



Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2023/2024

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1. INTRODUCTION AND LEGAL CONTEXT

St. Helens Fostering Service Statement of purpose is prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000 (CSA) for the conduct of Fostering Services. The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 and the Fostering Service Regulations 2011, govern the work of the Fostering Services throughout England and are used in inspecting and registering Fostering Services. Standard 16 of the National Minimum Standards and Regulation 3 of the Fostering Services Regulations, require a Fostering Service to produce a Statement of Purpose which should include:

- A statement of the aims and objectives of the Fostering Service
- A statement of the services and facilities provided by the Fostering Service
- Details of the Assessment and approval process for Foster Carers
- Details of Training and support provided for Foster Carers

A copy of the Statement of Purpose is provided to and available upon request, to:

- Ofsted
- The Local Authority responsible for managing the Fostering Service
- Any person working for the purpose of the Fostering Service
- Foster Carers approved by the Fostering Service
- Children and Young People placed by the Fostering Service (subject to age and understanding)
- Parents or any person with parental responsibility.
- The placing authority of any child placed with St. Helens foster carers (in the event that the placing authority is not St. Helens)

The Statement of Purpose is subject to regular review. There is separate Statement of Purpose for St. Helens Fostering panel.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

St Helens Fostering Service works in partnership with all departments of the Local Authority to promote “Corporate Parenting” and with a wide range of partner agencies to achieve the best possible outcomes for children we look after. The primary aim of the Fostering Service is to provide the highest quality of substitute family care for children who cannot live with their parents. Further aims are linked to the People’s Services Plan and the Sufficiency Strategy and are as follows;

Aims

- To provide a safe caring environment, with Foster Carers who will enable children and young people to develop their full potential throughout their childhood and into independence.
- To provide a Fostering Service that recognises the diverse nature of the community within St. Helens in terms of gender, ethnicity, culture, social class, disability, and sexual orientation.
- To provide a Fostering Service which is conducted and managed by professionals with appropriate skills and experience.
- To recruit, a diverse range of Foster Carers who can offer placements to children we look after in St Helens.
- To provide supervision, support and training for Foster Carers.

Objectives

Objectives for the Fostering Service are more specific than the aims. The overarching objective is around ensuring the provision of Foster Placements, where each child will have stability, security and a safe nurturing environment in which they can develop and thrive. Arising from this the more specific objectives are as follows:

- To carefully match the needs of children and young people with the skills of Foster Carers.
- To ensure the cultural and diversity needs, of children and young people are adequately met.
- To ensure that all children in foster care, benefit from support with the aim of improving educational achievements.
- To ensure that all children in foster care, receive appropriate support to ensure good emotional and physical health.
- To ensure that all children in foster care with a plan for adoption or return home are appropriately supported to manage this transition.
- To ensure, all young people in foster care, are adequately prepared for 'leaving care'.
- To ensure that all children in foster care, have access to a range of leisure and recreational activities with the aim of promoting enjoyment.
- To ensure that foster carers, promote family time with birth family and significant others and to contribute to the child's life story whilst in their care.
- To work in partnership with Foster Carers ensuring they access to training, guidance and support
- To ensure a commitment to the development of the service through service user/ stakeholder involvement.
- To ensure, a continued focus, on service improvement through quality assurance and stakeholder consultation.

3. SERVICE PROVISION

The Fostering Service provides placements to all children in our care up, to the age of 18 years. For young people over the age of 18 years, who wish to remain with their foster carers, the service actively supports a plan in which the placement becomes a "staying put arrangement". The fostering service continues to support foster carers who convert to "staying put". Primarily the fostering service is involved in recruiting and supporting the following kinds of placements.

Short Term Placements

The Fostering Service offers short-term placements where children are unable to remain at home. Care plans for these children, involve assessments being undertaken with a view to them returning home to parents or being placed with extended family members. At the same time permanence planning, will commence for these children.

Long-Term Placements

The Fostering Service offers long-term placements for children and young people as defined in the Care Planning and Fostering Regulations 2015. Long-term placements will provide support for a young person into independence and as such the placement will become 'home'. Children with a

long-term plan are matched to their foster carers, through the Permanence Panel and LAC review process. The service lead for fostering sits on permanence panel.

Fostering For Adoption

The fostering service is involved in completing the specific approval of adopters as foster carers, to enable a child to be placed 'fostering for adoption'. In addition, the service is involved in supporting these placements.

Regulation 24 Temporary Approval of Connected persons

The fostering service is responsible for completing viability assessments of connected persons, with a view to their temporary approval (regulation 24) as foster carers.

