

**BIRMINGHAM  
CHILDREN'S TRUST**

# **BCT Fostering Agency Statement of Purpose 2018-2019**



## 1. Introduction

The Statement of Purpose sets out the core aims and objectives of Birmingham Children's Trust Fostering Agency.

This agency was formerly the Birmingham City Council Fostering Agency. On the first of April 2018 Birmingham transferred its children's social work services into the Birmingham Children's Trust, a community interest company wholly owned by Birmingham City Council.

Birmingham Children's Trust Fostering is an Independent Foster Agency set within the Birmingham Children's Trust.

The Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirement for Foster Agencies to compile a statement detailing how the service will meet outcomes for children, along with the range of services provided, the governing principles and who manages and provides services.

The statement of purpose is for:

Children and young people

Birth relatives

Prospective and approved Foster carers

Social workers

Councillors

Members of the Birmingham Children's Trust

Foster Panel members

Regulation through Department for Education (Ofsted)

Members of the public

The statement of purpose will be reviewed annually through the Governance processes of the Birmingham Children's Trust, which is accountable for its performance to Birmingham City Council.

Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency's Statement of Purpose is prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000 (CSA) for the conduct of the Agency. This Statement has been produced in accordance with the Fostering Services' Regulations 2011. The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services' and Fostering Services' Regulations govern the work of fostering services throughout England and are used in inspecting and registering fostering agencies.

Standard 16 of the National Minimum Standard for Fostering Services and Regulation 3 (1) of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011 require a fostering service to produce a statement which contains a range of detailed information as set out in Standard 16. It is intended as a useful source of information for Foster carers, Fostering Social Workers, Childcare Social Workers and all children and young people. The aims and objectives of the Statement of Purpose should be child focused and show how the service will meet outcomes for children in the care of Birmingham Children's Trust.

Children's Guides are available and provide information about Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency in a language and a format appropriate to the age-ranges for which they have been produced.

The Statement outlines the fostering service and facilities provided by the agency, as well as setting out our aims and objectives.

Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency provides a copy of the Statement or the Children's Guides upon request to anyone working for the Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency, any foster carer or prospective foster carer and the parent of any child in our care. This statement will be made available in different formats if required.

All children in placement with foster carers will have this Statement explained to them in a manner appropriate with their age and understanding and have access to a copy of the Children's Guide. A personal copy will be provided to them on request.

## **2. Aims and Objectives of Birmingham Children's Trust 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' Birmingham Children's Safeguarding Board (BCSB) service framework.

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

Our approach is holistic, child friendly and promotes positive outcomes for all. The Fostering Agency aims to promote the best possible outcomes for children and young people looked after by Birmingham Children's Trust. Birmingham Children's Trust Fostering Agency is continuing to use the brand **# home – changing lives and making a difference** to support a smooth transition from the Council to the Trust.

### **Our Aims:**

- a. To provide the opportunity for all looked after children and young people to experience positive family life through the provision of high-quality substitute family care.

- b. To safeguard, protect, and promote the wellbeing of children and young people placed with Birmingham Children's Trust foster carers.
- c. To identify suitable fostering arrangements and match children to carers who can meet their assessed needs. This includes seeking independent placements where necessary.
- d. To work together with the placement team and other agencies to source the best placements and stability within foster care that will meet and promote best outcomes for our children and young people looked after.
- e. To improve the life chances of looked after children by meeting their emotional, social, physical, health and educational needs.
- f. To promote and ensure the wellbeing and safety of looked after children and enable them to make a positive contribution in the community.
- g. To provide services that are flexible, responsive and supportive of foster carers and their families, including high quality support, training and supervision.
- h. To continually improve service delivery by actively involving and listening to children, young people and carers.
- i. To encourage the whole organisation to value and respect the contribution of children, young people and foster carers, and work in partnership and co-production with them.
- j. To ensure a very high standard of care by regularly monitoring placements through supervision, training, reviews and consultation with children, young people, carers, parents and social workers.
- k. To provide a range of fostering resources to meet the individual needs of children and young people requiring placements, through comprehensive policies on recruitment, training, assessment and reviews of foster carers.
- l. To provide a consultation and support service to the placement team to optimise the use of internal foster carers.
- m. To work within the overall policies and procedures of Birmingham Children's Trust for children in care, and contribute to the development of these where appropriate.
- n. To promote fostering in the wider community within Birmingham City Council and beyond.
- o. To recruit, retain and increase the number of foster carers for our children in care.
- p. To maximise the use of Birmingham Children's Trust foster carers.

