

**Joint  
Fostering  
Service**

# **Statement of purpose**

## **2017/18**



**achieving  
for children**

This Statement of Purpose relates to the Fostering Service provided by Achieving for Children (AfC) on behalf of the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and is a requirement under the Fostering Services Regulations (England 2011).

## 1) Aims and objectives

The Fostering Service aims to provide a range of fostering services which are consistent with best practice, national standards and fostering regulations.

The primary aim of the service is to provide a range of safe, high quality placements suitable for meeting the diverse needs of children and young people who are looked after. The ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language of children and young people looked after 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 all 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 and publicity strategy, which focuses on the recruitment of local carers who are able to meet the diverse needs of children looked after in the boroughs. This supports the Sufficiency Strategy which outlines the placement needs of our children looked after and aims to enable children to remain in placements within the locality.
- To provide training courses according to a yearly training plan which is 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 or 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 increase in the number of approved fostering households.
- To promote the educational achievement of children looked after and young people by ensuring that foster carers are supported and are able to provide opportunities for children to achieve.
- To promote positive emotional and physical health of children and young people looked after 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 support in the fields of education, health and mental health for advice and support in managing the particular needs of children and young people looked after in their care.
- To maintain competitive and 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 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.

## 2) Principles and standards of care

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

The principles and standards guiding the service are as follows.

- The interests and welfare of children is paramount at all times, and this will be reflected in all aspects of the work.
- Children who are looked after 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 children looked after, their parents, birth families, foster carers, social workers, and other relevant departments and agencies.
- The service will advocate for children looked after 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 children looked after. 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 children looked after will be an overriding priority for the service.
- The needs of children looked after will be met in respect of education, and this will be achieved by working closely with other professionals particularly the Virtual School. 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 children looked after will be met in respect of health including mental health, and this will be achieved by working closely with other professionals including the specialist doctors and nurses for children looked after 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 child looked after 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 children looked after.
- 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.

A 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. This year a single Foster Carers handbook will be produced consistent across both boroughs.

The Fostering Service also organises a learning and development program each year which provides all carers with learning opportunities to build on their skills.

### **3) Services provided**

Fostering is the generic name given to many types of foster care where children looked after spend time (overnight at the minimum) in an approved local authority family.

The Fostering Service actively recruits, trains, assesses, supervises, supports and reviews all Achieving for Children foster carers in Kingston and Richmond.

Foster placements are provided for children and young people with approved Achieving for Children 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 appropriate assessments depending upon the length of the placement required. The service will support family and friends carers where this is possible and appropriate.

Placements made with independent agencies will comply with London Care Services Agreements and internal safeguarding procedures.

**The main types of foster carers recruited and approved by the Achieving for Children Fostering Service for Kingston and Richmond are as follows.**

#### **Family and friends (connected people)**

Where 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 these carers which meets their individual needs and circumstances.

#### **Respite care**

Respite care is planned care for short periods of time. This could be to give the child's family, or main carer, a break or to cover a period where normal care is unavailable. Respite care can range from a few hours a day, a weekend, the duration of a school holiday, or for a specific period of time. It allows a degree of flexibility for those interested in becoming a carer, but unsure whether to stop or reduce working.

#### **Family Link Care**

This service provides respite and short-breaks to families of children with disabilities, managed between the Fostering and Disabled Children's Service. Recruitment information regarding this provision is given to all potential fostering applicants.

### **Task centred**

These placements provide temporary care to children looked after and are approved for a specific number and a specific age range of children. They are usually planned periods of care however task-centred carers also provide placements on an emergency basis.

### **Long term**

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

### **Specialist**

This is a programme 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.

### **Staying put**

Enables previously 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. Support is offered by the Fostering Service and the case overseen by the Leaving Care Service in these instances.

### **Fostering to adopt**

Currently, there is one household approved for both foster care and adoption. This supports children minimise the numbers of moves so where rehabilitation is not feasible children can be adopted without an additional change of placement.

### **Commitment to permanence**

Achieving for Children is committed to achieving permanence for children in its care. Permanence planning is fundamental to the process of care and this is actively monitored. This does mean that placements that may be initially task centred or specialist as well as Family and Friends carers can become permanent placements where it is evidenced that these placements meet the long term needs of the children and young people.

