



Herefordshire Council Fostering Service **Statement of Purpose**

1. Introduction

This statement has been produced in accordance with the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 (3(1)) and is referred to as the "Statement of Purpose".

The National Minimum Standards and regulations form the basis of the framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the regulation of fostering services.

The statement outlines the aims and objectives of the Fostering Service and the services and facilities provided by the Fostering Service.

2. Aims and Objectives

Aims

- The Herefordshire Fostering Service aims to provide a comprehensive, high quality family placement service to children Looked After by Herefordshire Council and to deliver the service within national and local standards of management and good practice.
- It aims to provide good quality placement choice within a best value framework.
- The overarching aim is to achieve best possible outcomes for children and young people who are Looked After by Herefordshire Council.

Objectives

- To ensure that children are securely attached to carers capable of providing safe and effective care for the duration of their childhood.
- To ensure children are protected from emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect.
- To ensure children receive the education, health and social care they need to maximise their potential.
- To ensure that the services provided are flexible, responsive and supportive of carers.

3. Principles and Standards of Care

The Fostering Service seeks to ensure that its policies, procedures and practice comply with the following;

- Children Act 1989
- National Minimum Standards 2002 (Section 23(1) of the Care Standards Act 2000).
- Fostering Services Regulations 2002.
- U.K. National Standards for Foster Care (Fostering Network 1999).
- Code of Practice on the recruitment, training, management and support of foster carers (Fostering Network 1999).

The Fostering Service:

- Seeks to provide a choice of placement for all Looked After Children wherever possible.
- Seeks to provide or commission placements with foster carers for all Looked After children who require placements in a family setting.
- Respects the ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language of children and foster carers.
- Seeks to work in partnership with all those involved in the care of Looked After children, including, children, their families, foster carers and Social Workers.
- Recognises that children with disabilities may have additional special needs for placement.
- Respects foster carers as partners in the provision of a professional service.
- Seeks to ensure that the Fostering Service and the Herefordshire Aftercare Team work in partnership to maximise life chances for young people leaving care.
- To seek the views and opinions of young people and carers when planning and reviewing services.
- Seeks to provide continuity through a placement service, which works in partnership with Herefordshire's Adoption Service.

- Seeks to recruit, train and assess carers to the highest standard in order to meet the needs of local children for local placements.

4. Organisational Structure

Location

The Children's Resource Team, which comprises Adoption and Fostering, is located at Moor House, Widemarsh Common, Hereford in premises shared with Herefordshire's Adult Mental Health Team.

Management Structure

The Fostering Service Agency Decision Maker is the Head of Social Care (Children). The Children's Service Manager (Resources) is responsible for the overall management of the Fostering, Adoption, Family Support and Aftercare service.

The Fostering Team Manager is the Registered Manager of the Herefordshire Fostering Service.

The Children's Resource Team, incorporating the Fostering and Adoption Services employs the following staff.

- **2 Full Time (F.T) Team Managers:**
 - 1 Fostering Team Manager.
 - 1 Adoption Team Manager.
- **7.5 'Full Time equivalent' (f.t.e.) Family Placement Social Workers.** (These equate to supervising social workers).
- **1 full time "Homefinder" Family Placement Social Worker.** (A Homefinder is responsible for finding permanent placements for children).
- **1 full time "Shared Care" Social Worker** (Based within the Children With Disabilities Team).
- **0.5 f.t.e Child Psychologist.**
- **0.5 f.t.e. Play Therapist.**
- **1 full time Panel and Team administrator.**
- **2.75 full time Administration staff.**
- **Qualified Agency Family Placement Social Workers** (variable hours) are employed from time to time to compensate for staff vacancies.

Family Placement Social Workers in the Children's Resource team carry both fostering and adoption caseloads depending on expertise and the requirements of the service. This allows us to offer a more flexible service in response to changing demands and to provide continuity of support for carers preparing children for adoption. Currently the proportion of

worker time dedicated to the Fostering Service (including a full time duty service) is 6 Full Time workers.