## **Objectives of Birmingham Children's Trust Fostering Agency**

- a. The safety and welfare of the child will always be the paramount consideration in decision making, planning and day-to-day work.
- b. Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency will always respect the ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language of children, young people and foster carers.
- c. Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency works within the council's integrated equal opportunities policy in relation to staff, carers and service users.
- d. Foster carers and prospective foster carers are treated with respect and consideration, and staff work in partnership with them to deliver the best provision of care and support.
- e. Practice in relation to the recruitment, training, assessment, supervision, support and review of foster carers will underpin the maintenance of high standards of care for children and the meeting of individual needs.
- f. The views of foster families, parents, children, young people, social care teams and independent reviewing officers will be sought and taken into account in monitoring, reviewing and developing the service.
- g. Where a child is placed with family or friends as a foster child, those carers will receive the same high standard of support, training, supervision, and financial allowances as mainstream foster carers.

### **Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency service seeks to continuously evaluate and improve its services by:**

- a. The service will undertake a strategic recruitment marketing programme that ensures the ongoing need for foster carers is robustly communicated widely throughout the year, both within Birmingham and beyond city boundaries.
- b. To respond positively to legislative and good practice developments and make any changes necessary to policy, practice and procedures.
- c. To ensure children's views are presented in statutory reviews, foster care reviews directly by themselves or by others and that their ideas and views are valued and where necessary influence practice development.

## **2. Principles of Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency**

Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency is committed to:

- a. Providing high quality care in a family setting for all children and young people who need it, and to aid their return to their own families wherever appropriate. Where a return or placement with a family is not appropriate, the service will support the timely transition to an alternative permanent family.
- b. Ensuring that the child's wishes and feelings are actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages.
- c. Ensuring that the particular needs of disabled children are fully considered and taken into account when decisions are made.
- d. Ensuring that the needs of children in connected persons foster placements and their carers are fully considered.
- e. Promoting equality and diversity by recruiting and retaining a wide range of foster carers able to meet the needs of children in care within Birmingham Children's Trust.
- f. The planning and provision of placements to show respect for, and recognition of, the importance of ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language of children and young people, their families and foster carers.
- g. Providing continuity in the lives of children and young people who are fostered in order to maintain and develop their identity and education, promote their physical and mental wellbeing and ensure they achieve their full potential.
- h. Developing and maintaining a partnership with parents and children, carers and their families and social work staff, to enable them to meet the individual needs of each child.
- i. Ensuring that assistance is made available to every young person leaving foster care to live independently, and that financial and other support is made available to foster carers able to offer continued care and support to young persons during this transition and the critical period after leaving, including Staying Put.

#### **4. Standards of Care**

Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency aims to comply with the requirements of the Fostering Services' Regulations 2011 and the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards for Fostering 2011, Care Planning, Placement and Review Regulations 2010. The service also aims to follow the best practice guidelines of the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care.

Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency pursues best practice reflected in the UK National Standards for Foster Care 1999 and Code of Practice for Fostering 1999.

Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency aims to comply with the Human Rights Act 1998 and promote the best outcomes and opportunities for all children and young people in care.

Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency complies with the guidelines as laid out in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 and Birmingham Safeguarding Procedures.

## **5. Supervision and appraisal of carers**

All foster carers have a named supervising social worker who provides regular support and supervision.

A 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.

Each foster carer has an annual 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.

## **6. Monitoring arrangements to ensure effectiveness and quality**

Systems are in place to monitor and evaluate the provision of our services. These are: Council staff appraisals - all staff receive regular supervision and an annual appraisal.

All prospective foster carers are encouraged to complete evaluations at a variety of stages. These include:

- Information events,
- Fostering preparation and assessment training.
- Following panel
- BFCA and Birmingham Fostering Service Development Forums.

Approved foster carers are encouraged to provide feedback. This includes following all training events, twice yearly meet 'the senior managers events' and in their annual reviews.

The Head of Service and Assistant Head of Service operates an open invitation for feedback; foster carers are involved in service developments and are encouraged to contribute wherever they can to service improvement.

Social work compliance to standards is part of the audit requirements.

Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency is part of Birmingham Children's Trust and fostering services improvement plans and practice are monitored and evaluated accordingly. Progress monitoring reports and statistics are provided to the improvement board and the Executive Director of Children's Services on a quarterly basis.

