

**Fostering Statement of Purpose 2023 - 2024****Aims and Objectives**

Hampshire County Council's Children's Services Department manages the legal duties in relation to placing children who need to be looked after. This service is provided through the fostering service.

The service aims to meet the needs of all Hampshire's children who have been assessed as requiring a foster placement by providing a range of good quality, family-based care, for children who are unable to live with their own families.

The aims of the service are to:

- Support the development and welfare of looked after children who are placed within the service.
- Provide looked after children with a safe, stable, nurturing family experience which will promote their health, educational achievement and wellbeing, and which will assist them in coming to terms with their life experience and reaching their full potential.
- Provide different types of foster placements to meet the needs of the children being looked after, including temporary, permanent, respite including specialist respite.
- To retain a skilled group of foster carers who are able to meet the needs of children who are looked after.
- To recruit and assess quality foster carers in a consistent and transparent manner and increase number of carers to meet the needs and demands for placements.
- To offer training and support to all foster carers which will provide the necessary skills to enable them to care for looked after children and develop and enhance their potential.
- To meet the key aims of Hampshire County Council and the objectives of the Children and Young People's Plan.

## **Service Delivery**

### **Children first**

All work within the Fostering Service is guided by determining and acting on what is in the best interests of each child.

### **Placement matching**

Placement matching means placing children with a family that can meet their needs. This includes considering the wishes and views of the child, the child's birth parents and significant relatives, and factors such as culture, faith and language.

Placement matching is undertaken by the Placement Commissioning Team in consultation with the area Fostering and Child Care teams.

When placing children, proximity to schools, family and friends is taken into consideration. If the most appropriate match is not available at the time of placement, a child is placed with the most appropriate carers.

### **Types of fostering**

Fostering is a positive option for many children whose care cannot be met within their birth family. The need for care may be short term, temporary or long term. Hampshire County Council aims to provide a range of placement options to meet the needs of children who need care, including emergency placements, short term, long term, as well as managing placements with connected carers, a range of respite placements and parent and child placements.

### **Working together**

The Fostering Service works with a range of other teams and departments to ensure good quality care for the children looked after by foster carers and support for foster carers. The Service works as partners with agencies and services in specialist fields such as children in care and children in need social workers, health and education professionals as well as with children, children's parents and wider family members.

As part of the wider directorate of Children's Services, the Fostering Service also works to develop robust policies, procedures and protocols to benefit looked after children, foster carers and others that they work with.

### **Marketing fostering to find new foster Carers**

Hampshire County Council uses a variety of online and offline approaches to recruit a diverse range of foster carers, who can meet the needs of children in Hampshire. Hampshire County Council's insights and engagement team has provided the fostering service with research into audience profiles and feedback from current foster carers. This will help shape recruitment campaigns and messages that aim to raise awareness of fostering, drive traffic and generate leads, resulting in more foster carers. Hampshire is focusing on finding members of the public who are new to fostering to increase the overall number of placements available in Hampshire.

## Recruitment and Assessment of Prospective Foster Carers

In recruiting and assessing prospective foster carers, Hampshire County Council follows the Fostering Services Regulations, (2011), Care Standards Act, (2000), The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services as well as adhering to the good practice guidance provided by Coram British Association of Adoption and Fostering (Coram BAAF) and the Fostering Network.

The team has a recruitment stream, and an assessment stream. The recruitment stream support prospective foster carers from enquiry through to stage one. The assessment stream support prospective foster carers from the end of stage one, into stage two then through to approval.

In practice, following an initial enquiry, all prospective foster carers complete an initial application over the phone or online which is followed up with a welcome call. The fostering recruitment and assessment team offer evening and weekend calls for the convenience of prospective foster carers. Prospective foster carers are then offered an introductory visit virtually or in person at home, so they can further discuss their interest in fostering with Hampshire County Council. Prospective foster carers who meet our criteria then progress to the assessment process.

In 2022/23, we sought to improve the experience of prospective foster carers, amending the assessment process, so stage one managed by the recruitment stream starts before stage two managed by the assessment stream. However, these streams will sometimes run alongside each other to help expedite the process and avoid delay. On average the process from application takes six months, dependent on references and checks and the applicant themselves.

Makes an enquiry and sent information pack
Initial Application and welcome call
On demand support event – what happens next
Introductory visit and initial health and safety
<b>Stage one</b>
Prospective Foster Carer Application Form and Life events (C3)
‘Skills to Foster’ part one three-day training
Checks and References, including DBS
GP health assessment (Medical)
<b>Stage two</b>
Health and Safety visit
Assessment
‘Skills to Foster’ part two three-day training
Interviews with personal references
Discussion and visits with social worker (8-12 visits)

Preparation and review of written application with social worker (Form F)
Meet with Independent Fostering Panel
Decision made by Agency Decision Maker
Formal Handover to Supervising Social Worker
<b>WELCOME TO FOSTERING</b>

A similar process is used for those applicants who are currently with another fostering agency or authority and wish to transfer to Hampshire. On average, this process takes four months to complete.

