

# Statement of Purpose:

## Fostering Services January 2025

### City of York Council

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## **1. Introduction**

It is a requirement of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services that each fostering agency produces a Statement of Purpose. Within this document will be the aims and objectives and a description of the services that the organisation provides. This statement of purpose provides an outline of the requirements, how the service is managed, and the fitness of those that manage the organisation to provide fostering services. It shows how the welfare of children and young people will be met and how good outcomes will be achieved for all children in care in York. The Statement of Purpose will also demonstrate the systems that are in place to recruit new foster carers and how they will be trained prior to approval and during their fostering career.

## **2. Aims and Objectives**

The Fostering Service has been developed and is managed in accordance with the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 and the principles outlined in the National Minimum Standards 2011. These standards apply equally to our family and friend foster carers (connected carers).

The City of York Council's Sufficiency Strategy ensures that there is an adequate supply of placements for children and young people across the range of resources. The main aim of City of York Council's Fostering service is to provide safe, high quality foster home to meet the diverse needs of the children and young people who are unable to be cared for within their own families or where their families need a break.

If a child or young person needs a foster home then the first consideration will be to see if there is anyone in their family or friendship network who could safely care for them. If they are not able to be placed with someone from their family or friendship network, then it is intended that:

- Children and young people are placed with foster carers in or around York, when made subject to a care order.
- Foster homes for children in care are efficiently deployed to ensure that fostering or residential homes are made outside York when every stage of local provision and foster home has been explored and exhausted.
- Where children and young people are placed outside of the York area, regular efforts are made by the Making York Home and Home Finding

and Commissioning Support Team for them to return to their local area whenever this is in line with their agreed care plan.

- Young people for whom foster care is not appropriate, or who are unable to be placed in foster care, are looked after in a Children's home with an Ofsted rating of 'Good' or above.
- Permanency plans are considered for children and young people who are not able to return to their families. For many children this will be obtained via Adoption or Special Guardianship Orders.
- Short Breaks foster homes are available to support disabled children and their families.
- When seeking a foster home for a child or young person, their wishes and needs, including their racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic needs are considered and matched as closely as possible with the foster carers available.
- Siblings are offered accommodation together wherever possible and when appropriate.
- Family time is promoted for the child or young person and his / her birth family throughout their time in care, wherever appropriate.
- Foster homes provide a safe, stable and enabling environment for children and young people. They ensure that they are listened to and protected from abuse and neglect. They promote the child and young person's physical, social, emotional and intellectual development but providing them with the opportunity of developing to their full potential.
- Young people are encouraged to remain living with their foster carers when they reach adulthood through Staying Put arrangements.
- Children and young people are informed of their rights and of the advocacy and complaints process.
- Feedback from those who are in receipt of services, through comments, compliments or complaints, is incorporated into service development.
- There are regular feedback meetings between foster carers and senior managers.

The Sufficiency Strategy endeavours to ensure that the need to place children and young people outside York is minimised and that children who are placed outside York, for whatever reason, are enabled to return to a York foster home where it is deemed appropriate. Locality of service enhances the capacity of

other local partners (schools, health and CAMHS etc.) to support the child or young person in a corporate parenting model.

### **3. Service Provided**

The Fostering Service provides foster home for Children in Care with varying needs. It is intended:

- For all Children and young people in Care from York aged 0-18 years old.
- To provide for short and long-term fostering wherever necessary.
- To provide for children and young people who may require accommodation under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 or those who are looked after under a Court Care Order.
- To provide local authority accommodation for young people who are charged under section 38(6) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE)
- To provide stayover foster homes for children and families under a Child in need arrangement, Section 17 of the Children Act 1989

There is a commitment to ensure that young people in foster care are actively encouraged to remain living with their foster carers when they approach their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. This 'Staying Put' approach has enhanced the future outcomes for many previous children looked after who have then remained in their foster placement until their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday and beyond.

The Short Breaks service provides Short Break foster carers to support disabled children and their families. It is intended:

- For disabled children and young people, aged 0-18 years, who have an identified need for Short Break services.
- For short periods varying from a few hours of day care through to overnight stays or weekends.
- To provide for children who are physically disabled, learning disabled, on the autism spectrum or medically dependent for some or their entire daily needs.
- To provide for children who require a series of short breaks under the provisions of the Children Act 1989 and duties relating to Short Break care, which came into force in April 2011.

