effort will be made to ensure that carers are able to meet the broad spectrum of our children’s needs.

4. Aims

West Sussex Fostering Service’s main aims are to ensure that each of our children looked after is kept safe in high quality fostering households which provide them with the ‘Secure Base’ they need to be healthy, happy and fulfil their potential. Our other key aims include -

- To provide our children with a full and loving family life where inclusion and a sense of belonging are actively promoted.
- To provide high quality foster care placements that enables our children to fulfil educational potential.
- To listen to our children looked after, respect their rights and involve them in every aspect of service delivery.
- To provide foster carers with the skills, support and training they need to provide foster child/children with sensitive and insightful care.
- To treat our foster carers with respect, openness and as valued members of the ‘team around the child’.
- To ensure that the service delivered is based on statutory requirements, skilled social work practice and value for money for the council.
To achieve these aims the service continues to work on the following key objectives.

5. Objectives

- To ensure that the service has access to a choice of high quality foster care placements suited to meeting the diverse and complex needs of our children looked after.

- To ensure that there are sufficient strategies in place to ensure the retention of existing carers as well as the recruitment of new carers to meet the specific needs of our children.

- Each foster carer will have an allocated Supervising Social Worker to provide them with guidance and support, ensure adherence to regulations and best practice guidelines.

- That foster carers and children looked after are made aware of their rights and have access to the authorities’ complaints/compliments procedure and independent advocacy service.

- To ensure that a range of mechanisms are in place to obtain the views of children looked after and foster carers.

- That there is a transparent competency and skills framework for carers with an adequate and accessible professional development programme of training.

- To ensure that foster carers and the department have signed copy of the ‘Foster Carer Agreement’ on file.

- That there is 24 hour support to fostering households.

- That wherever possible and when assessed to be in their best interests - siblings will be accommodated together.

- That contact with birth family will be actively promoted by foster carers and their families as appropriate.

- To ensure that the service promotes equal opportunities for its children, foster carers and staff group regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, age, religious beliefs, disability or marital status.

- To ensure the ongoing monitoring of service development through quality assurance work.
7. Types of Fostering in West Sussex

Carers can be approved for a range of different tasks with the broader fostering role. The following categories incorporate the range of typical placement types.

- Short Term – time limited – may incorporate an assessment of need.
- Long Term – subject to permanency planning.
- Respite - child needs led support for substantive foster carers.
- Parent and Child – assessment undertaken of parent/s capacity to care for their child as part of an agreed plan.
- Kinship Care and Connected Persons – Providing placements for children and young people known to the carer/s.
- Children with Disabilities – Short term and long term placements for disabled children.
8. Foster Carer Allowances

There are two elements of payment that a foster carer receives:

- All Inclusive Allowance (child maintenance allowance)
- Skills Fee.

The All Inclusive Allowance varies according to the age of the child (or children) you are looking after. The Skills Fee is your reward for fostering. This increases with the number of children placed and with your level of training and experience.

As you would with your own household budget, you will be expected to manage your fostering allowance to cover the costs involved with supporting a child.

The table below gives you the total payment rates for a foster carer with one child (the Skills Fee and All Inclusive Allowance combined).


9. Recruitment and Assessment

The Fostering Service is currently engaged in a ‘Fostering Investment Project’ which went live in August 2017 and has a set target of the recruitment and assessment of 35 new carers over an 18 month period. This figure is in addition to the 24 carers the team is targeted to recruit to meet ‘business as usual’.

The team utilises current data to inform its recruitment strategy in order that the changing needs of the service can be met. It is recognised that more places are needed for sibling groups, children of school age, asylum seeking children and for children with disabilities - recent marketing is reflective of this. It is recognised that more carers with terms of approval for each of those groups are needed in the north of the county.

Information events co led by existing West Sussex foster carers are held in various locations across the county, local radio and media are fully utilised and a ‘refer a friend’ payment scheme is in place. Social media and digital marketing are integral to the teams ongoing success and are built in to the authorities overall marketing plan.

Alongside standard recruitment activity the Recruitment Team support mini campaigns including ‘Foster Carer Fortnight’, ‘National Adoption Week’ and ‘LGBT Adoption and Fostering Week’. Prospective carers are regularly contacted with regular newsletters via email.

