

<b>1.1</b>	<b>Fostering Service Statement of Purpose (2007)</b>
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Source:	London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Fostering Service
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This Statement of Purpose relates to the Fostering Service provided by the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and is a requirement under The Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The Statement of Purpose is formally approved by elected members. Furthermore, it should be reviewed, updated and modified, where necessary, at least annually.

### **1) Aims and Objectives**

The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Fostering Service aims to provide a range of fostering services, which are consistent with best practise, national standards and fostering regulations.

The primary aim of the service is to provide a range of high quality foster placements suitable for meeting the diverse needs of looked after children and young people. The ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language of looked after children and young people and the particular needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and positively valued and promoted when placement decisions are made.

The secondary aim is to provide consistently high quality services and support to Richmond foster carers by employing sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.

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

- To have in place a recruitment strategy, which focuses on the recruitment of local carers who are able to meet the diverse, needs of looked after children in the borough.
- To provide training courses according to a yearly training plan and based on foster carers needs so that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.
- To maintain a wide range of support services to ensure that approved foster carers feel valued as part of the Fostering Service and their services as carers are retained.
- To achieve an annual net increase in the number of approved foster carers.

- To increase the number of specialist fostering carers, to provide placements for young people in need of specialist care.
- To promote the educational achievement of looked after children and young people by ensuring that foster carers are supported and are able to 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 make use of leisure time.
- To ensure that foster carers have access to a multi-disciplinary team in the fields of education, health and mental health for advice and support in managing the particular needs of looked after children and young people in their care.
- To maintain a competitive, annually reviewed fostering fees and allowance structure, based on nationally recommended rates, ensuring all payments are paid on time.
- To ensure that staff employed by the Borough 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, monitored and appraised.

## **2) Principles and Standards of Care**

The principles upon which the Fostering Service is based on the Every Child Matters (ECM) Outcomes Framework and the Children and Young People's Service Plan.

The five ECM outcomes which we want to achieve for all children and young people, living, working, and educated in the borough are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a positive contribution
- Achieving economic well-being

Foster carers are expected to comply with the requirements of the UK National Standards for Foster Care (1999).

The principals and standards guiding the service are:

- The interests and welfare of children is paramount at all times, and this will be reflected in all aspects of the work.
- Looked after children will be consulted regularly on all aspects of their placement, and their wishes and feelings taken into consideration. The wishes and feelings of birth children in fostering households will also be sought and taken into consideration.
- All work will be undertaken in partnership with looked after children, their parents, birth families, foster carers, social workers, and other relevant departments and agencies.
- The service will advocate for looked after children to ensure that they have access to their own social worker, and any specialist services that they need.
- The service will operate in a manner that promotes equality, values diversity, challenges discrimination, and aims to meet the varied needs of looked after children. In recruiting foster carers and making placements consideration will be given to needs arising out of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability, language and sexuality.
- The safety and the protection of looked after children will be an overriding priority for the service.
- The needs of looked after children will be met in respect of education, and this will be achieved by working closely with other professionals. The Fostering Service will aim to ensure that each child has a stable school placement, a personal education plan, and the educational support necessary to meet his or her needs.
- The needs of looked after children will be met in respect of health including mental health, and this will be achieved by working closely with other professionals including the Specialist Nurse for looked after children and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.
- Children will be supported and encouraged to develop independence skills appropriate to age and ability, and encouraged to develop friendships and leisure interests in line with their wishes and individual care plans.
- Contact between the looked after child and their birth family, or other important people will be recognised and promoted where this is consistent with the care plan. Where it is possible and consistent with the child's best interest, siblings will be placed together.
- Foster carers and staff will be valued and supported in a way that assists them to provide safe and effective care for looked after children.

- The service will be regularly monitored against a range of quality standards, and will strive for constant improvement.
- Children, their birth families, and foster carers will be encouraged to make comments and provide feedback, and will have access to the procedure for making complaints.

The Foster Carer Handbook is supplied to each carer and is reviewed annually. It provides a full description of the Fostering Service, summaries of local policies and practical advice about how to provide care of the highest quality. The Fostering Service also organises a learning and development program each year which provides carers with learning opportunities to build on their skills.

### **3) Services Provided**

The service aims to ensure that when children and young people cannot remain with their own family and come into their care, the preferred option is foster care.

The Fostering Service actively recruits, trains, assesses, supervises, supports and reviews Richmond foster carers.

Foster placements are provided for children and young people with approved Richmond foster carers wherever possible. If no suitable placement is identified, placements with neighbouring boroughs or Independent Fostering Agencies may be commissioned.

Where a child or young person needs to be "looked after" and relatives or friends come forward to undertake this task, then the Fostering Service will monitor the placement under the Fostering Services Regulations and carry out an interim assessment if the length of the placement requires this. The Service aims to support kinship carers where this is possible and appropriate.

Placements set up in Private and Voluntary Agencies Ensuring Compliance with Safeguarding Checklist

**The Fostering Service provides the following types of placements:**

- **Task-centred**

These placements are usually planned periods of care however task-centred carers also provide placements on an emergency basis.