Foster carers are advised of the directorate and corporate complaints procedure and the independent review mechanism.

Children's care plans are monitored and progressed in a timely manner through the statutory review process and pathway planning.

The fostering panels consider all applications to foster and first reviews of foster carers. Panels also provide advice in relation to performance issues and good practice, including when termination of approval of carers may be considered.

Panels also comment on issues of practice through a system of notices of appreciation and notices of concern to line managers in order that future practice and services can be improved.

The Directorate produces statistical information in relation to performance indicators and targets. Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency has an electronic system which assists in producing monthly statistical information relating to recruitment, training, assessment and approval of carers, occupancy and recording long terms plans, matches and placements of our children.

The Fostering Development Forum consists of senior managers, first line managers from Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency, safeguarding oversight and the Birmingham Foster Carer Association (BFCA). The Forum meets regularly to consider and consult on issues of development or concern.

## **7. The procedures for recruiting, preparing, assessing and approving foster carers**

Marketing and Recruitment of foster carers is undertaken by the Recruitment team.

These are based at:

1 Lancaster House

Lancaster Circus

Birmingham

Telephone: 0121 303 1010

[www.birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk](http://www.birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk)

Birmingham City Council is a 'fostering friendly employer' and aims to encourage as many staff as possible to foster for the Local Authority (providing they do not work directly with looked after children in front line children's teams).

The centrally based recruitment team provides a focal point of contact for anyone interested in becoming an Adopter or Foster Carer.

The team provides information by email and the website plus an active duty enquiry line for prospective carers during office hours.

The team hosts regular information sessions and targeted marketing campaigns around the City.

We aim to recruit, assess and approve foster carers in a robust and timely manner to meet the needs of all children requiring a family.

Through children's trackers identifying the profile of children likely to need foster care, the recruitment activity is regularly updated to focus on areas of greatest need in advance.

There are specific teams for the assessment of Connected Persons Foster Carers and SGO applicants. They provide post approval support to approved Connected Persons foster carers and an SGO step down support service post Special Guardianship Order.

Prospective foster carers are expected to attend comprehensive 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.

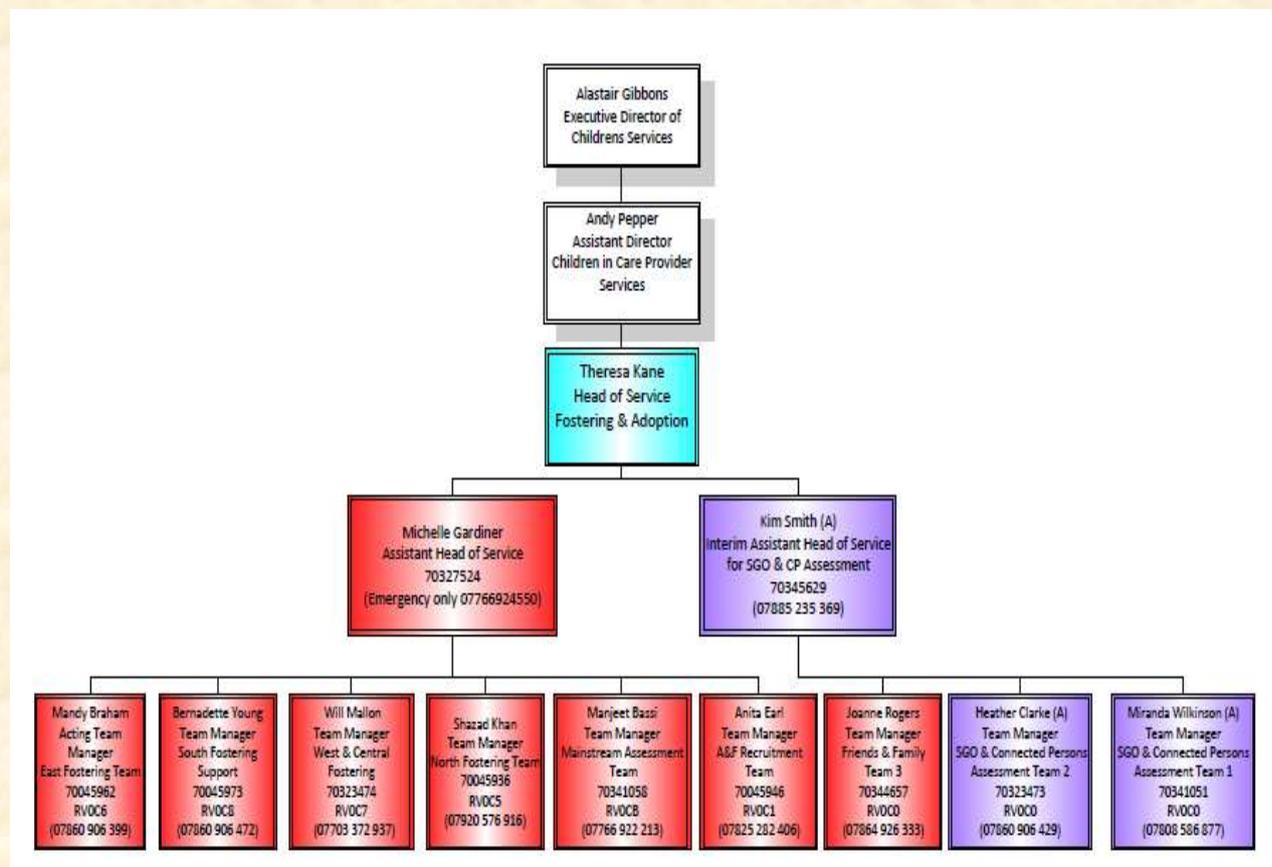
#### **Enquiries to become foster carers are generated through:**

