



Statement of Purpose

April 2024 - March 2025



fostersandwell.co.uk

Contents

Introduction and Policy Context	3
Aims and Objectives	4
Management and Staff Structure	7
Services Provided to Children	8
Matching	10
Children's Guide	11
Recruitment and Assessment of Prospective Foster Carers	12
Fostering Panel	13
Foster Carer Charter	15
Support and Supervision for Foster Carers	15
Review the Approval of Foster Carers	16
Training and Development for Foster Carers	17
Complaints	18
Allegations	19
Fostering Panel Complaints	19
Quality Monitoring	19
Registered Manager	19
Responsible Individual	19
Arrangements for the Revision and Circulation of the Statement of Purpose	20
Details of the Registration Authority	20
Details for the Children's Commissioner for England	20
Appendix 1 – Staffing Structure	21

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 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.

In Sandwell, we believe that all children and young people have the right to be healthy, happy, and safe; to be loved, valued, and respected; and to have high aspirations for their future. We would wish all children to have secure relationships with family, friends, and carers, be eager, excited, curious, and engaged in learning, have self-confidence, be able to co-operate and communicate socially and have the best possible health and development.

The Fostering Service is one of many services provided for children that help to achieve this vision. More information about children's services in Sandwell Children's Trust can be found via – www.sandwellchildrenstrust.org

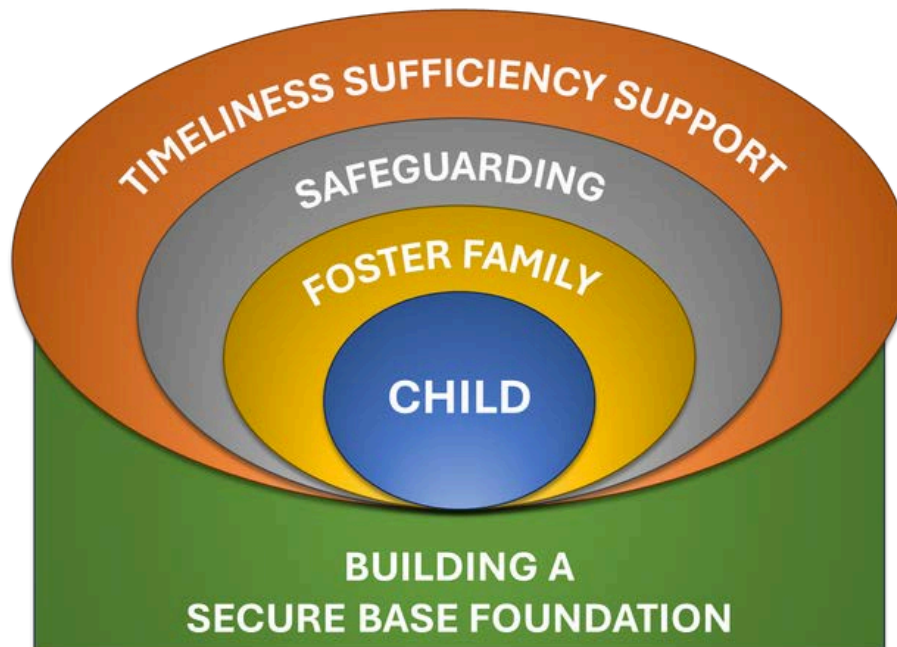
This Statement of Purpose has been produced in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards.

It sets out the core aims, and objectives of Sandwell Children's Trust for Foster Carers, Fostering Social Workers, Child Care Social Workers, Children, Young People, and any person with parental responsibilities along with the range of services provided.



Aims and Objectives

We aim to deliver a timely service, increase sufficiency, and provide good quality support to our children and families. We will do this using the STAR Model (strengths based, trauma informed and relational) approach to protecting and supporting children and families with the secure base practice model.



Our ethos – Children and families

- We have high aspirations for our children, we make a difference and change children's lives for the better
- We place children at the heart of everything we do
- We keep families safe, keeping them together where possible
- We work alongside our families, guided by their needs
- We empower and work with the whole, extended family
- We only use language that our children and young people can understand
- We celebrate our children and enable them to smile, laugh, play and succeed

Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering is committed to providing high quality foster homes 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 decisions are made. We work within an anti-discriminatory framework as part of the Trust Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.

