

Fostering Statement of Purpose

2021/22

Help them write their future

Fostering offers children the chance to rewrite their future, you could make it a good one.

1. Introduction

1.1 Statement of Purpose and Function

This Statement of Purpose sets out the framework for the Fostering Service of Milton Keynes Council in the year 2021/2022 and is written in accordance with Fostering National Minimum Standard 16 (2011).

Milton Keynes Council (MKC) has been a Unitary Authority since April 1997. The Fostering Service operates within the Children and Families service in the people directorate.

The responsibility of Milton Keynes Corporate Parenting service is to *“the children in our care (and Care Leavers) we have a responsibility to make sure that we work together with our partners to provide the best possible care and protection for them by protecting them from harm and neglect and providing them support so every child has opportunity to succeed..” (Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2019)*

This Statement of Purpose sets out the framework for Milton Keynes Council Fostering Service. The Fostering Service is run in accordance with the principles outlined in the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services and the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011). The Fostering Service is committed to establishing and maintaining standards and ensuring quality outcomes for vulnerable Children and Young People.

The Statement of Purpose sets out the aims and objectives of the service and the facilities and services to be provided, as stipulated in legislation.

This annually reviewed document is provided, and/or made available upon request to:

- Employees
- Foster carers
- Local Authorities
- Children and Young People
- Fostering Applicants
- Ofsted
- The general public or other interested party

1.2 The Legal Framework:

The Milton Keynes Council Fostering Service is managed within the standards and best practice set out in:

- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review 2010
- The Care Planning and Fostering Regulations 2015

- Fostering: National Minimum Standards 2011
- The Care Standards Act 2015
- The Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 and Amendments 2013
- Private Fostering Regulations 2005
- Transition to Adulthood Guidance (2010)
- Staying Put Guidance – Arrangements for Care Leavers aged 18 and above to stay on with their former foster carers 2013
- Independent Review of Determinations (Adoption and Fostering) Regulations 2009
- The Children’s Social Care (Coronavirus) (Temporary Modification of Children’s Social Care) Regulations 2020
- The primary function of the Fostering Service is to embrace the principles in meeting the dimensions of developmental needs of children (Children Act 1989 Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review 2010) under the categories of:
 - Health
 - Education
 - Family and Social Relationships
 - Emotional and Behavioural Development
 - Identity
 - Social Presentation
 - Self-Care skills

2. Aims and Objectives

2.1 Aim

Milton Keynes Council Fostering Service is committed to provide high quality safe foster care placements for children of all ages which addresses their social, emotional, educational, health, cultural and identity needs and will enhance and maximise their life opportunities. They are referred to as ‘looked after’ children and young people.

The Fostering Service aims to ensure:

- The Child’s welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of all foster care provision.
- The promotion of a stable and safe environment, ensuring that children and young people are protected from abuse and neglect.
- That children are entitled to grow up in a loving environment that can meet their developmental needs.
- The promotion of educational attainment, progress and school attendance of all children and young people in foster care placements.
- That all children will be supported to develop their emotional, intellectual, social, creative and physical skills through the accessible and stimulating environment created within the foster home.
- A positive regard to a child or young person’s racial, religious, linguistic and cultural needs by endeavouring to recruit and retain foster carers from a diversity of backgrounds and experiences.
- There are anti-discriminatory practices that promote equal opportunities for all and value diversity of both foster children and carers regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, age, religious beliefs, disability or marital status.
- That the particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.

- The significance of contact for children in care is widely recognised with a clear commitment to maintain relationships with birth parents and the wider family, including siblings, half-siblings and grandparents. The foster carer's role in this is crucial.
- That the Fostering Service works in partnership with all parties in the professional team that supports the child or young person in a fostering placement. This involves Children's Social Care, foster carers, birth family, health and educational partners, voluntary agencies and at the centre, the child or young person.
- That foster carers have full information about the child/children they are looking after.
- Foster carers are provided with supervision, support and training to enable a child or young person to maximise their opportunities for education, health, personal care, leisure and sporting activities to develop their skills, confidence and self-esteem and work towards addressing any past negative experiences.
- Foster carers are trained and skilled in order that they can offer stable, high quality, confident and thoughtful care to the children and young people in the care of Milton Keynes Council.
- The Foster Carer Agreement sets out expectations and understanding of the local authority and its carers and are signed following approval in compliance for Fostering Service Regulations 27 (5) (B)
- The Registered Fostering Operations Manager will in consultation with the safeguarding service discuss any appropriate notifications to Ofsted in relation to relation to schedule 7 to ensure notification are made where a child has died or at child is at risk of sexual exploitation or where there has been a child protection investigation regarding a child in foster care.

