

# Fostering Statement of Purpose

2025/26



Foster   
For Wigan



Wigan   
Council

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## Introduction

This statement of purpose is informed by the following legislative and national framework.

- The Fostering Service Regulations (2002 and 2011)
- National Minimum Standards Fostering Services (2011)
- The Children Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- The Care Standards Act (2000)
- Care Planning and Fostering Regulations (Amendments) 2015
- The Disability and Equality Act 2010
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Children (Leaving care) Act 2000
- Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD) for Foster Carers
- Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers: Amendments to the Children Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations 2004: Fostering Services July 2013
- Stable Homes, Built on Love – 2023 DfE
- Championing Kinship Care: National Kinship Care Strategy 2023 DfE
- Kinship Care: Framework for Local Authorities.
- Locally, in Wigan, this Statement of Purpose is underpinned by:
- Progress with Unity Plan – Wigan Council
- Our Practice Priorities, CARDS; Communication, Asset Based, Relational and Making a Difference.
- Our Signs of Happiness that our children have identified are most important to them; Confidence, Connectedness, Aspirations, Recovery, Belonging and Success.
- Our Wigan Family Safeguarding Approach.
- Wigan Council Sufficiency Strategy 2024
- PACE - An attitude or stance of Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy; qualities that are helpful when creating emotional safety and when trying to stay open and engaged with another person. that parents routinely show when communicating with infants.

## Our Priorities

Wigan Fostering Service and Special Guardianship Service recognises that children's needs are best met by a nurturing family.

- Our first priority will be for children to be placed with family or friends (known as kinship carers).
- If this is not possible, we are committed to matching children and young people with our Wigan foster carers.

- Where possible, if children are not able to return to their parents' care and are not moving on to adoption, we want fostering to be a step towards legal permanence under Special Guardianship.
- We are committed to supporting children and young people to remain in Wigan, maintain relationships with families and friends, to continue at the same school and thrive within their communities.
- We will recognise and support each child/young person with regards to their gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality.
- We will take a Family Safeguarding Approach to promoting safety, stability and resilience.
- Foster carers will support children to develop practical life skills and emotional resilience in preparation for independence.

## Aims

Wigan Fostering and Special Guardianship Service provide safe, high-quality fostering families for children and young people where they are valued, supported, loved and nurtured so they can grow and develop as individuals. We are committed to

- recruiting a range of new foster carers from within our diverse community and from the kinship networks of our children wherever this best meets their needs.
- ensuring foster carers provide a therapeutic parenting approach for all children in their care by making therapeutic training and support available to all and using a PACE approach in our interactions;
- understanding children's lived experiences and responding to this to support them to feel healthy, safe and secure and to prepare them for independence;
- supporting our children and young people to fulfil their educational potential;
- multi- agency working and partnerships;
- sharing full information with foster carers so they understand the needs of our children.
- respecting the rights and responsibilities of our children and their careers and involving them in all aspects of service delivery;
- developing a learning culture, inspiring our carers to continue to be curious and develop their knowledge and skills.
- developing and sustaining strong relationships so that our children have lifelong links that continue into adulthood;
- ensuring that the service delivers on statutory requirements, is always focused on what is best for the child and strives for good practice.

## How will we deliver these?

- Each foster carer will have a qualified social worker (supervising social worker) for supervision and support and to assist with identifying and reviewing carer training and development needs as part of a Personal Development Plan.
- Kinship carers will be supported to care for children wherever possible;
- Brothers and sisters will be cared for together wherever possible and appropriate.
- Foster carers will support family time for all children;
- We will provide information to children and carers about their rights and the complaints, compliments and advocacy process;
- Foster carers will have clear information about their role and the support available in an annual foster carer agreement.
- Each carer will have a personal development plan that supports them in their ongoing learning and development.
- Achievements and strengths will be celebrated, and decisions will be explained. Concerns will be addressed openly. Information about the complaint's procedure is made available to all.
- The service performance will be monitored, assessed with outcomes measured via the Quality Assurance Framework.
- There will be regular opportunities for team, personal development and service development through bimonthly service meetings which will include Foster Carer representatives, twice yearly engagement workshops and an annual celebration event.
- We will engage regularly with carers and learn from those that experience our services through Foster Carer Advocate meetings, support groups, surveys, engagement workshops and annual reviews.
- We will listen regularly with children who are cared for, using a variety of methods to ensure their voice is heard.
- We will look for innovative approaches to foster care that are needs led, delivering flexible packages of support to children.
- We will support a range of forums for foster carers to access peer support.