- **Permanent Fostering**

When children cannot return home and when adoption is not the right option, permanent fostering provides an alternative form of permanent substitute care for the duration of childhood.

- **Family and friends foster carers (Kinship)**

Where a family or friend comes forward to offer care to a “looked after” child the fostering service, assesses, approves and provides support to carers.

- **Specialist fostering scheme for ‘hard to place’ young people**

This is a multi-disciplinary project for ‘hard to place’ young people; working with health, education and other professionals. The scheme is intended to enable the young person to reduce offending behaviour, self-harm and substance misuse, to improve school attendance and grades, improve relationships with birth family, and improve their ability to live successfully in a family setting.

- **Supported lodgings scheme**

The Fostering Service is also responsible for approving and supervising supported lodgings carers who provide accommodation and support to young people leaving the care system.

- **Short Break Care**

Short-Break care is coordinated and managed by the Children with Disabilities service, This services provides respite and short-breaks to families of children with disabilities.

#### **4) Management Structure**

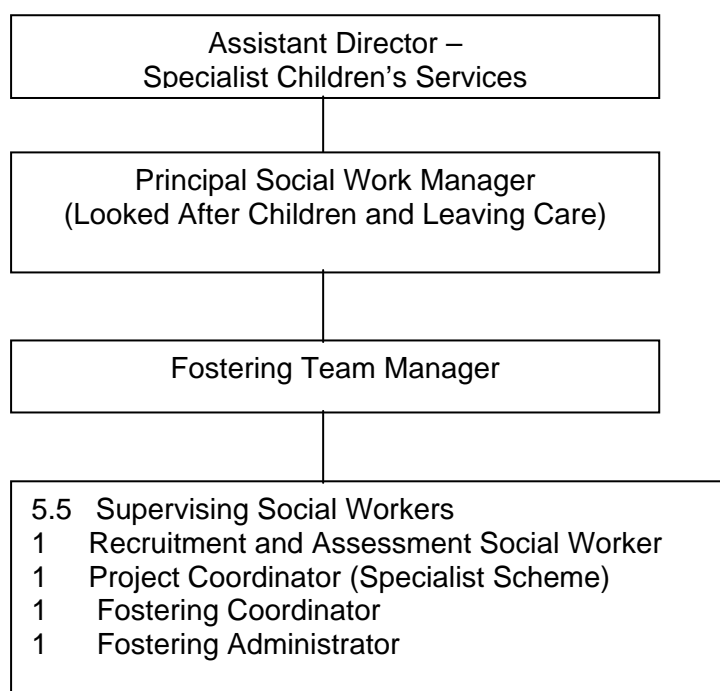
The Fostering Service is located within the Specialist Children’s Service Division of London Borough of Richmond upon Thames as part of the Education and Children’s Service Directorate.

As a department of the Local Authority, the service operates within the framework of regulation and statutory guidance that applies to all Local Authorities. The Service is inspected annually by the Council for Social Care Inspection (CSCI). The service is also included as part of the Council’s Annual Performance Assessment process for children’s services which is conducted jointly by CSCI and Ofsted.

The Corporate Parenting Group examines and reviews the activity of the Fostering Service through receiving the annual report of the Service.

## 5) Number, Relevant Qualifications and Experience of Staff

In recruiting staff, the Fostering Service work to the requirements set out in the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering.



Lisa Sepahi (Fostering Team Manager) is qualified with BSW in Social Work and Masters of Social Work in social policy and administration. She has worked in fostering for five years as a social worker and manager.

All of the social work staff hold a professional qualification and have a range of experience in working with children and families and in fostering. The Fostering Coordinator and Administrator have skills and experience that are particular to their positions, and all staff members receive appropriate supervision and training. Information about each member of staff is included in the Fostering Team Booklet that is routinely made available to prospective foster carers.

As of 31.12.06 all posts within the team are filled with permanent staff and there are no vacancies.

## **6) Recruitment and Approval of Foster Carers**

The Fostering Service recruits and supports foster carers in accordance with the National Minimum Standards for Fostering and the Code of Practice on the Recruitment, Assessment, Approval, Training, Management and Support

of Foster Carers. Plans for recruiting foster carers are outline the Fostering Recruitment Strategy which is update and reviewed annually.

- 6.1 The Fostering Service employs a Fostering Coordinator who is responsible for co-ordinating campaigns to recruit foster carers. Normally these include specific advertising in local papers, recruitment events, editorials, posters in local venues, and various other methods. Information is also available via the council's web-site.
- 6.2 The Richmond website enables those interested in Fostering to register their interest on-line.
- 6.3 Following an enquiry either on-line or via the services freephone line the Recruitment and Assessment Social Worker sends out an information pack..
- 6.4 The next step in the process is a home visit the Recruitment worker at this stage a decision is made to recommend carers to attend, preparation training, "*Skills to Foster*".
- 6.5 After successful completion of the initial training course prospective foster carers are invited to make a formal application and then a fostering worker is allocated to undertake the Home Study assessment report.
- 6.6 The service aims to complete assessments within 3-5 months. The Home Study report is then considered by the Fostering Panel. The Panel makes a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker (Assistant Director, Specialist Children's Services) as to the suitability to foster and the approval status.

