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Working together with Children, Young People and Families

Fostering Service

Statement of Purpose 2023

Statement of Purpose: Fostering and Short Break Fostering Services –

February 2023

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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 connected person 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 placements 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 placement 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.

- Resources for placements of children in care are efficiently deployed to ensure that fostering or residential placements are made outside York when every stage of local provision and placement has been explored and exhausted.
- Where children and young people are placed outside of the York area, regular efforts are made by the Placement 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 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 placements are available to support disabled children and their families.
- When seeking a placement 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 placement, wherever appropriate.
- Fostering and Short Breaks placements 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 Placement 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 placement where it is deemed appropriate. Locality of service enhances the capacity of other local partners (schools, CAMHS etc.) to support the child or young person in a corporate parenting model.

3. Service Provided

The Fostering Service provides placements 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 meet the need for placements 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)

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 18th 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 21st 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 'mail shots', Gateway events, 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 placement. 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 are able to 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 more thorough assessments and arrangements are considered. Depending on the care plan for the child, this period could involve completing an assessment to become a foster carer beyond the temporary approval period.

Child Arrangement Orders and Special Guardianship Orders are legal orders that provide the opportunity to secure permanent family placements for children

and young people who are placed with connected persons, so that they are no longer children and young people in the care of the local authority.

8. Recruiting Foster Carers and Short Breaks 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 or Short Break foster carer. All enquirers will be contacted by our Fostering Recruitment Lead who will give information about what being a foster carer or Short Break foster carer involves. 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. From this meeting the Fostering Recruitment Lead will make a recommendation to the Service Manager of the Fostering Team as to whether or not the enquirer has the potential to be a foster carer or Short Break foster carer.

If a positive recommendation is endorsed by the Service Manager, 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 is 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 Manager in the Fostering Team.

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 16 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, health visitors, 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 visited 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.

10. Approving Foster Carers and Short Break 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 or Short Break foster carer.

All applicants will receive formal written notice within ten days of the decision makers' final decision. An appeal can be made within 28 days 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 or Short Break foster carer's agreement will be completed. This is the agreement between the foster carer and the agency regarding the terms and conditions of the partnership between them. This must be signed by both parties prior to the first placement being made.

Review of approval of foster carer and Short Break foster carers

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 Professional 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 the placement of 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 have been made about the foster carer

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 Placements (IROP). 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 work book within 12 months, or 18 months for connected 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 Professional 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 and Short Break 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

The supervising social worker will visit regularly, usually on a four / six weekly basis or as agreed with the carer. There will also be at least once unannounced visit each year in line with National Minimum Standards.

Due to the nature of 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 placement 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 Connected 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 and Short Break 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. 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 Danielle Johnson, the Assistant Director for Children Education and Communities and the Director of Children Education and Communities is Martin Kelly. Both are based at the address of the registered provider above.

15. Management of the Service

The Fostering Service is part of the Corporate Parenting Group. The Group Manager is Sophie Keeble who is based at the address of the registered provider above.

The Fostering Service is split into two groups - Placement Finding and Commissioning Support Team and Assessing Permanent Carers Service.

Ethel Clarke is the Registered Manager for Fostering in York.

Responsibility for the assessment and recruitment of Foster carers (and Short Break foster carers) and ongoing support for approved Foster carers (and Short Break foster carers) sits with the Assessing Permanent Carers Team.

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

- Possess the necessary knowledge and experience of child care 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 professional qualification relevant in child care.
- A qualification at Level 4 NVQ in management.
- At least two years of experience of working in a child care setting, within the past five years.

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

16. Complaints and Outcomes

The directorate of Children, Education, and Communities 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 complaints 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 and Short Break 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 also 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 Education and Community management team, led by the Assistant Director, consider the lessons to be learned generally at the conclusion of stage 2 and stage 3 complaints. The responses are considered by the Fostering teams 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.

17. 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 February 2023.

18. Registration authority

Ofsted inspects local authority Fostering Services and can be contacted at:

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Address – Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD

Telephone – 0300 123 1231

E-mail – enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Copies of Ofsted inspection reports for the City of York Fostering Service can be read on the Ofsted website.

Customers can make complaints directly to Ofsted.