## Information Sharing

Foster carers will be provided with full information about the children placed with them and are expected to observe high standards of confidentiality. Placement Plans will be in place on the day that children move into a fostering family.

- Every child will have a Placement Plan, Care Plan, safe care plan, health plan and a personal education plan
- All children will receive a Children's Guide to Fostering
- Foster carers will keep written records for each child which enables them to look back and understand their story.

## Life stories

A Life story sharing session should be held within 2 weeks of child being placed in their new home, including child's SW and carers.

Carers should help to support keeping memory boxes for children. Carers should take lots of photos and keep these safe for children, along with certificates, mementos, drawings etc. Carers should record and store memories, these should transfer with children should /when they move on. If children leave, Carers should write a letter to the child summarising the time spent in their care, including anecdotes and positive reflections, as well as an age-appropriate explanation about why the placement came to an end.

There should not be a complete cessation of contact, and carers should continue to send birthday/Christmas cards to the child, and ideally retain some sort of connection.

Social Workers should ensure these memory boxes move with children if they leave.

## Types of Fostering

### Short Term Fostering

These carers are caring for children while their permanent care plan is agreed for them. This may be for a few days or months. Following this, children may return home to their parents, move on to kinship carers, or move on to adoption. A decision may be made to match the child to short term carers on a permanent basis. This will require consideration in the Child's Looked After Review and ratification at a Permanence Panel.

### Long Term

These carers are caring for children on a permanent basis until they are 18 years old or are ready to leave home. If this is with a mainstream carer, these matches are ratified at the Permanence Panel.

### Kinship Foster Carers

These carers are caring for children who were known to them already before they came into care. They may be relatives, family friends or may be known to the child through other connections.

## Sleepover Carers

This is planned short term care that is provided so that the carers can have a short break from their caring responsibilities.

## Parent/Child

These are placements of a child with their parent. The parent may or may not be Looked After themselves.

## Support Care

This care is provided as part of a package of support including day care where carers provide planned time limited support to maintain children with their fostering families and prevent unnecessary moves.

## Service Structure

Director of Children's Services – Colette Dutton

Director of Early Help and Provider Services – Ann Clarkson

Service Lead for Fostering and Special Guardianship and Agency Decision Maker – Anna Lomas

## There are six fostering teams:

1. Recruitment and Assessment Team comprising of a Team Manager – Claire Gardiner, Advanced Practitioner - Abi Clarke, 5 Supervising Social Workers, 1 Learning and Development Officer, 1 Recruitment Officer.
2. Fostering Support Team A which supervises mainstream carers, comprising of a Team Manager (Mockingbird Project Manager) – Steph Badley, Advanced Practitioner – Lorraine Taylor, 5 Supervising Social Workers and 2 support workers.
3. Fostering Support Team B which supervises mainstream carers, comprising of a Team Manager – Jen Aylesbury-Ball, Advanced Practitioner – Karen Melling, 5 Supervising Social Workers, 2 support workers and 1 Staying Put Co-ordinator.
4. Kinship Assessment Team A comprising of a Team Manager – Donna Flinn, 5 Supervising Social Workers.
5. Kinship Assessment Team B comprising of a Team Manager – Sam Donhoe, 5 Supervising Social Workers
6. Kinship Support Team which supervises kinship carers and provides a duty support service for Special Guardians comprising of Team Manager Joanne Fera, Advanced Practitioner Steven Potter, 5 Supervising Social Workers, 1 support worker.

There is one Panel Advisor, Tanya Bowman. This post ensures the panel operates within statutory guidelines, provides additional quality assurance advice and guidance, ensures that annual appraisals take place, facilitates the twice-yearly Panel Development Days and leads on recruitment to the Central List.

## Provision of Therapeutic Services

Children and carers are supported using the PACE approach (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy) and all support workers in the service are trained in this approach.

There is a range of specialist support that accessed through a multi-agency panel which meets weekly. The key objective of the panel is to provide a regular, easy to use access consultation for all practitioners and foster carers and to improve placement stability for children.

The support includes:

- an emotional health and wellbeing service Our Safe Space who provide emergency and planned consultations, therapeutic parenting course in Foundation and Nurturing Attachments and other bespoke interventions;
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, who provide therapeutic input to children and young people in foster placement, consultation to carers and other professionals. CAMHS comprises of clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, child and adolescent mental health practitioners and social workers with expertise in children's mental health;
- A comprehensive training programme;
- Fostering support workers who are trained in PACE and can completed targeted direct work;
- Other bespoke interventions as required by children.

