

Sutton Council Fostering Service

Statement of Purpose 2019

Sutton is developing a range of fostering placements, working with Foster Carers, Social Workers and others to give children and young people the best possible care, so that they go on to lead successful happy lives.

This document sets out the Statement of Purpose of Sutton Council's Fostering Service. A copy of the Statement of Purpose is provided to Ofsted, the government agency which regulates and inspects fostering services. The Fostering Service Statement of Purpose is intended to provide information to a wide audience including:

- Sutton Council staff
- Foster Carers and prospective Foster Carers and their families (including Foster Carer's own children)
- Children and young people placed with Sutton Foster Carers
- Local Authorities/ Health and Social Care Trusts which place, have placed, or are considering placing children with Sutton Foster Carers
- Colleagues from other social care agencies
- The general public

Sutton's Fostering Service aims to meet the requirements of:

- The Children Act and 2004
- The Care Standards Act 2000
- The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 (and associated revisions)
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010
- The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (England and Wales)
- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- The Children and Families Act 2014

The statement is updated annually to reflect changes in legislation and service developments.

VISION, POLICIES, AIMS & OBJECTIVES

Vision

Sutton's vision is that "Children and Young People in Sutton live with resilient families, are happy, safe and healthy and grow up with the skills, knowledge and attributes to be confident and independent; ready for adult life." (The Sutton Children and Young People's Plan 2014 – 17)

To support its vision, Sutton seeks to make the right placement, in the right place, at the right time, for every Looked After child. This means robust assessments and clear plans, which are right for the child first time. (Sutton LAC Sufficiency Statement 2014)

Sutton Council serves an increasingly diverse population of children and families who have experienced difficulty in their lives. In order to achieve our vision and meet the needs of individual children, Sutton will focus on furthering equality of opportunity, promoting diversity and eliminating discrimination within the service and towards children and their carers.

Permanence Policy

Foster Carers are encouraged to consider adoption or special guardianship for their foster children if they are unlikely to return to live with their parents. Adoption support and special guardianship support plans take account of the circumstances of foster carers who make these arrangements including those foster carers approved as connected carers.

Staying Put Policy

Sometimes a young person will remain in their foster placement after their eighteenth birthday and this is known as a “Staying Put” arrangement. (See Sutton’s Staying Put Policy) Sutton foster carers are encouraged to consider Staying Put Arrangements in order to:

- Ensure that young people are able to experience the transition to adulthood in a way similar to other young people their age.
- Ensure that young people do not leave their former foster family until they feel ready for independence.
- Help young people to maximise their opportunities for education, employment, or training.
- Reduce the risk of homelessness.
- Enable young people to develop emotional and practical skills to live independently.
- Reduce the likelihood of social exclusion.

Sutton also recognises and will encourage the development of supported lodgings for those young people sixteen plus where this is safe, appropriate and part of the young person’s care plan.

Aims & Objectives of the service:

- To provide the best possible foster placements for children and young people to enable them to reach their full potential.
- To recruit, assess, train and support all prospective and approved foster carers; including family and friends carers. We strive to provide a wide range

of local placements that can meet the diverse needs of children and young people in a safe and nurturing environment.

- To support, direct and advise all those affected by the fostering process.
- To actively promote fostering and family and friends care as the framework to secure alternative placements for children, unless there is clear evidence to suggest that this is not safe or appropriate.
- To ensure there are clear procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the Fostering Service thereby ensuring quality services.
- To ensure that cost effective services are provided and commissioned which maximise efficient use of resources providing sufficient placements.
- To provide wherever possible local placements, to promote continuity and maintain family networks.
- To work with prospective foster carers in a manner which respects their ethnicity, faith, disability, gender, age, relationship status and sexual orientation.
- To ensure that the recruitment process is timely, respectful, and fair and delays are avoided.
- To ensure monitoring systems are in place for data to be collated and used to inform service planning, strategy and procedures.
- To adhere to the principles of Data Protection and Freedom of Information and to continue the sound practice in managing confidential information.
- To ensure detailed placement plans are completed in a timely fashion. This includes arrangements for delegated authority to foster carers.
- To raise the profile of the Fostering Service in Sutton through a robust recruitment campaign, accessible information and advice.
- To deliver an effective matching process in order to ensure that foster carers have the right experience and skills to meet the needs of a particular child or young person.
- To minimise the number of placements experienced by individual children and ensure that placement stability procedures are adhered to.
- To ensure that the move on from foster care is a positive one for all concerned. For care leavers, this will involve careful planning to promote a smooth transition to adulthood and independence.

