

Fostering

# Fostering Service Statement of Purpose

April 2018 - March 2019

The Trust Board has granted the Chief Executive of the Sandwell Children's Trust the authority to approve this document.

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# 1. Introduction and Policy Context

Sandwell Children's Trust is an independent not-for-profit company that provides social care and support services to children, young people and families. The fostering service offers placements to Sandwell children, but is no longer part of the Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council. Therefore, to continue to provide fostering services, the agency is registered as an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA), and its fostering arm is called Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering.

This Statement of Purpose has been produced in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 3(1). It will be reviewed annually, amended as necessary and approved by the Trust's Executive Board (and Elected Members as part of the Trust's overall Business Planning Process). It is supported by a range of more detailed information including, the online Foster Carers Handbook, and a range of Policies and Procedures which describe the responsibilities and expectations of those involved in Fostering Services.

## 2. Aims and Objectives

Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering is committed to providing high quality placements to meet the assessed and diverse needs of looked after children and young people. The cultural background, religion and language of looked after children and young people and the needs of disabled children are fully recognised and promoted when placement decisions are made. Our vision is for Sandwell's children and young people to have the best start in life and for them to be nurtured and supported by those who care for them so that they will develop into healthy, socially responsible and achieving adults who, in turn, show the same level of care when raising their own families.

The Fostering Service also aims to provide high quality services and support to foster carers by employing experienced and qualified staff.

To achieve these aims the Fostering Service has the following objectives:

- To have an annual recruitment and publicity strategy which focuses of recruitment of foster carers who can meet the needs of looked after children in the borough.
- The recruitment strategy will also focus on increasing the number of approved foster carer households.
- To maintain a wide range of support services including independent support from Foster Talk to ensure that approved foster carers are valued as part of the Fostering Service and their services as carers are retained.
- To produce an annual training plan which is needs led so that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care.
- To promote the educational achievements of looked after children and young people by ensuring that foster carers are supported and can provide opportunities for children to achieve.

- To promote positive emotional and physical health of looked after children and young people by ensuring that foster carers help children and young people placed with them maintain good health and are encouraged to engage in recreational activities.
- To ensure that staff employed by the service have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to carry out their duties. Each member of staff has a personal development plan, which supports opportunities for training, and developing their skills and staff are regularly supervised and their work monitored.
- A foster carer forum is managed by all foster carers within the service.
- There is a bi-monthly support group held and this forum is used to disseminate information and consult on Service Development. Support groups also offer opportunity for foster carers to meet other foster carers, receive informal training and support from supervising social workers.

### 3. Services Provided

Fostering is the generic name given to many types of foster care where looked after children spend time (overnight at the minimum) with a family who has been approved by Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering.

Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering recruits, trains, assesses, supervises, supports and reviews all foster carers within the Trust. Foster placements are provided for children and young people with approved foster carers within the Trust when possible. However, if there are no suitable placement options within the Trust then placements with Independent Agencies may be commissioned.

When a child or young person needs to be 'looked after' and family or friends (Connected Persons) come forward to undertake this task, then Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering will carry out appropriate assessments depending upon the length of the placement required and monitor, supervise and support the placement under the Fostering Services Regulations.

There are a range of placements provided through the Fostering Service which include the following:

- **Short-term Placements:** Foster carers undertaking short-term placements do so in a variety of circumstances until an agreed permanence plan can be implemented for the child.
- **Long-term Placements:** When children cannot return home and when adoption is not the best permanence option, then long term fostering provides an alternative form of substitute care until independence.
- **Emergency Placements:** Foster carers offering emergency placements can be contacted at short notice to accept unplanned placement of children requiring care.

- **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. Respite care can be for a few hours a day, a week-end, the duration of a school holiday, or for a specific period.
- **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.
- **Family and Friends (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.
- **Staying Put:** Enables fostered young people to remain living in the foster carer's home post 18 years whilst developing further independent skills and managing the transition to adulthood. The case is overseen by the Leaving Care Service.

## 4. Recruitment

- Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering completes an annual recruitment strategy which is based on the assessed needs of the looked after children of Sandwell.
- The recruitment strategy is reviewed and updated annually to ensure that this is consistent with patterns of need. Recruitment events are then held at regular intervals.