38(6) Directions

The fostering service supports carers, for whom the Court has made a 38(6) direction in respect of children in their care. These carers are not foster carers, rather they have often been the subject of a negative viability assessment and the Court has made a placement direction regardless.

Connected Persons/Kinship Placements

The fostering service is involved in assessing and approving family/friends with a connection to a specific child, in order that they can offer a foster placement to that child. Our kinship foster carers are subject to the same regulatory oversight as our general/recruited foster carers.

4. SPECIALIST SUPPORT SERVICES

Many children and young people require specialist services to help them cope with the trauma they have suffered leading to their placement with Foster Carers. The Fostering Service is able to provide, a direct referral to St Helens Child and Adolescent Mental Health service for children in care. This service offers therapeutic services and assessment for children and young people placed in Foster Care. Consultation and support is also provided to Foster Carers, which includes information and advice in managing the impact of behaviour which may be a consequence of early year's trauma.

Foster carers also have access to specialist LAC nurses for children we look after, who offer guidance on the health of children in care and provide foster carers with health training.

5. EDUCATION SUPPORT/SCHOOL

Foster carers play a pivotal role in supporting children and young people in their care to improve their educational outcomes. Foster carers are expected to attend all Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings to promote and support the educational needs of children. In addition, Foster carers are also encouraged to participate in school activities alongside their child in placement for example attending sports day, parent's evening, providing cakes for bake sales and attending 'stay and play' events.

The Principal Education Officer for LAC in conjunction with the Virtual School, advocates on behalf of the child to ensure their specific educational and inclusion needs are met. Resource materials are provided to Foster Carers, in order to ensure they can support the Education needs of children in their care. The Fostering Service and Principal Education Officer for LAC work closely to improve school attendance and monitor carefully any absences from school. There is a clear expectation and understanding with Foster Carers that children are not taken out of school for holidays.

6. PROMOTING LEISURE ACTIVITIES

The involvement of children and young people in positive leisure pursuits plays a key part in Foster Care provision and helps to promote a sense of self-worth, social integration, independence, and achievement. Many younger children placed in Foster Care are encouraged to join local organisations such as Rainbows, Beavers and Scouts. Such activity has enhanced the quality of life for children and enabled a sense of belonging and achievement. The Fostering Service promotes the use of other leisure facilities such as sport, music and other cultural activities and has links with the Youth Service. All of children and young people placed with foster carers are provided with information about the Children in Care Council and are supported to attend if they choose to.

7. PLACEMENT MATCHING

This is the process where the needs of children and young people are “matched” to the skills, knowledge, experience and expertise of a particular Foster Carer(s). The Fostering Service works hard to provide placements, to ensure that the needs of children and young people are met by the skills and experience of Foster Carers.

The Duty Social Worker is the first point of contact, for enquiries from children’s social workers who require a Foster Care placement. They will liaise closely with supervising social workers, foster carers and the child’s social worker to ensure, the best possible match is made for all children. Children and young people have individual needs, and all placements are unique. The Fostering Service requires referral information and places great importance on trying to identify the needs of the child or young person. A child’s attachment to significant adults and sibling, will often be a crucial factor in making a good match, particularly if the placement is requested in a short time frame. Accurate matching is known to produce better outcomes and increase placement stability.

Once a referral is received, the Duty Social Worker will consider the available foster carers and will then begin the matching process. The matching process involves the Supervising Social Worker and Children’s Social Worker considering the foster carer’s assessment, to gain an understanding of their skills and whether they could meet the needs of the particular child.

The fostering service holds a weekly ‘duty meeting’, during which all referrals for placements are considered. For children whose permanence plan is long term fostering, the Supervising Social Worker will complete a matching report to inform decision making within permanence panel.

8.RECRUITMENT, ASSESSMENT AND APPROVAL OF FOSTER CARERS

Recruitment of Foster Carers

Applications to become a Foster Carer are welcomed from adults living in St Helens and the surrounding area. We continue to have a Social Worker who takes a lead on foster carer recruitment, he is actively involved in tracking the progress of enquiries from all prospective foster carers. In addition to the Social Worker we continue to have a Recruitment and Retention Officer, who supports the recruitment process by responding to enquiries and organising recruitment events and alongside this there is now an apprentice marketing officer dedicated to fostering recruitment.