Our Vision

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 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 on recruitment of foster carers who can meet the needs of looked after children in the borough.
- To focus on increasing the number of approved foster carer households.
- To maintain a wide range of support services including independent support from Foster Talk and New Family Social 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 provide foster homes for children who need to be placed in a suitable home on an emergency or planned basis, whether this is with mainstream foster carers or family and friends (connected persons carers).
- To offer services to children on the principle that their needs and welfare are best met within a caring and nurturing environment.
- To provide a high-quality Fostering Service to children, their birth parents, foster carers, and social work colleagues
- To provide foster homes that meet the needs of children requiring such a placement.

- To ensure safe, stable, and consistent care for every child placed in foster care.
- To ensure that the ethnic origin, cultural background, religious heritage, and language of children are fully recognised, valued, and promoted.
- To recruit a range of Foster Carers from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds to meet the needs of children needing placements.
- 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. Staff are regularly supervised, and their work monitored.
- There is a 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.

Management and Staff Structure

Fostering Service structure: Please see Appendix 1.

The ultimate responsibility for the Fostering Service rests with Sandwell Children's Trust. The Trust then gives strategic leadership to the Fostering Service. The Independent Fostering Agency only recruits foster carers to meet the needs of children known to Sandwell Children's Trust.

The Head of Service for Children in Care and Fostering has strategic responsibility and oversight for the activities of the fostering service and promotes partnership working across the Trust with partner agencies. The Head of Service also holds the role of Responsible Individual for the fostering service.

The Service Manager for Fostering (Registered Manager) provides operational management, quality assurance, performance and budget management, and coordinates the work of the fostering teams.

Team Managers are responsible for the day-to-day management of social workers, recruiting, assessing, and supervising foster carers, matching of children to available carers, dealing with complaints and representations and producing activity reports and statistical returns.

The teams consist of a recruitment, marketing and assessment team, a mainstream support team and connected carer assessment and support team.

Team Managers provide regular supervision to their respective teams. The Team Managers work closely with the marketing, recruitment and training support officers and all other teams within the Children's Trust.

All Managers and Social Workers within the service are professionally qualified with commensurate social work experience.



Services Provided to Children

Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering recruits, trains, assesses, supervises, supports, and reviews all foster carers within the Trust.

The primary purpose of the fostering service is to provide high quality, safe secure and caring foster families for children who are unable to live at home. Wherever possible and where safe to do so, children will be placed with someone from their extended family or a close family friend. These arrangements are recognised in legislation as "friends and family" foster care. When this is not possible, suitable homes will be found with one of our approved foster carers or a suitable agency. We aim to clearly identify the emotional, physical, cultural, and religious needs of a child and find a home that can meet their needs.

Except in emergencies, we plan introductory meetings between the child and the foster carer/s to lessen the anxiety for the child moving to a new family.

When a child or young person needs to be looked after and family or friends (connected persons) come forward to undertake this task, we will carry out appropriate assessments based on the duration of care required and will monitor, supervise, and support the arrangement under the Fostering Services Regulations. There are a range of placements provided through the Fostering Service which include the following:

Short-term care: Foster carers undertaking short-term care do so in a variety of circumstances until an agreed permanence plan can be implemented for the child.

Long-term care: 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 care: Foster carers offering emergency care 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 weekend, the duration of a school holiday or for a specific period.

Specialist care: Planned care where a child or young person is assessed as able to 'Step down' from residential care to a fostering home or to avoid a child or young person entering residential care.

Parent and child care: Foster carers offering parent and child care will provide support to a parent to help them to provide appropriate care for their child.

Fostering for Adoption: A child is placed with foster carers who are approved adopters and, subject to a Care Order being made or parental consent, are expected to become the child's adoptive family. The child therefore benefits from early care with their eventual permanent carers.

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 carers home post 18 years whilst developing further independent skills and managing the transition to adulthood. The case is overseen by the Leaving Care Service.

Children will be visited in their foster home by both their own social worker and the foster carers supervising social worker. Children will be encouraged to express their wishes and views about the foster home and will be invited to provide written feedback for the Foster Carers Annual Review. The children of Foster Carers are invited to provide written feedback regarding their parents Foster Carer Annual Review.

Matching

Full information is taken about the child's needs to assist in the matching process. As far as possible we aim to place children within Sandwell so that time with family and friends, continuity with school and leisure pursuits can be maintained and links to services can be kept. A 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.

If agreed, the match is proposed to the Foster Carer(s) and the Child's Social Worker who will further consider the strengths and vulnerabilities, involving the child as appropriate, and then decide if the specific foster home is able to meet the child/ren's needs.

The Fostering Service keeps information about the unmet care needs of looked after children. The Placement Officer monitors unmet care need for the Fostering Service.

The Team Manager for mainstream fostering support ensures that there is a weekly matching discussion about children who are waiting and foster care availability. The placement officer meets each morning with the external placements team to discuss opportunities for children who are waiting. Information is used to inform the sufficiency strategy and future recruitment activity.