### **Recruiting and approving connected carers**

Connected carers identified
Home Visit
<b>Stage 1</b>
Checks and References
<b>Stage 2</b>
Assessment
Pre-approval training
Discussion and visits with social worker
Preparation and review of written application with social worker
Meet with Independent Fostering Panel
Decision made by Agency Decision Maker
Formal Handover to Supervising Social Worker
<b>WELCOME TO FOSTERING</b>

### **Approval of Foster Carers**

The assessment process ends with a written report which is then read and signed by the prospective foster carers and presented to an independent fostering panel for review. Hampshire's fostering panels consist of members who have relevant personal and/ or professional experience or expertise in looking after children. They review the written report and ask relevant questions to enable them to make a recommendation.

The recommendation of the panel is sent to the Agency Decision Maker for Hampshire County Council. The Agency Decision Maker has the final decision for approval of foster carers.

On approval, a supervising social worker from the area Fostering Team is allocated to support the foster carer with their role.

### **Training Foster Carers**

Hampshire County Council's training pathway includes all essential and developmental training. All foster carers are expected to participate in training, which is essential in undertaking the fostering task and enabling them to progress to the next skills level. They are also required to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD Standards) for foster carers.

Training is delivered by staff, foster carers and specially commissioned trainers and the programme is managed by Hampshire's Workforce Development Team. The programme included the use of e-learning and is flexible and reactive.

Social workers help create a Personal Development Plan for foster carers that provide a framework to identify carer's skills, strengths and goals, identifying any training needs along the way.

During the assessment, prospective carers attend two three-day training courses; 'Skills to Foster part one and two'. These courses focus on topics that carers need to be aware of before taking a child or young person into placement, such as paediatric first aid and safeguarding.

## **Supporting Foster Carers**

### **Financial support**

All foster carers receive an allowance for each child they foster, according to the age of the child. For foster carers who are able to demonstrate their skills and experience in supporting children and young people with complex needs, a skills fee is also possible. A formal panel-based skills appraisal reviews foster carers against a set of specific criteria. Any skills fees awarded are paid per child in placement. Allowances are set annually by Hampshire County Council.

### **Practical support**

All foster carers work with an allocated supervising social worker who has responsibility for managing and supporting them. Six-weekly supervision visits are complemented by a series of support groups, automatic membership of Hampshire's Fostering Network (other organisations are also available) and access to 'out of hours' duty services. Placement stability workers can offer intensive support to maintain the placement.

In addition to formal support, foster carers are encouraged to participate in informal support and social activities organised by other foster carers and foster carer support networks.

### **Reviewing Foster Carers**

Formal supervision with foster carers also includes reviews of foster carers' record keeping and the outcomes they are delivering for the children in their care. The Fostering Service will undertake unannounced visits to the foster home and there is a formal annual review of each fostering household. The first annual review is presented to the independent Fostering Panel. Alongside this, Hampshire's procedures indicate situations in which further reviews should be undertaken, for example in the case of a serious complaint or if a change in approval is recommended.

## **Service Statistics**

### **Children living in care**

In March 2023, there were 1,856 children in the care of Hampshire County Council. The number of children placed in foster care was 1,281.

Foster Care provision	No of children	% of HCC overall Children in Care
Connected	267	14%
Hampshire County Council	527	28%
Independent Fostering Agency	487	26%
Total	1,281	69%

At March 2023, Hampshire County Council had approximately 499 registered fostering households.

### **Complaints about the Fostering Service**

Feedback is vital to our growth and development. We take great pride in the services we provide and want to ensure we deliver a quality service to all. We welcome all feedback and deal with all comments promptly and professionally.

As part of our commitment to safeguarding, we ensure that children and young people in care and foster carers are aware of our 'Comments, Complaints and Compliments Procedure' and know how to raise concerns.

From April 2022 to March 2023 the Fostering Service received two complaints from foster carers, which were progressed under a formal complaint process.

More information about the comments, complaints and compliments process can be found by visiting: [www.hants.gov.uk/childrens-services/contact-cs/cs-complaints.htm](http://www.hants.gov.uk/childrens-services/contact-cs/cs-complaints.htm)

### **Complaints against foster carers**

All complaints against foster carers are investigated using the 'Complaints and Allegations against Foster Carers Procedure'. Emphasis is placed on resolving complaints of this nature swiftly and locally where possible.