## 5. Assessment and Preparation

- After making an enquiry, all prospective foster carers are provided with an information pack and will have an initial home assessment visit to discuss their interest in fostering in more detail. This forms part of the Stage 1 process.
- Applicants will need to complete consent to checks allowing the service to complete statutory checks on them. Once consent to check forms are received back from applicants: statutory checks are carried out, including Disclosure and Barring (DBS) checks on all household members, which comply with the requirements of Schedule 3 of the Fostering Services Regulations of 2011.
- Applicants are also invited to attend the Skills to Foster preparation training.
- Stage 2 of the fostering assessment process is when an assessing social worker is allocated to assess the suitability of the applicants. The service aims at completing all assessments within four months of application.

## 6. Approval and Termination of Approval

- Once completed, the Assessment report is presented to Fostering Panel for recommendation on suitability. Any recommendation made by the Fostering Panel must be approved by the Agency Decision-Maker.

- Sandwell Children's Trust 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.
- The foster carers then enter a signed foster carer agreement with Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering Services which sets out a range of terms and conditions about being a foster carer.
- 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.
- Following any proposed decision not to approve applicants of a foster carer by the Agency Decision-Maker the applicant/carer has the right to make representation to Sandwell Children's Trust Panel or to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) Panel. The decision following panel will then be made by the ADM. Information on the IRM will be provided by the Fostering Service.
- When foster carers decide to retire, or resign from the fostering service, then the Fostering Panel are provided with notification of this.

## 7. Matching

- Full information is taken about the child's placement needs to assist in the matching process. As far as possible children are placed within the Sandwell area so that contact with family and friends, continuity with school and leisure pursuits can be maintained and links to services can be kept.
- When a placement is not available within the Trust then placements with independent fostering agencies may be commissioned.
- The Fostering Service keeps information about unmet placement needs of looked after children. The Team Manager for Fostering support ensures that there is a weekly matching discussion about children who are awaiting placements and foster care availability within the fostering team meeting. Information will be used to inform the sufficiency strategy.
- 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.
- An emergency list of foster carers is provided for use by out of hours' services.

## 8. Training and development for Foster Carers

- The Skills to Foster Training programme which is a pre-approval training is offered to applicants.

- Post approval all foster carers are expected to attend training as identified in their Professional Development Plan (PDP). This is then reviewed in supervision. Learning may be through formal training or through Artemis online training offered by Sandwell Children's Trust, reflections of reading in supervision or through informal support from professionals.
- Foster carers are expected to complete their Training, Support and Development Standard Portfolio within 12 months of approval and are supported to do this through workshops that are provided by the Fostering Service.
- Family and Friends (Connected Persons) Carers are expected to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD) within 18 months of approval.
- Supervising social workers discuss foster carers' training needs as an integral part of the supervision process and the annual foster carer review will address carers' training and development needs through a review.
- Foster carers are expected to provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children in their care. Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering equips carers with the knowledge and strategies to identify and address bullying, whether in the foster home or outside it.

## 9. Support

- All foster carers receive an allowance fortnightly and payments for young people. Foster carers are advised about what the allowance should cover in caring for the child or young person. Foster carers are paid a fee for each child in placement and this is increased on satisfactory completion of the Training, Support and Development Standards.
- All foster carers have an allocated supervising social worker from Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering who visits, supports and supervises the carer. The supervising social worker will visit six weekly or more frequently if required. They will also work closely with children's' social workers.
- All foster carers have access to the foster carer handbook. The service has an on-line handbook. The handbook provides access to policies, procedures and guidance for foster carers.
- All foster carers have an annual review, chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer from Sandwell Children's Trust. The first review after approval is presented to the Fostering Panel. In addition, Fostering Panel will also consider the reviews of foster carers where there have been specific and significant complaints, allegations, or issues about standards of care or other major changes in circumstances.
- Foster carers can access out of office hours' support from Sandwell Children's Trust Emergency Duty Team.
- Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering holds bi-monthly support groups for foster carers. Foster carers are encouraged to attend and this is set out as an expectation in the Foster Carer Agreement.