Timescales have been set for Initial responses to enquiring prospective carers which has been made possible through the development of a dedicated ‘duty line’. Interest is actively encouraged through our marketing from all members of the community regardless of - relationship status, employment status, class, sexual orientation,
gender, ethnicity or religion. Applicants who have been convicted of any serious crime against a child or an adult are immediately excluded.

All prospective carers are expected to attend ‘Fostering Networks’ ‘The Skills to Foster course’ which his run by an assessing social worker and has representation from experienced foster carers, a supervising social worker and a care experienced young person. Upon successful completion of ‘The Skills to Foster’ course, and when prospective carers wish to proceed, the Form F Assessment is started.

All assessments are undertaken in adherence with requirements laid down in the following –

- Schedule 3 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations (2011)
- The National Minimum Standards in Foster Care (2011)
- Assessment and approval of Foster Carers 2013 (amendments to Children Act 1989)
- Schedule 4 of the Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010

West Sussex Fostering assessments are completed on the Coram BAAF Form F template and are undertaken in prospective carers homes. The average assessment period is currently between 12 and 16 weeks and is used to gather evidence and provide analysis on applicants past significant experiences and relationships, their applicable skills and competencies, and their motivations to foster.

All prospective West Sussex Foster Carers / household members are subject to the following checks / references

- Disclosure and Barring Checks on all member of the household over the age of 18.
- Child Protection checks.
- Department of Health checks.
- Children and Young People’s Social Care ESCR check.
- At least two personal references.
- A full medical examination with their GP.
- A work reference from their present employer.
- School references for birth children.
- References from significant others – including ex partners.
10. Panel

All new applicants are expected to attend a West Sussex Fostering Panel which are held three times a month in Bognor, Worthing and Horsham and chaired by an independent panel chair. The panel itself is constituted to meet the requirements of the Fostering Service Regulations and is comprised of a central list of independent members with a range of personal or professional backgrounds relevant to the fostering role. Additionally there is representation from West Sussex Health, Education and Fostering professionals.

Using the ‘Signs of Safety’ model of practice the Fostering Panel considers assessments using ‘the three houses’ approach which informs the areas it chooses to further explore through questions put to the applicants and assessing social workers. Assessments / applicants are subsequently scaled and a recommendation is submitted to the Agency Decision Maker where the final decision is made. Applicants are made aware of their right to appeal within 28 days of the final decision to the Independent Review Mechanism should they disagree with the final decision taken by the ADM.

11. Support to Carers

West Sussex Fostering Service works in partnership with its foster carers to meet the broad range of needs represented in our looked after children cohort. These needs can be complex and challenging and often derive directly from the abuse or neglect children were subjected to before they entered care. Some of our children have specific health conditions and require carers with specialist training to ensure their needs are met. It is recognised by the Fostering Service that carers and their families need a range of different kinds of support to enable them to meet our children’s’ needs.

Each Fostering household is allocated a qualified social worker / ‘Supervising Social Worker’ to provide supervision and support. Frequency of visits is predicated on need and on what basis the child is placed but takes place at least 4 times a year with the majority of households receiving 6 weekly visits. Additionally at least one Unannounced Visit takes place annually in which the household is visited without notice.

The Fostering Service recognises that carers need to be able to access support and guidance whenever they need it. A Duty system is operated by each of the three fostering teams in the event that carers are unable to reach their allocated SSW on their landline or mobile phone. Additionally all West Sussex Foster Carers have contact details for the teams Practice Managers and Group Manager should they need to escalate any matter. All staff members in the Fostering Service have smart phones which enable them to access emails, texts and voice messages when they are out in the community.

Outside of core working hours Foster Carers are asked to contact the dedicated ‘Emergency Duty Team’ who ensures that calls are logged and subsequently passed on to the relevant worker and their respective manager.
West Sussex Fostering Service also provides an Independent Support Service for each if it’s fostering households through the ‘Fostering Network’ helpline should there be a need for mediation or advocacy. The helpline is part of a suite of benefits and services available to each carer as part of their annual membership.

In addition to this our independent body of foster carers (UFCA) runs an independent ‘Help Line’ to support carers both emotionally and practically. There is a regular interface with UFCA and the Fostering Service to ensure that issues are adequately addressed and are done so within good timescales.