#### **4. Support in Education**

There is a 'virtual' head teacher for Children and Young People in Care to look at improving attainment issues and improving partnerships with schools. Foster carers are expected to attend Personal Education Planning meetings with the young people and go to parent's evenings and other events. There is an expectation that holidays will not be taken in term time and that children are not routinely taken out of school.

#### **5. Provision of Leisure, Sport, Cultural and Religious Activity**

Foster carer training and supervision promotes the importance of leisure provision for Children in Care and there is an expectation that foster carers will encourage new experiences and activities to enhance children's self-worth, social development and independence.

Children and Young People in Care and their foster carer families are able to access the MAX card, which gives free access to a range of leisure activities throughout the local area. Information about play schemes, clubs and holiday activities, and other initiatives are provided to foster carers on a regular basis through 'Weekly updates', and information sharing events. We aim to support all young people in their religious and cultural beliefs and customs, and we ensure that information is available to provide understanding of different cultures and religions. We will provide resources that may be needed to ensure young people are able to practice their beliefs and customs. We aim to ensure that all young people are given appropriate support in line with their individual needs and background (in accordance with the duties of the Equalities Act 2010).

#### **6. Children and Young People's Guide and Guarantee**

Subject to a child's age and understanding, the Fostering Service ensures they receive a Young People's Guide at the point of coming into care and going to a foster home. It is expected that this Statement of Purpose links with the Young People's Guide.

The guide includes details about foster care and being a Child or Young Person in Care and provides information on useful contacts. Young people are given a copy of the council's Guarantee to Children and Young People in Care (York's Pledge to children and young people in care), which outlines what they can expect from the council when they are in local authority care. Children and

young people also receive information about how they can access advocacy and information about their rights and entitlements from York's Children's Rights and Advocacy Service (known as Speak Up).

Young people aged 11 and over can get involved in the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum. Young people aged 14-17 can attend Show Me That I Matter (York's Children in Care Council) and those aged 17 and above can join I Still Matter (York's Care Leavers Forum); both groups meet every month with senior managers and Elected Members to share their views and help to improve services. Younger children, aged 10 and above, are invited to join Speak up Youth, which is a youth club specifically for children and young people in care where young people can take part in a range of social activities and participation work. In addition to this children of foster carers are invited to a support group which aims to help them in their understanding of why children become looked after and supports them as part of a fostering family.

## **7. Connected Carers**

Temporary approval can be made for some immediate / emergency arrangements with members of a child or young person's family or friendship network, when the child or young person comes into the care of the local authority. Temporary approval as a foster carer lasts for 16 weeks (with a possible extension for a further 8 weeks), whilst outstanding statutory checks are completed. Depending on the care plan for the child, this period could involve completing an assessment to become a foster carer during the temporary approval period.

Child Arrangement Orders and Special Guardianship Orders are legal orders that provide the opportunity to secure permanent home for children and young people who live with foster carers, so that they are no longer children and young people in the care of the local authority.

## **8. Recruiting Foster Carers**

### Criteria for Assessment

An application to become a foster carer is accepted on the basis of the suitability of the applicant's circumstances and capacity to offer appropriate care to Children in Care, and to support their background, race, culture, language, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age or ability.

## Enquiry

Anyone who is resident in York, or within reasonable travelling distance, can enquire about coming a foster carer. All enquirers will be contacted and share information about what is involved in being a foster carer. If the enquirer wishes to proceed, and there are no obvious known barriers to doing so, a home visit will be arranged so that further information can be exchanged, and the process of approval more fully explored. Following this meeting a recommendation will be made as to whether or not the enquirer has the potential to be a foster carer. If a positive recommendation is endorsed, the enquirer will be offered a place on a 'Skills to Foster' preparation course. If the recommendation is not to proceed, the reasons for this will be explained to the enquirer.

