

FOSTERING SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This Statement of Purpose relates to the Fostering Service provided by the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames Children's Services and Safeguarding and is a requirement under The Fostering Services Regulations 2002. The Statement of Purpose is formally approved by elected members. Furthermore, it should be reviewed, updated and modified, where necessary, at least annually.

1. Aims and Objectives of the Local Authority in relation to the Fostering Service

The Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames (RBK) aims to provide a full and comprehensive Fostering Service that is consistent with best practice and national and departmental standards and requirements.

The primary aim is to provide a range of family placements suitable for meeting the diverse needs of looked after children and young people whose needs and wishes, welfare and safety are at the heart of the fostering service. The ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language of looked after children and young people and the particular needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and positively valued and promoted when placement decisions are made.

The secondary aim is to provide consistently high quality services and support to Kingston foster carers by employing sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.

To achieve these aims the Fostering Service has the following objectives:

- To have in place an ongoing, monitored recruitment strategy to recruit foster carers. Recruitment campaigns are targeted to attract carers who can meet the needs of children and young people of all ages, including those with disabilities or other specific needs.
- To deliver planned initial and further training courses so that foster carers are trained in the skills required to provide high quality care and meet the needs of each child/young person placed in their care.
- To maintain a carer retention strategy ensuring that a wide range of support services are in place such that approved foster carers feel valued as part of the Fostering Service and their services as carers are retained.
- To achieve an annual net increase in the number of approved RBK foster carers to reduce reliance on Independent Fostering Agency placements.
- To develop a specialist fostering scheme, Fresh Start, for secondary school age looked after children who might otherwise be placed in residential placements.

- To promote the educational achievement of looked after children and young people by ensuring that Kingston foster carers provide them with every opportunity to achieve their maximum potential.
- To promote good health and fulfilling personal relationships of looked after children and young people by ensuring that foster carers help children and young people placed with them maintain good health and make productive use of their leisure time.
- To ensure that Kingston foster carers have access to specialist workers in the fields of education, health and mental health for advice and support in managing the particular needs of looked after children and young people in their care.
- To maintain a competitive, annually reviewed fostering fees and allowance structure, based on nationally recommended rates, ensuring all payments are paid on time.
- To ensure that staff employed by the Borough have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to meet the demands of the work they do. Staff are given regular opportunities for training and developing their skills and are regularly supervised, monitored and appraised.

2. Principles and Standards of Care

As a service provided by RBK Children's Services and Safeguarding, the principles upon which the Fostering Service operates are based on the five outcomes for all children enshrined in the Children Act 2004 and the Council's six Strategic Aims as set out in its publication *"Everyone Counts"*.

The five outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a positive contribution
- Achieving economic well-being

The Strategic Aims are:

- Working in Partnership
- Caring for the Environment
- Putting People First
- Enhancing Quality of Life
- Developing Education and Lifelong Learning
- Providing Best Value across all Services

The Council expects its foster carers to comply with the requirements of the UK National Standards for Foster Care (1999). In summary the Council requires carers:

- To provide every opportunity for children and young people in their care to achieve their maximum potential in terms of educational achievement, maintaining good health, experiencing fulfilling personal relationships and making productive use of their leisure time.

- To ensure that young people who have been looked after by foster carers enter the adult world as socially responsible and economically active citizens.
- To provide a secure home for children and young people in their care, endeavouring to make it an enjoyable experience with sufficient choices and challenges on offer designed to equip children to manage their own lives as age appropriate.
- To take positive steps to promote and value children's cultural heritage.

The Foster Carer Handbook is supplied to each carer and is reviewed annually. It provides a full description of the Fostering Service, summaries of local policies and practical advice about how to provide care of the highest quality. The Fostering Service also publishes a series of Good Practice guides in which the roles and responsibilities of foster carers in respect of a variety of topics are clearly identified. These are supplied to each foster carer, reviewed annually and reissued as necessary.

3. The Services and Facilities provided by the Fostering Service

3.1 Management Structure

The Royal Borough of Kingston Fostering Service is located within the Family Placement Team. The Family Placement Team also provides the Council's Adoption Service. The Team is managed, on a day-to-day basis, by the Family Placement Team Manager. A Practice Adviser (Fostering) deputises for the Team Manager, oversees the Fostering Duty service and supervises an agreed number of fostering supervising social workers.

