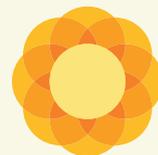


Statement of Purpose

2023 - 2024



BIRMINGHAM
CHILDREN'S TRUST



**Foster
Birmingham**
Birmingham's biggest family

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Why foster with Birmingham Children's Trust?

Fostering is extremely rewarding!

As a Foster Carer you can make a real difference to a child's life by providing them with a nurturing, safe home where they can have every chance of a happy and secure childhood; supported to reach their aspirations and succeed in life.

It's a big commitment to become a Foster Carer but extremely worthwhile. The rewards are enormous; some of our Foster Carers have been fostering for over 30 years!

By becoming a member of Birmingham Children's Trust Fostering Service, you will be contributing to the provision of high-quality placements, which give best value for the city, committed to placing children close to their home communities within Birmingham.

We will provide you with local support and guidance from our highly experienced fostering staff and Therapeutic Emotional Support Service (TESS), with access to a wider range of training to develop your knowledge, skills, and expertise.

There is a tiered payment scheme which reflects the complexity of the child requiring a foster placement and the skills and knowledge you offer.

We will treat you with respect, recognising you are a professional Foster Carer working in partnership as a member of the 'team around the child'.

Foster Carers are of critical importance to Birmingham Children's Trust.

I am delighted that, in August 2021, Ofsted judged us as 'Good.' Comments included:

"Children are making good progress because of the care they receive from Foster Carers. Children live with Foster Carers who they have trusting relationships with. Foster Carers invest in children and are committed to developing relationships with them."

"Foster Carers understand children's physical and mental health needs. Children attend

medicals annually. Foster Carers are proactive in supporting children who have additional health needs."

And

"Children make good progress in education. Foster Carers are proactive and show determination to help children succeed. This has helped children to move back into mainstream schools."

As part of our transformation journey to 'Outstanding,' we want to thank you for taking the time to find out about fostering in Birmingham.

We are inviting new Foster Carers to be part of our Fostering Service as we believe our children will receive the best opportunities with our Foster Carers.

This year we have continued to invest in the Fostering Service to improve our targeted Marketing and Recruitment Strategy and to improve recruitment and retention of Foster Carers.

To assist us we are working closely with our fostering community, the Birmingham Foster Carers Association (BFCA) and, as Corporate Parents, we are ambitious wanting children who are looked after to be living in loving foster families in their local communities where they feel safe, confident, and have a sense of belonging through into adulthood – a place where they can call home.

Thank you for taking the time to find out about fostering in Birmingham.



Lisa Jamieson
Interim Director of Commissioning and Corporate Parenting

Keen to know more?

Call us on **0121 303 7575** and learn how you can be part of *Birmingham's Biggest Family!*



Introduction

Birmingham Children's Trust Fostering Agency became operational as an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) on 1 April 2018.

The agency was formerly the Birmingham City Council Fostering Agency.

This Statement of Purpose outlines the aims, objectives, and service arrangements of Birmingham Children's Trust Fostering Services.

It has been written to provide information to Foster Carers, those interested in becoming Foster Carers, children and young people, fostering services staff, and all other colleagues or professionals within the Children's Trust and Birmingham City Council.

The Statement of Purpose also links with the Children's Guide that is provided to all children and young people who are placed in foster care.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) has the responsibility to inspect the Fostering Service regularly to ensure that we achieve the aims and objectives as set out in the Statement of Purpose.

Our most recent inspection report can be located at www.ofsted.gov.uk

A copy of this statement is lodged with Ofsted.

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually through the governance processes of the Trust.

It is supported by a range of more detailed information including the online Foster Carer Handbook, and a range of procedures which describe the day-to-day responsibilities and expectations of those involved in Fostering Services.

This Statement of Purpose also links with the Children's Guide which is provided to all children, subject to the child's age and understanding at the point of placement.

In Birmingham, all children in care and care leavers have the opportunity to participate in decisions which affect their lives. We strive to ensure that they have access to the services they need and the opportunity to shape how these services are planned and delivered.

Our Children in Care Council (CICC) plays a vital role in ensuring children and young people with care experience have a say in their care and in the things that matter to them.

Section 1

National Legislative and Policy Framework

A range of legislation and guidance governs the way in which the Fostering Service is provided and managed.

The Fostering Service is run in accordance with the principles and practice outlined in the:

- Care Standards Act 2000
- Children Act 1989
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2013 (Amendments to the Children Act 1989)
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards for Foster Care 2011
- Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services 2011
- Care Planning, Placement, and Case Review Regulations 2010
- Care Planning and Fostering Regulations (Amendments) 2015
- The Disability and Equality Act 1998
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD) for Foster Carers
- Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 and Birmingham Safeguarding Procedures



Section 2

Policy Statement

The Trust's Fostering Service believes that every child in care should be able to enjoy the same quality of life and opportunities as any other child.

We recognise that children's needs are best met by their family, where it is safe to do so, and we are committed to placing children who are not able to remain in their own family in an appropriate alternative family placement wherever possible.

We recognise that being separated from parents for any length of time, will inevitably have a detrimental effect on most children's wellbeing.

In addition, many children who become looked after, will have had adverse childhood experiences prior to coming into foster care.

Their mental health needs may be complex and their need for understanding of their past is essential. We are committed to engaging with other professionals in the assessment of the needs of children and ensuring that these are understood and prioritised.

We recognise the transition into adulthood is a major step requiring positive daily living support and enhanced connections with the adult world of opportunity and responsibility.

We are committed to facilitating young people 'Staying Put' with their Foster Carer into early adulthood wherever possible.

On this basis, the Fostering Service will provide the best possible family-based care for children and young people who are unable to live within their own family for whatever reason.

We are committed to placing children and young people within their local area for them to maintain contact with families and friends, to continue at the same school, and thrive within their community wherever possible.

Each child / young person will have access to services that recognise and address their needs

in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, disability, and sexuality.

Placement decisions will consider the child / young persons assessed racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic needs and match these as closely as possible with the ethnic origin, religion, culture, and language of the Foster Carer.