## **9. Preparing and Assessing Applicants**

### Preparation course.

The 'Skills to Foster' preparation course are jointly run by a Fostering Social Worker and experienced foster carers with input from other professionals involved with Children in Care, and also young people who have been fostered. On completion of the course, one of the course deliverers will discuss with each candidate how their enquiry will progress. If suitable, enquirers can then make an application to be assessed as a prospective foster carer. Assessments can be started before the preparation training commences and can also run concurrently. This is at the discretion of a Service.

### Assessments

A thorough assessment of the applicant's eligibility and suitability to become a foster carer is undertaken. The assessment will focus on competencies and qualities in relation to their ability to care for children and work with parents and the agency. The assessment is undertaken in two parts which usually run concurrently. Stage 1 of the assessment establishes whether there is any information likely to impact on the suitability of the applicant in line with fostering regulations.

All foster carer applicants, members of their household over 18 years of age and any adults who are likely to have regular or unsupervised contact with the children placed are required to apply for an enhanced Disclosure and Barring check. Checks are also made with current and previous employers and SSAFA and NHS trust if appropriate. For applicants with birth children, checks with

schools, nurseries, school nurses, and the local authority children's services database are also carried out.

Written references are sought from at least three personal referees. Each referee is interviewed, and a written record made of their comments regarding the applicant's suitability to become a foster carer.

A standard medical examination and report is requested from each applicant's doctor and is commented on by the local authority Medical Adviser. If the applicant is aware of any medical issues that may impact on fostering, these should be discussed, along with any potential prohibiting information, at an early stage. Any prohibiting information received with the first stage of the assessment process must be explored, and if there is a recommendation not to proceed, this must be shared with the applicant and presented to the Agency Decision Maker within a period of ten days of receipt.

The full assessment is undertaken over a series of visits to the applicant's home. The Stage 2 process includes a personal profile of the applicants own experiences, relationships (past and present), parenting capacity and experience and understanding of issues facing children looked after and their families. Any children of the applicant will be interviewed and involved in the assessment process according to their age and understanding. If the applicant has had significant previous relationships, contact will be made with previous partners.

All the information and analysis from stages 1 and 2 are shared with the applicant in a written report (with the exception of the references and other checks or third party information). The applicant is invited to comment on the accuracy of the information prior to a formal presentation to the Fostering Panel. The completed assessment will be taken to the Fostering Panel with a recommendation as to whether or not the applicant should be approved. The applicant is strongly encouraged to attend panel. The Assessment will be completed within eight months from application.

## **10. Approving Foster Carers**

### Fostering Panel and the approval of prospective foster carers.

The Fostering Panel meets monthly to make recommendation on fostering applications, foster carer reviews, de-registrations, and extensions to temporary connected carer approvals. The chair of the panel is suitably qualified and independent of the council. Following consideration of the information provided,



the panel makes a recommendation and a verbal outcome is given immediately to the applicants. Panel's recommendations are considered by the Agency Decision Maker, who then makes the decision as to whether or not the applicant is approved as a foster carer.

All applicants will receive verbal notification of the Agency Decision Makers decision within 2 working days and formal written notice within 5 working days of the decision makers' final decision. An appeal can be made within 28 days of receiving the decision, and applicants may either make further representation to the foster panel or have their assessment considered by the Independent Review Mechanism.

Once approved a foster carer agreement will be completed. This is the agreement between the foster carer and City of York regarding the terms and conditions of the partnership between them. This must be signed by both parties prior to caring for your first child.

#### Review of approval of foster carer.

Training is a requirement for every prospective and approved foster carer, and foster carer's training needed are reviewed annually. Each foster carer will complete a Personal Development Plan with their supervising social worker to identify their developmental aims and objectives for the following year. Requirements for the review of foster carers are set out in the Fostering Service Regulations 2011 and accompanying Statutory Guidance.

Regulations require that a foster carer's approval is reviewed within the first 12 months and, thereafter, at intervals of not more than a year. The report relating to the first review is presented to the Fostering Panel.

The purpose of the review is to enable the authority to check that the foster carer and the household circumstances continue to be suitable for children.