- To consider staying put arrangements for children and young people.

SERVICES PROVIDED

RECRUITMENT OF PROSPECTIVE FOSTER CARERS

Fostering Recruitment

The Fostering recruitment strategy will set out how the London Borough of Sutton will continue to recruit its own foster carers, offering a wide range of local placements.

Approval Stage

The Fostering Panel is an independent body which is required under Fostering Regulations to make recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker. The panel consider all applications to foster, including those made by family and friends. Existing foster carers are now presented to the panel every three years to provide a quality assurance and safeguarding role to the service.

In accordance with the National Minimum Standards, panel members are drawn from a central list of individuals with the appropriate skills and qualifications to act as panel members.

Unsuccessful applicants are informed of their right to make representations to the agency or apply for an Independent Review Mechanism Panel hearing within 28 days from receipt of the letter confirming the Agency Decision. On approval as a foster carer, a Supervising Social Worker (SSW) will be allocated. They will offer supervision, management and support to the foster carers and assist them in commencing the induction and core training.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS FOSTER CARERS

The temporary approval of a relative, friend or other connected person and the immediate placement of a child with a connected person under Regulation 24 of the Care Planning Regulations 2010 is the responsibility of the child's social worker and team manager.

When such arrangements have been made the Connected Persons Assistant Team Manager in the Adoption and Permanence Service will be notified immediately to undertake a Regulation 24 temporary approval assessment to establish if it is suitable to continue with this arrangement.

If there is a positive conclusion to the assessment, the recommendation to continue with the arrangement will be presented to the Head of Service (Agency Decision

Maker) to decide on the approval of the connected person as a temporary family and friends Foster Carer. For planned placements the arrangements will be made before the child is placed by undertaking an assessment and plan undertaken by the children's social work team and the Adoption and Permanence Service.

The Adoption and Permanence Service makes arrangements to undertake statutory checks, payments and to commence the full foster carer assessment. A supervising social worker is appointed to support the Family and Friends Foster Carers from the Fostering Team.

SUPERVISION AND SUPPORT FOR FOSTER CARERS

The service recognises that supervision, support and development opportunities for foster carers are a crucial component of successful retention of good foster carers. The work undertaken by our foster carers is highly valued and recognised.

Following an approval decision by the Agency Decision Maker, the foster carer will receive written details about their approval and registration. They will meet with their SSW and are provided with a welcome pack. This includes two copies of the Foster Care Agreement to read and sign, retaining one copy for themselves.

SSW Visits

All carers (including family and friends carers) have an allocated SSW, who visit foster carers regularly in accordance with National Minimum Standards and Fostering Regulations. The SSW visits and is in regular contact whilst a child is in placement. All visits and support will be tailored to meet the needs of the carer and child in placement. Additional support can be provided through increased visits, provision of additional activities and input from the LAC Psychology service.

When children are not in placement the SSW will continue to visit at intervals of not more than every 6 weeks unless it has been agreed by the Fostering Service Manager that visits can be less frequent. In these instances an updated assessment will need to be completed and signed by the Fostering Manager before any further placements are made with the carers.

As part of the monitoring of the work of foster carers, there are a minimum of two unannounced visits per year by the SSW. The Fostering Regulations allow the service to increase the frequency of unannounced visits if there are concerns or for any other reasons why this may be appropriate. The foster carer should be informed of the reasons as to why the frequency of visits is increased unless there are clear safeguarding reasons not to do so.