All children and young people will be carefully matched to highly skilled and trained Foster Carers who are able to meet the individual child's emotional, social, behavioural, cultural, and religious needs, ensuring that the child remains at the heart of all we do.

Of paramount importance is the child's / young person's safety and welfare which is actively promoted within all foster placements.

Children and young people are safeguarded from significant harm within fostering placements.



Section 3

Our Vision



To give every child the opportunity to thrive in their families, in their school and in their communities.

All children should enjoy a happy, healthy childhood which promotes their self-confidence and resilience, which gives them the foundation for adulthood and opportunity to fulfil their potential. The Fostering Service is working to improve outcomes for Birmingham's children in care, providing them with safe and secure environments in which they can thrive, fulfilling their aspirations."



Section 4

Aims and Objectives of the Fostering Agency

Birmingham Children's Trust aims to provide the most effective intervention in a proportionate and timely way that engages with children and their families.

This means making sure that staff who have the particular skills and specialist knowledge work with the family at each stage of their journey through the fostering system.

This is supported by the 'Right Service Right Time' framework of Birmingham Safeguarding Children's Partnership.

The Fostering Service is an integral part of Birmingham Children's Trust services. We provide a multi-agency service for children and young people in care.

Our Aims

The main aim of our Fostering Service is to provide safe, high-quality foster care placements for children and young people that value, support, and encourage them to grow and develop as individuals. As well as promoting their health and general wellbeing, we believe that children and young people in our care should:

- Be helped to grow and reach their potential.
- Have positive family life experiences through high-quality substitute family care.
- Be given safe, nurturing experiences within a variety of caring resources which reflect need, respect difference, value diversity, and promote inclusion.
- Be listened to and that services we provide should take these views into consideration.
- Receive high-quality, relevant aftercare, which supports their journey into adulthood.
- Have their rights and responsibilities respected and involve them, along with their carers, in all aspects of service delivery.

We believe that our children in care deserve:

- Services which help them overcome adversity and positively address disability.
- Good-quality and timely assessments that reflects the child's / young person's needs and demonstrate how such needs are going to be met.
- Receive the right help and support at the right time to improve their outcomes and lived experience.
- Positive care planning and, as Corporate Parents, Foster Carers have high aspirations for every child / young person in their care.
- All significant adults in their lives work together.
- To be heard, consulted with, and encouraged to participate in their care and family life.

The service is committed to:

- Ensuring the service provided is based on statutory requirements, sound principles and good practice, and works within the principles of value for money for the Trust.
- Encouraging participation from our service users; listening to children, young people and our Foster Carers and taking on board their feedback and that from the Children in Care Council and the Birmingham Foster Care Association as to how we can improve the service, the quality of placement matching, and the support, training, and development offer.
- Multi-agency working and developing partnerships which will progress the needs of our children in care and support the Foster Carers.
- Working at all levels in partnership with Education, Health, and the Therapeutic Emotional Support Service (TESS) to promote the wellbeing of children whom we look after.

- Providing a high-quality responsive child-centred service in relation to its core functions, which we regularly monitor through supervision, training, reviews, and consultation with children, young people, carers, parents, and Social Workers.
- Recruiting Foster Carers from within our diverse community and from the child's kinship network, whichever is best to meet their needs.
- Applicants being comprehensively assessed and prepared through training to be able to deal with a range of issues that Foster Carers face when looking after children within a safe family home.
- Recognising the value, skill, and commitment required for Foster Carers and treating them, their families, and homes with respect. Therefore, we are committed to providing our Foster Carers with appropriate financial provision which reflects their skills, knowledge, and complexity of the placement they are able to offer. Further work will be undertaken to reflect the carer's skillset with the right placement.
- Supporting children through trauma-informed foster care (understanding that children's behaviours are affected by their experiences of trauma). Foster Carers to be offered training that considers addressing the attachment needs of children in care and trauma responses to their past.
- Ensuring children reach their potential in education and employment.
- Ensuring children's health needs are met and they receive the services required.
- Ensuring young people are supported through to independence in a planned way.
- Delivering regular supervision to each Foster Carer from a fostering Supervising Social Worker who will assist in identifying the individual training and development needs of Foster Carers so that we are able to continually develop our fostering workforce.
- Taking into consideration individual child's needs / wishes and feelings as they relate to the foster placement.
- Accommodating siblings together wherever possible and appropriate.
- Promoting Family Time (Contact) between the child and young person and his / her birth family and other important people to them, throughout their placement.
- Ensuring that Foster Carers make children and young people aware of their rights in line with Birmingham Children's Trust Promise to children and young people. This includes making children and young people aware of the Complaints, Compliments, Advocacy, and Independent Visitors Processes.
- Ensuring that our Foster Carers feel valued by providing regular updates on the service, building our carer community through events such as carer awards as well as family events, and providing opportunities for Foster Carers to have a voice via the Foster Carer's Association focus groups.
- Children placed with family or friends as a foster child, those Connected Persons Foster Carers receive the same high standard of support, training, and supervision as mainstream Foster Carers.

Our service objectives

We put children at the centre of what we do, and we support the carer to do the same by:

- Promoting and safeguarding the welfare of the children throughout their childhood in all decision-making, planning, and day-to-day work.
- There is a choice of high-quality foster care placements available to meet the complex and diverse needs of children.
- Working in partnership with children and their families.
- Ensuring equality of opportunity, having a positive regard for the child's racial, religious, and cultural needs.
- Ensuring that all practice promotes equal opportunities for all, values diversity for Foster Carers, children, and young people.
- Promoting and abiding by The Promise for children and young people who are in our care.