12. Groups

There are a number of Support Groups available to our carers for attendance which run across the county at locations including Crawley, Horsham, Felpham and Worthing. These groups provide a good opportunity for carers to broaden their support networks, receive peer support as well as contribute to their Development Plans as key speakers regularly attend. All carers are actively encouraged to go along to these groups and in general terms they are well attended.

Additionally there are specialists monthly Support Groups for ‘Parent and Child Carers’ as well as carers of ‘Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children’.

13. Participation for children in our care

Children and young people are kept safest when their voice is heard and services are most effectively provided when they have had a say in their development and delivery. Using the principles of “You said….We did” children and young people are invited to participate in activities across the county.

During 2019-20 children and young people will continue to be involved in talking about their experiences of foster care and how wellWSCC is delivering its Pledge to children in care.

14. Pledge to the children we look after

WSCC has developed a ‘children’s pledge’ to the children we look after which can be found here -

https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/media/11922/the_pledge_leaflet_yspace.pdf

15. Therapeutic Support

The Fostering Service has a referral route to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and any foster carer accessing the service can apply to the Therapeutic Access Panel for the 12 week Therapeutic Training course.
CAMHS comprises of Clinical Psychologists, Psychiatrists, child and adolescent mental health practitioners as well as Social Workers. The importance of meeting the therapeutic needs of our children is embedded in the foster carer training pathways available to all our carers as well through the regular support received from SSW’s.

16. Education (Virtual School)

Specialist educational support is available to all West Sussex Foster Carers through the ‘Virtual School’. There is an expectation that foster carers will not take children on holiday in term time and we work in partnership with our colleagues in the Children Looked after Teams to ensure that this only occurs in exceptional circumstances. Supported by the supervisory process and embedded in the foster carers training programme is the expectation that all foster carers actively promote educational attainment for children in their care. This involves advocating for children with teaching professionals, attending all update events and open evenings as well as providing support with homework.

17. Professional Development – Training

It is vital that foster carers are supported to learn and develop their skills, both in order to meet the needs of children placed in their care but also to ensure their ongoing development as integral and valued members of the professional network. The National Minimum Standards are clear that foster carers should maintain an ongoing training and development portfolio which demonstrates how they are meeting the skills required of them by their fostering service. The Standards also state that foster carers’ personal development plans set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development. All foster carers therefore are able to access a comprehensive range of learning opportunities which are regularly reviewed to provide up to date guidance on research, legislation and national practice. Foster carers are involved in reviewing, developing and delivering training and learning opportunities.

The training programme established in West Sussex is based on a Levels System whereby carers are expected to fulfil each training course assigned to each Level before making progression to the next. The training/accreditation pathway for both new and existing carers has been developed to provide structure and a clear career pathway. The training offered is also available to Adopters, Supported Lodgings Providers and Family and Friends Carers. The development pathway links training and skills/knowledge/attitudes to the different accreditation levels.

Moving through the Levels depends on:

- The carer evidencing the knowledge and skills they have and the attitudes they hold. Your Family Placement Social Worker can help you with this. (Refer to Tasks/Skills Profile)
- The training that the carer has completed.
- Resolution of any concerns, complaints and investigations in order that West Sussex County Council is satisfied with the outcome and that the requirements of the National Minimum Standards are met.
- A vacancy being available at that level and for your specific approval.

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The process is as follows:

- When a carer seeks to move from one level to another, their application (portfolio) will be presented to the County Fostering Accreditation Panel.
- Application forms are available from SSW’s.
- The panel will consider in all cases - The carer's application form, the carer’s last annual review, written comments from the carer’s SSW and Practice Manager and any additional evidence submitted by carers or the

18. Accreditation Levels

Newly approved foster carers are appointed to Level I. Carers transitioning from other fostering agencies or for new carers with relevant transferable skills – consideration is given at approval stage to starting at Level 2/3. All courses at Levels I, II and III are linked to the underpinning knowledge required for the Level 3 Diploma for Children and Young People’s Workforce and the TSD Standards.