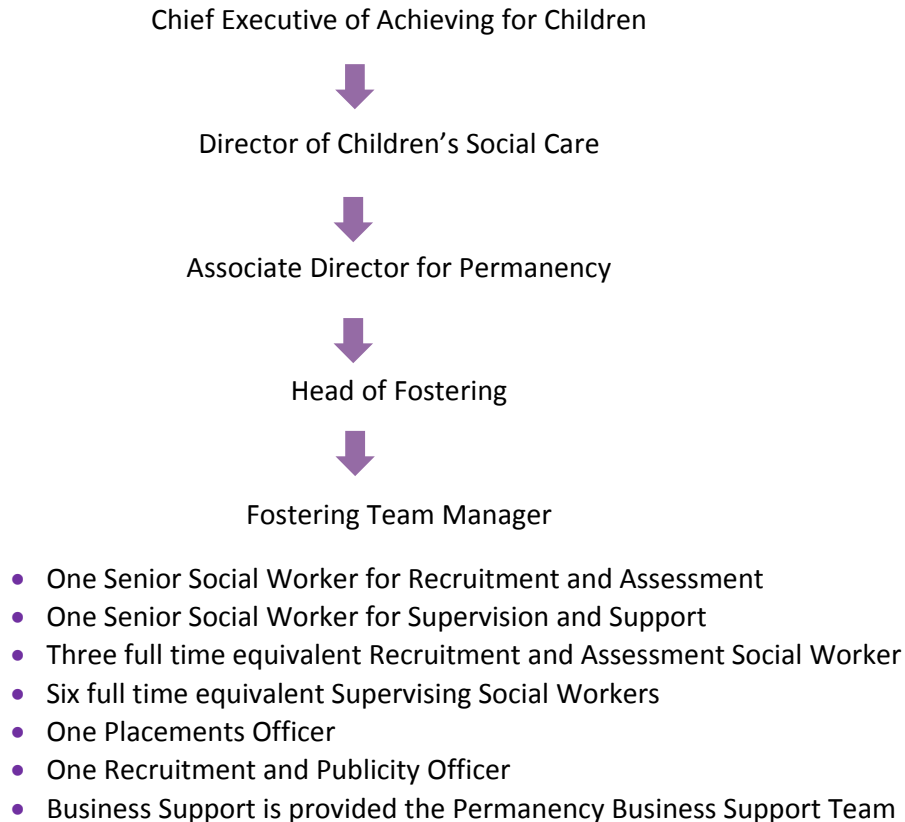
## **4) Management structure**

The Fostering Service is located within Children's Social Care provided by Achieving for Children. The service operates within the framework of regulation and statutory guidance.

The corporate parenting group examines and reviews the activity of the Fostering Service through receiving regular reports of the service.

## 5) Number, relevant qualifications and experience of staff

In recruiting staff, the Fostering Service works to the requirements set out in the Fostering Services Guidance and Regulations 2011 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering 2011.



All managers and social work staff hold a professional qualification in social work and have a range of experience in working with children and families, and in fostering.

Business support staff 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 Foster Carers Handbook that is made available to all foster carers.

## 6) Recruitment and approval of foster carers

The Fostering Service recruits and supports foster carers in accordance with the National minimum standards for fostering (2011), the Fostering services regulations (2011) and the Assessment and approval of foster carers Guidance and Regulations (2013). Plans for recruiting foster carers are outlined in the Fostering Recruitment Strategy which is updated and reviewed annually.