Special Guardians access support through the kinship support team.

There is a range of support available:

- Daily SGO duty service to respond to queries and urgent requests;
- Applications are made, following assessment for children on SGOs to the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund for specialist therapeutic support;
- Monthly support group;
- Newsletter to share information;
- Access to the Fostering and Special Guardianship Training Programme.

## Provision of Health Support Services

There are Designated Nurses for Looked after Children and Young People who in conjunction with other nurses within the team oversee Children's Annual Health Assessments and have input into the health promotion of Young People. A dedicated Medical Advisor advises the fostering panels on medical issues for applications to foster.

The Fostering Service is committed to ensuring the health outcomes for young people looked after continually improve. The team works with our foster carers and children looked after to promote healthy living and assists in the tracking of children's dental health and annual health assessments.

## Provision of Educational Support Services

Specialist educational support is available to foster carers in the fostering service through the Virtual School. There is a Virtual Headteacher for Looked after Children who monitors attainment and attendance and works to improve partnerships with schools in Wigan. The Virtual School provides training, support and advice to foster carers and staff regarding fostered children's educational needs.

We want our children to have good attendance at school to support them to achieve their potential. There is an expectation that holidays will not be taken in term time and that children are not taken out of school for meetings or appointments unless there are exceptional circumstances.

The Fostering Service works alongside and supports educational initiatives for looked after children by promoting children's educational needs to our Foster Carers. Carers are expected to attend Personal Education Planning Meetings with children and young people.

## Provision of Leisure, Sport, Cultural and Religious Activity

Foster carer training and supervision promotes the importance of leisure provision for looked after children and young people with the expectation that carers will seek out and support new experiences and activities to enhance children's self-worth, social development and independence. Children and their foster carer families in Wigan are able to access the Blue Light Card which gives them discounts on a range of goods, activities and services [Discounts for foster carers | Blue Light Card](#) with their ID badge.

The council as a whole provides a 'corporate offer' to foster carers, their families and looked after children improving discounted access to a range of council services, including sports and leisure opportunities.

Links are established with local businesses such as Applecast and other organisations, securing a range of benefits, offers and activities for foster carers and their families. Information on community play schemes, events, clubs and activities during holidays are provided to carers on a regular basis.

We aim to support all young people in their religious and cultural beliefs and customs. 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 are committed to directly challenging racism and ensure that all young people who access our services are aware of our policies in relation to anti-oppressive practice and anti-racism.

We will ensure that all people are treated equally, regardless of age, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, disability or religion. Fostering supervising social workers assist and advise carers with issues such as appropriate placement matching and with transracial placements.

## **Lifelong skills**

Foster carers will support children from a young age to develop practical and emotional life skills to prepare them for independence. The Passport to Independence provides a framework for guiding this work. Progress on this should be discussed in supervisory and statutory visits.

## **Care leavers provision and the Care Leaver Hub**

The Children's social work teams and Care Leavers Service work closely with the Fostering and Special Guardianship Service to support young people to remain in their fostering family after the age of 18 years of age so they can move on at a time that is right for them. The 'Staying Put' policy provides financial and other support for former foster carers making commitments to young people aged 18 -21years.

There is a commissioned supported lodgings scheme for care leavers and other relevant, qualifying young people age 16yrs and above. This is provided by DePaul.

The Care Leaver Hub welcomes foster carers to visit and support activities for Care Leavers such as the Stay and Play sessions for care experienced

parents during which foster carer model parenting and play alongside our young parents.

## Recruitment of Foster Carers

The Fostering Service has a Marketing and Recruitment strategy which utilises current data regarding sufficiency. The Marketing team and Fostering Service plan and evaluate campaigns, recruitment material and strategic priorities in partnership with the Foster for Greater Manchester Recruitment Hub.

Innovative approaches to starting conversations about fostering are used in community events and there is regular ongoing communication with those who have expressed an interest to foster but have not yet applied.

Word of Mouth recruitment is rewarded with a £1000 thank you payment.

## Initial Assessment Process – Mainstream Fostering

Initial enquiries about fostering are received by the Foster for Greater Manchester Recruitment Hub which aims to respond the same day or within 24 hours. Interest is encouraged from all members of the community, regardless of relationship status, employment situation, class, gender, sexuality, culture, ethnicity or religion.