Early review of approval may also take place when:

- There is a significant change in the foster carers circumstances
- There are issues concerning the foster carers approval arising from a disruption meeting
- Allegations or poor standards of care have been made about the foster carer
- A foster carer can also request an early review

Foster carers are reviewed every year. A range of information is collated for a review meeting, which is chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer for Carers (IROC). The review will address the previous year's experiences of the

foster carer, as well as any issues regarding quality of care and support, past and future training, health and safety or any safe care issues. The review process is an opportunity to acknowledge a foster carers achievements and to identify their strengths and areas for further development.

The review meeting will also explore whether the terms of the foster carers approval is suitable or should be recommended for change. All recommendations of changes to approval through the review process will be presented to the Agency Decision Maker. The foster carer will have 28 days to make representations if changes are recommended to their approval terms.

## **11. Training for Foster Carer and Short Break Foster carers**

A requirement of the assessment and approval process is that each foster carer is expected to attend initial core training within the first 12 months induction period.

Following the pre-approval training course 'Skills to Foster', all foster carers are required to progress to the post approval core training programme within their first year of becoming a foster carer. They are expected to complete the Training, Support, and Development Standard (TSDS) training workbook within 12 months, or 18 months for family and friend carers. The TSDS provide a national minimum benchmark that sets out what all foster carers should know, understand, and be able to do within the first 12 (or 18) months post approval. Foster carers will be offered continual training and development opportunities during their time as approved foster carers for City of York council and will be expected to attend certain key training events in line with National Minimum Standards.

All training is recorded in the Personal Development Plan (PDP) and discussed at the annual foster carer review. Training needs identified during individual reviews are used to develop the Fostering service's training programme.

## **12. Support for Foster Carers**

The first line of support for foster carers is their supervising social worker who will:

- Support and work with the whole family
- Act as the link between the service and the foster carer
- Facilitate professional supervision with the foster carer
- Consult with foster carers regarding the children in their care, in line with their approval range and skills level

- Complete a matching report for children living with foster carers

The supervising social worker will visit regularly and maintain monthly contact. Foster carers will also receive formal supervision every four months. There will also be at least once unannounced visit each year in line with National Minimum Standards.

Due to the nature of stayover and short break foster care (i.e., occurring for short periods, intermittently) the supervising social worker will visit these carers at a frequency agreed on an individual basis. Support for foster carers is also available from the social workers of the children placed in the foster home.

Out of hours, any crisis in respect of the children and young people in the foster home will be dealt with by the Emergency Duty Team.

Foster carer support groups are held regularly in various locations in the city. There is a recently established group exclusively for family and friend carers which meets on a quarterly basis. These groups discuss a variety of topics, and some are attended periodically by Social Workers in the fostering service and other guest speakers.

### **13. Allegations against Foster Carers**

All allegations in relation to foster carers are investigated and reported to the Local Authority Designated Office (LADO). Investigations are carried out on behalf of City of York Safeguarding Board under the procedures for investigating allegations against professionals and volunteers. Foster carers are offered independent support during this process.

### **14. Registered Provider**

The registered provider of the Fostering Service is the City of York Council, Children Education and Communities, West Offices, Station Rise, York, YO1 6GA.

The registered individual is Director of Children's and Education Services is Martin Kelly who is based at the address of the registered provider above.

### **15. Management of the Service**

The Fostering Service is part of the Resource Service. The Head of Service is Michael Cavan who is based at the address of the registered provider above.

The Fostering Service Registered Manager for the City of York is Dawn Atkin.

The Agency Decision Maker is Danielle Johnson, Director of Safeguarding

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering require that the people involved in managing the service:

- Possess the necessary knowledge and experience of childcare law and practice.
- Have management skills and financial expertise to manage the work efficiently and effectively.
- Ensure that it is run on a sound financial basis and in a professional manner.

The National Minimum Standards for fostering require that the Registered Manager has:

- a recognised social work qualification or a professional qualification relevant to working with children at least at level 4
- a qualification in management at least at level 4
- at least two years' experience relevant to fostering within the last five years
- at least one years' experience supervising and managing professional staff

Dawn Atkin fulfils the criteria above and has many years post qualifying experience and a background of management and working in the fostering service.