- The Kingston and Richmond websites enable those interested in fostering for Achieving for Children to register their interest online.
- Following an enquiry, either online, by email, via the services Freephone line direct call to the team or through Home for Good (see below in this section), a team member rings the enquirer and completes the enquiry form.
- The next step in the process is an initial home visit by a social worker. A written report is completed (within five working days) and signed by the Fostering Team Manager.
- At this stage a decision is made whether or not to recommend carers to attend the preparation training, 'Skills to Foster'.
- After completion of the training course a decision is made whether to commence a Stage 1 assessment including the collection of a range of checks and references.
- A Stage 2 assessment may be run in parallel.
- When all the Stage 1 assessment information is returned a decision is made whether to proceed within 10 working days.
- The service aims to complete Stage 2 assessments within three to six months. This report is considered by the Fostering Panel.
- The panel makes a recommendation to the agency decision maker (Director, Children's Social Care) as to the suitability to foster and the approval status.
- The agency decision maker makes a final decision as to the recommendation made by the panel and the foster carer is notified of the outcome verbally within two working days and in writing within five working days.

To support recruitment of foster carers, the Achieving for Children Fostering Service has a contract with the Christian charity Home for Good. The Home for Good initiative raises awareness through church networks to increase the number of people who apply to become foster carers. Home for Good have been working with churches in both boroughs to identify potential foster carers. This contract runs until 3 January 2018.

## **7) Support and supervision of foster carers**

On approval all 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 or twelve weekly if a permanent placement) and meetings, the supervising social worker undertakes two unannounced visits annually and carries out a comprehensive annual review of the foster carer.

Foster carers are provided with a Fostering Handbook (electronically) and are required to sign up to the Foster Carers Charter Agreement and Supervision Agreement after approval.

There is an annual robust training programme in place, in line with the National Minimum Standards and the Training, Support and Development Standards for foster carers.



This is to ensure all foster carers receive continued professional development. It is expected that carers will complete a minimum of three training courses a year and undertake identified mandatory training courses.

Training sessions are held on a rolling programme at a variety of times to suit all circumstances. Online training is also available.

All foster carers 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.

All carers are subject to an annual foster home review that looks at their fostering experience over the previous 12 months, including training attended and support provided. Views are sought from the supervising social worker, the foster carer, foster children, birth children, placing social workers, independent reviewing officers and other relevant professionals.

The Fostering Panel will consider reviews in the first year of approval and every three years or more frequently as needed. Following each review, the agency decision maker will sanction continued approval of the foster carers, or change or terminate the carers' approval.

When not presented to panel, reviews are conducted by an independent reviewing officer and independent support is available to carers through the foster carer associations and the Fostering Network or Fostertalk, membership of which is offered to all foster carers.

## **8) Partnership**

The Fostering Service works in partnership and in collaboration with all the social care teams and services in the borough to coordinate and provide support to children looked after and their carers.

Referrals for placements are received in the fostering duty system, placement options are sought and final placement agreed by the placing social worker. Checks, contracts, and quality assurance work is completed by the fostering duty workers.

The service works in partnership with the teams with regard to care planning, permanency planning, and coordinating care and services for all children looked after by Achieving for Children.

The service works together on plans for independence with young people their carers and social workers for young people leaving care from the age of 16 upwards.

- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
- Children Looked After Doctors and Nurses
- Substance Misuse Worker
- Phoenix Project (children at risk of sexual exploitation)
- Youth Participation

The Fostering Service liaises directly with these and other appropriate health professionals to coordinate input from physical health, emotional wellbeing, substance misuse, child sexual exploitation, and recreational activity specialists.

#### **Virtual School and SEN**

The service liaises regularly with the Virtual School and SEN to ensure children and young people's educational needs are met within their identified placement.

#### **Youth Offending Service (YOS)**

Where needed services to young people placed in fostering are also coordinated with the YOS and the police, and specialist risk assessments undertaken as required.

### **9) Complaints and allegations**

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 part of the Fostering Handbook. AfC has both corporate and Children's Services complaints procedures that operate if no resolution can be achieved at the problem solving stage.

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 led by the local authority lead officer.

Foster carers must notify their supervising social worker if they experience any verbal threats, aggression or violence. These are taken very seriously and dealt with quickly and the outcomes documented.

There is a leaflet for children and young people, which advises them what to do if they have a complaint.

Ofsted will be informed of the outcome of any serious complaint or allegation immediately.

The service is regulated and inspected by Ofsted.

Contact details for Ofsted:

Ofsted  
National Business unit  
Royal Exchange Building  
St Anna's Square  
Manchester M2 7LA  
T: 0300 123 1231