Where there is foster carer availability an emergency list of foster carers is provided for use by the out of hours services.



Children's Guide

A children's guide is provided to all children in care, when placed, when they are of sufficient understanding to be able to benefit from the information obtained in the guide.

The aim is to provide information about what it means to be fostered, what social workers do and what children can do if they are not happy in their foster home or if they have any worries or concerns. The guides are reviewed annually.

The children's guide includes how a child can contact their IRO, the Children's Commissioner for England, Ofsted if they wish to raise a concern with inspectors and how they can secure access to an independent advocate.



Recruitment and Assessment of Prospective Foster Carers

The Fostering Service works to a recruitment and retention strategy which is updated annually. The strategy recognises the need to recruit local foster carers who will be able to meet the diverse needs of the children requiring foster homes.

Sandwell Children's Trust will recruit and assess a diverse range of foster carers who are able to meet the needs of children in care.

All members of the public who make an initial enquiry in relation to becoming a foster carer will be referred to the fostering service. All enquiries will be treated as a potential resource and given a prompt response. They will be contacted, to gather further information and for general discussion about fostering.

When a foster home is not available within the Trust then a foster home with independent fostering agencies may be commissioned.

Applicants will be sent an information pack and letter. An initial enquiry form will be completed gathering basic information about the household. A check will be carried out in relation to applicants and all members of their household on Children's service records.

Where the applicant or member of the household is known, the enquiry will be passed to the manager for a decision on how to proceed. At this early stage, it may be appropriate to advise applicants against pursuing fostering if they clearly do not meet the criteria to foster. The manager's decision will be communicated to the person concerned with reasons given, the decision will be recorded.

Where the decision is to proceed the applicant will be invited to a planned information event and an initial visit to the applicant's home will be arranged. The purpose of this visit is to discuss fostering in more depth and to allow the social worker to assess the suitability of their accommodation. An application form may then be provided to the applicant to complete and once returned the manager will make the decision whether the assessment process will commence. The two-stage assessment process will be fully explained to applicants and will be thorough and fair. The fostering service will work in partnership with applicants at all stages.

Checks and references are undertaken in Stage 1, these include:

- DBS Checks
- Written personal references
- Employment references
- Local Authority/Ofsted Checks
- Medical Checks
- School References (for children already within the family)
- Pet Assessment

Preparation training (Skills to foster) is provided, and all applicants are expected to complete the required training programme.

Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the assessment process can run concurrently. If the fostering service came to a view that an application will not succeed at Stage 1 applicants will be given reasons. Some information for the assessment is provided in confidence therefore there may be some occasion where it may not be possible for reasons to be fully explained.

If the manager decides that the prospective foster carers can proceed to stage 2, the case will be allocated to a social worker to complete the assessment and consider the suitability to foster. The report and decision as to the applicant's suitability to foster should be completed within the statutory eight months of the application being accepted. However, the service aims to complete assessments within 16 weeks.

Once the assessment is completed this will be presented to the fostering panel for a recommendation.

Fostering Panel

The fostering service has a fostering panel constituted in accordance with regulation 23 of the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011. The service maintains "a central list" of panel members. The Panel Chair and Vice Chair are independent people with professional experience of fostering. They are supported by the Panel Adviser.

All panel member's annual appraisals are conducted by the panel chair and panel advisor. The panel chair's annual appraisal is conducted by the Panel Adviser and the Responsible Individual/Registered Manager.

Sandwell Children's Trust has one established Fostering Panel that meet on a regular basis. Detailed minutes are kept of all panel meetings.

The functions of the panel are to consider:

- Applications for approval and to recommend whether a person is suitable to act as a Foster Carer
- To review approved carers and any subsequent reviews referred by the Fostering Service
- To oversee the conduct of assessments carried out by the Fostering Service

- Advise on and monitor the effectiveness of the procedure for undertaking reviews of Foster Carers
- Give advice and make recommendation on any cases referred to the Fostering Panel 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 panel consists of a wide range of professional experiences with a good understanding of children and young people.
- 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 advisor, panel members and social workers who attended panel. The chair approves and finalises the minutes before they are passed to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM).
- The ADM 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.
- When the ADM 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 Trust panel or the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). The decision following any representation process will be presented back to panel and a final decision will then be made by the ADM.
- The panel has a quality assurance role and monitors the standards of reports presented to it and feeds back any concerns to the Registered Manager and ADM.
- 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 sign a foster carer agreement with Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering Service which sets out a range of terms and conditions about being a foster carer.