Duty Social Worker Support

A Duty Social Worker is available daily to offer support and advice to all our foster carers if their allocated SSW is unavailable. The duty social worker is responsible for working with the Placements Service by ensuring all placements are well matched

and foster carers are informed and have the necessary information prior to making a decision to foster a child. Foster carers are supported out of hours and during Bank Holiday periods by the Emergency Duty Team and senior on call managers.

Emergency Duty Team

The Emergency Social Work Duty Team is available to all Foster Carers when the Fostering Service is closed, at weekends, bank holidays and after office hours.

Independent Support for Foster Carers

Can be accessed via the Fostering Network. All foster carers are given annual membership and can access the support, advice and guidance on matters relating to fostering. This can include support when a complaint or allegation is made against them.

Foster Carer's Handbook

All Foster Carers are provided with the Foster Carer's Handbook which provides comprehensive information on all aspects of fostering including information on allowances, training and procedures.

Children's Guide to Fostering

The Fostering Service has a children's guide providing age appropriate information about fostering. The child's Social Worker is responsible for giving this to the child and spending time talking it through and explaining its content in accordance with the child's age and understanding. The SSW will take a proactive role to ensure this is done.

Foster Carer Training/ Continuous professional development (CPD)

The provision of post approval training is central to maintaining high standards of care. It contributes to the professional development of foster carers.

Sutton foster carers are required to evidence completion of 30 hours training each year of which 5 hours need to be delivered in a formal teaching session to ensure their continuing professional development (CPD). Each foster carer has a Personal Development Plan (PDP) completed to assess and identify their learning and development needs.

Foster carers can access details of the training programme and apply for courses on line. Sutton provides a good range of fostering specific courses and carers are also able to attend training that is put on by the LSCB and access some of the courses that are available to Social Workers.

The Training, Support and Development (TSD) Standards

As part of their induction, all foster carers are expected to complete the TSD standards by producing a workbook in their first year following approval as foster carers and within 18 months for connected persons foster carers. This programme has now also been made available on line and SSW's are able to directly support carers to complete the programme during supervision visits. The SSW is responsible for assisting the carers in undertaking this work and ensuring that it is completed within the specified timeframe.

Foster Carer Reviews

Foster Carer reviews are held annually from the date of their original approval. The SSW is responsible for preparing and submitting the required paperwork with contributions from all of the stakeholders in a placement.

The annual review is an appraisal of the year and forms the essential evidence to evaluate the quality of the care being offered. The paperwork is forwarded to the team manager for quality assurance and then to the foster carers and the Reviewing Officer at least 10 working days before the review meeting is held.

The Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (FIRO) chairs the review meeting and prepares a separate report of the meeting with recommendations which are passed to the Service Manager for comments and agreement. For couples who foster it is the expectation that both parties will be present at the review meeting.

Reviews provide an opportunity to positively evaluate progress and practice over the previous year.

The FIRO is part of the Quality Assurance Service and has no case work responsibilities for Sutton. This offers a degree of independence in the process. All newly approved foster carers have their first annual review presented to the Fostering Panel for consideration of continued approval.

The carer or the Fostering Service can request a review at any time. Concerns regarding a foster carer's progress or change in circumstances can lead to a review being called within the 12 month period of approval from the previous review. All foster carers are required to have a DBS, other statutory checks, medical reports and education checks on their own school aged children, every three years.

A new review protocol has been established following consultation with the fostering IRO and foster carers. Sutton Foster Care Association was extensively involved in helping develop the new protocol.

Foster Carer's Allowances

The Fostering Service is responsible for ensuring that foster carers are paid the appropriate allowances. Details of the current allowances for Foster Carers are provided to all carers and listed in the Foster Carer's Handbook. These are reviewed

annually in accordance with NMS and Foster Carers are consulted if changes are proposed.

PLACEMENTS FOR CHILDREN

The Placement Process

The Fostering Service receives requests for foster care placements from Social Workers after senior managers have approved the child coming into Local Authority care. The request is provided in writing on a Placement Referral Form and outlines the reasons for placement, the expected outcome, care needs, ethnicity, religion and language and intended timescales, legal status and any other key information that enables a suitable match to be found.