- The Payment for Skills (PFS) model ensures quality by providing a competency and skills framework with clear expectations for Foster Carers with training and personal development programme.
- Ensuring that carers take appropriate decisions relating to the children in their care by delegating their authority for day-to-day decisions unless there is valid reason not to do so.
- Ensuring that any decisions are transparent and fair, any concerns are addressed, and information about complaints procedures are made available to all.
- Ensuring service performance is monitored, assessed with outcomes measured via a Quality Assurance Framework.
- Promoting a 'team around the child' approach in working with the child, young person, and their birth family alongside the Foster Carer.
- Consult regularly and learn from those who are in receipt of services through, comments, complaints, or compliments, and to have regular meetings and consultation with Foster Carers, senior managers, elected members and the Fostering Panel, including the Panel Chairs.
- Consulting regularly with children and young people who are fostered, using a variety of methods to ensure their voice is heard with active participating and encouragement for children in care being part of Birmingham Children's Trust Children in Care Council.
- Having a commitment to continuous improvement through provision of wider placement choices by pioneering more innovative approaches to foster care that are needs-led, delivering flexible packages of support to our children in care.
- Continuing to innovate and develop the service in co-production with our Foster Carers, through focus groups, workstreams and carer-to-carer training.
- Using customer feedback from a range of sources including Foster Carers and the Children in Care Council to develop and improve our Fostering Service.

- Ensuring that all information / records will be treated confidentially and held securely.

The Fostering Service is responsible for a diverse range of foster care placements for children who are unable to live with their own birth family and are being looked after by Birmingham Children's Trust.

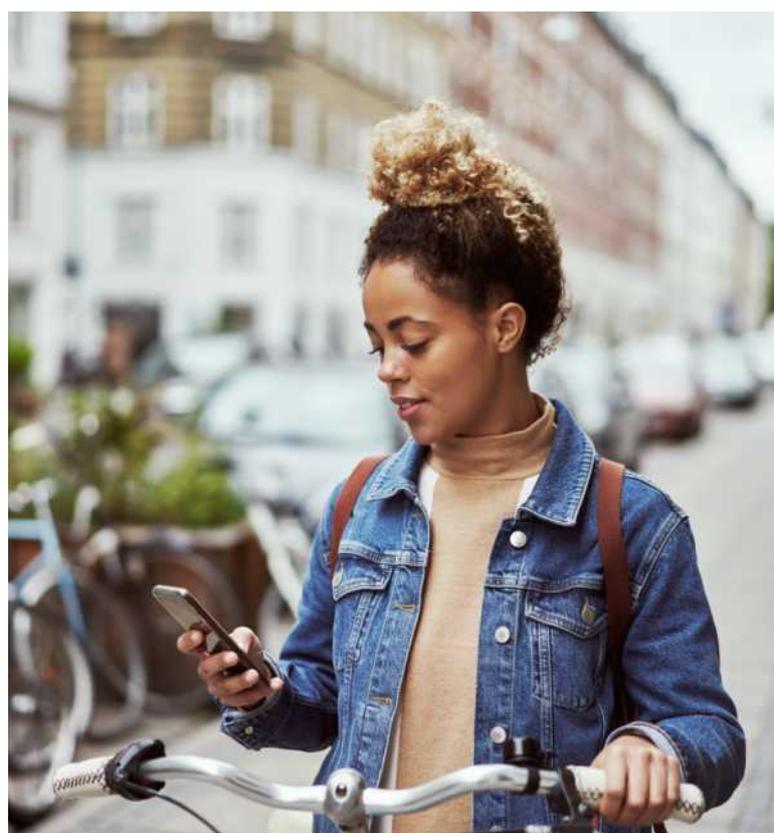
The foster care placements range from babies to teenagers, for children with complex needs who require a placement on their own as well as large sibling groups who need to stay together.

Providing stable placements remains a key priority which means finding carers who can support children and young people through to adulthood and beyond.

The Fostering Service actively promotes the option of Staying Put with our Foster Carers to enable young people in their care to remain with them beyond their 18th birthday if this is what the young person wants too.

We recognise that respite care is an important source of support to foster placements.

When considering respite arrangements, careful thought is always given to the needs of the child and the carers.



Section 5

Our priorities for 2023 – 2024

Our recruitment strategy ensures that we target recruitment to meet our service priority needs:

- Continue improving the retention and support for Foster Carers by continuing to develop foster care recognition events, including a welcome to our new Foster Carers.
- Enhance the Step Up Fostering Programme - to help facilitate successful transition of young people from residential care into foster homes.
- Strengthen the role our Recruitment Ambassador Scheme to work alongside the service to drive forward recruitment initiatives and manage information events.
- Placement stability and support remains a priority with new initiatives to support stability and permanence for children in care, including Foster Carer buddying and hub-based support groups.
- Greater support offered to children and young people from their Foster Carers in supporting children returning home to their families, and for children and young people on the edge of care.
- Work with the Children in Care Council to develop their involvement in the Skills to Foster Preparation Training, involvement in the preparation of the Recruitment Ambassadors, and in the design of a child / young person's profile pen picture ('About me') to be used as part of the matching process for a new placement.
- Review and enhance the wraparound support offer.
- Launch of Phase 2 of the Fostering website which is 'a one stop shop' for Foster Carers providing information and a range of support and training from different services to assist and support our Foster Carers in their role.

- Develop a pool of retained high-skilled and experienced Foster Carers who can work with older children / teenagers with complex needs, providing them with a family home.

Recruitment targets

Our target for 2023 - 2024 is to recruit 35 - 40 new fostering placements / beds. Our aim is to recruit Foster Carers who can be trained and supported to provide high-quality placements which meet the varied and often complex needs of children and young people needed to be looked after:

- Carers from diverse backgrounds who can provide placements for older children from a variety of ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds.
- Carers for older children (10+) and teenagers (13+).
- Carers for sibling groups of all ages.
- Connected Persons Carers approved as Foster Carers to offer a placement to a specific child known to them.
- Carers who can offer permanent placements and long-term stability for children who are unable to return to their birth families.
- Carers for older children / teenagers with complex emotional needs, including young people stepping down from residential care.
- Parent and Child Fostering placements.
- Carers able to accommodate children and young people in an emergency often outside of core working hours, such as evenings and weekends.
- Foster Carers for children with complex health needs and disabilities.

Section 6

How we monitor and evaluate the Service

- The performance of the service is monitored and analysed in the Annual Regulation 35 Report.
- The Fostering Service also monitors its performance and compliance with Regulations and National Minimum Standards. A quarterly report is presented to the Executive in accordance with NMS 25.7.
- Staff at all levels are provided with regular supervision by their line manager and consultation is also available for very complex cases.
- The Corporate Parenting Board receives the Annual Report on the performance of the Fostering Service.
- The Professional Agency Advisor provides support, advice, and quality assurance to the Fostering Panel. The advisor manages the Panel arrangements, facilitates Panel training needs, and supports the Independent Panel Chairs.
- Monthly performance and quality assurance meetings to review fostering performance data and feedback from audits, compliments, and complaints to improve the quality of practice and service delivery. Four-monthly meeting with Panel Chairs to review quality of practice, reports, and lessons for learning.
- Analysis of placement disruptions which have taken place through disruption meetings.
- Identification and analysis of children in care which will inform and influence our recruitment strategy.
- The Statutory Children in Care Review meeting, along with the function of the Independent Reviewing Officer, has a quality assurance role.
- The Fostering Panel Advisors will also feedback any learning points raised by the Fostering Panel.
- Quarterly feedback from the Fostering Annual Review Officer, who chairs Foster Carers' Annual Reviews.
- The Fostering Development Forum consists of senior managers, first line managers from the Fostering Agency, and the BFCA. The forum meets regularly to consider and consult on issues of development or concern.



Section 7

Feedback from Service Users

The views of children and young people receiving a service are sought through a variety of methods, including feedback from the Advocacy Service, lessons from disruptions, outcomes from complaints, children's view expressed in statutory reviews and through the 'Mind of My Own' app. The views of children, young people and Foster Carers inform service planning.

Written feedback is requested from the child's Social Worker as part of the Foster Carer's Review and at the end of each placement.

Newly approved Foster Carers are requested to provide regular feedback regarding the assessment, transition, and support process.

Birmingham Children's Trust Children in Care Council (CiCC) contributes to the Fostering Panel, having provided questions to be asked of the applicants.

The Trust's Fostering Service aims to gather feedback from applicants throughout their approval process and from approved carers and their own children during their fostering career.

We will do this through:

- Feedback requested by the Fostering Panel on views of applicants on the assessment process.
- Questionnaires following the Skills to Foster Preparation Course for prospective Foster Carers.
- The statutory Children in Care Reviews which ensures that the child / young person's and birth parent's views are fully explored.
- Direct work with children / young people which provides an opportunity for them to explore their feelings and give their views.
- Feedback from carers attending training courses and shared through joint meetings with our Training Officer to develop training programmes and individual courses as required.

- The Head of Service and Assistant Head of Service operate an open invitation for feedback; Foster Carers are involved in service developments and are encouraged to contribute wherever they can to service improvement.
- Regular supervisions with the allocated Supervising Social Worker so that managers can identify any shortfalls and address this promptly.
- Foster Carer consultation on key changes in policy and service developments and general Foster Carer satisfaction through questionnaires and network support meetings.
- Close working with BFCA, joint training and delivery of training, and recruitment and retention in partnership with our Foster Carer workforce.
- Feedback collated from carers attending training courses and shared through joint meetings with workforce development / training providers to develop training programmes and individual courses as required.
- The views of Foster Carers are gathered during regular supervisions with their allocated fostering Supervising Social Worker so that managers can identify any shortfalls and address this promptly.



Section 8

Management and Staffing

Head of Service for Fostering and Registered Manager - Tracy Collins

Tracy has worked within the field of social care for over 30 years, working in local authority children's services in various roles. She is registered with Social Work England and holds a CQSW (Certificate of Qualification in Social Work) a BA (Hons) in Applied Social Studies, MA in Social Work, and Diploma in Management Studies.

0121 303 5313 / 07592 586515

Tracy.Collins@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

The Head of Service is line managed by the Interim Director of Commissioning and Corporate Parenting - Lisa Omar (Jamieson), who is also the Responsible Individual.

Lisa holds a MA in Social Work Studies gained in 1996 and has worked in LAs since this time. She has an NVQ Level 4 in Management and is registered with Social Work England.

0121 303 4070

Lisa.Jamieson@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

Interim Head of Connected Carers - Carol Lees

Carol holds a Post Graduate Diploma in Social Work awarded in 1991, an MA in Child Protection Studies and a BA (Hon's) in Social Psychology. Carol is registered with Social Work England and has worked for a number of local authorities in children's, fostering and adoption services. Carol has also worked as an interim associate consultant for Coram(i).

0121 303 5313

Carol.X.Lees@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

The address for all of the above is:
Birmingham Children's Trust
1 Avenue Road
Aston
Birmingham
B6 4DU

The fostering Social Workers are responsible for supporting Foster Carers and are accountable to their Team Managers. Most also have many years of experience in the family placement field.

All are qualified and registered Social Workers with extensive experience in children's social work. All Social Workers receive monthly supervision from their Team Manager.

There is an annual appraisal system in operation for all staff which is reviewed regularly in line with staff learning and development.

The Panel Administrator organises the Fostering Panel; all Panel papers are managed electronically. There are two Panel Advisers who provide support and technical advice to the Fostering Panels that sit at least monthly.

Social work staff and all Foster Carers undergo enhanced DBS checks.

See the structure charts in Section 15, pages 27 and 28.

The Trust's Fostering Service comprises of nine teams, three of which are mainstream fostering, one citywide team supporting Connected Carers, and one providing post order support to Special Guardians and Private Fostering.

In addition, there are four assessment teams, one of which covers mainstream recruitment and three Connected Persons Assessment Teams:

- Recruitment and Assessment Team: The recruitment, assessment, and approval of mainstream Foster Carers.
- Support Teams: The day-to-day support and supervision of mainstream and fully approved Foster Carers.
- Connected Persons Teams: The assessment and approval of Connected Foster Carers, including potential Special Guardians.

- Connected Foster Carers receive the same quality of supervision and support as mainstream Foster Carers.

All these teams together undertake the statutory functions of assessment, approval, supervision, support, training and development, safeguarding and review.

Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team

The Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team has a crucial role in promoting the need for Foster Carers from across Birmingham and surrounding areas.

The team oversee marketing and advertising to recruit specific Foster Carers who can meet the needs of children most likely to need foster care.

There is a dedicated Marketing Manager who leads on marketing and recruitment activities, events, and communication in line with the Marketing and Recruitment Strategy.

The Recruitment and Assessment Team aim to ensure that all people who are interested in becoming Foster Carers are welcomed without prejudice, responded to promptly and given clear information about recruitment, assessment, approval, and support services.

They assess all applicants in line with the National Minimum Standards in a timely and robust manner, paying attention to safeguarding and keeping children at the heart of the assessment.

The Recruitment and Assessment team is responsible for:

- Marketing, communications, advertising, publicity and campaigns in partnership with Birmingham's City Council's Communications Team.
- Arranging regular events, information events and pop-up recruitment stands at local community events, including larger citywide and regional events. We encourage Foster Carers to attend events.
- Processing initial enquiries.

- Undertaking initial home visits.
- Providing the Skills to Foster Training and preparation groups where they will be able to learn about the tasks, skills, and benefits of fostering and have the opportunity to meet approved Foster Carers and others in training.
- Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) transfers.
- Assessments - including pre-stage, Stage 1 statutory checks and references.

If you would like to become a Foster Carer or find out more about fostering, please contact us using one of the methods below:

0121 303 7575

fostering@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

www.fosterbirmingham.co.uk

Once you have made an enquiry, a member of our team will be in touch within one working day.

An information pack can then be emailed or posted along with information about forthcoming information sessions.

The team aims to provide a seamless, efficient, and responsive service to Prospective Foster Carers.

Fostering Support Teams

The teams offer supervision and support to Foster Carers. All carers have an allocated Supervising Social Worker who will visit regularly, conduct an Annual Foster Carer Review, liaise with children's Social Workers and the key professional involved, and help to ensure appropriate placements are made.

All children placed with Foster Carers should be in an approved placement with a carer who has the quality, skills, and experience to meet their needs.

All Foster Carers have a named Supervising Social Worker who provides regular support and supervision to the Foster Carer.

A standardised supervision format is used to record regular supervisory visits.

Information can be extracted to inform the foster care review process, and there are specific areas which relate to the quality of the service the carer provides along with the difference this has made to the outcomes of the child in their care.

Each Foster Carer has an Annual Foster Home Review which explores issues including children's achievements, how children's needs have been addressed, any difficulties and resolution, training opportunities, plans for the future, children, social work, stakeholder and parental feedback and a health and safety check.

All newly registered Foster Carers are approved to care for children and young people between the ages of 0-18 but, in line with our smoking policy, some carers will not be approved for children under the age of 5 (with exceptions of Connected Carer approvals).

Friends and Family Viability and Assessment Teams

The Friends and Family Viability Assessment Team's role is to assess extended family members or persons known to a child who is unable to live with their birth parents.

These assessments mostly occur when a child and their family are involved with children's services and are going through care proceedings, whereby the Court is involved in making decisions and potential carers are put forward for assessment as potential alternative carers for a child.

Some connected carer assessments are private applications by people seeking Special Guardianship Orders for children from within their network whom they are caring for and have done so for some time.

Connected Carers are 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 best interests of the child for whom they wish to care.

Consideration is given to the established relationship the child may have with this

person and the opportunity for the child to be brought up within their birth family.

Connected Carers will be treated with respect and the difficulties within the family or network that have led to the child being in the care of the Local Authority will be acknowledged without pre-judgment.

Some Connected Carers are assessed whilst the child is living with them, and some are assessed in readiness for the child to move in.

Some connected carers are approved as Foster Carers for a specific child on a temporary basis and will go on to either become a fully approved Foster Carer, be granted a Special Guardianship Order in respect of the child or, in some cases, the child returns to their parents' care.

Regulations require that children who are looked after by the Trust can only be placed with either an approved Foster Carer or, for a period not exceeding 16 weeks, with a relative or friend of the child who has been approved as a temporary Foster Carer by an appropriate senior manager within Children's Services (the Trust).

The Connected Person's and SGO Assessments Team offers consultation to the child's social care team and any practitioner where Connected Person assessments may be required.

Upon request for a Connected Person Viability and / or Form C assessment, a Social Worker undertakes an initial visit to complete the necessary paperwork required under the regulations. If suitable for assessment by the Connected Persons Team an assessment plan will be agreed and reviewed.

A Form C assessment will be undertaken and presented to the Fostering Panel. The Agency Decision Maker (ADM) will make the final decision regarding the applicant's suitability to foster.

The team provide support and supervision to all Connected Persons once approved who can access training and support groups, along with the mainstream Foster Carers.

Foster Carers and their families receive:

- Regular supervision visits in line with the fostering task.
- Twenty-four-hour telephone support from an on-call fostering worker and manager. In addition to this, the BFCA also provides out-of-hours support.
- Invitation to the Foster Carers Annual Awards event in recognition of the support and care Foster Carers provide.
- Invitations to monthly support groups held throughout the city, including educational and social events and groups specifically for children of Foster Carers.
- All Foster Carers on approval are funded for membership of the Fostering Network which provides a holistic package of support, helpline, independent advice, and mediation as well as associated benefits including legal insurance.
- Ongoing comprehensive training offer to encourage continuous development.
- Access to the Trust's TESS, which provides consultations, interventions, and support to both the Foster Carers and the child(ren) in placement.
- BFCA offers peer, buddy, and mentor support to carers on a variety of matters, including support to carers where allegations have been made, and provides advice, information, and an advocacy service for carers.
- BFCA supported by the Trust provides a mentoring service for newly approved carers.
- BFCA produces a newsletter for all Foster Carers approximately every 3 months.
- Access to the Foster Carers Handbook and all have foster placement and financial agreements, plus a comprehensive guide with information about the Trust Fostering Agency.
- Opportunities to join development working groups to review standards and practice.
- Opportunities to attend senior management clinics and participate in consultations to share views and raise any issues.

The Trust is always keen to hear from our Foster Carers.

Financial support

Fostering allowances are in line with the national minimum standards and are paid fortnightly in accordance with a published schedule.

We provide all carers with written guidance on what these allowances cover and what additional expenses may be claimed.

In addition to the weekly fostering allowances that are paid to reflect the cost of a child's food, clothing, pocket money etc. we also provide skill-based fees to our carers.

The levels of the fees scheme reflect the considerable skills that carers develop.

This also creates a career structure that allows carers to progress, receiving a higher rate of payment upon achieving each level.

Types of Fostering

The Trust Fostering Agency provides a range of foster care placements to children and young people who are in the care of Birmingham Children's Trust.

These include:

- Short-term Foster Carers who provide care for children for periods lasting from a few days to several months or until the child either returns home or to extended family, or moves to their permanent placement which could be through Adoption, Special Guardianship, or long-term fostering.
- Long-term Foster Carers who provide permanent placements for children and young people who are unable to live with their birth family, usually until they can live independently. All long-term matches of children with their Foster Carers are agreed in accordance with the long-term fostering matching policy.

- Respite carers who provide a placement for a child for planned and specific periods to provide support to the child's family / Foster Carer, thus maintaining the child within his / her own family / foster family and community.
- Fostering for Adoption - the service is committed to an approach in planning for children where the number of placements for any child pre-adoption is kept to a minimum. We now have policy and procedure fully in place and some carers who have been granted dual approval and a number of concurrent placements made where it is envisaged that children will not need to move from Foster Carers who are approved adopters.
- Connected Person Carers - Birmingham is committed to placing children with family or friends with whom a child is already familiar rather than with Foster Carers they do not know if at all possible. Children's teams in partnership with the Connected Persons team identify families and friends to care for children by exploring the social network of the child to find out if there are 'Connected Persons' who might care for the child with support.

Many children / young people first placed with Connected Persons Foster Carers leave care when an order is made by the courts, such as an SGO or a Child Arrangement Order. Birmingham has a comprehensive Family and Friends Policy.

- Short breaks and services for children with disabilities - this service is provided via our children with disabilities services and alternate placements residential services. They provide regular, planned, short breaks for children / young people with disabilities where required. Disabled children have a full assessment carried out which identifies the appropriate services / plans and the level at which they are to be provided. Children / young people with disabilities or complex needs receive a short break as required and identified within their Care Plan. This allows for a relationship to build up between the child / young person and the service for short break care. Where a child / young person has particular health

needs specific training is provided prior to a placement.

- Emergency Duty Foster Carers are approved to work with the Emergency Duty Team to provide emergency placements for children and young people outside office hours. These placements are of short duration to provide a safe place in an emergency.
- Parent and Child Fostering - This is a specialist area of fostering whereby a parent and their child lives with the Foster Carer. The Parent and Child Foster Carers primary responsibility to ensure the welfare and safety of the child placed with them, but they also support and help the parent to bond with their child and develop their parenting skills in order that they can parent with confidence.
- Step Up Foster Carers - This is a specialist area of fostering where Foster Carers 'step up' and help young people move from residential care to a fostering home, to give them the experience of living in a family where they receive love, care and understanding. The challenge is great, but so are the rewards!

Placement Matching

Placement matching means placing children within a fostering family who can meet their needs.

This includes considering the wishes and views of the child, the child's birth parents and significant relatives.

Placement matching will consider the child / young persons assessed racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic needs and match these as closely as possible with the ethnic origin, religion, culture, and the language of the Foster Carer(s).

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 until a better match is found.

Placement matching is undertaken alongside our Placements Team who are responsible for finding suitable homes for children where they are unable to live within their family or wider social network.

We aim to provide foster placements offering therapeutic care by promoting a 'team around the child' approach, with the focus on the Foster Carer providing 'therapeutic re-parenting' using the key principles of the PACE parenting approach.

We actively manage the placement to ensure that outcomes for the children are our primary focus.

Foster Carers need the following to 'therapeutically re-parent:'

- To be seen as a key part of the team around the child.
- A heightened sense of self-awareness, including being emotionally grounded and evidencing the ability to be reflective in their practice.
- To possess a good working knowledge of theoretical models to use as a framework for understanding young people's behaviour.
- Access to good-quality wraparound services.

Working together

The Trust Fostering Agency works in partnership with support services, forming a 'team around the child' that includes the children in care nurses service, the Therapeutic Emotional Support Service (TESS), Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO), the Virtual Schools service, and many other services.

- Foster Carers work as part of a 'team around a child'. As part of the professional multi-agency team around the child they will have contact with differing professional colleagues who will be working with our Foster Carers to ensure that the child in placement is supported, has their needs met, and achieves positive outcomes.
- As part of the wider Trust 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.

- The Service works in partnership with Birmingham Foster Care Association (BFCA) to drive forward our service developments, improving practice and the offer to our carers.
- All carers are required to work closely alongside the families of children in care with sensitivity and an understanding of the responsibility attached to looking after another person's child. This can be complex and demanding both for the carers and the child and requires an emphasis to be placed on joint working with Social Workers and colleagues in all relevant agencies.
- All carers are required to record details of the child's life in their care and contribute to effective assessment and care planning.

Annual Foster Carer Review

Annual reviews of carers ensure that we keep in the forefront our aims and objectives for the children in our care.

The views of all those involved are sought to contribute to the meeting. It is particularly important that the child's or young person's voice is heard.

It is at the review that decisions are made regarding the carer's suitability.

Their terms of approval are reconsidered, and support and training needs identified. The first Annual Review is presented to Panel for consideration.

Any subsequent reviews are presented to the Independent Fostering Reviewing Officer for consideration and a decision made on progression.

The Fostering Reviewing Officer provides a quality assurance function, providing independence to the process. Reviews may be presented to the Panel as required.

The Reviewing Officer will make clear recommendations for the forthcoming year and these are followed through in supervision.



A health and safety checklist is completed or updated for the Review.

Every Review will include feedback from the child in their care, their parents, and Social Workers as well as the carer's own children.

The support teams ensure that the Foster Carer reviews are reflective of continual practice and support the continuous professional development of all Foster Carers, along with the difference this has made to the care provided through the child's lived experience in their care and improved outcomes achieved.

Safeguarding checks

- Every carer must have an Annual Review.
- Disclosure and Barring Service are completed as part of the Foster Carer's assessment and at intervals of three years.

The Family Safe Caring Policy is updated at every review or / and new placement. Health and safety checks are reviewed annually.

- Foster Carers also receive an unannounced visit throughout the year.
- In the event of a child protection investigation because of an allegation of abuse against the Foster Carer, the Foster Carer Review will take place immediately after the conclusion of the investigation. They are presented to Panel for consideration of the carer's ongoing suitability to foster.
- If a Foster Carer is the subject of a child protection allegation against them, Foster Carers have access to independent support from FosterTalk's independent support service, or the BFCAs.

Section 9

Learning and Development

Central to The Trust's ability to provide the best possible service to children, training is of vital importance in supporting carers and helping them to develop the therapeutic nurturing parenting skills to face the many challenges that fostering brings.

Training is organised by the Fostering Service and the BFCA with contributions from relevant professionals and organisations. All training aims to address the learning from the various feedback forums, safeguarding, complaints and disruptions of children in care.

The Trust offers a variety of courses designed to cover the diverse nature of foster care and to support carers to offer therapeutic re-parenting to our foster children to help them recover from their difficult start in life.

Training can be assessed in different locations and at different times, including full and half-day courses to meet the circumstances of Foster Carers. Attending courses also gives carers the opportunity to meet and talk to other carers. Integral to the training is valuing difference, diversity, and challenging discrimination. Some training is written and delivered by a cohort of trained and experienced Foster Carers; this enhances the foster care training package. We currently provide 85 online courses and over 40 face-to-face courses across the city. Training for Foster Carers ensures the following:

- Training meets the needs of Foster Carers, the requirements of National Minimum Standards for the Fostering Service, and the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care (TSD).
- The training provided enables Foster Carers to provide high-quality care which meets the diverse and complex needs of children and young people placed with them.
- The training promotes the recruitment and retention of Foster Carers.
- The training ensures that carers are an integral part of Children's Services.

- The training is delivered within existing and planned resources.
- All training promotes partnership working.

The learning and development plan is updated each year. The development of the training programme is annually informed by course evaluations, an annual questionnaire to Foster Carers, requests from Foster Carers and Social Workers for specific training, plus national and local drivers.

Every Foster Carer is expected to gain the knowledge required from the core training: safeguarding, first aid, therapeutic parenting using secure base and the PACE model, plus additional training that includes skills training, the health and social wellbeing of looked after children, eating disorders, missing from care, contextual safeguarding, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation, supporting the education of children, and safe caring.

Our Training Offer

Foster Carers can also choose from a range of further learning opportunities, examples of which include:

- Life Story Work
- Cultural Diversity
- Allegations and Safer Caring
- Young People and Mental Health
- Supporting Educational Achievement
- Positive Parenting Techniques for Parents and Carers
- Therapeutic Care and Social Pedagogy

Our advanced training programme offers nationally accredited and specialist courses including:

- BTEC Level 4 - Expert practice in working with traumatised children
- BTEC Level 3 - Advanced skills in foster care

Section 10

The Fostering Panel

The Panel considers the approval of all new carers and existing carers' reviews.

The Panel will make recommendations on Foster Carers' terms of approval including:

- Type of fostering
- Age of child(ren)
- Gender of child(ren)
- Number of children (to a maximum of three)

The Panel's recommendations are considered by the Agency Decision Maker who makes the final decision.

The 1989 Children Act sets the 'usual fostering limit' to three children, unless the children are siblings to each other.

In certain circumstances, the Fostering Service may consider placing children outside of the usual fostering limit on exemption. With the carer's agreement, whenever this applies, the

exemption will be formally recorded and presented to Panel. Consideration will also be given to what additional support the carers may require.

Any other variation of approval is risk assessed to ensure the needs of all the children in the household are met.

A return to Panel will be considered in accordance with the Change of Approval Practice Guidance to ensure there is independent scrutiny and oversight.

The Panel considers all cases where there have been significant concerns in terms of safeguarding, quality of care, or allegations made. Panel will also consider any significant changes to the fostering household and resignations for Connected Carers.

Panel minutes are recorded, and decisions are confirmed in writing to the carer.

Section 11

Recording and Access to Records

The Fostering Service has a responsibility to maintain accurate records on all Foster Carers and to ensure that information is shared with the carer wherever possible.

There is a statutory requirement to retain files for 10 years following closure.

However, in accordance with the Trust's policy, the practice is to retain for 35 years.

Carers have a right to access their records and can request this via www.birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk by:

- Clicking on 'Contact us'
- Then click on the 'Access your personal information (SAR)' link
- Complete the request form

Section 12

Complaints or Challenging Decisions

Complaints

Complaints are received in the spirit of open communication.

It is hoped that any problems can be dealt with quickly and resolved at a local level.

Formal complaints are dealt with in accordance with the Trust's Complaints Procedure or the Fostering Agency Complaints Procedure and the appropriate response will be determined by the Trust's Complaints Manager who will also monitor the progress of any complaint to the conclusion of the process.

Carers are made aware of the complaints procedure in relation to children in their care and how to complain in their own right.

The complaints procedure is easily accessible on the Trust website at www.birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk and clicking on the 'Contact us' link for more details.

Comments / Compliments

All comments and compliments are recorded and reported in the Regulation 35 report.

A response will be forwarded to the individual concerned acknowledging any compliment. Panel will also issue a 'Notice of Appreciation' for any excellent work presented to Panel.

Challenges to decisions regarding suitability to foster

The process for assessing a person's suitability to foster consists of two parts. These are carried out by the Agency concurrently, but the information required for Stage 1 is sought as soon as possible.

The decision about whether an applicant has successfully completed Stage 1 is made within 10 working days of all the information required in that stage being received.

If, during Stage 1, it is decided that an applicant is not suitable to foster the applicant has no right to a review of this decision and they will be informed of this in writing.

However, if the application has progressed to Stage 2 and, following a brief or full report being presented to Panel it is determined that an applicant is 'not suitable to foster', the applicant must be informed in writing (within 28 calendar days) that they may seek a review of this determination by the IRM or make representations to the Agency.

If the Permanence Panel recommends that the applicants are unsuitable and this is supported by the Agency Decision Maker (qualifying determination) then the applicants can refer the matter to the Independent Review Mechanism for Fostering which reviews decisions made by Birmingham Children's Trust Fostering Agency.

Allegations

Allegations about the standard of care provided by Foster Carers, including conduct, safeguarding, abuse or neglect of a child by Foster Carers, are investigated according to the Birmingham Children's Trust Child Protection Safeguarding procedures.