## **16. Fostering service**

All managers and social workers are professionally qualified in social work and are registered with Social Work England. Managers and social workers have a range of experiences in childcare settings and are experienced in finding homes for children with foster carers and support to foster carers. All staff within the fostering service have regular supervision and annual appraisals that continually look at developing an individual's knowledge and skills and enhances the service.

The foster service currently supports 122 household. The number of carers and households varies monthly, due to new registrations and de-registration of foster carers. City of York Council foster carers are currently caring for 245 children in care.

## **17. Complaints and Outcomes**

The directorate of Children's and Education Services, has an established system for dealing with complaints from children and adults who are not satisfied with any aspect of the service they have received.

All children and young people who are in foster care are advised about the complaint's procedure by their social worker and independent reviewing officer and are given details on how to lodge a complaint.

Parents of children in care are also provided with information detailing how to lodge a complaint.

Foster carers are informed about the complaints procedure and how to make a complaint. This enables them to advise children and young people who may wish to complain, and to consider and raise any concerns of their own.

Child protection matters are immediately referred to the service manager responsible for the child or young person's social worker.

Any child or young person, parent, or foster carer can make a complaint directly to the social worker or service manager who is providing the service. This will be passed to the complaints team who will determine how best to proceed with the complaint. The emphasis will always be to ensure a prompt discussion, and the approach will always be to solve the problem promptly and with the complainants satisfaction.

Children, young people, parents and foster carers are also advised that they can make their representation directly to the complaints team.

If a complaint cannot be resolved at an early stage (stage 1) or it is deemed to be sufficiently serious, it will be jointly investigated by a manager from another part of the service and an independent person (stage 2). The recommendations of such a stage 2 complaint are passed to a senior manager for a direct response to the customer.

If the customer remains unhappy with the response at stage 2, they can ask the complaints team for their complaint to be considered by the director, or a member of staff acting on the director's behalf. This is stage 2 and the final stage of the council's complaints procedure, after which the customer could approach the Local Government Ombudsman if they still feel unhappy with the outcome.

The Children's and Education management team, led by the Director of Safeguarding, consider the lessons to be learned generally at the conclusion of stage 2 and stage 3 complaints. The responses are considered by the Fostering service when a complaint relates directly to these services. Complaints against

foster carers are managed in line with the general complaint process and policies, or by the Safeguarding Children's Board.

### **18. Availability of Statement of Purpose**

The original statement of purpose for City of York was agreed by the Executive Member with responsibility for Social Services in 2003 and has been reviewed regularly since then. The fostering agency's policies, procedures and any written guidance to staff reflect the statement of purpose.

This statement of purpose is posted on the council's website and can be made available in a format that is appropriate to the physical, sensory and learning impairments, communication difficulties and language of children, parents and staff. City of York will make arrangements for those who are unable to understand the document to have it read, translated or explained to them.

The statement of purpose is made available to all staff via the council's intranet. This statement of purpose was reviewed and updated in January 2025.

## **19. Significant Contact details**

### **Registered Manager**

Dawn Atkin- Service Manager

City of York Council

Fostering Service

West Offices,

Station Rise,

York,

YO1 6GA.

[dawn.atkin@york.gov.uk](mailto:dawn.atkin@york.gov.uk)

Tel: 01904 555575

### **Agency Decision Maker**

Danielle Johnson Director of Safeguarding

City of York Council

Fostering Service

West Offices,

Station Rise,

York,

YO1 6GA.

[danielle.johnson@york.gov.uk](mailto:danielle.johnson@york.gov.uk)

Tel: 0190455 554961

### **Ofsted North**

Address – Piccadilly Gate,

Store Street,

Manchester,

M1 2WD

Tel: 0300 123 1231

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

E-mail – [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

### **Fostering Network**

87 Blackfriars Road

London

SE1 8HA

Tel: 020 7620 6400

**Complaints and compliments**

Corporate Governance Team

West Offices,

Station Rise,

York,

YO1 6GA

Tel: 01904 554145

Email: [haveyoursay@york.gov.uk](mailto:haveyoursay@york.gov.uk)

**York Children's Rights and Advocacy Service**

Email: [speakup@york.gov.uk](mailto:speakup@york.gov.uk)

Tel: 07769 725174