The Managers and all Family Placement Social Workers are professionally qualified Social Workers with a diploma in social work or equivalent. Managers and Family Placement Social Workers have a range of experience in childcare settings and are experienced in the placement of children with foster carers and support to foster carers. The Fostering Manager, Children's Services Manager and Agency Decision Maker have relevant management qualifications.

5. Services and Facilities Provided

The Fostering Service provides a range of foster care to children and young people who are Looked After by Herefordshire Council. The service offers the following types of placements:

- **Emergency Contract Care;**
Contract foster family providing emergency and short-term support for children and young people of 10 years and over.
- **Short term foster Care;**
Carers offering short term and emergency placements for children pending long term arrangements for permanency or reunification.
- **Kinship Care;**
Care by friends or family members who are approved as foster carers.
- **Teenage Placement Scheme;**
Fee paid foster carers for teenagers.
- **Middle Years Scheme;**
Fee paid foster carers for children aged 7 to 12, at the time of placement, requiring permanency.
- **Long Term Foster Care;**
Foster care for children requiring permanency, who are under 7 at the time of placement.
- **Shared Care;**
Foster carers offering short break care for children with disabilities – up to 120 days per year.
- **Respite Care;**
Foster carers offering regular respite to children Looked After.
Foster carers offering respite to Children In Need.

Other Services Provided

- **Family finding**
This service is responsible for finding in house or externally purchased Fostering and Adoption placements for all referred children in Herefordshire.
- **The Fostering Panel**

Hereford operates its own Fostering Panel for the approval, review, registration and deregistration of carers.

- **The Fostering Duty Service**

A Duty Family Placement Social Worker is available throughout office hours. Outside office hours, foster carers can access the Hereford and Worcester Emergency Duty Team.

- **Education**

All children looked after by Herefordshire Council are encouraged to access educational opportunities and develop to their maximum potential. The Education Liaison Support Service provides advice, guidance and additional curriculum support to all foster carers and children. All children in foster care have access to a home computer and relevant educational software. Foster carers have a special link to the Herefordshire Library Service and initiatives such as "Caring with Books".

- **Health**

The physical health needs of children are monitored by the Medical Advisor to the Fostering Service. Each child placed is registered with a General Practitioner.

- **Psychological, Psychiatric and Therapeutic Support**

A Psychologist provides advice to foster carers and social work staff on all aspects of behaviour, attachment and mental well-being. A "fast track" referral system to the Herefordshire Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service is available for children in the care of the Herefordshire Fostering Service.

A Play Therapist is available to children placed with foster carers, preparing both the child and the carer to facilitate the child's move on to permanency foster care or adoption.

6. Number of foster carers and children placed.

The Fostering Service has, at any one time, in the region of 240 Foster carers living in 125 households. The numbers of carers and households varies on a monthly basis due to new registrations and de-registrations of foster carers.

On any one day Herefordshire Council will be looking after approximately 200 children. Of these 90% will be placed with families, the vast majority of whom are Herefordshire based foster carers. Herefordshire does not have a residential care facility and the very small number of children requiring residential care are placed with independent providers.

Additionally, 15 children and young people with disabilities receive regular short-term breaks with carers approved under the Shared Care Scheme.

7. Complaints

Herefordshire Council has a complaints procedure, which is communicated to all service users and to foster carers, Looked After children and their families.

In the past twelve months Herefordshire Child Protection Procedures were invoked on five occasions with regard to foster carers. The outcome of this was that one foster family was deregistered, one allegation was withdrawn and three were unfounded. No complaints were received against foster carers which invoked the Complaints procedure.

8. Recruitment, Pre-Approval Training and Support of Prospective Foster Carers.

The Fostering Service provides a range of services to local people who enquire about becoming foster carers.