Foster Carer Charter

Sandwell Children's Trust Foster Carer Charter can be found on our website: <https://www.sandwellchildrenstrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/The-Foster-Carers-Charter-Sandwell.pdf>.

The Fostering Service is committed to providing and promoting safe, stable, and nurturing placements where the outcomes and life chances for looked after children are positive. To achieve this, it is important to have a working relationship which is based on trust and respect between all those involved in the care of the child.

Support and Supervision of Foster Carers

- All foster carers receive a fortnightly allowance and foster carers are advised about what the allowance should cover in caring for the child or young person.
- All foster carers have an allocated supervising social worker from the Fostering Service who visits, supports, and supervises the carer. The supervising social worker will visit eight-weekly or more frequently if required. They will work in conjunction with children's' social workers.
- All foster carers have access to the on-line foster carer handbook which contains useful information for foster carers in relation to fostering issues.
- The foster home is inspected annually, without appointment, by the fostering service to make sure that it continues to meet the needs of foster children.
- The Fostering Service have monthly support groups and quarterly coffee mornings. Foster carers are encouraged to attend.
- All 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.
- Foster carers can access out of office hours support from Sandwell Children's Trust Emergency Duty Team.

Reviewing the Approval of Foster Carers

A review of foster carers' approval must take place not more than a year after approval, and thereafter whenever the fostering service provider considers it necessary, but at intervals of not more than a year.

A review will consider whether a foster carer's approval should continue and if there should be any changes to their terms of approval.

An allegation or complaint might well trigger a review of approval, as could any major change in the foster carer's household – for example, a serious health issue, separation, or divorce. These matters will be presented to the Fostering Panel for Review.

The first review after approval is presented to the Fostering Panel. All Foster Panel Reviews are presented to the agency decision maker for a decision about ongoing approval.

Annual reviews (excluding the first review and reviews where there has been a significant change of circumstances) may be reviewed by the Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (FIRO). Where a review is presented to the FIRO, the FIRO will make the decision about continued approval. Where the FIRO identifies concerns/significant changes in circumstances the FIRO will make the decision to refer the review to the Fostering Panel for a recommendation and ADM decision.

Following any proposed decision not to approve applicants by the Agency Decision Maker, the applicant/carer has the right to make representation to Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering Panel or to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) Panel. The fostering panel will subsequently review any representations, make a further recommendation and the case will be presented back to the Agency Decision Maker for a further Qualifying Determination decision.

Information on the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) will be provided by the Fostering Service.

When foster carers decide to retire or resign, the fostering panel are provided with a notification from the fostering agency.



Training and Development for Foster Carers

As part of the assessment process all foster carers are expected to attend the Skills to Foster Training programme.

Once approved all foster carers are expected to undertake a range of training to update their skills. There are core training modules that are mandatory and must be completed in the first year of approval and every 3 years thereafter. Training will be identified in their supervision with their supervising social worker and reviewed regularly. Learning may be through formal training or through the online training offered by Sandwell Children's Trust. Development can also include reflections from reading in supervision or through informal support from professionals.

A foster carer skill level scheme is in place for mainstream carers to be able to progress and advance through their fostering career with many development opportunities and bespoke training offers to support this.

Foster carers are expected to complete their Training, Support and Development Standard (TSD) Portfolio within 12 months of approval and are supported to do this by their supervising social worker and through workshops that are provided by the Fostering Service. The national training, support and development standards provide a framework for training for the first year of a foster carer role and sets out what foster carers should know, understand and be able to do.

Family and Friends (Connected Persons) Carers are expected to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD) within 18 months of approval. Foster Carers' personal development plans set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development needs and experience.

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.

Supervising Social Workers discuss foster carers' training needs as an integral part of the supervision process. The annual foster carer review will review the foster carer's personal development plan and the effectiveness of training and development received is evaluated.

Complaints

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

All complaints and queries will be dealt with in a manner that meets Sandwell Children's Trust local and national standards.

Complaints by children are dealt with under the Children's Trust complaints procedure, which needs a short time for responding to children's complaints and the provision of independent advocacy.

Sandwell Children's Trust Fostering staff are fully conversant with the complaint's procedure.

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

The Corporate Complaints Manager may be contacted by telephone on: 0121 569 3101 or by writing to:

Customer Services Complaints Team

Wellman Building
Dudley Road
Oldbury
B69 3DL

Email: cs_firmstep@sandwellchildrenstrust.org

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

Allegations

Allegations against Foster Carers are dealt with in accordance with the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB), procedures for managing allegations/concerns about Foster Carers. All Foster Carers subject to any allegation are offered independent support from - Foster Talk.