## **7) Support and Supervision of Foster Carers**

- 7.1 On approval foster carers are allocated a Supervising Social Worker. The Supervising Social Worker monitors the foster carer's performance and current placements, and provides advice, information and support. As well as regular home visits (minimum six weekly) and meetings, the SSW undertakes at least one unannounced visit annually and carries out a comprehensive annual review of the foster carer.
- 7.2 Foster carers are provided with a Fostering handbook and are required to sign a foster carer agreement after approval.
- 7.3 There is a robust training programme for foster carers and it is expected that carers will complete 3 training courses per year and undertake identified mandatory training courses. Training sessions are held on a rolling programme at a variety of times to suit all circumstances.

- 7.4 Further training includes supporting carers to undertake NVQ and specific courses, some alongside social workers in the council.
- 7.5 Foster carers will receive regular allowances to cover the costs of fostering, and are provided or loaned necessary equipment, and some specific insurance cover is available to supplement their own insurance arrangements.
- 7.6 All carers are subject to an Annual Foster Home Review that looks at their fostering experience over the previous year including training attended and support provided. Views are sought from the supervising social worker, the foster carer, foster children, birth children, and placing social workers.
- 7.7 The Fostering Panel will consider reviews, in the first year of approval and every three years subsequently there after or more frequently as needed. Following each review the agency decision maker will re-approve the foster carers, or change or terminate the carers' approval.
- 7.8 Reviews are conducted by an independent reviewing officer and independent support is available to carers through Richmond's Foster Carer Association.

## **9) Partnership**

The Fostering Service works in partnership and in collaboration with a number of teams and services in the borough to coordinate and provide support to "looked after children" and carers.

9.1 Looked After Children's team: referrals for placements are received directly from this team, the services works in partnerships with this team with regard to care planning and coordinating care and services for LAC.

9.2 Leaving Care Team: referrals for placements are received directly from this team, the team works together on plans for independence for young people leaving care this is done in partnership with carers.

9.3 Multi-disciplinary team: the fostering service liaise directly with team to coordinate Mental health assessments, referrals to CAMHS, education for LAC, access to LAC nurse, provision of "think space", education surgeries, this team also acts as a vital part of care provision for young people in the Specialist scheme.

9.4 Initial Response team: referrals for placements are received from this team via our duty fostering worker, placements are coordinated and agreed between the two teams.

9.5 Family Support Team: Referrals for placements are received from this team via our duty fostering worker, placements are coordinated and agreed between the two teams.

9.6 Youth Offending Team: Referrals for placements are received from this team via our duty fostering worker; placements are coordinated and agreed between the two teams. Services to young people placed in fostering are also coordinated where there is a need for YOT involvement and risk assessments.

9.7. Disabled Children's service: Referrals for placements are received from this team via our duty fostering worker; placements are coordinated and agreed between the two teams. Services are also coordinated where a child/young person in foster carers requires this support.

## **10) Statistical Information**

The Fostering Service gathers a range of statistical data to assist with monitoring and evaluating performance. Figures are constantly changing, so the information in this section constitutes a snapshot at one point in time.

As of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2006 the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Fostering Service held the approval for 35 sets of foster carers, consisting of 3 specialist foster carers, 26 task centred/ permanent foster carers, 4 kinship foster carers, and 2 respite foster carers. On this date, these foster carers were looking after a total of 41 children and young people (consisting of 3 in specialist fostering, 32 in task-centred or permanent placements, and 6 with family or friends).

## **11) Complaints and Allegations**

11.1 Wherever possible complaints are dealt with informally. Where appropriate, in the first instance, any complaint by or against a foster carer will be dealt with on a problem-solving basis. There is a written procedure given to all foster carers as an as part of the Fostering Handbook. The Council has both corporate and Children Services complaints procedures that operate if no resolution can be achieved at the problem solving stage.

11.2 Where a complaint against a foster carer constitutes a child protection allegation this is dealt with as a child protection enquiry and is investigated under Child Protection procedures.

11.3 The Council has a system for monitoring any incident involving verbal threats, aggression or violence. Foster carers are advised to notify their Supervising Social Worker if they experience such an incident.

11.4 There is a leaflet specifically designed for Children and Young People which advises them what to do if they have a complaint.

11.5 During the year 2006 the Fostering Service received the following numbers of complaints:

Formal complaints: 3

- Complaint/Allegation: Allegation against foster carer regarding Standard of care provided to a young person, CSCI notified Feb. 2006, complaint concluded, further investigation and review of carers undertaken, these represented to Fostering Panel in December 2006..
- Allegation: from parent of fostered young person regarding incident of domestic violence, allegation investigated and found to be unsubstantiated.
- Complaint: Young person complaint regarding foster carer's use of racist remarks, investigated and no-substantial evidence to support the complaint.

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