Level I

There are eleven foundation courses at Level I. It is mandatory that all approved foster carers undertake the First Aid course as soon as practical as it is recognised that an emergency could occur at any time. We encourage all approved carers to attend the remaining foundation courses but have a minimum requirement that one approved carer for the household will do so. Carers are required to attend all courses within two years of approval and must do so before an application can be made to Level 2.

Level 2

The courses for this level, (other than the Diploma), are mandatory for the primary carer, and must be completed within two years of being appointed to level 2. It is however, desirable that all carers in the household attend level 2 courses. Those intending to progress through to Level 3 must undertake and be awarded a Level 3 Diploma for Children and Young People’s Workforce, and have completed all the Level II pathway courses.

Level 3

The course “Direct Work with Children” (4 days) is mandatory and should be completed by the carer with the Diploma within 18 months of attaining Level 3. The County Fostering Accreditation Panel will review carers wishing to remain at Level 3, every three years using evidence from practice and any written work produced. Level 3 foster carers are expected to start to develop expertise in their area of approval through training, reading and reflective practice. It is important to note that Foster Carers accredited to Level III, if in employment, should have flexible working arrangements so that they are able to attend meetings, medical and therapeutic appointments.
19. Foster Carer Training Profile

Foster Carers are responsible for keeping and updating their ‘Foster Carer Training Profile’. Certificates, awards and details of any approved APEL are recorded and used as evidence for the Foster Carer Annual Review as well as Accreditation Panel.

20. Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning. (APEL)

Where carers have undertaken other courses not accessed through the Foster Carer Development Pathway, they can submit details to establish whether the Department will accept them in-full or in-part as an alternative to the courses specified in the pathway programme. The onus is on carers to provide evidence of prior learning that duplicate the learning objectives of the course they wish to APEL. If the objectives have not been fully met, it is expected that course(s) be attended in full.

21. TSD Standards and expectations for First Year post approval.

All foster carers are required to meet the TSD standards within their first 12 months of approval (or 18 months for Family and Friends Carers). These standards were formerly known as the Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) standards, and are now administered by the Department for Education.

The standards are:

- **Standard 1**: Understand the principles and values Essential for fostering children and young people.
- **Standard 2**: Understand your role as a foster carer.
- **Standard 3**: Understand health and safety, and healthy care.
- **Standard 4**: Know how to communicate effectively
- **Standard 5**: Understand the development of children and young people.
- **Standard 6**: Keep children and young people safe from harm
- **Standard 7**: Develop yourself

Your Supervising Social Worker will work with you to ensure the completion of the standards within the expected timeframes. Further information can be found about the TSD Standards on the links below.

https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/guidance-for-foster-carers

22. Review of Foster Carers

Our foster carers are reviewed on an annual basis and presented to panel after one year of practice and thereafter every 3 years. Reviews are brought forward if there has been a significant change in circumstances or if there is a request to alter the carers terms of approval. When a carer has been subject to a Standards of Care report the department may wish for the next annual review to be taken back to Panel to provide an overview of practice. The Foster Carer Annual Review Document incorporates Signs of Safety and Secure Base models and is used to assess the
carers practice over the course of the year and review by extrapolating details of care afforded to children placed. Request for feedback will be obtained from the following parties wherever possible and appropriate to do so -

- Each child looked after that has been placed over the course of the review year.
- The Foster Carers.
- Each member of the Fostering Household including birth children.
- The Childs Parents.
- The Childs Social Worker.
- The Independent Reviewing Officer.
- Health Professionals
- Education Professionals.

Each annual review should consider the foster carers ongoing approval in the context of, among other things –

- The quality of care and emotional warmth afforded to each child placed.
- The impact of the fostering role on each member of the fostering household.
- Commitment to training and development and future training needs.
- Safeguarding.
- Any significant events or changes to the fostering household.
- Any change to the carers financial circumstances and analysis on any subsequent impact on children looked after.
- Adherence to Health and Safety document.
- Adherence to Safe Care Plan/s.
- The foster carers current terms of approval.
- Completion of statutory checks.
- Completion of at least one unannounced visit.

23. Standards of Care

It is the expectation that all West Sussex County Council foster carers will provide children placed with them the best possible care to ensure that their welfare needs are met. The Fostering Service may have concerns about a foster carer, which may not warrant investigation under Child Protection Procedures, but which raise significant concerns about standards of care being provided. Concerns expressed in direct relation to the conduct, attitude and practices of a carer are investigated under this procedure.