- The Family Placement team is located within the Looked After Children's Services section.
- The Looked After Children's Services Section is a service group within Children's Services and Safeguarding, managed by the Directorate Head of Children's Services and Safeguarding.
- Children's Services and Safeguarding currently forms part of the Learning and Children's Services Directorate, managed by the Director of Learning and Children's Services.
- The Children, Youth and Culture Scrutiny Panel of elected members examines and reviews the activity of the Service through receiving the annual report of the Looked After Children Service.
- The executive of the Council makes any decisions it is required to in respect of the Fostering Service under the Council's own standing orders or as prescribed by legislation or regulation.
- As a department of the Local Authority, Learning and Children's Services operate within the framework of regulation and statutory guidance that applies to all Local Authorities. Children's Services and Safeguarding also make annual returns to the Department for Education and Skills as required by the Annual Performance Assessment.

3.2 The Services it provides

The Council's policy is that for children and young people who cannot remain with their own family and come into their care, the preferred option is a substitute family.

The Fostering Service actively recruits, trains, assesses, supervises, supports and reviews RBK foster carers and maintains the fostering service for the Borough.

Foster placements are provided for children and young people with RBK approved foster carers wherever possible. If no suitable placement is identified, placements with neighbouring boroughs or Independent Fostering Agencies may be commissioned.

Where a child or young person needs to be "looked after" in an emergency and relatives or friends come forward to undertake this task, then the Fostering Service will monitor the placement under Regulation 38 of the Fostering Services Regulations and carry out an emergency assessment if the length of the placement requires this. The Service aims to support kinship carers where this is possible and appropriate.

The Fostering Service provides the following types of placements:

- **Emergency placements**

This service provides emergency care, immediate safety, security and comfort when there are exceptional and unforeseen circumstances and no suitable arrangements can be made with relatives or family friends.

- **Task Centred Fostering**

These placements are usually planned periods of care to enable desired changes in family circumstances to occur. They include:

- ◇ Looking after a child when a parent is ill or imprisoned.
- ◇ Providing a holiday placement for a child attending a residential school.
- ◇ Assessment of a child's needs to assist longer-term planning.
- ◇ Rehabilitating a child to his/her family following a breakdown in relationships at home.
- ◇ Helping to prepare a child for long-term fostering or adoption.
- ◇ Pre-adoption baby placements.

- **Short Break (Respite) Foster Care**

A series of planned short break care arrangements to provide relief to the birth family and /or quality experiences meeting the needs of disabled children and other vulnerable children is a particular feature of this service. Short break arrangements also provide foster carers with a break when looking after a child in a long-term placement.

- **Permanent Fostering**

When children cannot return home and when adoption is not the right option, permanent fostering provides an alternative form of permanent substitute care for the duration of childhood. (These arrangements are considered by the Fostering Panel.)

4. Number, Relevant Qualifications and Experience of Staff

The Family Placement Team currently has a staffing level of 8.0 full-time permanent, qualified Social Workers, including the Team Manager. At present 7.0 full time permanent equivalent qualified social workers are employed and a successful experienced candidate has been offered the vacant post, commencing in early September 2006. There is a half-time Publicity and Recruitment Officer and the equivalent of 2.2 full-time Administrative Officers. The Family Placement Team also employs 5 named, sessional qualified workers as required. Qualified Agency workers may be engaged to cover vacancies as necessary.

The Team Manager has a social work qualification and a Diploma in Management Studies level 4.

All social work staff, including sessional staff, are CQSW or DipSW qualified.

One full-time worker and one half time worker hold PQ Childcare and PQ1. One full-time worker and two half time workers hold PQ1 and a part-time worker is undertaking PQ1.

Staff are regularly supervised. All social work staff are suitably experienced in the fields of Childcare social work and Family Placement.

5. Number of Foster Carers

On 31 May 2006 there were 44 approved RBK foster carer households.

6. Number of Children placed

On 31 May 2006 there were 33 children and young people placed in RBK foster homes, including 1 respite placement (with 4 other ongoing respite series of placements but with children not in placement on that day). A further 11 young people were placed with Independent Fostering Agencies and 1 child was placed with a foster carer approved by another London Borough.