The following is a summary of the recruitment, assessment and approval process:

- Publicity and promotion of foster care to attract new foster carers is continuous throughout the year and is detailed in a recruitment strategy.
- Prospective carers are provided with information about foster care within 48 hours of making the request.
- Prospective carers, who wish to have further information, will be visited by a Family Placement Social Worker, within 2 weeks. In order to provide continuity, this allocated worker will continue to work with the prospective applicant.
- Applicants are enrolled in pre-approval training, which occurs prior to or concurrently with the Form F assessment, whichever provides the timeliest service. This training opportunity is being extended to Kinship carers.
- Full statutory checks and references are undertaken on all applicants and CRB checks on any other adult in the household over the age of 16 years.
- All applicants complete a full medical questionnaire (British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) form AH1), which is made available to the agency medical advisor for comment.
- Assessments are undertaken by a qualified social worker in accordance with fostering service regulations and are completed using BAAF form F.
- A portfolio illustrating fostering competencies is completed as part of the assessment.
- All applicants are invited to attend one of two panels, either the Adoption and Permanency Panel, or the Fostering Panel, which makes recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker on the terms of their approval.

9. Post Approval Training

- On approval, foster carers are offered targeted training opportunities, related to their own development needs, e.g. “Men In Foster Care”, “Working with Children who have been Sexually Abused”.
- Herefordshire offers NVQ level 3 to all foster carers. This programme is being delivered in partnership with the Herefordshire College of Technology 10 foster carers enrolled in 2003 following a pilot group in which one carer successfully obtained the award.
- Currently, additionally, all carers are encouraged to complete First Aid training and multi-disciplinary child protection training. All foster carer training will be extended to Kinship carers as part of our on-going review of our services to them.

Support

- All foster carers are supervised by a Family Placement Social Worker.
- All foster carers have access to support groups. There are currently two support groups in operation. A social group, run by carers meets monthly. A daytime group is facilitated by Family Placement Social Workers. A further development is planned to extend group support to Kinship carers who currently have access to telephone support links to other carers.
- A Duty Family Placement Social Worker is available throughout office hours. This is the first point of contact for all enquiries for fostering, adoption and requirements for placements outside office hours, foster carers can access the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Emergency Duty Team.
- The Emergency Duty Team links with a locally based NCH family support service, which provides additional support to carers out of hours, if required.
- Foster carers have access to Herefordshire Education Liaison Support Service for advice and support to ensure children’s educational opportunities are maximised.
- Foster carers have access to a child psychologist, based in the Children’s Resource Team for on-going therapeutic support or one-off consultation, as required.
- A leisure pass gives foster carers and their families, full free access to Herefordshire’s leisure facilities.
- Foster carers who require respite on a planned basis can access respite services from other foster carers.
- A “buddying” system is facilitated by Family Placement Social Workers between experienced carers and newly approved carers.

- “Caring With Books”, an initiative in partnership with the library service, provides all foster carers with easy access to borrowing books, story sacks, videos and tapes with a “no blame, no fine “ agreement.
- Financial support is provided to carers needing to hire multi-purpose vehicles for special outings and holidays.
- Six monthly, a Foster Carer Forum is convened to celebrate the work of Herefordshire foster carers in partnership with elected members, officers and fellow professionals. The forum also provides a multi-disciplinary training event and a social opportunity for carers.

Reviews of Foster Carers

All carers are reviewed annually and their continued registration is considered by the Fostering Panel, which makes recommendation to the agency decision maker as to the terms of their continued registration. Bi-annually, foster care reviews are held at the foster home.

10. Approval and Review of Statement of Purpose

This Statement of Purpose was formally approved by the Cabinet Members of Herefordshire Council on 18 December 2003. It will be reviewed and updated annually. Copies will be distributed to the following;

- National Care Standards Commission.
- The Herefordshire Council Website.
- Foster Carers.
- A children’s version will be produced for dissemination to all children using the service.

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