- Marketing campaigns - the team delivers promotional campaigns to raise general awareness about the City's need for foster carers and also to generate enquiries from potential applicants.
- The scope of this brief covers all standard elements of promotional activity including the production and distribution/display of posters and literature citywide, media campaigns and advertising.
- The team also advertises and networks through community and engagement projects and events and co-ordination of recruitment campaigns on a 12 month planned basis (including making use of venues, and a range of social media and events).
- The team provide regular information sessions for members of the public where there is the opportunity to hear more about what fostering (and adoption) entails and how the assessment process is undertaken.
- There is structured publicity throughout the year including press articles and advertising, local radio interviews and advertising, posters, billboards and public information events. All of these aim to raise the profile of fostering throughout the local community.
- Specific campaigns are organised and planned over a 12-month period.
- Our advertising aims to recruit a broad variety of carers who can cater for the specific needs of our children in care and young people, including those from ethnic minorities and those with disabilities.

- We work with our current carers and involve them in our recruitment campaigns. They are enthusiastic ambassadors for the service and are one of the best sources of new carers.
- Foster carers who recruit friends to the service receive a financial incentive as we recognise that foster carers are the best recruiters.
- All enquiries are responded to within 24 working hours. We complete an initial enquiry form and arrange to visit prospective carers within 5 working days of their enquiry.
- Once the expression of interest is returned, the stage one assessment is started. When routine checks have been applied for stage one, the social worker hands over to the assessing social worker who will complete the fostering assessment stage 2. Where appropriate the whole assessment 1 and 2 will be completed within 4 months.
- The assessment will then be considered by the Foster Panel. The Panel will make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker for approval or not.

## 8. Staffing

### Management, staffing and service structure



Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency is part of the Birmingham Childrens Trust under the overall leadership and direction of the Director of Trust. The Corporate Parenting Panel is a group of people who meet regularly to oversee services provided to Looked After Children and Care Leavers. It includes elected members, senior Children's Services managers, Foster Carers and representatives from the Children in Care Council, Health and the Virtual School.

### **Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency**

**Head of Service for Fostering and Adoption, Theresa Kane.**

Theresa has 17 years' experience within the field of social care. She is registered with the HCPC. She holds a Diploma in Social work, BSc (Hons) in Social Work, Post Qualifying Award in Child Care and Child Protection, Introduction to Line Management and a Post Graduate Diploma in Leadership and Management in Health and Social Care. She has worked as a social worker since 2000. She has been a manager since 2008.

Address: Birmingham Children's Trust, 1 Lancaster Circus, Birmingham, B4 7DJ.

Email: Theresa.kane@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

The Head of Service is line managed by the Assistant Director (Children in Care Provider Services) - Andy Pepper

**Assistant Head of Service and Registered Manager Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency, Michelle Gardiner** - Michelle has 13 years' experience in social care. She is registered with the HCPC and has experience within children and families social work. She holds a Diploma in Social work, Post Qualifying Award in Child Care and Child Protection, a Post Graduate Diploma in Leadership and Management in Health and Social Care. She has worked as a social worker since 2003. She has been a manager since 2009.