Allegations against any adult working with a child are monitored by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). Further information can be found in Allegations and Standards of Care Concerns Practice Guidance.

Foster Carers can be provided with support from the BFCA or Fostering Network if required.



Section 13

Ofsted and the Children's Commissioner

Ofsted

Complaints are received in the spirit of open communication. Any serious concerns regarding the Fostering Service Practice can be referred to the Ofsted inspectorate.

Ofsted is responsible for the regulation and inspection of Children's Social Care Services including Local Authority Fostering Services.

Address: Piccadilly Gate, Store Street,
Manchester, M1 2WD

Phone: **0300 123 1231**

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

The Children's Commissioner

The Children's Commissioner for England is Dame Rachel de Souza.

She speaks up for children and young people and has unique powers to help bring about long-term change and improvements for all children, particularly the most vulnerable.

Address: Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT

Phone: **020 7783 8330**

Website: www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

Section 14

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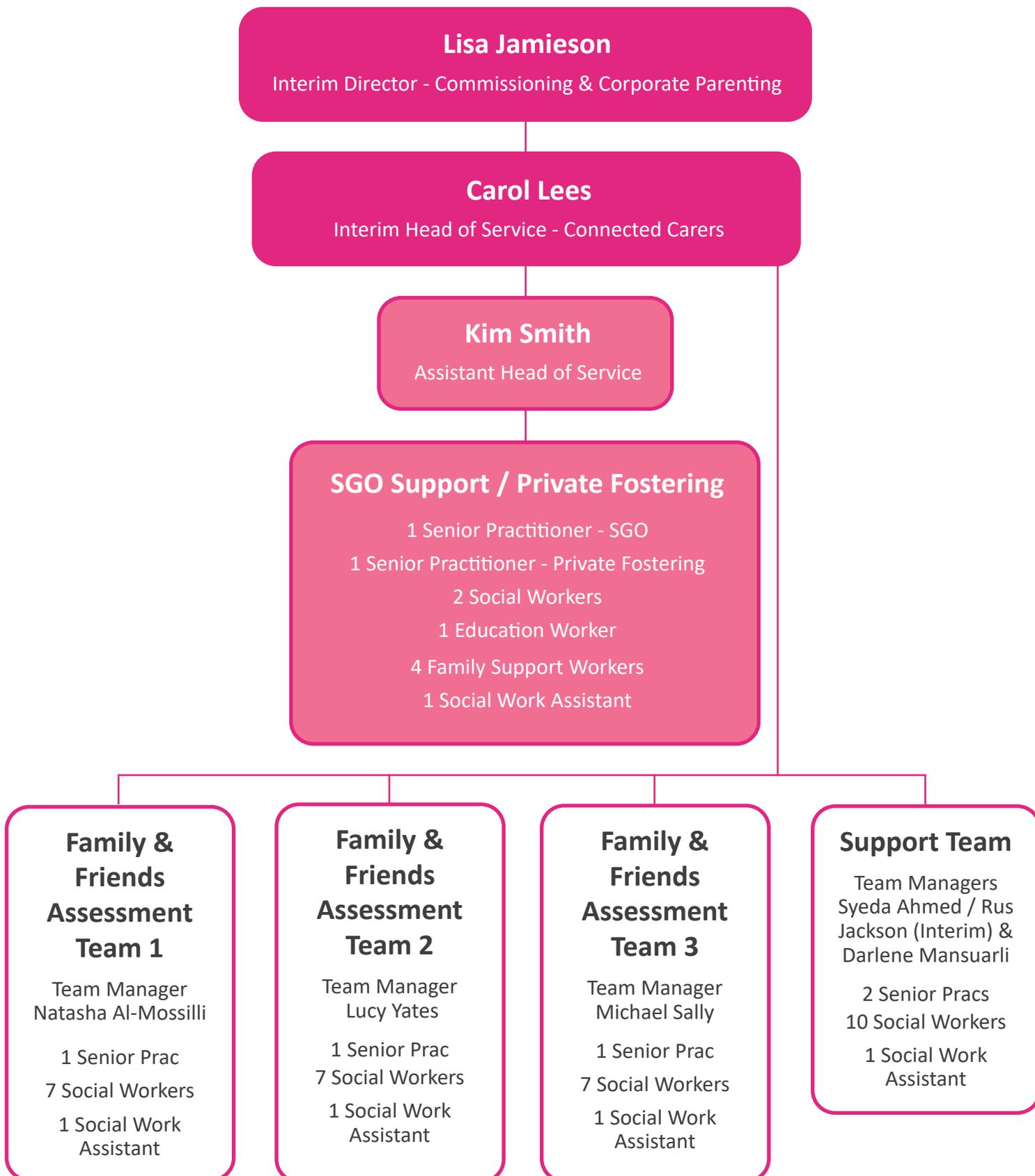
Address for all: Birmingham Children's Trust,
1 Avenue Road, Aston, Birmingham,
B6 4DU

Section 15

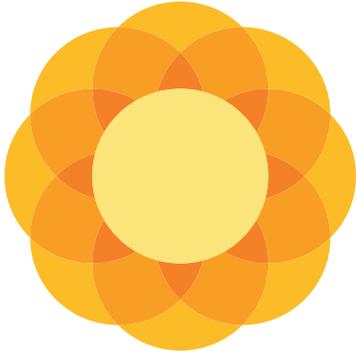
Fostering Structure 31



Fostering Structure 32



All social work staff are required to have the Diploma in Social Work or equivalent on appointment and have current Social Work England Registration. All Team Managers are qualified Social Workers and are required to hold or are working towards a management qualification.



Foster Birmingham

Birmingham's biggest family

Most children in care are looked after by foster carers who provide a strong, stable and secure family environment, either short or long-term.

Our mission at Birmingham Children's Trust Fostering Service is to provide Birmingham children with Birmingham families and we are currently responsible for providing care to over 1,900 children in Birmingham.

Fostering in Birmingham could be one of the most rewarding things you ever choose to do. If you're interested, please get in touch.

0121 303 7575

Fostering@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

www.fosterbirmingham.co.uk

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