The service ensures all children's Placement Plans and matching details are recorded systematically and consistently. All forms will be signed and copied to the relevant staff, parents and carers. Copies will be maintained on the Carers file as well as the child's or young person's file.

All children will be placed with carers who are able to meet their needs and will be provided with a bedroom of their own unless they are siblings who have previously shared rooms and where this is suitable to their own needs.

If in certain circumstances, when it is in the child's best interest to place them with a carer outside of the carer's approval category and the carers are in agreement with this, a variation or exemption, will be requested and agreed by a Senior Manager in the Fostering Service. This is important in the placing of siblings.

Permanent and Long Term Foster Care is offered to children unable to return to their birth families and in need of long term care. More responsibility will be delegated so that the foster carers can make day to day decisions affecting the child, in keeping with the child's placement plan. Foster carers, where appropriate, will be encouraged to consider adoption or special guardianship as this offers a higher level of placement security for the child.

Family and Friends Foster Care is when family or friends care for a child who is officially looked after by the council. We believe that it is usually better for children when foster carers become special guardians as this enables carers to make all the decisions for children, supported by a special guardianship plan. Our specialist Connected Persons Team offers guidance on this.

Respite or Support Foster Care, offers placements to children for specific short periods to support the child or young person to continue to live at home. Some foster children may benefit from a shared care arrangement to support their usual foster placement or for holidays from residential care.

Family Based Short Breaks offer regular weekend breaks for children with severe and complex needs or life threatening conditions. These carers will receive specialist training to enable them to offer new experiences to disabled children to have fun and to enable their parents to have a break.

Parent and Child Foster Care is offered to young people and their baby to support them in developing the appropriate parenting skills. These placements are often provided for a young parent who is a child in need, or a looked after child. The fostering service may also offer a placement to adults with young children, if the adult has serious difficulties or where the baby is a looked after child subject to a legal order. If the placement is for assessment of the parents parenting skills, this will be made clear in the written plan between the parent, the Foster Carer and the social worker.

In each of these situations, the individual written placement plan will differ to meet the individual special requirements of the child or children. In each arrangement, the fostering service will make it clear to the Foster Carer whether this is a looked after arrangement or a Section 17 arrangement to prevent the child becoming looked after.

DELEGATED AUTHORITY (DA)

The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2010 & 2013 set out the principles of Delegated Authority in Foster Care placements.

A Placement Planning Meeting is held before or within 5 days of a placement being made and delegated authority will be discussed and managed according to Sutton's Delegated Authority policy.

Children's social workers are responsible for completing this form in partnership with the Foster Carer, their SSW, the child according to their age and understanding, birth parents and any other relevant stakeholders in the placement.

The SSW will ensure that this written information is given to the Foster Carer along with the Placement Information Record and a copy of the child's Care Plan.

EDUCATION

The Fostering Service believes that education and training are key elements to all children living successful adult lives. The Fostering Service will aim to keep children within their existing school provision with the aid of transport if required. If this is not possible the Fostering Service and social workers will endeavour to find suitable alternatives working closely with Sutton Education Service and Virtual Head Teacher.

A suitable alternative is considered to be another full time school placement or placement as outlined in any Statement of Educational Needs that may be in

existence. The "Education of Looked After Children" policy outlines in detail the requirements, roles and responsibilities of staff, carers and parents.

Sutton has appointed a Virtual Head Teacher, to oversee the educational needs of all looked after children placed within and outside of the borough. Sutton will also provide support, training and advice to Foster Carers. Schools will provide all children with a Personal Education Plan (PEP). Carers will be supported to provide extracurricular activities aimed at encouraging educational attainment.

THERAPY AND MENTAL HEALTH PROVISION

A specialist service to children in care and their caregivers is provided by two Clinical Psychologists. They are employed by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and offer psychological assessment, intervention, consultations and training

Referrals for their services can be made by either the child's social worker or the SSW.

STORAGE, ACCESS AND SECURITY OF FOSTER CARERS RECORDS

The London Borough of Sutton's Fostering Service recognises the importance of case records and will do all in its power to ensure records are kept secure at all times. The Fostering Service adheres to the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 and the local authority's requirements for the storage of files and information relating to Foster Carers and kinship carers.

Foster carer files are stored electronically on the secure Frameworki database. Paper files which were used before the Frameworki system was implemented are archived with a specialist company in a secure storage facility. Only the Fostering Service can access and request these files to be removed from the archive.

In accordance with The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 any record relating to a foster parent in the register maintained under regulation 31, must be retained for at least 10 years from the date on which their approval is terminated. The records compiled under regulation 30(5) must be retained for at least 3 years from the refusal or withdrawal, as the case may be, of the application to become a Foster Carer. Closed files will be archived off site but can be retrieved within 24 hours.

ALLEGATIONS, COMPLAINTS, DISRUPTIONS AND OUTCOMES

Allegations

All children are entitled to the same level and standard of protection from harm, including those receiving services from statutory or other agencies. For this reason, enquiries and investigations relating to children in receipt of such services must be dealt with under the London Child Protection Procedures, Child Protection s47 Enquiries Procedure.

Allegations or suspicions that a foster carer has caused harm to a child will be investigated thoroughly, speedily and sensitively under those procedures and will involve open and honest communication with and support to all those affected.

It is important to note that, although there may be insufficient evidence to support a Police prosecution, this does not mean that action cannot be taken to protect a child nor that the termination of a foster carer's approval cannot be considered.

During an investigation, it may be necessary to consider what action, if any, should be taken to protect other children with whom foster carers have contact, including their own children.

All allegations are referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) located in the Safeguarding Service and in these instances when threshold for referral is met, OFSTED are notified about the allegation / incident.

Following an allegation or complaint against Foster Carers, the case is presented to the Fostering Panel to ensure scrutiny and for recommendations about the carer's suitability to continue providing care.

In all cases the needs of the children remain paramount. All carers will have access to independent support from the Fostering Network. An independent worker can be appointed to support carers through the process of investigation if required.

Complaints

Complaints regarding the Fostering Service can be made to the Children's Social Care Complaints Department, by:

Complaints E-form on our Website

https://www.sutton.gov.uk/info/200436/customer_services/1058/feedback_complaints_and_compliments/5

THE STRUCTURE OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE & QUALIFICATIONS

The Fostering Service is part of the Children's Social Care Service within the London Borough of Sutton's People Directorate.

Sutton is committed to monitoring the quality of its services and the outcomes of placements. We have appointed experienced social work staff with relevant qualifications, who are registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council and have had enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service checks. They are appointed by interview in accordance with the Fostering regulations and standards, equal opportunities, good practice and the boroughs human resources recruitment policies.

| ROLE | NAME | QUALIFICATIONS |
|---------------------------|------------------|--|
| Fostering Team Manager | Diana Schroder | CQSW ILM Level 5 |
| Supervising Social Worker | Andy Wilson | MA Social Work DipSW PGC Practice Education |
| Supervising Social Worker | Becky Page | BA Honours in Social Work |
| Supervising Social Worker | Nga Peace | Master of Social Work, University of Arkansas, USA |
| Supervising Social Worker | Angie Stephenson | CQSW DipSW PQ 1 |
| Supervising Social Worker | Rebeka Juhasz | Master of Social Work, University of Budapest, Hungary |

Copies of staff qualifications, registration, references and checks are kept on personnel files. Regular supervision, training and annual personal development and performance appraisals are conducted.

REGISTRATION AND INSPECTION

OFSTED is responsible for having an overview of the Fostering Service. They undertake regular inspections of the Fostering Service and during the inspection seek confidential feedback from service users, carers, and placing Social Workers.

OFSTED are alerted to any significant incidents in the Fostering Service such as child protection investigations or major allegations against carers.

The service is registered with and inspected by Ofsted. Enquiries should be addressed to:

Ofsted

Royal Exchange Buildings

St Ann's Square

Manchester

M2 7LA

08456 404045

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Tel: 0300 123 1231 (about children services)

Tel: 0300 123 4666 (complaints about agencies)

Tel: 0161 618 8524 (minicom / textphone enquiries)