In supporting foster carers, the Fostering service commissions FosterTalk, an Independent Fostering Support Service to aid foster carers who are subject to investigation following a complaint or allegation.

## Contacting the Regulator

Ofsted is responsible for inspecting the Fostering Service. They will also receive and investigate any complaints about the Fostering Service. Significant incidents are also reported to them.

**Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD**

**Telephone: 0300 123 1231**

## Management Structure

The Fostering Service is part of Hampshire County Council's Children's Services Directorate.

The Area Director for North East is responsible fostering recruitment and assessment and fostering support. Day-to-day operational management of the service is the responsibility of the Fostering Service Manager.

Team Managers lead the work of social workers, and supervising social workers, children and family support workers and the administration services to support foster carers within their district.

The Fostering Service comprises of a Service Manager, Team Managers, Assistant Team Managers, Qualified Social Workers, Family Support Workers, Social Work assistants, Marketing and Communications professionals and administrative staff.

Fostering Service Manager						Corporate Comms	Children In Care Lead
West Fostering Team Manager	East Fostering Team Manager	Recruitment Team Manager	Assessment Team Manager	Hampshire Hive Team Manager	Senior Admin Officer	Marketing and Communication Manager	Family Connections Service Team Manager
Assistant Team Manager	Assistant Team Manager	Assistant Team Manager	Assistant Team Manager	Assistant Team Managers	Admin Officers	Marketing and Communication Officer	Assistant Team Managers
Social Workers	Social Workers	Social Workers	Social Workers	Hive Carer Support Workers	Senior Admin Assistant	Events and Volunteering Officer	Connected Persons Assessing Social Workers
Children and Family Support Workers	Children and Family Support Workers	Recruitment Officers			TM PA's	Partnerships/community engagement Officer	Children and Family Support Workers
		Trainers			Finance Lead		



## Staff Qualifications and Experience

Team Managers and social workers all have social work qualifications to support their extensive experience in providing services for children. They are registered with Social Work England.

Children and Families support workers do not hold a professional social work qualification but have experience of working with children, young people and families gained from working with a range of services. They work under the close supervision of social workers or team managers.

All Hampshire County Council employees and contractors are subject to rigorous selection and checking prior to commencing work within their teams as set out in regulations. The recruitment process for the Fostering Service is also monitored by Ofsted.

## Fostering Highlights 2022/23

### Marketing, recruitment, and assessment

During 2022/2023 the Fostering Service has continued on a journey to improve recruitment and retention of foster carers through Hampshire County Council's Modernising Placements Programme. This has seen investment into the service which include new roles.

In support of the new targets and expanding the team we have continued in our mission to find caring, compassionate, and nurturing people within our community to start their journey to becoming skilled and engaged foster carers for Hampshire

Focusing on recruitment, we want to ensure we generate as many enquires as possible and then support them through their journey to becoming a Foster Carer, maintaining strong conversion rates. In 2022/23 we achieved:

- Secured 322 firm enquires, a slight decrease from 336 last year;
- Provided 899 information packs, an 11% increase on last year
- Recruited 49 new county carers an increase of 48% on last year.

### Out of Hours support

In 2022 we launched a support line dedicated to foster carers to use outside of usual office hours. This line is manned by fostering staff who can provide support and advice. This line has been received positively by foster carers and helped in preventing placement breakdown.

### Hampshire Hives

One success in recruitment and retention of foster carers has been the growth of our Hampshire Hives. The Hampshire Hives provide networks of foster carers supporting each other in small hubs with the aim to improve foster carers experience and placement stability.



At March 2023, there were 16 Hives across Hampshire with a further seven planned to launch in April 2023.

- There are **350** Looked after children across the 16 hives
- There are **132** birth children across the 16 hives
- A total of **482** children.

**16%** of families in the Hives are Family Connections Carers. Family Connections Carers make up approximately **26%** of all approved Hampshire Foster Carers.



### Most recent Ofsted Inspection Highlights

The service's last Ofsted inspection in 2019 concluded an overall quality rating of 'outstanding'. This is recognition of the quality of our service provided by staff and

foster carers. Inspection is the main way Ofsted check the quality of services for children and young people. The purpose of inspections is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Report highlights include:

*Tenacious and creative work is undertaken to support children to safely remain in the care of their families wherever possible. Intensive support workers demonstrate skill through their sensitive, relationship-based work with families. Thorough, well-evidenced rehabilitation assessments and plans provide a sound basis from which to support children to successfully return home when this is in their best long-term interests. Appropriate and well-balanced decisions concerning children who do come into care are informed by thoughtful and rigorous management oversight.*

*Social workers build consistent and important relationships with children in care. They undertake insightful direct work that is carefully tailored to children's individual needs. Social workers' verbal accounts and written records of this work powerfully convey a strong picture of children's lived experiences, and the views of their birth families, supported by ongoing life-story work to help children understand their earlier lives. Social workers record their work with children diligently and sensitively, using a personalised and straightforward style of writing that demonstrates warmth and concern.*

*Children's participation is active, influential and widespread. Regular surveys, activity days, digital feedback initiatives, participation conferences and the recruitment of a growing number of care ambassadors are some of the wide range of methods and approaches that are routinely used to understand how children experience their lives in care. The local authority is innovative about how it encourages participation, for example through a theatre project which promotes children's well-being and mental health through the creative arts. Lead participation champions in each district organise an array of events and forums each month through which children's views are sought, for example about the qualities of a good social worker.*

*Children live with carers who meet their needs well and go to great lengths to improve their outcomes. Residential care is considered where it is appropriate for older children, including the use of the highly rated children's homes managed by the local authority. Comprehensive and highly evaluative assessments of connected carers and special guardians result in appropriate and lasting arrangements for children, underpinned by strong support plans. Carers receive determined support when they are struggling with children's behaviours and this helps them overcome challenging periods and to build resilience.*

*Assessments of prospective foster carers and the training and support subsequently provided are of a high standard. Children are carefully matched with carers, and the support offered by their supervising social workers helps them to remain resilient and child-focused during challenging times.*

A further Focused Visit in 2023 looked at the Local Authority's arrangements for children in care.

Highlights include:

*Social workers are knowledgeable, confident and child-centred in their discussions about children and their needs. Their practice is inclusive of the child's wishes and feelings, ensuring they have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect them.*

*Children live in stable homes. Their carers and consistent social workers build meaningful relationships, know their children and advocate for them effectively. Family relationships are given due weight and consideration so that children in care continue to have the benefit of relationships that are important to them. Family time is usually well considered and planned, with the child's best interests in mind. When children are unable to see family members, sensitive work helps them to understand why. Brothers and sisters have opportunities to live together when this is in their best interests.*

For more information or to view the full report visit [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

### **Family Connections Service (Previously Connected Carers Assessment Team)**

The Family Connections Service sits under the Children in Care lead, ensuring close links with Children's Teams to advise on the processes of assessing Connected Carers.

The Family Connections Service Administrative support and the knowledge base of the Children and Family Support Workers (CFSWs) ensure that the assessing social workers are fully supported throughout and new staff have a good level of guidance and support.

The Family Connections Service is working to improve the consistency of post SGO support to ensure that connected carers have the right support to care for children without the need for care orders where this is right for the child.

The Family Connections Service model ensures the understanding of fostering regulations and National Minimum Fostering Standards is considered across the county within Care Planning with Childrens Social Workers working closely with the team.

### **Fostering Support Teams**

The teams continue to support both Hampshire County Carers and Connected Carers. Management has remained stable which has added to the continuity of high-quality oversight and support for foster carers.

The teams provide;

- Supervision to foster carers;

- Support to foster carers, their birth children and any other household members including children in placement;
- Provide training to approved and pre-approved foster carers;
- Manage complaints and allegations against foster carers;
- Foster carer assessments;
- Support Staying Put placements;
- Arrange foster carers for out-of-hours (OOH).

Hampshire County Council support foster carers in their day-to-day care of the children, providing; advice, emotional support, talking through issues, arranging respite placements, liaising with the children's teams, managing payment issues, ensuring that foster carers have all the correct paperwork and know-how to complete it to ensure they comply with Fostering Regulations and meet the required standards.

The Placement Commissioning Team (PCT) ensure that identified placements will meet the needs of the child(ren), ensure that carers are supported to receive the child and liaise with the children's team to ensure that a placement planning meeting is held. The Fostering Support Teams ensure that the carer has all the practical equipment to care for the child and where needed, source this for them. Foster carers can call and speak to a supervising social worker for telephone support when required and we have a duty system to facilitate this.

Annual Household Reviews with foster carers are conducted. These reviews assess the past year of fostering, provide evidence to support the National Minimum Standards and make recommendations for the future. Reviews are presented to panel after the first year of fostering or after a complaint and allegation. At all other times these are authorised by the team manager. If carers continue to meet the required standards each year a new Foster Carer agreement is signed.

It is ensured that all carers have up-to-date statutory checks and additional checks to ensure the suitability of the household.

### **Hampshire Approach**

In particular, the strengths-based approach has informed the way supervision sessions are held and the language used to address any challenges. The service has always been child-focused, and all forms are being re-written to reflect more the voice of the child.

We continue to promote and embed the Hampshire Approach in all our practice.