Complaints and concerns expressed against foster carers are an inevitable result of the increasingly complex and sensitive work carers are required to undertake. When concerns are expressed there is an obligation to investigate but it is recognised that this process can be extremely challenging for carers and their families. Staff will therefore aim to carry out investigations sensitively, openly and honestly.
Where the concern is to be investigated under the Standards of Care procedure the Fostering Practice Manager is responsible for ensuring that the following steps take place within 28 days.

- Where the concern has been made verbally, the person expressing concern must put their concerns in writing within 3 working days to the relevant Practice Manager in order to proceed with the Standards of Care Procedure.

- The foster carer’s supervising social worker and the child’s social worker will meet with the Fostering Practice Manager and the Practice Manager of the child’s social workers if appropriate within 7 working days of the initial complaint/concerns being raised to consider.

- The Practice Manager and Supervising Social Worker to meet the foster carer within 14 working days of the initial complaint/concern

- The outcome of the visit to be fed back to the relevant Fostering Group Manager and Children’s Group Manager who will make a decision on the appropriate actions to be taken. This decision-making to take place within 21 working days of the complaint/concern being received.

- Serious complaints about a foster carer must be notified to Ofsted [Regulation 36 and Schedule 7 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011]. The decision whether the complaint is serious under the terms of Regulation 36 and therefore notified to Ofsted must be made by the Fostering Group Manager in consultation with the Service Lead for Fostering and Adoption.

The Fostering Service wishes to “know itself”, to understand what it does well and what aspects of service delivery need to be improved. It actively seeks the views of its foster carers in a variety of ways. For example, via assessment and annual review processes, with surveys, and direct feedback at supervision visits.

24. Complaints

When things go wrong it is really important to us that we respond quickly and fairly to put them right. We will always try to resolve any areas of disagreement or concerns informally in the first instance and respond promptly to formal complaints about the fostering service through WSCC Complaints Procedure.

This can be found at: https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/about-the-council/have-your-say/make-a-complaint/childrens-social-care-complaints/
Or contact us using the details below:

- Email www.westsussex.gov.uk
- Tel: 01243 777100
- West Sussex County Council  
  Comments, compliments and complaints  
  County Hall  
  West Street  
  Chichester  
  PO19 1RQ

Additional information

Text phone for people with hearing impairments - 18001 01243 777100.

Freephone: 0800 137126

SMS texts: 07545 200547

Our offices are open 8.30am-4.30pm, Monday-Friday. If you phone out of office hours you can leave a message on our answerphone.

Our complaints procedure plays an important role in improving our service and WSCC Complaints Policy commits us to:

- Giving a full and clear response to a complaint within 20 working days. If this is not possible, we advise complainants when an answer will be given.
- Assessing each complaint thoroughly and fairly.
- Being honest and polite, and keeping information confidential.
- Apologising if we have made a mistake.
- Telling complainants about what we are doing to put things right.

Concerns, complaints and allegations about registered services including fostering agencies can be directed to Ofsted particularly where it is not possible for them to be resolved directly with the agency.

Our Children’s Safeguarding Service deals with complaints that involve concerns for the safety or welfare of children in foster care. Information on this service can be found at the WSCC Children’s Safeguarding Board website:


Or by phone - 0330 222 7799

Email - lscb@westsussex.gov.uk
25. OFSTED

For advice and information on how Ofsted can help, they can be contacted at:

National Business Unit
Royal Exchange Buildings
St. Ann’s Square
Manchester, M2 7LA
Tel: 08456 404040

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Or via the website at www.ofsted.gov.uk

Details of the Children’s Commissioner for England are:

Ann Longfield

Children’s Commissioner for England
The Office of the Children’s Commission
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London, SW1P 3BT
Tel: 020 7783 8330 Email: info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk

26. Contact Details for the Service

Sarah Foster (Service Lead Fostering and Adoption)
Melanie Spencer (Group Manager for Fostering)

Horsham Centre,
County Hall
North Chart Way,
Horsham,
RH12 1XH

01243 642555