2.2 Objectives:

- To prepare, supervise, support and train foster carers to enable them to provide high quality foster care to those placed with them and to assist the carers in developing their professional practice.
- To optimise, through a robust imaginative and inclusive recruitment programme, the opportunity for foster placement choice which will meet the diverse needs of the Milton Keynes children in care population.
- To 'family find' for children requiring planned permanent stable foster placements, who are unable to live with their birth family.
- To ensure regular monitoring of foster placements, e.g. through household reviews, supervision, and unannounced visits to determine whether children's needs continue to be appropriately met.
- To ensure that complaints and allegations about foster carers are rigorously investigated and that procedures relating to allegations are fully adhered to.
- To make sure that the work of Fostering Services reflects identified need and emerging priorities, taking into account Children's Social Care service plans and objectives.
- To ensure that all Private Fostering placements are monitored in line with government regulations and that all private foster carers are suitable for this role.
- To provide support for children and their carers who are subject to Special Guardianship Orders or Child Arrangement Orders.
- To ensure that all staff employed within the Milton Keynes Fostering Service have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to carry out their duties and ensure that each member of staff has a personal development plan which supports opportunities for training and developing their skills and that staff are regularly supervised and appraised.

2.3 The Foster Carers' Charter:

Milton Keynes Fostering Service is committed to reflecting the spirit and intentions of the Foster Carer Charter, which is set out below.

Children come first:

- Children in foster care deserve to experience as full a family life as possible as part of a loving foster family with carers who can make everyday decisions as they would their own child and without the child feeling that they 'stand out' as a looked after child.
- Children must be given every support to develop their own identities and aspirations, fulfil their potential, and take advantage of all opportunities to promote their talents and skills. Above all they should be listened to.

Local authorities and Fostering Services must:

- Recognise in practice the importance of the child's relationship with his or her foster family as one that can make the biggest difference in the child's life and which can endure into adulthood.
- Listen to and involve foster carers and their foster children in decision-making and planning and provide foster carers and their foster children with full information about each other.
- When making (and ending) foster care placements understand and clearly identify the continuing support needs of the child and the have contingency plans in place in the event that the placement is not successful.
- Treat foster carers with openness, fairness and respect as a core member of the team around the child and support them in making reasonable and appropriate decisions on behalf of their foster child.
- Ensure that foster carers have the support and development opportunities they need to provide their foster child with the best possible care. That includes liaising with local foster carers groups and seeking to respond to problems and disseminate best practice.
- Make sure foster carers are recompensed on time and are given clear information about any support allowances, fees, and holidays they will receive including in cases of dispute with the service or during gaps in placements.

Foster carers must:

- Provide positive adult role models, treat the foster child as they would their own child, and be a 'pushy parent' in advocating for all aspects of the child's development, including educational attainment and physical and emotional health and wellbeing and co-operate fully as part of a team with other key professionals in the child's life.
- Support their foster child and do all they can to make the placement work. Take part in the available learning and development opportunities, use skills and approaches that make a positive impact and enable the child to reach his or her potential. Support their foster child to help them to counter possible bullying and discrimination as a result of their care status.

2.4 The Golden Triangle

The Golden Triangle is our practice framework which encapsulates the Family Support Ethos, Signs of Safety methodology and our Principles of Practice. In Milton Keynes we pride ourselves on delivering a responsive, high quality service to our children, young people and families. Our Golden Triangle model of support helps families to move forward together, stronger and more able to cope with the challenges of life in a modern and thriving Milton Keynes.

3. Management and Staffing Structure

3.1 Management:

Overall responsibility for the Fostering Service is with the Head of Delivery – Corporate Parenting, who is directly accountable to the Service Director, Children and Families. Currently the Head of Delivery, a Team Manager, Two Deputy team Managers and Senior Practitioners provide the management capacity for the team and drive both the operational management and strategic direction of the Fostering Service as a whole.

3.2 Fostering Team Staff Establishment:

In March 2021 the Fostering Service underwent a managing change process and the two previous fostering teams; Support and Supervision and Recruitment and Assessment, were brought together under one Operations Manager. The two Deputy Managers undertake the day-to-day operations of both sides with oversight and strategic development from the one Team Manager. The FIRO role was deleted as part of the managing change process, with household reviews (HHR's) falling within the remit of the Fostering Operations Manager. The staffing structure is listed in Appendix 1.