There is now a clear focus on recruitment within the service and to progress with recruitment targets a small recruitment task force now meets on a weekly basis. The task force includes senior managers from within the fostering service, the recruitment and retention advisor, apprentice marketing officer, corporate marketing officer and the recruitment social worker. A major focus of the task force has been developing a new fostering recruitment campaign. The campaign launched on social media has included clips of our own foster carers talking about their experiences of fostering. Alongside the online campaign there are now regular face to face to recruitment events at community events and venues including supermarkets, Hospitals, Churches and the market. These events culminated in a week long recruitment campaign which was branded as ‘fostering fest’ during this week there was focused recruitment activity on a daily basis.

Recruitment incentive payments continue to be provided to foster carers and St Helens council staff, who introduce a prospective foster carer, who goes on to foster for us.

The role of the foster carer recruitment champions has been re launched and the champions are now actively involved in foster carer recruitment events.

Assessment of Foster Carers

Any person contacting the Fostering Service and expressing an interest in fostering will be able to have an initial discussion with a fostering social worker. We continue have a clear and consistent approach involving a dedicated recruitment social worker, following the progress of each enquiry. Following the discussion, if the enquirer wishes to proceed an information pack will be sent out on the same day.

Once an expression of interest, has been received from an applicant and is deemed suitable an initial visit is completed by the fostering recruitment social worker.

The Recruitment and Retention Officer ensures that all prospective applicants who have received, an information pack but not returned their expression of interest, receive a follow up telephone call.

The initial visit is undertaken to assess motivation to foster and discuss the implications of fostering with the applicants and any other family members. Home conditions will be discussed, and some further basic information will be collected to enable an initial evaluation of the application. If all parties agree that fostering could be suitable for the family and the basic criteria are met, an invitation to a preparation-training group is given.

The preparation group training has been designed by members of our own services and is referred to as "Introduction to Fostering". The training includes:

- Skills to Foster
- Child Development
- Separation and Loss
- Working Together
- Safer care
- Moving On

"Introduction to Fostering" training is run by our own social workers and the Recruitment and Retention Officer who are well placed to advise prospective foster carers regarding our own fostering service.

Statutory Checks

During the assessment St Helens Fostering Service will undertake a variety of statutory checks to ensure the suitability of applicants and ensure children are protected. These checks will include:

- Disclosure and Barring Service check (DBS)
- Local authority checks
- Employer check
- School health visitor reports
- Medical reports and assessment
- Personal references
- Domestic Violence Checks
- Overseas checks were appropriate
- Ex-partners and children of an appropriate age will be contacted and were possible interviewed
- Health and safety inspection
- Pet questionnaire and more detailed pet assessment if needed

Fostering Assessment

If successful with their preparation group training, the applicant will be provided with an application form and when completed and returned the Fostering Service will assign a qualified social worker to undertake a comprehensive assessment with the prospective carer/s and their family. The assessing social worker could be a permanent member of staff within the fostering service, or an independent social worker. We now have a contract with a provider who can provide independent social workers, to ensure we are ready to complete assessments in a timely fashion.

The assessing social worker will complete the fostering assessment, which covers individual profiles of applicants, relationships and partnerships, applicants support networks, children in the household, other adult members of the household, childlessness/ limitation of family size, description of family life, valuing diversity and parenting capacity. As part of the assessment process, the social worker will usually need to make between six to eight visits to the home to spend time working with the applicants on their assessment. During the assessment, the applicants and their family will be required to fully participate in the process. The assessment will consider whether an applicant can care for a child or young person in a safe and responsible manner, ensuring that their developmental needs are met, and the applicants have the skills and abilities to learn new skills. Foster carers are required to meet the Fostering Service National Minimum Standards 2011.

Once the assessment is completed, the applicants will have an opportunity to read and discuss possible amendments contained in the assessment report. The report is then presented to the St Helens Fostering Panel. An applicant can withdraw their wish to engage with an assessment, at any time during the process. If an applicant does not withdraw, but the assessment is not going to be recommending them as foster carers, the assessment will be presented to St Helens Fostering Panel for a recommendation and the Agency Decision Maker will make a Qualifying Determination decision. The applicant can then apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) within 28 days or follow St Helens Council complaints procedure.

The Fostering Panel is independent from St Helens Fostering Service and consists of a central list of professionals and independent members including Foster Carers, elected members and people with personal and professional experience of children in care. We have two panel chairs one is our longstanding chair who has previous management experience within fostering and adoption services and is also a former Ofsted inspector. More recently we recruited a second chair who has significant management experience within fostering and adoption services and also has personal experience as an adopter.

The role of the fostering panel is to scrutinise assessments presented to panel, ensure they comply with National Minimum standards and regulations and contain sufficient information and analysis to inform a recommendation about the applicant's appropriateness to become approved foster carers. It is expected that the assessing social worker and the applicants will attend fostering panel and be prepared to answer questions from the panel members.

The Panel will make their recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker whether to approve, defer for further information or not approve the application to foster.

9. CONNECTED PERSONS

In addition to recruiting and approving foster carers, the fostering service is responsible for assessing connected persons (usually family members), who could be specifically approved as foster carers for a named child. There are currently more kinship/connected foster carers within the service than general/recruited foster carers and for many children this is the preferred placement plan allowing them to remain within their family.

Before a connected person can be assessed as a foster carer, a viability assessment is undertaken. Responsibility for undertaking viability assessments sits with the fostering service. These assessments are tightly linked into fostering standards and regulations, to ensure that we only go on to assess connected persons who meets these requirements.

Connected persons can be temporarily approved as foster carers following a viability assessment, under Regulation 24 of the care planning regulations 2010. We are clear that no children should be placed with a connected person, until a viability assessment has been completed and approved by the ADM.

Following the completion of a viability assessment, connected persons are then assessed using a Single Assessment tool. This assessment meets the requirements for both the fostering and SGO regulations. A fostering social worker completes the Single Assessment alongside the child's social worker. Once completed the assessment is presented to the fostering panel. If a connected person becomes an approved foster carer, they are required to adhere to fostering standards in the same way as recruited foster carers and will receive the same support from the fostering service.

10. FOSTER CARER POST APPROVAL TRAINING

The provision of post approval training is central in maintaining high standards of care by ensuring the personal and professional development of Foster Carers. Training provides Foster Carers with the necessary skills and knowledge, to continue to provide a high-quality service to children and young people. It is also the key to safeguarding children, Foster Carers and their families. The changing requirements of providing effective and safe foster care means that even the most experienced Foster Carers benefit from the opportunity to learn new skills and refresh their previous learning. The Fostering Service has a clear strategy that highlights safeguarding as the main priority area for Foster Carer training.

It is an expectation that the Training, Support and Development Standards for foster care will be completed by each foster carer during their first year of approval. Our Recruitment and Retention Officer is involved in delivering seminars to our foster carers to support them in evidencing the Training, Support and Development Standards. All foster carers are also expected to have completed first aid training and safeguarding training within their first year of approval and this training is renewed regularly.

A rolling program of training is available to meet the on-going professional development of Foster Carers throughout their fostering career. In addition to offering formal training courses, more bespoke training can be delivered to Foster Carers through supervision and online courses. Foster Carers are also encouraged to attend training offered to social workers and learn alongside them.

A key aspect of training is the positive involvement of experienced Foster Carers, making the training experience relevant and stimulating. The current training program covers;

- Safer Care
- Recording
- Attachment
- Managing Behaviour
- Safeguarding and Child Protection
- Children's Rights

Additional Support to Foster Carers includes:

- Membership of Fostering Network which affords independent advice to Foster Carers facing allegations, training opportunities and a dedicated telephone support service for Foster Carers
- More experienced Foster Carers providing mentoring to less experienced foster carers.
- Foster Carer forums- during which Foster Carers have the opportunity to meet and consult with Senior Managers
- Foster Carer support groups run by a Team Manager within the fostering service
- Fostering service newsletter
- Foster Carer celebration event during the annual Foster Fest

11. FOSTER CARER REVIEWS

The process for undertaking Foster Carer annual reviews involves an independent reviewing officer, from the Safeguarding Unit, conducting the reviews. Contributions to the annual review are sought from foster carers, children's social workers and the children themselves.

Some of the annual reviews will need to be presented to fostering panel, such as those where there is a recommendation that approval is not continued or those where the outcome of an allegation is being considered.

Concerns regarding a Foster Carers progress or change in circumstances, can lead to a review being called at any time. The Foster Carer or the Fostering Service can request a review at any time.

Reviews provide an opportunity to positively evaluate progress, development, training and practice over the previous year and plan training and development to support the carer throughout the coming year.

The Foster Carer reviewing officer, attends the fostering service manager's meeting to provide feedback regarding emerging themes from foster carer reviews.

12. MANAGING COMPLAINTS AND ALLEGATIONS

The complaints and allegations procedure provides a fair, transparent and effective means of dealing with any concerns raised by third parties regarding the care provided by Foster Carers. At the heart of the procedure is the clear understanding that the protection, welfare and interests of the child or young person must come first.

There is a clear procedure, which is set within realistic time frames to ensure any issue is investigated with due respect to the Foster Carer. The Fostering Service recognizes that investigating complaints or allegations made against Foster Carers can be a very daunting and uncertain experience for Foster Carers. The procedure ensures that the Supervising Social Worker, can continue to support the Foster Carer through the process. Independent support has also been commissioned via Fostering Network for all foster carers facing allegations.

13. STAFFING THE FOSTERING SERVICE

The skills, knowledge and experience of the Fostering Service staff are the cornerstone to providing a safe and effective service to children and young people. All staff employed are appropriately trained and qualified and many have significant experience in working with children and fostering services. There is a significant commitment to ensuring the professional development of all staff working in the Fostering Service.

All staff are subject to an annual appraisal, during which, future training and development needs are identified for the following year. Full staff details are provided below:

Numbers, qualifications and experience of staff

Name and Team	Qualification	Years in Fostering
Fiona Woods Head of Service Fostering, Adoption and Provider Services Alternative ADM for the Fostering Service	DipSW Diploma in Personnel Management	Qualified in 1996, has worked in children's services since qualifying and moved into fostering and adoption services in March 2019
Katharine Radclyffe Service Lead Fostering and Adoption ADM for the Fostering Service	MA and Diploma in Social Work Postgraduate Diploma in Health and Social Services Management	Qualified in 1995, worked within children's services since qualifying. Has worked as a Strategic Manager within fostering and adoption Services since 2009. Joined St Helens Fostering Service in 2016.
Dominic Tumelty Head of Service Children We Look After Alternative ADM for the Fostering Service	B.A. (Spec) Hons Social Policy and Social Work University of Hull 1989. Certificate of Qualification in Social Work, University of Manchester 2002 Diploma Psychiatric Social Work, University of Manchester, 2002	Qualified in 1992 previous experience in 3 other local authorities as a Senior Manager with responsibility for Fostering and Adoption. Previously ADM for fostering in two different local authorities. Became alternate ADM for St Helens Fostering Service in 2022.
Kath Bell Team Manager 4 days	CQSW BA honours social administration	Qualified in 1983 and all post qualification experience is within children's services. Appointed to current post in St Helens Fostering Service in 2012
Letty Gayakaya Team Manager	MA in Social Work	Qualified in 2011 has worked in children's services since qualifying. Joined our fostering services in June 2019
Vacancy Assistant Team Posts one full time and one part Agency Team Manager cover against this post		
Kerrie Butler Panel Advisor Part Time	BSc Psychology in 2007 MA in Social Work in 2011	Qualified in 2011 and has worked in St Helens children's services since qualifying. Joined the fostering service in 2019.
Wendy Smith Senior Social Worker	NNEB Diploma in Social Work	Qualified in 1997 and has worked in children's services in St. Helens since qualifying
Lisa Kinahan Senior Social Worker	BA(hons) Social Work	Qualified in 2011 and has worked in St. Helens Children's Services ever since.
Caroline Kienstra (part time) Social Worker	BA Hons Social Work BTEC National Diploma in Early Years. PQ Consolidation.	Qualified in 2010 and has worked in children's services ever since
Sharon Atrill Senior Social Worker	BA Hons Social Worker. PQ in Social Worker	Qualified in 2010 and worked within children's services.

Pam Maguire Senior Social Worker	Diploma in Social Work	Qualified in 2007 and worked in children's services St. Helens since then.
Jeanette Lloyd (part time) Senior Social Worker	BA Social Work (Hons)	Qualified in 2010. Has worked in children's services since then.
Gail Wolstenholme Senior Social Worker	BA (hons) Teaching, Postgraduate Diploma and MA in Social Work	Qualified in 2016. Has worked in children's services since qualifying in duty and assessment teams. Joined the fostering service in St Helens in August 2021.
Melanie O'Neill Senior Social Worker	MA in Social Work	Qualified in 2016 and worked as a frontline social worker and then undertook a specialist role within the NSPCC. Joined the fostering service in St Helens in September 2021.
Jane Stroud Senior Social Worker	CQSW	Qualified in 1987 and has worked across a range of frontline and specialist children's teams since qualifying. Jane joined the fostering service in St Helens in April 2022
Vacancies three full time social workers one full time social worker covered by agency social workers		
Reece Jackson Recruitment and Retention Advisor	NVQ 2 Business Administration	Reece worked as an administrator in the fostering service and joined the service as recruitment and retention officer in October 2022