The next stage is an initial home visit which is completed by a Recruitment Officer from the Hub and a Wigan approved Foster Carer Ambassador who will remain in contact throughout the assessment process. If all parties agree that there are no safeguarding concerns and that this is the right time to move forward, the enquirer is invited to make a formal application which includes consent to statutory checks, and the fostering assessment is allocated to a supervising social worker in Wigan.

The applicant and supervising social worker will agree a plan for the assessment and will book dates for preparation training and the fostering panel. The assessment is completed as outlined in the following [Assessment and Approvals of Foster Carers](#) and the service aims to complete this within 20 weeks.

## Initial viability assessments of potential kinship carers

This is completed following a referral from the child's social worker and is completed in accordance with the Practice Standards. The decision to proceed to a full assessment is made jointly with the child's social worker. If the child needs to be placed urgently, temporary approval will be assessed under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010. Before a child is placed, temporary approval must be agreed by the Agency Decision Maker and a full fostering assessment must be completed within 16 weeks. A further 8-week extension may be granted under Regulation 25 if required but every effort should be made to complete the assessment within the initial period of approval.

## Full Fostering Assessments

The service uses the CoramBAAF Form F foster carer assessment format for the completion of its mainstream fostering assessments. Kinship foster carers are assessed using the dual assessment Coram BAAF Form K which considers their suitability to foster and to be a Special Guardian.

The assessment of a foster carer takes place face to face, in the applicant's home over a period of at least six to eight visits, plus reference interviews and interviewing other relevant parties.

The assessing social worker would ensure that timelines, analysis of significant relationships, the family dynamics and characteristics of the foster carers underpin and inform the assessment. The assessment focuses on the individual or individuals applying to become foster carers and their wider support networks.

This includes a detailed assessment and analysis of their past and present experiences, skills and competencies. The assessor will also use the process to assess the applicant's suitability to foster children who have experienced trauma and disrupted attachments.

The completed assessment is submitted to the fostering panel to consider the recommendation made. Applicants attend the fostering panel with the assessing social worker and will receive the recommendation of the panel on the day they attend. This recommendation is sent to the Agency Decision Maker along with the panel minutes for a decision to be made.

## Fostering Panel

There are three fostering panels a month in Wigan, one is held face to face and two are held virtually using TEAMS. These are independently chaired, and panel members comprise of people from a variety of ages and backgrounds including social work, other professions, experienced foster carers from other agencies and people with care experience.

The fostering panel considers assessments, first annual reviews and those that have been referred for their oversight, deregistrations and Regulation 25 extension requests.

The fostering panel recommendation is sent with the fostering panel minutes, to the Agency Decision Maker, who makes a final decision within five days of receiving the minutes. Any appeal to decisions to deregister or reduce terms of approval must be made within 28 days and may either be made to the Wigan fostering panel or the Independent Review Mechanism who in turn will make a recommendation back to the agency.

## Matching children with carers

All children must have a strengths-based referral which provides

- relevant and proportionate information about their history
- an assessment of their needs
- details of their care plan including plans for family time
- information about their identify
- information about what helps them to feel safe
- details of support interventions in place.

A matching discussion must take place with the child's social worker prior to a match being agreed which considers how the carer will meet the child's needs and any gaps or vulnerabilities that have been identified so these can be addressed.

The suitability of the match must be agreed by all and confirmed in a matching form.

All permanence matches must be discussed in the child's looked after review and then presented to the Permanence Panel for consideration.

## Annual Reviews

All foster carers have an annual review of their suitability and terms of approval as foster carers. This is a formal appraisal of the work that they

have undertaken during the year and includes an opportunity to reflect on achievements, practice and learning.

Annual review meetings are chaired by Fostering Independent Reviewing Officers (FIRO) and draw on contributions from the Foster Carer and family, including birth children, Supervising Social worker, Child's Social Worker, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), Child / Young Person placed, parents and other professionals involved with the placement.

The review report and FIRO report are presented to the fostering panel in the case of all first reviews following approval and if this is assessed as required due to an investigation into a concern or allegation. This decision to continue approval with specified terms, is made by the Service Lead.

## **Support, Supervision and Training of Foster Carers**

We place a high value on relationships and so following approval, mainstream foster carers continue to be supervised by their allocated social worker (fostering supervising social worker) who provides supervision and support until their first annual review.

All other foster carers have a supervising social worker allocated from the Fostering Support or Kinship Support teams. They undertake supervisory visits which will be agreed with the team managers at a frequency of four, eight or twelve weekly. Linked carers are expected to be present on alternate supervisory visits at least.

Supervisory visits should be reflective and should encourage carers to be curious about the children in their care, reflect on how they are implementing the training they have completed and should explore multiple perspectives and hypotheses. Supervisory visits should conclude with clear actions and carers should receive a copy of the record of this visit within two weeks.

All temporarily approved foster carers and all carers who have an exemption in place, will have four weekly supervisory visits due to the high level of support and supervision required. Other foster carers will have eight weekly supervisory visits unless they are caring long term for children who are very settled and stable. In these situations, supervisory visits may reduce to twelve weekly. This is agreed in discussion with the team manager and may be subject to change as support needs increase.

Unannounced visits take place at least every six months and the children placed must be present.

All visits and contacts with the foster carer must be recorded within 48 hours.

During office hours if a foster carer is unable to contact their own supervising social worker, they can contact a Duty supervising social worker for advice and support. The supervising social worker will usually be the first point of contact for the foster carer and will be able to offer support, advice, guidance and supervision regarding most matters relating to fostering and the care of the child.

Additionally, every looked after child has an allocated social worker. This person will usually be the first point of contact for the foster carer for any information and advice on issues that relate to the child. If this worker is not available during office hours, a duty worker is always available to deal with any urgent problems or issues.

If additional emergency support is required outside of these times, foster carers can contact the out of hours duty service. Wigan fostering service provides an Independent Support Service to foster carers (currently commissioned through Fostering Network) where this is required for mediation purposes or to provide advocacy support for the carer during allegations.

## Mockingbird

There are four Mockingbird hubs in Wigan, each supporting foster carers in their constellation. These include kinship carers and key workers from residential children's homes who have a plan to move into a family. Mockingbird Hub Carers are supervised by Mockingbird Liaison Workers in the service who are integrated into the service and have other fostering households they supervise. This has enabled Mockingbird to be embedded in the heart of the service.

## Peer Support

A monthly support group is chaired by an experienced Wigan foster carer. This group provides a forum for speakers, peer support and liaison with the team managers and service lead.

Foster Carer Association is in development in Wigan and is being supported through foster carer peer led Greater Manchester support. The implementation plan has started with an anticipated launch date later in 2025.

Regular social events in partnership with Applecast Community Farm, enable carers and children to meet and get peer support in a family friendly environment.

## **Foster Carers Handbook**

Policies and procedures are available to carers online via the Tri.x Fostering Handbook which is updated regularly.

## **Training and Development**

The Fostering Service has a comprehensive training programme, and each carer has a personal development plan in place which aligns to the Signs of Happiness that our children have identified as being so important.

All carers will be expected to complete Safeguarding training prior to full approval as a minimum and it is a requirement to have a personal development plan in place.

A comprehensive rolling programme of training is available and reviewed regularly, meeting the on-going professional development of foster carers and special guardians. Kinship foster carers are also provided with targeted training opportunities more suited to the fostering task of caring for family members or friends' children. Special Guardians are encouraged to access the training programme.

The service is developing a pool of Foster Carer Training Consultants to enable carers to strengthen their training delivery skills and co-deliver training with staff in the service.

## **Customer Feedback Team**

Wigan Children's Social Care and Early Help has a Customer Feedback Team which is independent of the Fostering Service. Foster Carers are given information about the formal process of making a complaint and sharing compliments. This is detailed in their Foster Carer Agreement.

## **Allegations**

All allegations in relation to foster carers are investigated in accordance with the guidance on managing investigations into standard of care concerns and allegations. All allegation investigations will be undertaken in consultation with the Local Authority Designated Officer.

## Monitoring performance

The performance of Wigan Fostering and Special Guardianship Service is monitored against practice standards and performance targets using quantitative data and qualitative learning from quality assurance work.

- The Service Lead reports annually to the council's Corporate Parenting Board.
- The Service Lead reports monthly and quarterly to the Performance and Accountability Group.
- Team Managers report monthly to the Service Lead and quarterly to the Performance and Accountability Group on team performance.
- Sufficiency actions are monitored at the Sufficiency Steering Group.
- Quality assurance is monitored through monthly audits completed by team managers, moderated by the service lead and collated by the Quality Assurance Unit.