- Whilst foster carers might be involved in providing transport for children there is also support provided for some children to be transported to and from school and contact if required and to supervise contact.
- All approved foster carers are members of Foster Talk, who can provide support on several areas which include legal and financial matters. This organisation also provides independent support to foster carers who are subject to allegations.
- The Fostering Service provides regular updates for foster carers through the fostering newsletter, foster care forum and support groups.

## 10. Fostering Panel

The Fostering Service has a Fostering Panel constituted in accordance with Regulation 23 of the Fostering Services regulations 2011 (amended 2013).

Fostering Panels have an independent role separate from Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering.

All panel members' annual appraisals are conducted by the panel chair and panel adviser. The Panel Chairs annual appraisal is conducted by the Panel Adviser and the Agency Decision-Maker.

Sandwell Children's Trust has one established Fostering Panel that meets fortnightly. Additional panel meetings are arranged if required.

The functions of the Fostering Panel are to consider:

- Each application and recommend whether to not a person is suitable to be a foster Carer, Family and Friends Foster Carer (Connected Persons) and their terms of approval.
- The first annual review of each approved carers and any other review as requested by the fostering service.
- The termination of approval or change of terms of approval of a Foster Carer.
- Applicants and existing foster carers are invited and encouraged to attend Panel when their application or review is presented to Panel.
- The recommendation of panel is conveyed verbally to the applicant on the day of panel. The draft panel minutes are forwarded to the Panel Chair, panel members and Social Workers who attended panel. The Chair approves and finalises the minutes before they are passed to the Agency Decision-Maker.
- The Decision-Maker reaches a decision in relation to any application within seven working days of receiving the final panel minutes, and this is conveyed to the applicants verbally within two working days and in writing within five working days, in line with statutory requirements.



- **Representation:** When the Agency Decision-Maker decides not to propose approval then a Qualifying Determination Letter is sent to the applicants and they have 28 days to make representations to Sandwell Children's Services Trust Panel or the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). The decision following panel will then be made by the ADM.
- The Panel has a quality assurance role and monitors the standard of reports presented to it and feeds back any concerns to the Agency Decision-Maker.

## 11. Management structure and staffing

Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering Agency reports to the Corporate Parenting Board, who provides a scrutiny function regarding placement activity. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People [Cabinet Member for Children's Services] is Councillor Simon Hackett.

The **Responsible Individual and Agency Decision-Maker** for the Fostering Service is Tracy Collins, Group Head for LAC Placement Provider Services.

Menna Davies is the **Registered Manager** and the **Team Manager** is Balbir Sahota.

The **Fostering Agency Adviser** is Maxine Ellis.

**Fostering Social Workers:** All Fostering Social Workers are qualified (Diploma in Social Work/CQSW) and are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

**All Fostering Service staff are subject to the Trust's policy on recruitment, staffing, equal opportunities and disciplinary.**

See Appendix 1 Current Structure chart (draft). This is under review by the Trust.

**Fostering Service location:**  
**Wellman Building**  
**Oldbury**  
**West Midlands**  
**B69 3DE**

## 12. Complaints

All prospective foster carers, birth families and where appropriate family members of children who are in foster care are provided with written information about the Trust's complaints procedure.

All young people, who are in care and who are of an appropriate age and understanding are likewise informed of the complaints procedure and are also informed about accessing advocacy services via the IRO service.

Fostering staff are fully conversant with the complaints procedure.

The Complaints Manager provides intervention, problem solving, independent investigation and mediation.

The Complaints Manager may be contacted by telephone on: 0121 569 7867 or by writing:

Customer Focus Team  
Sandwell Council House  
Freeth Street  
Oldbury  
B69 3DE

Information about the complaints procedure can be provided in large print, Braille, audio tape or in another language on request to the Complaints Manager.

## 12.1 Fostering Panel Complaints

Any complaint about the Fostering Panel should be directed to the Panel Adviser and Chair to assist in resolution. If the matter cannot be resolved at Stage 1 then the usual complaints procedure for Sandwell Children's Trust will be used.

## 13. Details of the Registration Authority

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD  
E-mail: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

## 14. Details for the Children's Commissioner for England

Anne Longfield OBE  
Children's Commissioner for England  
Sanctuary Buildings  
20 Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT