

# SOCIAL CARE, HEALTH AND WELLBEING

## Kent Fostering Service Statement of Purpose & Policy



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# POLICY AND PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

## Introduction

This Statement of Purpose sets out the framework for Kent's Fostering Service. Kent's 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). As a local authority provision, the Fostering Service adheres to Kent County Council's policies and procedures for Specialist Children's Services. These give written guidance to staff to enable an efficient and effective service to be delivered. The Kent Fostering Service is committed to establishing and maintaining standards, and ensuring quality outcomes for vulnerable Children and Young People

## Legislative and policy framework

Kent's Fostering Service is run in accordance with the principles outlined in the:

- Children Act 1989
- Fostering: National Minimum Standards (2011)
- The Care Planning and Fostering regulations 2015
- The Care Standards Act 2015
- The Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 & Amendments July 2013.
- 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
- Family & Friends Guidance (2010)
- Transition to Adulthood Guidance (2010) including Staying Put
- Independent Review of Determinations (Adoption & Fostering) regulations 2009
- Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006

## Procedures

The following procedures inform the delivery of fostering services by Kent County Council

- Culturally Competent Care Policy, Procedure and Guidance
- Contact Policy and Procedures
- Kent & Medway Safeguarding Children Procedures
- Guidelines for Social Workers on Foster Carers Wishing To Adopt
- Permanent Fostering Procedures
- Staying Put Policy (2016)
- Permanency Policy, Guidance & Prompts (2016)
- Family and Friend Care Kinship Policy Procedures and Guidance
- Special Guardianship/Policy Procedures and Guidance
- Allegations and complaints against Foster Carers
- Statutory Guidance on Promoting the Health of Looked After Children (2015)

## **Kent County Council (KCC) Policy Statement**

KCC recognises that a child's needs are best met by a nurturing family and is committed to placing children who are not able to remain within their own family in an appropriate alternative family placement wherever possible.

KCC is committed to placing children and young people with KCC approved foster families and has developed and invested in a dedicated and comprehensive Fostering Service that actively works to meet the quality standards required and the diverse needs of the children who become looked after by KCC and their families.

KCC is also committed to placing children and young people with local foster families in order to allow them to maintain contact with families and friends continue at the same school and thrive within their own community. Wherever possible children will be placed within 10 miles of their local community (other than where there is a risk that means they need to be placed outside of their community)

Each child/young person will have access to foster care services which recognise and address their needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality. Placement decisions will consider the child's assessed racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic needs and match these as closely as possible with the ethnic origin, race, religion, culture and language of the foster family (Culturally Competent Care Policy)

### **Aims and Objectives**

The main aim of Kent's Fostering Service is to provide stable and high quality foster care placements for children of all ages that value, support and encourage them to grow and develop as individuals.

In addition to promoting their health and general well-being the service is also committed to ensuring that every foster carer recognises the importance of the educational achievement of Children in Care and work with KCC in raising their academic attainment. The Service also recognises that a small number of children may not achieve formal academic qualifications but will encourage foster carers to help children and young people to reach their maximum educational ability.

### **Structure of Kent Fostering. (Detailed structure charts in Appendices)**

The Registered Manager and Head of Service for Kent Fostering is Caroline Smith. The centralised part of the Service is directly line managed by the Head of Fostering which includes recruitment and assessment, decision making on all new approvals including Connected Persons, administration of six fostering panels, Specialist Fostering Service including Disability Fostering and the Fostering Review Team. Training and Development for foster carers and Initial Enquiries are also managed directly by the Head of Fostering.

The county has seven area Fostering Support Teams, directly line managed by Service Managers within the areas, alongside the Child in Care teams. This structure is to promote joint working and support to foster carers, children and young people. The Fostering Support Teams supervise foster carers, match all referrals for children placements with appropriately skilled carers, promote training for carers and facilitate support groups. They are also responsible for the completion of placement plan arrangements and ensuring safe care plans and delegated authority are completed.

## **Kent Pledge**

The fostering service supports the Kent Pledge to Children in Care.

## **Our Pledge**

*We understand that being in care and leaving care is not always easy and that it can bring extra challenges and pressures for you. If we are going to get it right for you we need to make a real difference to help you do your best and have success in your life. Our pledge includes a number of things we will do that will help make sure that your time in care is a positive experience. These are based around six themes:*

- *A sense of belonging*
- *An adult who is always there for you while you are in care*
- *A good education.*
- *Good memories for the future*
- *Getting ready for being an adult.*
- *Championing your needs and interests*

## **Services provided by Kent County Council**

KCC Fostering Service has a range of fostering services for children who need them these include:

- Individual and sibling group placements
- Bridging placements
- Emergency placements
- Task Centred placements
- Permanent and long term fostering
- Parent and child placements
- Respite placements
- Specialist Short breaks Scheme for disabled children
- Disabled Children's foster placements
- Connected persons foster placements

## **The Aims of the Fostering Service**

The aims of the Fostering Service are to ensure:

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of foster care provision.
- Promotion of a stable and safe environment ensuring that children and young people are protected from abuse and neglect.

- Children are entitled to grow up in a loving environment that can meet their developmental needs.
- Promotion of educational attainment, progress and school attendance of all children and young people in foster care placements.
- 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.
- The promotion of the health, personal care and developmental needs of all the children and young people in foster care placements.
- Positive regard for the child's racial, religious and cultural needs. Children should have equal access to local family based care regardless of race, religion, ability or disability.
- Children's views, wishes and feelings are acted upon, unless this is contrary to their interests or adversely affects other members of the foster care household.
- 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.
- 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, and of maintaining relationships with birth parents and the wider family, including siblings, half-siblings and grandparents, is recognised, as is the foster carer's role in this.
- Acknowledgment and recognition of the contribution that can be made by family and friends as carers.
- Foster carers have a right to full information about the child
- Partnership between all those involved in fostering children is essential for the National Minimum Standards to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes other statutory agencies, fostering service providers and foster carers and forms part of Kent County Councils Foster Carer Charter.

## SECTION 2

### RECRUITMENT, ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF FOSTER CARERS

#### Recruitment

##### Initial Enquiries Team

Dedicated administrative staff will offer a gateway into the service and provide the following functions:

- Co-ordinate advertising
- Dedicated telephone line/answer phone so all enquires routed to them
- Provide consistent responses to enquiries
- Initial screening to see whether those enquiring meet minimum criteria for acceptance for assessment
- Collate and send out packs and application forms
- Receive and acknowledge applications
- Input details of enquiry/application into database
- Track application during assessment process and provide ongoing link/liason
- Collection of data in relation to applications and timescales

##### Timescales

- Initial enquiries will be responded to within one working day
- Packs will be sent out within one working day
- Follow up call within five working days
- Initial home visit offered within ten working days
- From application to Panel should meet the National Minimum Standards of eight months. The Service aims to complete within six months.

##### Advertising

Dedicated staff will use a range of media via the Communications team (newspapers, radio, posters , social media and website) and include:

- Campaigns
- "Drip drip" advertising
- Editorials (particularly in relation to campaigns)
- Website
- Posters
- Leave behind cards
- Leafleting
- Community presence including use of banners and roundabout advertising

Adverts will be general (setting out the range of care needs) and specific for districts or particular types of carers.

Leaflet drops will take place in the Districts where recruitment of carers is needed to meet the needs of the Children in Care population

Advertising will target those most likely to be interested in caring. Information will be made available through Education services including schools, health providers and Local Authority information and locations.

KCC strives to place children with carers from similar backgrounds, and there is a particular shortage of carers from black and minority ethnic families, these applications will be particularly encouraged, by specific advertising and promotion of fostering.

The fostering recruitment strategy will outline the requirements for the service.

### **Bounty Scheme**

Kent has a continuing need to increase and replenish its bank of foster carers and, since it is recognised that the best way of finding new foster carers is through existing carers – often relatives or friends – a bounty payment will be made to any existing carer who is fostering for KCC who successfully introduce new carers to the Service. The bounty will be paid when the new carer is approved.

### **Information**

General information about the Service is available on the website and also is provided over the telephone. The information pack, brochure and an application form will be sent out to the prospective carers via email or post.

### **Information Open Events**

Prospective carers can attend the monthly information events (which are published on the website) to hear about the service from existing carers and Fostering staff. It is also an opportunity to ask questions.

### **Tracking**

The Recruitment Co-ordinator will track all enquiries and applications

### **Determining suitability of applicants**

Recruitment is undertaken 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.

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

### **Statutory Checks**

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

- DBS Check (Disclosure and Barring Service)
- Systems check for KCC 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**

Applications from couples are unlikely to be accepted where the duration of their relationship has been for less than 2 years

**Age**

Whilst there is no upper or lower age range 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 on line information such as the Foster Carers Handbook and to support children with homework.

**Pets**

Applicants must not usually have more than 2 household dogs or keep dangerous pets. A risk assessment of all animals will be undertaken and for any household where there are more than 2 dogs agreement must be obtained by the Service Manager.

**Weapons**

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

**Financial security**

Applications from people on all levels of income including State Benefit 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. Foster carers are self-employed and not paid when they do not have a child in a placement.

**Working carers**

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/ren. 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 role 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. KCC 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**

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/ren. All medicals will be reviewed by the agency medical advisor.

### **Smoking**

Due to the known health risks associated with secondary smoking KCC's aim is to provide a smoke free care environment for Children in Care. Existing carers are therefore pro-actively encouraged to stop smoking. Applications will not be accepted from people who smoke, or have smoked in the past 6 months, for children under the age of 5 or disabled children. E cigarettes will be classed as the same as smoking. 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 smoking policy that precludes 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**

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 Service Manager and 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.

### **Alcohol**

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.

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.

Foster Carers must be aware that whilst they are responsible for the care of other people's children, they must take account of their own alcohol consumption

### **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.

### **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 child minders
- Wish to continue to be approved to foster for another local authority or independent agency
- Wish to continue to privately foster children

### **Relative & friend/Connected Persons applicants**

Relative/friend 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 it 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 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 (Area Assistant Director). 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.

Relatives and friends carers may undertake the training that is offered to all foster carers. This includes the Skills to Foster training along with the initial and core training. Where this is completed the full fostering payment (i.e. maintenance and fee) will be made. If training is not undertaken then the maintenance payment in accordance with the age of the child will be made.

### **Recruitment of Connected Person carers outside Kent**

The Fostering Service will undertake to recruit, assess and supervise foster carers from other parts of the country where it is clearly in the child's interest to be placed with relatives or friends and away from their home community.

### **Social Services Employees who Foster**

- When considering an application to foster, the worker needs to consider the Corporate Conflict of Interest Policy and discuss it with their line manager.
- It would not normally be considered appropriate for a Children and Families Social Workers to be assessed as a foster carer for the geographical area in which they live. Fostering Social Workers will not normally be assessed as a foster carer for the authority in which they are employed
- During the assessment process, the assessing Social Worker should pay particular attention to any conflict of interest between work and fostering. He/she should seek the views of the applicant's line manager to ensure that areas of potential conflict have been fully discussed. Areas could include access to information, demands of their job, or conflict for the person as either a worker or Foster Carer if allegations are made against them.
- The type of child, age and number of children are always looked at during assessments, but special attention needs to be given to this to ensure that work and fostering are compatible

### **Assessment and preparation of prospective foster carers**

The process of approving a foster carer should usually take no more than 8 months as per the NMS. It is the Service target to aim to reduce this to six months where ever possible. The process is divided into 2 stages as per the Fostering Services Regulation 2013. The recruitment and assessment of all new carers is undertaken by the Centralised Fostering Service.

### **Initial visit**

When the Initial Enquiry team accepts an application a fostering social worker will undertake an initial home visit within 10 working days. This visit will take place at the home of the prospective applicant.

The assessment process and the criteria for approval will be clearly explained to applicants at the initial visit.

### **Stage 1 of the Assessment**

#### **DBS check**

These will be instigated following the initial visit. Formal checks in the form of Enhanced Disclosures from the Disclosure and Barring Service must be undertaken for all applicants and members of their household aged 18 and over.

Previous offending behaviour will be scrutinised and applications are unlikely to be progressed if any member of the household has been cautioned for, or convicted of:

- Offences against children
- Driving disqualification within the last 5 years
- Any offence involving harm to another in the last 10 years

### **Other checks**

Checks will also be undertaken within KCC's own information systems (including the LADO) and those of other local authorities where the prospective carer has lived in the previous 10 years. If any applicant's own children or any other child they have cared for have ever been subject to a Child Protection Plan, legal proceedings or compulsorily removed from their care this will preclude the application from proceeding.

All applicants will be required to provide the following information:

- Proof of identity including a recent photograph e.g. driving licence, passport or birth certificate;
- A full employment history, together with a satisfactory written explanation of any gaps in employment;
- Where a person has previously worked in a position whose duties involved work with children, so far as reasonably practicable, verification of the reason why the position ended; a formal reference will also be taken;
- A letter from landlord confirming; a) that the applicant has sought and gained permission to undertake placements, where permission is required by the terms of any lease or tenancy agreement and b) that the applicant is not in arrears with their rent payments and that they are not in breach of the terms of their lease or tenancy;
- For applicants who own their property a mortgage statement confirming regular payments and that there are no arrears will need to be provided;
- Documentary evidence of any relevant qualification;
- A social media check will be undertaken to include Facebook and other social media sites.

### **References**

In addition to the statutory references a minimum of six personal references will be taken up for fostering applications. References from ex partners and children from previous relationships will also be sought. A minimum of three of the personal referees will be interviewed by the Fostering Social Worker. If there are adult children of the family they will receive a written reference request, followed up by an interview during the assessment process. Previous partners will also be interviewed as part of the assessment process.

### **Assessment process**

All eligible applicants will be assessed to determine whether they are suitable to become a Kent foster carer. Each application will be considered on its merits with the welfare of children being paramount.

A written agreement will be undertaken outlining how the assessment process will progress including meeting dates. On those rare occasions when a satisfactory relationship cannot be established this should be brought to the attention of Fostering Assessment Team Manager.

Interviews will normally be carried out in the applicant's home, following a standard assessment format, to determine their suitability to offer care. The assessment process should be completed within 8 months from application, however the service aims to complete within 6 months.

Kent Fostering Service will need to satisfy itself that applicants have good mental and physical health and vigour. Factors to be taken into account include:

- Motivation
- Mental, physical and emotional well being
- Life style
- Understanding of the fostering task
- Understanding of the needs of looked after children.
- Ability to manage and care for a child who may have emotional, health, developmental, behavioural and or educational needs.
- Ability to work with child's birth family.
- Ability to meet the ethnic, cultural, religious, health and educational needs of the child.
- Suitability of accommodation.
- Ability to balance the needs and lifestyles of the people in the household
- Provide a healthy and safe place to live
- Understand and respect confidentiality and privacy
- Keep clear and accurate records
- Commitment to professional development to include ongoing training and attendance at support groups
- Access and ability to use basic computer communication systems

### **Preparation of applicants**

All applicants, other than those recruited for specific children as relatives or friends of the child, must attend basic training (Skills to Foster) prior to presentation to the Fostering Panel. The primary focus of this course will be the fostering task in relation to the needs of children requiring placement. A report of each applicant's participation in the course in relation to the content of each session will be included in the final report to panel and will form part of the assessment process.

## **Approval process**

The fostering Panel will hear all applications presented, and will make a recommendation. The recommendation is considered by the Agency Decision Maker who will make the final decision. The function of Kent Fostering Panels is determined by the Kent Fostering Panels Terms of Reference. Applicants are required to attend the Panel.

## **Review of Panel decisions**

Applicants will be informed verbally and in writing as to whether they have been approved as foster carers, and the terms of approval, once they have been presented to the panel and decision maker. If the decision is not to approve the applicant, he/she will be informed verbally and in writing and will be given 28 days to make written representations asking that the decision be reviewed.

Alternatively the applicant can request a review of the decision by The Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

The applicant can only apply for one of these options.

For other matters where an applicant disagrees with the decision, he/she may make written representations within 28 days of receiving notice, the matter will be reconsidered at Panel, or at the IRM and a final decision made by the Agency Decision Maker. Where applicants have asked in writing for a review of the decision they may attend panel to present their written representations in person.

Where applicants attend panel they may bring a friend or colleague to provide support however due regard to third party information and confidentiality will always be paramount and panel chairs will have discretion with regard to a supporter being present for all of the panel. Applicants may not bring legal representation to Panel under any circumstances.

## **Foster Carer agreement (Terms and Conditions)**

Following approval an agreement between Kent Children's Social Services and the foster carers will be drawn up in accordance with standard procedures. The agreement sets out the terms and conditions for Kent foster carers, the Fostering Service and Kent Children's Social Services. Fostering social workers need to ensure that newly approved foster carers understand fully the expectations of them under the terms and conditions of the agreement.

## **Management and development of foster carers**

Following approval the Area Fostering Support teams have responsibility to manage, supervise, support, develop, monitor and review its carers.

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

KCC actively seeks to recognise the very important contribution made by foster carers through provision of supervision, training, and formal recognition. These include:

- Regular contact with the Fostering teams
- Mentor for new foster carers
- Monthly local support groups which foster carers are strongly encouraged to attend
- Mandatory and optional training opportunities, with funding provided for child care where necessary
- Local Area Advisory Groups

- County Fostering Advisory Group.

### **New Carers Induction**

A new carer's induction workshop is held throughout the year in each area and this is a requirement for all new carers to attend.

### **Supervision and monitoring**

Kent's Fostering Service is responsible for ensuring the quality of placements and foster carers will receive regular supervision by a named member of staff in the Fostering Support Team. New Carers will be allocated a "mentor" (experienced carer) and details of support groups provided including KFCA (Kent Foster Care Association). Foster carers can expect to have formal supervision with their Fostering Social worker on a 4 - 6 weekly basis. Additional Supervision will be discussed as felt necessary. The primary responsibility of the Fostering team in supervising foster carers is to ensure the welfare of the child.

Fostering social workers will also carry out as a minimum one unannounced visit a year as part of their monitoring and quality assurance function and use this opportunity to check the accommodation.

### **Holiday Entitlement.**

Kent Foster Carers are entitled to 14 night's paid annual leave, pro rata where they will receive the professional reward/fee. Carers can decide to either take the 14 nights as a one off payment which they can use towards the cost of a family holiday for all the children or if agreed, alternative arrangements can be made for the care of the children to enable the carers to have a break. This will either be with relief carers or registered respite foster carers within the service. Relief carers should be identified by the main carers and assessed by their fostering social worker. Relief carers will be approved as appropriate to care for the child, by the Service Manager in the area.

### **Annual review of approval**

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.

### **Fostering Review Team**

Independent senior practitioners will Chair foster carers reviews, co-ordinate the completion of the report and ensure feedback is obtained from children, young people and other relevant professionals.

### **Carer Support Groups**

Monthly support groups are held within the local area and facilitated by the fostering support team. It is expected that all carers will attend a minimum of 75%.



Foster carers are encouraged to develop networks of support including the Kent Foster Care Association (KFCA).

### **Equipment**

KCC operates an equipment loan scheme to provide nursery equipment to foster carers. This is outlined in Guidelines for the Provision of Equipment on Loan for Foster Children.

The fostering service will also facilitate provision of specialist equipment required to accommodate any special needs or disability of individual children.

### **Participation and activity days for children and young people**

Foster carers will be expected to support the children / young people in their care, to attend a minimum of three participation activity days per year, organised through VSK, OYPC or KFCA.

### **Training**

Training is a continual process and all Kent foster carers will be offered new training and training to update their skills on a regular basis following approval. Carers will be required to complete the evidenced based Training Support and Development Standards work book within the first year of approval (first 18 months for connected persons). The fostering service provides a training pathway, including qualification based training. Carers will also be encouraged to access additional training "on line."

The foster carer's training needs will be identified as part of their Personal Development Plan and intended to develop their skills and knowledge and to ensure that they can meet their obligations under the Foster Carer Agreement. Failure to attend training that has been identified as appropriate could place continued registration as a foster carer at risk.

Kent foster carers will be presented with certificates for the training courses they have attended. The Fostering Service will keep a training record for each carer.

Foster carers will be part of the Foster Carer Training Steering Group and involved in the design of training.

### **Managing complaints and allegations against foster carers**

Foster carers are required to meet high standards of care. They are not permitted to use any kind of physical punishment and KCC expects high standards of behaviour from them at all times, regardless of the difficulties presented by some of the children they look after.

Children in care in any form of substitute care are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation and have the same right to protection from abuse as all other children.

However, it is not always clear at the start whether allegations made against carers are in fact a child protection matter or an issue of complaint. Complaints and allegations will be dealt with following the Allegations and Complaints against Foster Carers procedures.

### **Support arrangements for carers subject to complaint or allegations**

It is recognised that being the subject of a complaint or allegation can be an extremely stressful experience for foster carers

The impact of allegations and complaints on foster carers and their families will vary in relation to the nature of the allegation/complaint, potential consequences, previous experiences, and the extent of additional stress on the foster carer.

KCC has commissioned Foster Talk to offer telephone support 24/7, offering practical and legal advice. The fostering service will also allocate a trained "peer support" to support the carer. These peer supporters will be experienced foster carers who have been specifically trained. Each area support team will hold a list of peer support carers in their local area.

### **Managing whistle blowing and complaints by foster carers**

KCC has a 'whistle blowing policy' in relation to staff practice. The principles of this policy should be followed in relation to confidential disclosures made by foster carers, and are summarised as follows:

Should a foster carer become concerned about poor practice, and feel that it is not appropriate to discuss these concerns with the person in question in the first instance, he/she should:

- With regard to significant concerns about another foster carer, speak to his/her own supervising social worker who will follow up accordingly. This should happen immediately, as in some situations prompt action may be needed.
- With regard to significant concerns about a member of staff, contact the staff member's immediate line manager directly.

Examples of significantly poor practice that could prompt a confidential disclosure include:

- Neglect or emotional, physical, or sexual maltreatment of a child
- Providing a poor standard of care to a child
- Conduct which may be an offence or breach of law
- Health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as other employees
- Discrimination of any kind

Every effort will be made to protect the confidentiality of any carer who raises a concern and does not want their name to be disclosed. It must be appreciated that the investigation process may reveal the source of the information and a statement by the individual may be required as part of the evidence for any formal proceedings.

Concerns expressed by foster carers should be recorded in writing. The extent and nature of investigation will depend on the circumstances of the specific concern; however, foster carers can expect to receive feedback regarding investigation and outcome.

Foster carers are also able to make a formal complaint about any aspect of the services provided by Kent Children's Social Services. Further detail regarding how to make a formal complaint is included in the Fostering Handbook.

### **Termination of approval of foster carers**

On rare occasions KCC may also wish to terminate a foster carer's approval. Grounds for termination of approval include:

- Consistently poor care of a child, or a pattern of poor care affecting a number of children
- Conviction for any offence which indicates that a child could be at risk in the individual's care
- Evidence that a foster carer has neglected or emotionally, physically, or sexually abused a child

- Consistent and significant failure to comply with Kent County Council policies and procedures, including attendance at required training
- Financial misconduct in relation to any fostering payments made or financial support provided for a child's benefit
- Serious physical or psychological ill-health of a carer that prevents him/her being able to care for a child appropriately

Where there is an allegation against a carer which is unfounded or unsubstantiated the local authority reserve the right to consider the implications for children and young people, should the carer continue to foster.

## **SECTION 3**

### **REFERRAL, PLACEMENT AND SUPPORT OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

#### **Safeguarding**

Children's safety and welfare will be promoted and they will be protected from abuse and neglect, and learn appropriate boundaries in relationships with others. The aim is for the child to develop a sense of belonging and feel secure. Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family, which can meet their needs during childhood, and beyond.

The fostering service will work in partnership with other agencies concerned with safeguarding including health and education to promote the welfare of children.

Children will be helped to understand how to keep themselves safe including when outside of the household or when using the internet or social media.

Prospective foster carers will have a health and safety assessment of their home, and will be expected to address any deficiencies before a child is placed.

Foster carers will be trained in safe care practice, and a specific safe care plan will be drawn up for each child placed. This will include consideration of how other members of the family and household can contribute to safe care. Training on CSE is mandatory for all carers of children aged 11 years and over. Prevent training is mandatory for all foster carers.

KCC Procedures for Allegations and Complaints against Foster Carers will be followed where there are any concerns.

#### **Valuing diversity**

KCC Culturally Competent Care guidance will be used as a basis for recruitment and assessment of carers, and provision of placements that will meet the diverse needs of children.

Each child/young person will have access to a fostering service that recognises and addresses their needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality. Placement Plans and decisions will consider the child's assessed health, racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic needs and match these as closely as possible with the ethnic origin, race, religion culture and language of the foster family.

If a foster placement has to be made in an emergency and no suitable match is available steps should be taken to achieve a better match within six weeks if it is considered to be in the child's best interest to do so.

Where trans racial or trans community placements are made, KCC will provide the foster carer with additional support and information to enable the child to be provided with the best possible care and develop a positive understanding of their heritage. Additional training may be offered to foster carers to enable them to meet the child's needs.

## **Disabled Children**

When families are recruited and matched with disabled children careful consideration will be given to the child's culture and specialist advice will be taken during the assessment, preparation and placement planning process. This may include access to interpreters, specialist equipment, and assistance with transport. An occupational therapist will complete an assessment of accommodation for all new applicants, looking to care for children with a disability.

## **Preparation for placement**

The Permanency Procedures and guidance should be followed for all children irrespective of the planned length of placement and a permanency planning meeting should happen prior to entry into care. The child's social worker and the fostering social worker will ensure that the child is helped to understand what to expect from living in the foster home, and is given the appropriate children's guides. When English is not the child's first language or there is learning, hearing or communication impairments, assistance will be provided to ensure that counselling and preparation is appropriately given.

Information about the foster carer and their household will be given to the child before they are placed. Whenever possible children should be enabled to visit the foster carer's home before placement begins. In an emergency, at a minimum the foster carer's profile will be emailed by the Fostering Support team to the child's social worker so this can be discussed with the child before they arrive.

Children will be encouraged to bring favourite possessions with them.

The Children in Care Planned and Unplanned admissions to foster carer checklist should be followed by the child's social worker.

Foster carers will explain household rules and expectations to the child, including access to household facilities.

Gathering of memorabilia for the child will begin at the point that the child is placed. When a child is leaving a placement they will be helped to understand why, and supported in the move to their new placement, independent living or return home. The checklist for social workers – Change of Placement should be followed by the child's social worker. Foster carers will be supported to maintain links with children, in line with their care plan.

## **Information provided to foster carers**

Placement referral information, matching and risk assessment details should be given to carers at point of placement. A placement arrangement meeting including permissions for delegated authority must be completed within 5 working days.

## **Promoting positive behaviour**

Foster carers will receive training to enable them to understand the feelings and behaviours of Children in Care, and are expected to follow the Promoting Positive Behaviour policy and procedures. Training in safe methods of restraint will be available to carers who care for particularly challenging children. In accordance with the policy, carers should not use restraint without training (other than when necessary to safeguard the child or others from physical harm and only in exceptional circumstances). Foster carers are expected to promote and model positive behaviour.

Children who are in foster care will be encouraged to make friends, participate in sports and outdoor activities, stay overnight with friends, and explore the world appropriately without excessive constraints.

### **The wishes, views and feeling of children**

Children's wishes, views and feelings will be taken into account, with regard to their age and understanding, unless this is contrary to their interests. Where it is not possible to act upon their wishes, they will have clear explanation and support.

The wishes and feelings of children and young people with disabilities, special educational needs or complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made about them. The wishes of pre-verbal or non-verbal children will be established carefully by their social worker, based on their behaviour and other means of communication. Children and young people where English is not their first language, or who have disabilities that may impact on their communication will be provided with interpreters, signers or other support as needed. Foster carers must be supported to communicate with the child or young person.

Information for children should be translated into a medium that they can understand.

The child's social worker will assist the child to complete their feedback on the placement for the foster carer's annual review and when a placement ends.

Children will be supported, and enabled, to contact their Independent Reviewing Officer on request, and will be given information on how to access the independent complaints service.

### **Health**

Children will have prompt access to doctors and other health professionals, including mental health and specialist services when they are needed. The child's health will be promoted in accordance with their placement plan, health assessments, and health plan. Foster carers are required to attend health appointments with the child, and to notify the child's social worker if for any reason an appointment has to be cancelled. An Initial Health assessment must be requested within 5 days of a child being placed and completed within 28 days. Foster carers are required to support and facilitate the IHA.

Foster carers are required to complete Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire's on an annual basis and return to Virtual School Kent. <http://www.virtualschool.lea.kent.sch.uk/contact-us>  
All children must be registered with a G.P. and a dentist, and with an optician if necessary. Foster carers will have access to training on the administration and recording of medication.

Foster carers should have written permission from someone with parental responsibility to administer first aid and non-prescription medication and will be clear through the placement plan about what decisions are delegated to them and when consent for medical treatment needs to be obtained. Foster carers will also receive training on administration of medication, health promotion and first aid.

Children will be supported to make informed decisions about their own health, and a healthy lifestyle. The wishes and feelings of children will be sought and taken into account in their health care, according to their understanding.

## **Leisure**

Carers must create a stimulating environment to develop the emotional, intellectual, social, creative and physical skills of children. Children will be supported to take part in school based, and out of school activities including individual interests and hobbies, this will include trips. Children will be supported by their foster carer to attend as a minimum 3 participation events per year.

## **Savings and Pocket Money**

All foster carers will follow the policy for savings and pocket money for children in their care.

## **Promoting educational attainment**

Children will be supported to attend school, and in their learning during and beyond the school day. Carers must attend parents meetings and advocate for the child with schools, colleges and other educational establishments.

## **Contact arrangements**

During the course of the placement contact will be promoted with parents, relatives, especially siblings, and friends of the child unless this is not in the child's interests. Contact arrangements will be set out in the placement and care plan, and also within short break care plans. The wishes and feelings of the child will be taken into consideration.

Kent's Contact Policy and Procedures set out the considerations and requirements regarding contact and should be used to inform contact plans.

Contact arrangements will be considered and discussed with birth parents. This will include explanation of the contact arrangements under the Adoption & Children Act when Authority to Place (Placement Order or Authorised Consent) is gained.

Recruitment and assessment of foster carers will consider their ability to manage the level of contact a child needs. Foster carer will be prepared to understand the effects of unauthorised contact, including through online social networks, and offered support in case this happens.

Contact facilitated within a foster carers home must be risk assessed and a contact agreement completed with the foster carer and birth family, by the child's social worker and fostering social worker.

## **Siblings**

Social workers will complete a sibling assessment prior to requesting a fostering placement. In matching siblings with foster carers the permanency planning must be taken into account. If the care plan is to place siblings together, where this is not possible, foster carers will be identified that can actively promote direct face to face sibling contact.

## **Change of Placements**

Children will not be moved if the carer is willing to continue caring for the child unless it is decided through the child's care planning process, considered at a CIC review and takes the child's current wishes and feelings into account.

## **Placement Stability**

Where it is identified that there may be a potential placement breakdown, the fostering social worker or child's social worker will call a Stability Core group meeting.

[Add link to Sense of Belonging Policy.](#)

### **Disruptions**

The child and carer's family will be supported in order to avoid placement disruption, (i.e. a breakdown in the placement where the child has to be removed). If, despite all efforts and following the stability core group, a placement breaks down, the service will provide support to facilitate the transition for both child/ren and the fostering family. The over-riding consideration is the welfare of the child and help will be offered to ensure that the child moves in a planned way. The Disruption Procedures (2012) will be followed. It is expected that carers will give 28 days' notice that they are no longer able to care for the child (3 months' notice for Permanent fostering placements).

Children's social workers are asked to provide written feedback to the fostering service at the end of placements and to inform foster carers annual reviews.

### **Services available**

Kent's Fostering Service offers a wide range of generic and specialist fostering services to meet the needs of children. Specialist schemes have eligibility criteria and specific referral processes that can be obtained through the Fostering Team. Services include:

- **Individual and sibling group placements**  
All foster carers are approved for specific groups and some are approved for sibling groups or specialist schemes
- **Task Centred and respite placements**  
Foster carers are able to prepare children for adoption, rehabilitation home or permanency through foster care.
- **Emergency bed placements**  
A small team of foster carers specialises in short term work and many can accept unplanned placements and provide a 24 hour, 7 days a week, crisis service.
- **16+**  
For older young people entering care who require support in their transition to adulthood, the service will recruit carers who will work with these young people to support their independence.
- **Parent and child placements**  
Foster carers give comprehensive support to the parents and children and are available to accommodate mothers and/or fathers and their babies offering the ability to contribute to a comprehensive assessment of the parenting skills of the placed adult.

In addition to the tasks that foster carers would normally undertake, the recruited carers will contribute to the assessment of the Parent/Child relationship and assist with the development of parenting skills at a more intensive level.

It is important that the assessment is undertaken in a professional and objective manner to gain the confidence of both the courts and other professionals in the use of foster carers for this task.



The Parent/Child foster placements offer a number of advantages over a residential placement

- Consistent support in a family environment
- Parents able to maintain links with Local Networks
- Foster carers able to support post placement
- Continuity of care for baby/child if outcome is separation from parent
- Cost effective
- Consistent delivery of Models of assessment.

- **Short breaks for disabled children**

Children who are disabled living at home will be supported by a number of specialist services to help them access the same or similar opportunities as all children. Emphasis will be focused on early intervention and supporting users and carers within their own life structure by developing local community based services. The aim is to provide a positive experience for the child whilst giving parents and carers a break.

- **Relative/friend placements (Connected Carers)**

It is Kent policy that wherever possible children should be placed with relatives or friends. A full fostering assessment and approval of the relatives or friends should be undertaken prior to placement of a Looked after Child. In an emergency, when it is considered to be in the child's interest to be placed before this can be done, then an assessment as a temporary carer must be completed by the child's social worker, and agreed by the Nominated Officer. There is a 16 week period post placement when a full fostering assessment and approval must be gained (only in exceptional circumstances can this be extended).

- **Permanency**

Kent County Council's permanent fostering processes provide a formal structure for decision making regarding fostering placements that are intended to provide the child/young person with stability to adulthood. While not offering the level of legal security that an adoption, **Special Guardianship** or **Child Arrangements Order** can provide, use of the formal process is intended to quality assure, safeguard and support the child's placement.

Foster carers will be recruited to offer permanency for children and young people up until the age of 21 years. Children will be matched to foster carers at the point of entry into care who can offer permanency through fostering should that become the agreed permanency care plan. Permanency planning meetings should commence pre-entry into care and be attended by fostering and adoption dependent on the child's age. Kent's Staying Together Policy which supports permanence for older children and those with complex or diverse needs should be considered.

It is important for social workers to remember that the primary purpose of fostering is to care for children on a short-term basis to support a rehabilitation plan or other permanence plan. However, in some circumstances where returning to the birth family is not an option, it may become clear that it is in the best interests of a child to remain in a foster home where they have been successfully settled for some time. In these circumstances it may be appropriate for foster carers to provide permanency to children through applying to the Court for a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order, or adoption. Kent's Staying Together Policy which supports permanence for older children and those with complex or diverse needs should be considered.

## **Procedure for the Placement of a Child**

A duty fostering social worker can also be contacted directly until midnight and at weekends. This service is for both receiving new referrals and dealing with emergencies for existing placements.

### **Access to Resources Team (ART)**

All placement referrals within Kent are made via the Access to Resources Team (ART) through Liberi. The team provides access to in house placements, independent fostering providers and residential placements. Upon receipt each referral is passed to the appropriate in house fostering team or to external providers to ascertain if they have an available placement. This is undertaken following the quality assurance of the referral by the relevant team.

Once the referral is accepted a search will be undertaken to ascertain whether an in-house placement is available that appears to be appropriate to meet the child's needs. If such a placement is available or if there is a possibility of a placement by the required date, the social worker will be advised accordingly. Once the placement has been accepted by the social worker, liaison regarding actual placement details, placement meetings etc. will take place between the fostering social worker, child's social worker and foster carer(s).

Where there is a child already in the proposed foster placement, contact should be made with the social worker for that child to establish their views on the proposed placement.

### **Matching carer and child**

An important part of the referral process will be the successful matching of carers and child. A good match will depend upon the quality of the information that is available to share with the potential carer. No information relating to the child or family should be withheld from the fostering team or the foster carers. Where there are concerns about information sharing this needs to be reviewed with the fostering service in the context of a risk assessment in relation to the foster carer, their family and family networks. In the rare circumstances of withholding information the decision to do this must be agreed by the Service Manager and recorded on the child's file. The assessment of the child should be complete and up to date.

Matching will be recorded within the Placement Plan form identifying any additional support that needs to be provided to the foster carers to meet the needs of the child. The placement matching will highlight the strengths and vulnerabilities in the match and how these will be managed within the placement. The referral and matching form should inform the individual Safe Care Plan for the child/young person, the Placement Planning Meeting and Child in Care Reviews.

### **Planned Placements**

The child's social worker will provide detailed information on the child(ren) and conditions of placement required. They will be responsible for ensuring that, wherever practical, each child will be consulted about the placement options available and, if possible, have a profile and or introductory visit to the carer, prior to placement

### **Emergency Placement (Emergency Bed Scheme)**

In an emergency and at short notice, and if satisfied that the placement will safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, the Fostering Service will place a child with a foster carer for

a period of seven days during which time the social worker will complete their sections of the Placement Information Referral and placement planning arrangements to ensure that the carer has sufficient information to enable them to care for the child.

### **Placement Planning Meeting**

This is a crucial statutory meeting of all involved parties to ensure that essential information is exchanged and plans for the day to day care of the child are in place. It is a requirement of the Care Planning and Fostering Regulations (2015) that this meeting takes place before the child is placed or within 5 days of placement. As the Placement Arrangements Meeting is the forum for sharing information and negotiating care and contact arrangements, children can suffer as a result of delays.

The meeting will be chaired by the Fostering Social Worker who will ensure the foster carers attendance but the child's social worker is responsible for inviting the child, the parents, and if appropriate representatives from Health and Education. Part one of the referral information, placement request and delegated authority sections of the Placement Plan are completed by the child's social worker on the child's electronic record (Liberi) and the Placement Arrangements section and matching is undertaken by the fostering social worker.

The Placement Arrangement meeting is the opportunity to clarify roles and responsibilities regarding contact, the child's education support, transport arrangements, information and recording, health care, special needs and the day to day care of the child or young person.

### **Financial arrangements**

Foster carers receive a maintenance payment for each child they care for; this should be spent on the day to day care of the child which includes contribution to household bills, leisure activities, transport, clothing and pocket money and savings . There is an element built into the maintenance to also cover birthdays, Christmas/religious holidays and festivals as well as annual holidays.

For carers who are eligible for the professional fee this will be paid according to the age of the child.

Travel claims should be submitted no later than one month following the date of the claim

In exceptional circumstances a carer can receive an advanced payment of up to a £100 at the time that the placement commences e.g. a child placed with no belongings in an emergency.

Where a child meets the criteria, a single placement supplement (which is an additional payment to hold one placement as a vacancy), may be considered. This must be reviewed regularly and at a minimum of twice a year.

Payments to carers are set up by the fostering social worker and are paid weekly. Any over payments should be advised to the Fostering Payments Teams immediately this is identified, and arrangements made to pay this back. Where there are underpayments these should be reported immediately to the fostering social worker in order that this is rectified quickly.

Progression through the Payment for Skills Scheme is available to eligible carers which would be identified through their personal development plan and annual review.

### **Supporting a child in placement**

The child's social worker or authorised representative is required by regulation to visit the child in the foster home:

- As circumstances may require
- When reasonably requested by the child or foster carers
- Within one week of the beginning of the placement
- In the first year of the placement at intervals of not less than six weeks
- When a placement has been formally agreed as permanent, visits from the second year onwards can be at intervals of not less than every three months
- Where a child is placed with a temporarily approved relative or friend, visits must be weekly until the first review, and then at intervals of no more than 4 weeks until the carer is fully approved as a foster carer.

Where placements have been made immediately or as emergency (Placement Plan Meeting did not take place prior to placement) the social worker is required to visit the child at least once every week.

On each visit the social worker is required to see the child alone (unless the child is of sufficient maturity and refuses). Even then they should be encouraged to meet with their Social Worker and to prepare a written report.

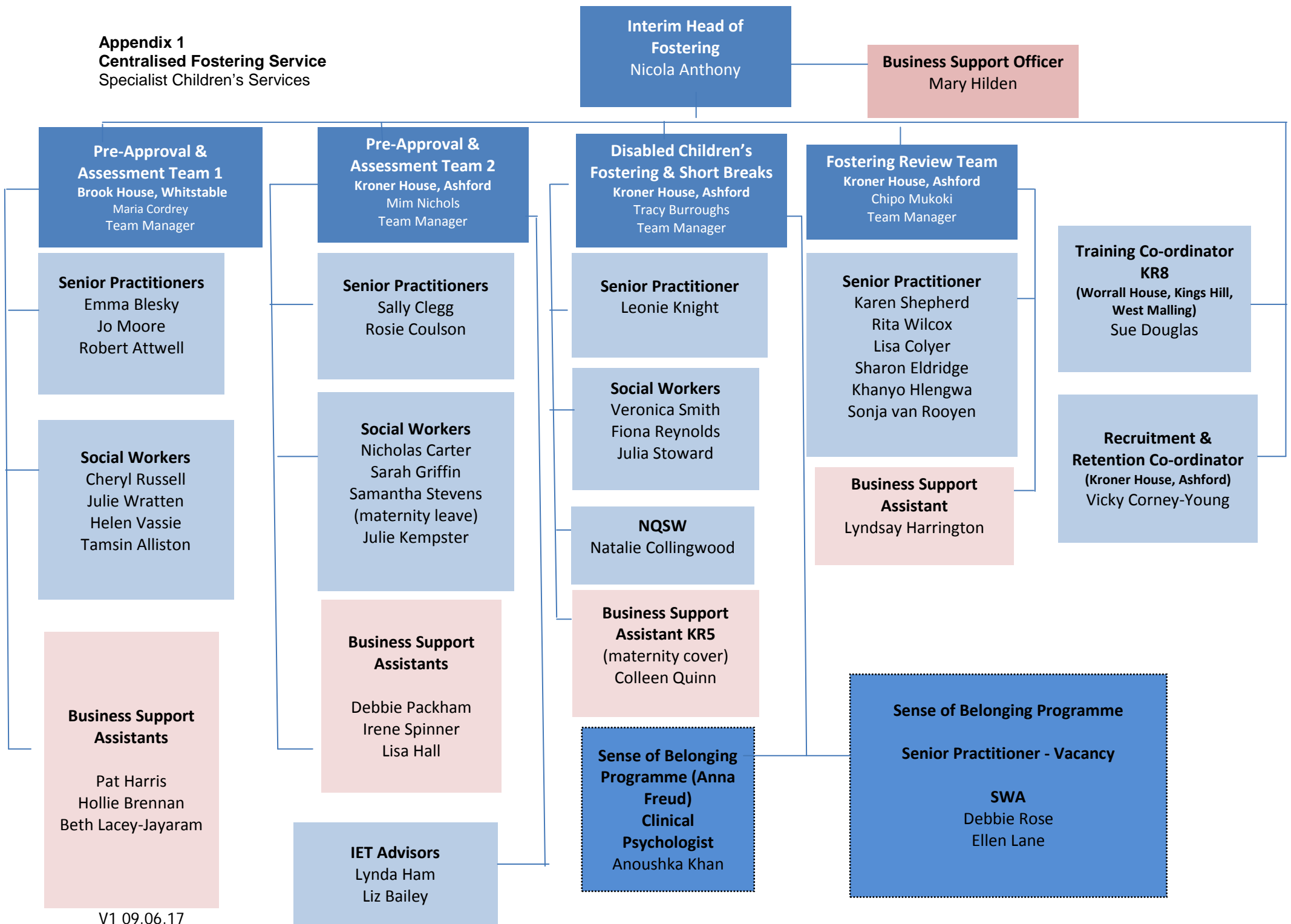
The child's social worker should also promote a positive working relationship with the foster carers.

### **Monitoring of the Service**

Fostering standards are monitored through

- Foster Carer supervision
- Unannounced visits
- Foster Carer annual reviews
- Fostering Panels
- Allegations and complaints/compliments
- Feedback forms for children
- Feedback forms from social workers
- Feedback from foster carers
- Ofsted
- County Foster Carer Advisory Board
- Local advisory groups
- Partnership working with Kent Foster Carers Association
- Quality Assurance and Auditing
- Management Oversight and Staff Supervision

**Appendix 1**  
**Centralised Fostering Service**  
 Specialist Children's Services



# Fostering Support Teams

<p>North Kent Fostering Support Team</p> <p>(Sevenoaks / Dartford / Gravesend)</p> <p>Ranjit Kang</p>	<p>West Kent Fostering Support Team</p> <p>(Tonbridge &amp; Malling / Tunbridge Wells / Maidstone)</p> <p>Lisa Fitzpatrick</p>	<p>East Kent 1 Fostering Support Team</p> <p>(Swale / Canterbury)</p> <p>Catarina Dechaine</p>	<p>East Kent 2 Fostering Support Team</p> <p>(Thanet)</p> <p>Ana Camacho</p>	<p>East Kent Fostering Support Team</p> <p>(Thanet / Canterbury)</p> <p>Sheila Will</p>	<p>South Kent 1 Fostering Support Team</p> <p>(Ashford)</p> <p>Jamie Griggs</p>	<p>South Kent 2 Fostering Support Team</p> <p>(Shepway / Dover)</p> <p>Siobhan Hamilton</p>
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