Fostering Panel Complaints

Any complaint about the Fostering Panel should be directed to the Panel Advisor 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.

Quality Monitoring

The quality of the work of the fostering service is monitored through staff supervision, which is linked to an appraisal system, eight weekly recorded visits to foster carers including unannounced visits, annual reviews, feedback from training sessions, case recording and peer/management audits.

The panel agency advisor provides scrutiny and feedback as does the fostering panel chairperson. Team Managers monitor data about incidents of concern in foster care including restraint, allegations, complaints, and unauthorised absence. The Registered Manager (Operational Manager) monitors the schedule 6 and 7 requirements of the Fostering Service Regulations 2011.

The information gathered thoroughly annual reports, audits, inspectors, and customer feedback is constantly evaluated by the managers of the fostering service to judge its on-going effectiveness and make changes where necessary.

In addition, the service is subject to inspection by Ofsted.

Registered Manager

The Registered Manager (SC2 currently submitted and under review with OFSTED) for the fostering service is Vanessa Strang

Responsible Individual

The Responsible Individual is Kate Mullinder.

Arrangements for the Revision and Circulation of the Statement of Purpose

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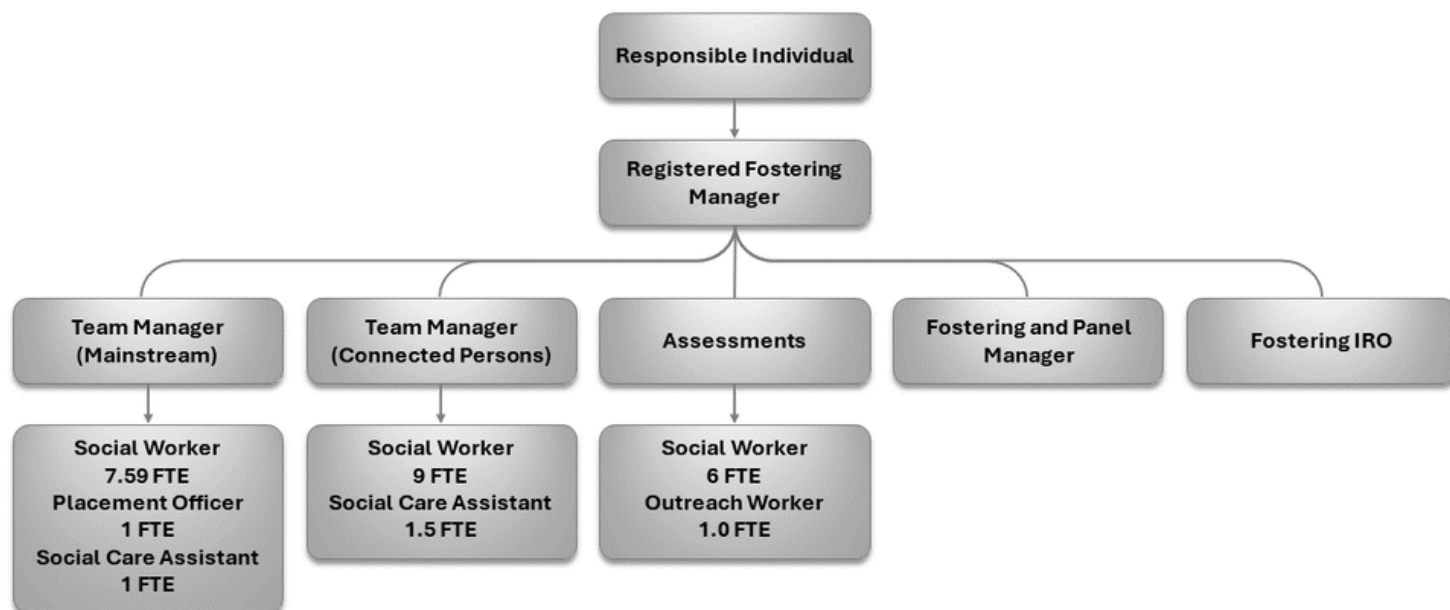
Details of the Registration Authority

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
26-32 Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
E-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Details for the Children's Commissioner for England

Dame Rachel de Souza
Children's Commissioner for England
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street London
SW1P 3BT

Appendix 1: Fostering Service structure



Sandwell Independent Fostering Agency Statement of Purpose and Function
 [First approved: 27/09/2018 – Updated: 11/02/2019 Reviewed: 27/09/2019]

Revisions:

- 16/10/2019
- 18/12/2020
- 31/03/2021
- 28/03/2022
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