7. Complaints

7.1 Wherever possible complaints are dealt with informally. Where appropriate, in the first instance, any complaint by or against a foster carer will be dealt with on a problem-solving basis. There is a written procedure given to all foster carers as an Appendix to the Foster Carer Handbook (Appendix 4). The Council has both corporate and Learning and Children's Services complaints procedures that operate if no resolution can be achieved at the problem solving stage.

7.2 Where a complaint against a foster carer constitutes a child protection allegation this is dealt with as a child protection enquiry and is investigated under the Council's own and Pan London Child Protection procedures.

7.3 The Council has a system for monitoring any incident involving verbal threats, aggression or violence. Foster carers are advised to notify their Supervising Social Worker if they experience such an incident. This is written in the Foster Carer Handbook.

7.4 There is a leaflet specifically designed for Looked after Children and Young People which advises them what to do if they have a complaint.

7.5 There is a leaflet 'A Guide for Service Users to Guildhall One' the Fostering Service is sited in Guildhall One. This advises service users how to complain and signposts to information on the complaints procedure (see 7.6) and for children and young people signposts to the Children and Youth Participation Officer.

7.6 There is a Complaints leaflet specifically designed, which is given to service users at prescribed times and information available on the website; www.kingston.gov.uk

7.7 RBK employs a Children and Youth Participation Officer who provides an advocacy service for children and young people living in the Borough. There is a much publicised leaflet advising how to contact her.

7.8 Complaints are logged/monitored in the Fostering Service Complaints Log.

7.9 During the year 2004 the Fostering Service received the following numbers of complaints:

- Informal (stage 1) 2
- Formal (stage 2) 0
- Review Panel (stage 3) 0

7.10 Informal – the outcomes of the informal complaints received were:

- Closed after satisfactory conclusion 2
- Ongoing 0

7.11 Formal

No formal complaints were made

7.12 Review Panel

No review Panels took place

8. The Procedures and Processes for Recruiting, Approving, Training, Supporting and Reviewing Carers

Recruiting and Approving

8.1 The Fostering Service employs a Recruitment and Publicity Officer who is responsible for co-ordinating campaigns to recruit foster carers. These include articles and advertisements in the local newspapers, posters in the town centre, car stickers, postcards, displays in local libraries, posters in schools, electronic banner display at the new cinema complex, open information sessions and various other methods. Information is available on local and national web-sites. As well as focused campaigns many people refer themselves directly throughout the year.

8.2 The Kingston website enables those interested to respond on line so the Duty Officer can contact them to discuss further.

- 8.3** Following an enquiry to the Duty Officer an information pack is sent.
- 8.4** A home visit by the Recruitment Officer, office interview with a fostering worker and an invitation to attend the initial training course, "*Skills to Foster*" are the next steps.
- 8.5** Usually after successful completion of the initial training course prospective foster carers are invited to make a formal application and then a fostering worker is allocated to undertake the Home Study assessment report. Occasionally an application will be accepted at the time of attending a Skills to Foster course and the home study started in parallel.
- 8.6** The service aims to complete assessments within 4-6 months. The Home Study report is then considered by RBK's Fostering Panel. The Panel makes a recommendation to the Fostering Service Decision Maker (the Directorate Head of Children's Services and Safeguarding) as to the suitability to foster and the approval status.

Supporting, Training and Reviewing Post Approval

- 8.6** On approval foster carers are allocated a Supervising Social Worker from the Family Placement Team. The Supervising Social Worker monitors the foster carer's performance and current placements, and provides advice, information and support. As well as regular home visits and meetings, the SSW undertakes at least one unannounced visit annually and carries out a comprehensive annual review of the foster carer.
- 8.7** Fostering workers organise various support groups for foster carers.
- 8.8** The Publicity and Recruitment Officer organises two annual retention events for foster carers and fostering staff.
- 8.9** Within four months of approval foster carers attend Child Protection Training and also an induction session with the Family Placement Team Manager and Fostering Practice Adviser.
- 8.10** There is a robust training programme for foster carers and carers are required to complete foundation training, hopefully within the first two years of a fostering career. Training sessions are held on a rolling programme at a variety of times to suit all circumstances. There is some joint training with fostering workers and social workers.
- 8.11** Further training includes supporting carers to undertake NVQ and specific courses, some alongside Learning and Children's Services social workers.
- 8.12** Out-of-Hours Foster Carer telephone support is available when the office is closed.

This Statement of Purpose is subject to annual review and is reflected in the Team Plan of the Fostering Service.

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