3.3 Support to Fostering Service Staff:

In accordance with recruitment guidelines contained in Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011), all Fostering Service staff have a coordinated induction programme, to introduce them to the policies and procedures of Milton Keynes Council and Children's Social Care.

Fostering Service staff receive regular formal supervision from their line manager in accordance with the Milton Keynes Council Children's Social Work policy.

Fostering Service staff also have access to the services of a clinical psychologist, who is available to offer support and guidance about personal or case-related matters via either individual or group sessions.

Fostering Service staff performance and progress is now considered over the year and reflect on difficulties encountered. The change to use 1-2-1's to replace staff appraisals took place in April 2020 and is a means to support and develop staff continually and to identify and challenge performance issues as the earliest opportunity.

Fostering Service staff have access to a comprehensive annual training programme, and opportunities for continuing professional development. There is a range of opportunities available for qualified and non-qualified staff.

The Fostering Team welcomes regular student placements from the social worker degree and apprenticeship programme, which enriches the whole team's practice.

Milton Keynes Council provides an independent Employee Support Service, accessible to all Milton Keynes Council employees.

4. Service Provision

4.1 Overview:

The Milton Keynes Fostering Service offers children and families a wide-ranging source of support from children on the edge of care, to those who require a short term or long term looked after foster care provision.

The service also offers specific support to children with disabilities, those placed in private fostering arrangements and children subject to legal orders.

To meet the range of placements required for children in care, foster carers and Supported Lodgings Providers are assessed for specific tasks and these include:

- Short Term foster carers: short-term placements for children whilst their permanency is being secured.
- Remand placements: for those young people remanded to the care of the local authority.
- Kinship placement of a child or young person who is 'connected' to the applicant. These are assessed both as emergency (Regulation 24) and planned placements following a positive assessment.
- Permanent fostering placements: through active family finding, we identify appropriate permanent foster carers for children and young people, which provide the best possible match in respect of their identified needs.
- Parent and Child; assessment based foster placements for young parents and their child/ren in a family-based environment where parenting skills are able to be modelled and observed in line with a placement agreement.
- Foster to Adopt; placements for babies and children where their permanence plan is or is likely to be adoption, but who might also be reunited with their birth family. There carers are approved and supported via Adoption Connects but there is some crossover of support between the teams.
- Supported Lodgings; we offer young people aged of 16 plus accommodation to meet their support needs as they move towards independence.
- Staying Put; this scheme offers the opportunity for those young people aged over 18 years to remain with their current foster carers for a specified period of time in order that they complete education or training and who are supported further due to their vulnerability
- Private Fostering: we carry out assessments, monitoring and support of private fostering arrangements
- Family Finding: The Fostering Service will family find for children and young people where their permanence plan is to be placed in foster care outside of their birth family, until they are 18 years of age. In 2020, the service updated if Matching and Permanency Policy to reflect changes in the needs of children for permanency. Many more children are now being placed for adoption or Special Guardianship Order and very few children require Long term Foster Care.
- Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs); assessment and support of Special Guardians and preparation of reports as requested either by the court during care proceedings or as an avenue to secure permanence for a child or young person outside of the care system.

Kinship Foster Carers:

Milton Keynes Council (MKC) has a strong family support ethos and where possible, will place children within their wider family network or with a person connected to the child. The fostering recruitment and assessment side work closely with family members in undertaking initial viability assessments and fostering assessments and where deemed as appropriate, will assess and support the approved family member to gain Special Guardianship of the children in their care.

Supported Lodgings Carers:

There are currently two 'types' of supported lodgings carers, one is a commissioned service and the other is from existing foster carers who are subsequently approved to provide supported lodgings for their former foster children as they get older. The Fostering Service recognise the need to offer this resource more widely to young people moving towards independence and active recruitment is underway to achieve this.

Parent and Child Placements:

The Fostering Service is able to offer placements to young parents and their children. The foster carer will be tasked with specific responsibilities, including providing detailed reports to the assessing social worker but will not undertake a formal full parenting assessment.

Working in Partnership

The Fostering Service works in collaboration with fellow professionals based within the Family Support Teams, the Corporate Parenting Children's Team, 16-25 Care and Care Leavers Team and services across the council. This enables direct access to support children with their overall needs and supporting good outcomes.

Support for Carers

Milton Keynes Council proactively engages with Foster carers throughout the years, through monthly support groups for foster carers, including Kinship carers, specific social events which includes award ceremonies, fostering fun days, annual Christmas celebration, etc.

A mentoring scheme is in place for newly approved carers, whereby support is available from an experienced carer to assist with onboarding and settling in and also includes guidance with new issues in order to meet the child or young person's cultural or religious need. A buddy scheme is also in place to support carers.

The emergency out of hours duty rota is also available, whereby foster carers can access support over the phone from a supervising Social Worker.

Feedback and participation are encouraged through formal supervision, annual household reviews, coffee mornings, etc.

Foster carers are involved in recruitment through carer and young people videos.

There is a plethora of mandatory and additional training to enhance carers – these are accessible either classroom based or online.

4.2 Safeguarding:

All children and young people in care must be protected from harm and abuse. The robust vetting and assessment of foster carers and supported lodgings providers provides the basis to safeguard children and young people and the following further procedures to protect children are promoted by the Fostering Service.

- ✦ Fostering National Minimum Standards 4 and 19 (2011)
- ✦ Safer Caring Policy
- ✦ Promoting and Safeguarding the Welfare of Children training
- ✦ Missing from Care Procedure
- ✦ Milton Keynes Together (Safeguarding Children's Board) policies and procedures
- ✦ Child Sexual Exploitation Guidance

All foster carers receive 'Safer Caring' (a fostering network publication) following approval as carers. All children in care are subject to regular independent statutory reviews in line with Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 and 2013

The Fostering Service also has a detailed Allegation against Foster carers procedure revised in 2017, which is followed if an allegation is made against a Foster Carer regarding any child who is or has been in their care.

4.3 Health:

The Fostering Service promotes the health and development of children and young people living in foster care. The Looked after Child Nurse and the Primary Mental Health Nurse for Children in Care are both based within the Children in Care service. Fostering staff and foster carers have direct access to these professionals.

It is an expectation that all children and young people are registered with a GP and dentist. Foster carers are made aware of their obligation and responsibility to support children to attend medical, dental and other health appointments.

Each foster carer is provided with a medical card specific to the child in their care. Foster carers are given delegated authority to agree to action to meet the specific medical needs the child or young person may have.

All health care information for each child is provided to the foster carer prior to a child being placed in their care and specific training is provided where it is required to individual foster carers.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) offer a dedicated service to children in care providing one to one work with children and foster carers.

Foster carers have access to clinical supervision with Juliet Kesteven or Steve Farnfield, available on request, monthly slots available.

4.4 Promoting Educational Achievements:

The Fostering Service prepares and encourages foster carers to support each child's individual educational achievements whilst in a foster placement.

The Virtual School Team is based within the Children in Care service; fostering staff and foster carers have direct access to this professional team. This team provides support for carers and direct work to children and young people.

Foster carers are expected to undertake core training as part of their introduction post approval. This training includes promoting the educational achievements of children in care. Foster carers are also encouraged to attend further training to support the educational attainment of those children placed in their care. Foster carers are required to provide home environments that stimulate, encourage and value the experience of learning and educational achievements. As part of its pledge to looked after children, Milton Keynes Council ensures that children and young people have access to a computer.

4.5 Family and Social Relationships:

Contact arrangements are a significant vehicle for developing and maintaining key relationships in the child's life. As most children will return to their birth family, it is very important to support

family relationships, particularly those of siblings, as these are the longest relationships children will experience throughout their lives. Foster carers facilitate and support the child within their agreed contact arrangements and care plan.

4.6 Emotional and Behavioural Development:

It is vitally important to nurture good mental health and emotional stability for each child in foster care. The Fostering Service strives to provide nurturing and secure environments with opportunities for positive activities which build self-esteem and attachment. For children in need of clinical or therapeutic input the Fostering Service secures the input of the Primary Mental Health Worker based in the Corporate Parenting Team and can also access other resources through CAMHS.

The Fostering Service provides a wide range of learning and development opportunities which aim to assist foster carers in gaining a deeper understanding of, for example, attachment issues, which may impact on the emotional and behavioural development of children.

4.7 Identity:

The Fostering Service recognise that a child's sense of self is made up of many factors which includes culture, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, sexuality and disability and looks to place children in the best possible fostering family match available.

The Fostering Service offers training and assistance to foster carers to support children in recognising who they are and where they come from by the specific use of life story work training. Identity is a common thread that runs through all foster carer training including such topics as; building self-esteem and resilience; valuing the child for who he/she is; valuing difference and positive personal identity building.

Ongoing Life Story books and Therapeutic life story work are offered to support children in care and those leaving care through permanence.

4.8 Social Presentation:

The Fostering Service very much recognises the importance of the healthy living and communal interaction that leisure and social activities offer children and young people. It is important that children have the opportunity to learn a range of social skills, including the way in which they present themselves in different contexts. Foster carers offer and support children and young people in a range of social activities and opportunities where they can learn what is appropriate in different situations.

All children and young people are allocated specific 'life chances' money from the weekly allowance to support these activities and all foster carers have access to Passport to Leisure, which offers foster carers and the young people in placement reduced rates within specific sporting centres.

4.9 Self Care Skills and Moving Towards Independence:

Foster carers recognise that, over time children will be given greater responsibility for looking after themselves, their living space, clothes, and possessions and for making decisions about how they spend their time and money, although the timing of this may vary with individual children.

The Fostering Service provides training to foster carers to develop their skills regarding how to help young people prepare for adulthood and independent living. Foster carers are expected to provide young people with positive life experiences and to provide information, practical skills and advice that will support them in their transition to adulthood. This work is supported by the Corporate Parenting Team who provide Leaving Care services and support to young people, including the development and implementation of a Pathway Plan.

10 Participation:

The Fostering Service complies with the council's Children and Young People's Participation Charter which was signed by the Leader of the Council in, November 2014.

This gives a clear commitment that all council services will seek and be responsive to the views and participation of young people in the development and delivery of services.

A participation worker offers children and young people in foster care the opportunity to meet up, have fun and a place to discuss the matters that affect them in regular participation groups. Participation groups are split across the age ranges to maximise attendance and to gather the views of matters specific to the age range of the child.

The council also facilitates a Children in Care Council. This group of young people have direct access to the Corporate Parenting panel, lead member and senior managers to discuss and influence the service changes. Children in foster care are encouraged to be involved in both the participation groups and to discuss and influence the service changes. Children in foster care are encouraged to be involved in participation groups.

At Milton Keynes Council we want to incorporate and promote the voice of the child, family and carer in all Council activity and see Participation embedded in our culture and practice. We want to see children and young people shaping their lives now and for the future; and the services and support they and other children and young people receive. We want to ensure the specific involvement of our Looked After Children and Care Leavers to get opportunities to have their voices heard. The Fostering service is a key part of this work and is directly engaged with the Participation and Engagement Team to facilitate our Children in Care, Care Leavers and Carers to be involved. For young people this can include informal settings such as the different youth clubs available to them, a more formal setting in the Children in Care Council but also through 1:1 interaction with Social Workers, Supervising Social Workers, Participation Workers and the IRO and Virtual School teams. The Voice of the Looked After Child feeds into the wider Participation work on the views of young people across MK. To strengthen and add weight to the voice of the child MKC has adopted the Champion Model, where elected members Champion key areas of work, including Fostering, Voice of the Child and Children in Care.

5. Recruitment, Assessment and Approval of Foster Carers

5.1 Recruitment and Assessment:

The Milton Keynes Fostering Service actively welcomes enquiries from all individuals who are interested in fostering, regardless of age, marital status, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or disability.

The fundamental issue is whether prospective foster carers will be able compassionately to meet the complex needs of a child in care as set out in our Fostering Recruitment Policy 2021.

The Fostering Service has a number of staff actively working on the recruitment of foster carers. The operations Manager devises a Recruitment Action Plan at the beginning of each financial year. In order that this service is best placed to meet the needs of the growing numbers and changing needs of looked after children, the Recruitment Action Plan is informed by data analysis trends in the changing looked after children population.

The Fostering Service has a Duty system which offers a first point of contact to individuals making an initial enquiry to become a foster carer. Following initial screening the enquirer is sent a fostering information pack. After this, the Duty officer will arrange an initial visit to discuss the application further. If both the applicant and the Duty officer feel the application should proceed, Enhanced DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks are undertaken together with positive identification checks. During this time an Assessing Social Worker is allocated to undertake the fostering assessment, support the applicants to Panel and remain with them for the first 3 months of their fostering journey.

Timescales

- Initial enquiries will be responded to within one working day
- Information Packs will be sent out within one working day
- A follow up telephone call will take place within five working days
- Initial home visit offered within ten working days
- From application to Fostering Panel should meet Fostering National Minimum Standard of eight months. (Fostering NMS 13:2011) The Fostering Service is aiming to complete any foster carers assessment within six months in 2017/2018.

Assessment

Recruitment of foster carers is carried out according to the statutory requirement that the welfare of the child is the primary consideration.

Applications are welcomed from couples in stable and enduring relationships and single adults. Prospective foster carers are assessed thoroughly, sensitively and openly by staff who are appropriately qualified and supervised. Foster Care regulations and The Fostering minimum standards 2011 form the basis of the assessment. To meet these requirements the Fostering Service assesses potential foster carers using the Coram BAAF Form F format.

For children placed with a connected person, the fostering team will complete the full

assessment in 16 weeks or up to 24 weeks in some circumstances, in line with Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.

The following conditions must be met when applying for general approval as a foster carer.

All adult applicants and their household will be required to undertake statutory checks which include:

- DBS Check (Disclosure and Barring Service)
- Systems check for MKC to ensure children are not known to child protection
- Health
- Schools if you have children of school age
- Previous partners

- References (personal and employment)
- Financial
- Social media check

Stability and Age

Applicants must be at least 21 years of age. Applications from couples are unlikely to be accepted where the duration of their relationship has been for less than 2 years. Applicants will need to show that they have a broad experience of life in order to meet the demands of this challenging role. Applicants will also need to show that they are fit and healthy enough with high energy levels to care for the young people who are fostered.

Accommodation

The assessment of the accommodation will take into account the safety of the child and whether there is sufficient space for all the family. It is expected that all foster children will have their own bedroom unless the child chooses to share with a sibling of a similar age and gender or is very young these arrangements will be based on a risk assessment. It is expected that a carer will have security of tenure.

Contact

Applicants must have a personal telephone number and email address. They must have the use of a home computer, to access online information such as the Foster Carers Handbook and to support children with homework.

Pets

Applicants must not keep dangerous pets. All carers being assessed will have to carry out a detailed Dog/Pet questionnaire.

Weapons

Applicants must keep any dangerous weapons secure and in compliance with the relevant regulations.

Financial security and Working Carers

Applications from people on all levels of income including State Benefits are welcome. Applicants must understand that registration as a foster carer is not a form of employment and therefore there are no guarantees with regard to income. It must be considered as part of an assessment that foster carers are not paid when they do not have a child in a placement. It is the usual requirement that one carer will not be employed outside of the home and that a carer will be available before and after school, (including facilitating the school run), if a child is ill or excluded from school and to attend planning and other meetings relating to a child/children. Carers will also need to be available to attend training and support groups. Applicants may be able to undertake some part time work alongside the fostering roles particularly if they are caring for older children. Consideration will need to be given to other caring commitments and how these can be balanced with the fostering role.

Applicants' Children

Applicants will want to ensure that becoming a foster carer will not negatively affect the welfare of any other children living with them. MKC is committed to considering and supporting the welfare of applicants' children in relation to the fostering placements that are made. Foster carers birth children will be supported and seen regularly by the fostering social worker and at annual reviews.

Health and Smoking

A Medical will be undertaken for all applicants. Health factors that may impact on applicants' capacity to care for children will be considered when assessing applicants. These issues are important with regard to how they may impact on the applicant's capacity to care for child/children. All medicals will be reviewed by the agency medical advisor. With reference to current policy, due to the known health risks associated with secondary smoking MKC's aim is to provide a smoke free care environment for Children in Care. Existing carers are therefore proactively encouraged to stop smoking. Applications will not be accepted from people who smoke, or have smoked in the past 12 months, for children under the age of five or disabled children. Electronic cigarettes will be classed as the same as smoking. Fostering Placements will not be made in smoking households of children who are suffering from asthma or other respiratory problems, heart conditions or glue ear.

In addition, successful applicants would be expected to have a household smoking policy that prohibits smoking indoors, and that promotes a healthy understanding of the risks to health of both passive and active smoking.

Applicants will also be required to demonstrate how they will encourage young people not to smoke when they, themselves, are smokers or use E-Cigarettes. Foster Carers should not encourage children/young people to smoke or purchase tobacco under the legal age limit. Where carers are aware that young people in their care may be drinking and or smoking, they should advise the child's social worker.

Drugs and Alcohol

Where Carers are prescribed drugs for purposes of treatment, they must ensure that they are properly secured in a locked medicine cabinet and present no risk to fostered children/young people. If the drugs need to be kept in the fridge, a lockable cash box is a useful way of keeping them secure. The illegal use of drugs by Foster Carers whilst they are responsible for the care of children/young people is expected to result in de-registration. Such matters will be referred to the relevant Fostering Panel.

Foster Carers must not collude in any way with the taking of drugs by young people in their care. Carers must advise a young person's social worker of any concerns they have regarding their use of drugs.

Foster Carers must ensure that if they are drinking alcohol, this does not result in the inability to be responsible for children in their care. The service has a specific alcohol policy that is shared with

Foster Carers to assist their understanding of the services expectations.

Foster Carers should be aware that many children/young people will associate alcohol with inappropriate care as a result of their personal experiences, and therefore may be fearful when they see Carers drinking.

Foster Carers should not encourage children/young people to drink or purchase alcohol under the legal age limit. Where Carers are aware that young people in their care may be drinking alcohol, they should advise the child's social worker.

Transport

Providing transport for Children in Care is an integral aspect of the role of foster carers. If approved, applicants will be required to transport children to school, medical appointments, contact and other meetings as required. They will need to have access to a car that is properly taxed, insured, maintained and equipped at all times. Where a carer does not drive, they will need to evidence that they can transport children as required.

5.2 Kinship/Connected Persons Applicants:

Kinship carers will be required to meet the same rigorous standards as mainstream applicants although there is some discretion within the assessment for these carers where that is in the interest of the child for whom they wish to care.

Relatives and friends will be treated with respect, and an acknowledgement of the difficulties of the family situation which has led to the child becoming looked after. In some cases, the child's social worker will complete a short viability assessment of the prospective carers to ensure that there is a degree of confidence in the arrangement that is being offered. A full fostering assessment will be completed jointly by a fostering social worker and the child's social worker prior to the child being placed. In an emergency, where it is necessary for the child to be placed first, then a temporary assessment, will be undertaken and temporary approval must be agreed by the Nominated Officer. Full approval must be given by the fostering panel and decision maker no more than 16 weeks after the child is placed (unless there are exceptional circumstances when an 8-week extension can be made), if the carers are not approved in this time then the child must be removed from their care.

Each applicant is required to undertake a full health check (using the Coram BAAF AH form) to ensure they are fit to carry out the fostering duties. Personal and employment references are also sought.

If at any stage, the social worker considers that the assessment should not continue, this will be discussed in supervision with their line manager and then shared with the applicant(s) as soon as possible. Reasons for this decision will be provided in accordance with regulations.

Subject to the Foster Panel recommending approval, the Agency Decision Maker will make the final decision regarding approval and the foster carers will receive clear terms of approval in writing.

An agreement setting out the terms of the contract between Children's Social Care and the foster carers is drawn up and signed by both parties. The terms of reference for the 'Foster Carers Agreement' are set out in the regulations and define the roles and responsibilities of Children's Social Care and foster carers.

5.3 Non acceptance of Applications:

Applications will not be accepted from people who:

- Are in a household with a transient resident population - i.e. guest house or one taking students
- Wish to continue to work as registered child minders
- Wish to continue to be approved to foster for another local authority or independent agency
- Wish to continue to privately foster children

5.4 Fostering and Adoption Panel:

Milton Keynes Fostering and Permanence Panel operate in accordance with relevant fostering regulations and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011.

The Panel considers the approval of prospective foster carers, reviews of current carers, the matching of children and young people into permanent fostering arrangements, where allegations made against foster carers and the termination of approvals.

Panel may make a 'Qualifying Determination', that it considers a prospective or existing foster carer is not suitable to foster a child and does not propose to approve him or her as suitable to foster a child. In these circumstances the prospective or existing foster carer may either apply to the Independent Reviewing Mechanism for a review of the qualifying determination or make representations themselves to the Fostering Service.

5.5 Following approval: Supervision, Support and Training to Foster Carers:

Foster carers have the most important role to play within the Fostering Service and are critical to MKC efforts to achieve positive outcomes for Children in Care.

MKC actively seeks to recognise the very important contribution made by foster carers through provision of supervision, training, and formal recognition. We support our carers throughout their journey, recognising the challenges they face in their first year.

All approved carers remain with their Assessing social worker for the first 3 months whilst also having an allocated supervising social worker. This recognises the handing over period and enables the worker with the established relationship can aid a lot of the settling process. It is important for carers to feel safe and supported during this transition as there is a lot of learning and systems to understand. It provides an opportunity to reflect on their assessment and begin matching with children and young people. Furthermore, it provides a blueprint for thoughtful transitions that carers can understand when it comes to moving a child on.

Newly approved carers have access to our Mentoring programme and can be matched with a trained and experienced foster carer.

All approved foster carers are given a welcome pack and a password to access the foster carer's website.

All approved foster carers will have access to the comprehensive training programme.

All mainstream foster carers are expected to complete the training support and development (TSD) Induction Standards within the first year's training. Kinship foster carers have 18 months to complete the standards. Training workshops are regularly run to assist foster carers in completing this task.

Foster carers' approval is reviewed on an annual basis, or more frequently where required. Re-approval of foster carers is not automatic, and where issues of concern have arisen the decision regarding whether approval will be renewed may be referred to the Fostering Panel. For all new foster carers, the first Annual Review will be presented to the Fostering Panel as a matter of course.

Foster carers will receive unannounced visits from the social worker for any child placed with them, as well as unannounced visits from the Fostering Service.

DBS checks will be renewed every 3 years (or earlier if required). Other checks may be carried out at point of review if necessary.

Medicals are undertaken every 3 years as standard or following any period of significant illness, injury or medical treatment.

6. Complaints and Allegations

6.1 Complaints:

Milton Keynes Council has a clear commitment to dealing with complaints through listening, discussion and early resolution. Under Section 26 of the Children Act 1989, children and young people who are receiving specific services from the Council, have the right and opportunity to complain if they consider that the service has not adequately provided for them, or about which they have not been consulted. It also gives parents and carers the chance to complain on behalf of the child/young person. An independent advocacy service is available to all Milton Keynes children in care.

Sometimes, the distinction between a complaint and an allegation is not always clear. If there is doubt, Fostering Services will err on the side of caution and will follow the protocol for allegations.

6.2 Allegations against Foster Carers:

There is a clear and robust protocol to be followed should an allegation be made against a foster carer or a member of their household. This could be in relation to a child currently in placement or a historical issue.

Fostering Allegations Policy 2021 is available for all carers.

The welfare of children remains of utmost importance and all allegations are viewed as extremely serious. From notification, a member of the management team will contact the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), to ensure that the allegation is considered independently and procedurally appropriately. LADO information packs are provided to carers. This sets out LADO role and responsibility, access to Fostering Network, independent support and advice and mediation support.

Following the conclusion to an investigation (and, where appropriate, once a completed risk assessment is available) a completed household review will be presented to the Fostering Panel for their consideration.

The service recognises the particular stress foster carers experience when they are the subject of an allegation. The supervising social worker remains the first port of call for fostering households and holds the primary function of supporting a family through this time and beyond – understanding the very real impact of allegations on emotional wellbeing.

If an Internal Investigation is required, this is undertaken by an Assessing social worker. The service recognises the need for independent advice and support to carers in this situation and funds the individual membership of Fostering Network for each of our approved foster carers. Through this service, foster carers can access the services of the Fostering Network Advice and Mediation worker, in addition to their 24/7 legal help line, should an allegation or complaint be made against them or a member of their family.

6.3 Regulatory:

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)

From April 2007, Ofsted has been the public body responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting Fostering Services provided by both Local Authorities and Independent Fostering Agencies, under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000.

However, from November 2013, Ofsted stopped carrying out individual inspections of local authority Fostering Services. Under a new Single inspection Framework (SIF), Ofsted currently inspects local authority services for children in need of help and protection; children looked after and care leavers. These inspections include local authority adoption agencies and Fostering Services.

All enquiries or contact with Ofsted should be addressed to:

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate,
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
Telephone: 0300 123 1231
Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

The Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)

The IRM started operation in April 2004. It is operated by Coram Children's Legal Centre on behalf of the Department for Education. Since 1 April 2009 this service was expanded to include consideration of fostering cases. This enabled the option of an independent review of the qualifying determination where a Fostering Service provider proposes not to approve prospective foster carers or to withdraw or change the terms of an existing foster carer's approval.

The IRM review the qualifying determinations made by a Fostering Service provider and make a new recommendation having considered all the relevant information afresh. The IRM do not make the final decision this is down to the fostering provider but the IRM's recommendation must be taken into account when the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) makes their decision.

Independent Review Mechanism

Unit 4, Pavillion Business Park
Royds Hall Road
Leeds
LS12 6AJ
Telephone: 0845 450 3956 (charged at local rate) or 0113 202 2080

Appendix 1

Fostering Operations Manager – 1 Full Time Equivalent (FTE)

Deputy Team Manager – Support and Supervision – 1 FTE

Senior Practitioner – 4.6 FTE

Social Worker – 5 FTE

Social Work Assistant – 2 FTE

Deputy Team Manager – Recruitment and Assessment – 1 FTE

Senior Practitioner – 6 FTE

Social Worker – 1 FTE

Social Work Assistant – 1 FTE

Available in audio, large print, braille and other languages