Address: Birmingham Children's Trust, 1 Lancaster Circus, Birmingham, B4 7DJ

Email:michelle.gardiner@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk

The fostering social workers are responsible for the provision of the fostering service and are accountable to their Team Managers. All are qualified registered social workers with extensive experience in childcare social work. Most also have many years' experience in the family placement field.

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.

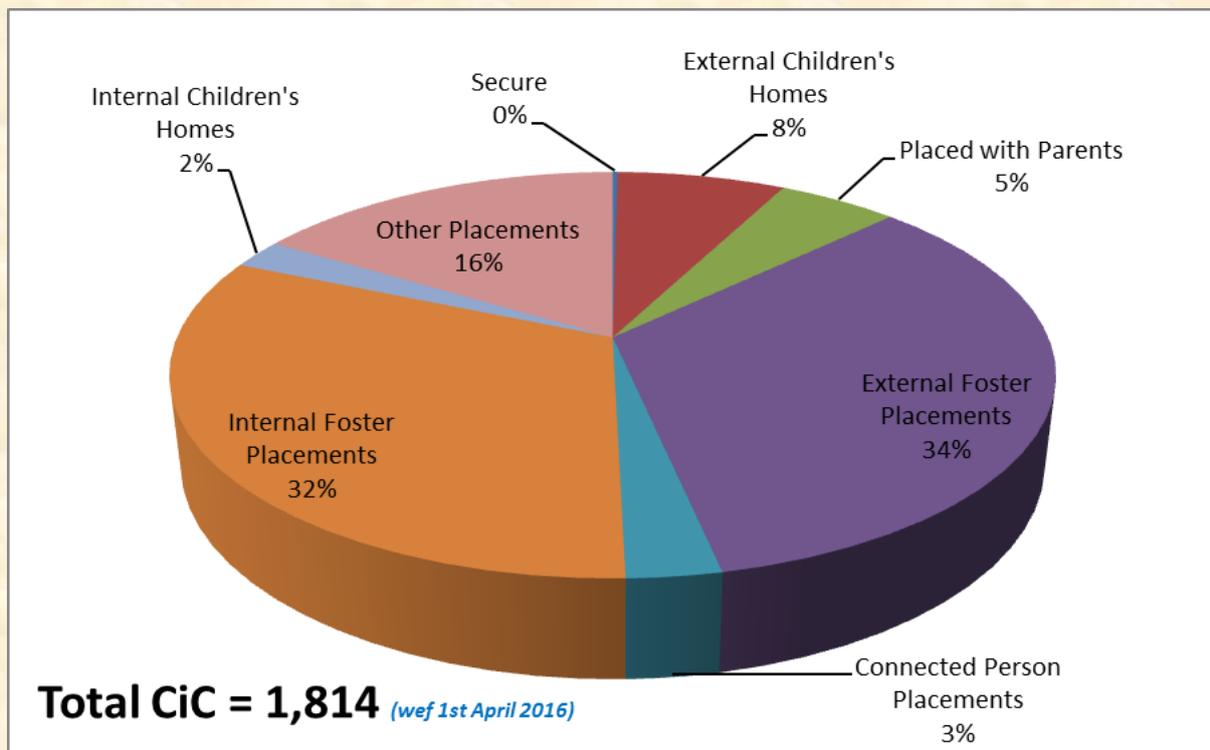
The panel administrator organises the Fostering Panel; all panel papers are managed electronically. There are two panel advisors who provide support and technical advice to the foster panels that sit at least monthly.

Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency works in partnership with support services, forming a 'team around the child' that includes the looked after children's nurses service, the Emotional Support Service (TESS), Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) and the virtual schools service and many other services

Social work staff and all foster carers undergo enhanced DBS checks.

### 9. Services provided by Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency

Birmingham Children's Trust currently looks after 1,814 children (as at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016); Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency has 482 approved foster carers providing 817 placements. There is a shortfall of internal availability for teenage, UASC and long term fostering placements which the marketing and recruitment strategy and fostering services action plan aims to address. Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency is also taking a more joined up approach with our placements service to ensure all children and young people coming into care are placed within internal fostering provision wherever possible to utilise our own in house fostering placements across the city.



Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency provides a range of foster care placements to children and young people who are looked after by Birmingham Children's Trust. These include:

- Short-term, where foster carers look after children for periods lasting from a few days to several months or until the child moves to their permanent placement.
- 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 are able to live independently.
- 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 policies and procedures fully in place and some carers who have been granted dual approval, along with 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 (formerly Family and Friends). Birmingham Children's Trust is committed to placing children with family or friends with whom a child is already familiar, rather than with a foster carer s/he does not know if at all possible. Children's teams in partnership with the Connected Persons team/s 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 in the short term. There is provision to make a placement with a relative/friend carer. These placements must be assessed and presented to Fostering Panel within stipulated timescales.
- Many children/young people first placed with Family and Friends Foster carers leave care when an order is made by the courts, such as a Special Guardianship Order or a Child Arrangement Order. Birmingham Children's Trust has a full policy on Family and Friends Foster Care available on request.
- 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 it is 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 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.

## **10. Supporting, Training, and Reviewing Carers**

### **Support to foster carers**

A service is available 24 hours a day via the Emergency Duty Team at Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency. Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency also provides an on-call Duty Service for foster carers for 365 days a year until midnight every day, including weekends and Bank Holidays. This is provided by qualified fostering social workers and Team Managers. In addition to this the Birmingham Foster Carer Association (BFCA) also provide out of hours support.

Each area fostering support team provides monthly support groups for carers that include topical presentations from relevant professionals and ongoing learning and development.

There are opportunities for senior management clinics and consultations, an opportunity for the Executive Director for The Children's Trust, Assistant Directors and Heads of Service to informally listen to foster carers' feedback and suggestions for development of foster carers and services.

Foster carers are regularly invited to join development working groups to review standards and practice.

Birmingham Foster Carer Association (BFCA) also 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.

The BFCA supported by the Birmingham Children Trust provide a mentoring service for newly approved carers.

BFCA produce a newsletter for all foster carers approximately every 3 months.

BCT Foster Agency funds the membership of the BFCA and the Fostering Network for all approved foster carers.

The BFCA has its own accommodation and administrative support funded by the city council.

Foster Talk also provides any alternate independent support and advice for foster carers.

An annual awards celebration event which recognises the support foster carers provide to the City Council is held and attended by Managers, staff and carers.

Financial support is paid to all carers in the form of child age-related maintenance payments and other allowances to meet the cost of caring for children in placement. An annual financial grant and/or specific financial assistance towards basic equipment required for the children in placement is also provided where foster carers qualify.

Foster carers are also paid a fostering fee based on their level of skill and experience in the fostering task.

Every carer has access to the Foster Carers Handbook and all have Foster Placement and Financial Agreements, plus a comprehensive guide with information about Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency, roles and responsibilities of the fostering task. An electronic version is available through the fostering and adoption website as well as through the BFCA website. The Handbook includes information on safeguarding and children's health and development, identity and self-esteem, behaviour, education, the law etc. [currently under review]

It also has age appropriate leaflets for children on 'being fostered', about child protection conferences and on looked after reviews.

### **Training for foster carers**

Before approval, applicants attend 'Skills to Foster' training the Fostering Network's preparation course. Qualified social workers work with experienced foster carers to deliver the training the content of which covers:

- What do foster carers do?
- Who are the children and young people?
- Working together
- Health and health promotion
- Education and health
- Attachment and lifestory – including Secure Base and PACE
- First Aid
- Delegated Authority
- Safe caring and safeguarding
- Understanding behaviour
- Moving on
- Missing, CSE and Radicalisation

Connected Persons foster carers also attend the above and have access to one to one consultations and information sharing induction/welcome via qualified social workers and senior practitioners within Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency.

When couples apply, both applicants are expected to attend the skills to foster training programme. Missed sessions are made up on the next available course or are covered by the assessing social worker.

Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency has made provision for a training officer dedicated to the fostering task with the training budget for staff and all foster carers. Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency has its own dedicated office space for training, shared with the adoption team.

Post-approval training is now organised by the fostering training officer and a programme is circulated to all foster carers, including connected persons foster carers in partnership with BFCA. This covers all areas of training required for meeting the required Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011 and foster carers training and development.

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

Training includes First Aid, the Health and Social Well-being of Looked after Children, Eating Disorders, Missing from Care, Child Sexual Exploitation and Radicalisation, Supporting the Education of Children and Safe Caring.

There are mandatory courses including First Aid, Allegations, Safe Caring, Safeguarding, Delegating Authority, Attachment, Separation and Loss, and Moving Children On.

Foster carers also have access to some of the training provided for social work staff through the Learning and Development division, plus additional courses from external providers.

Other elements of training and development are provided through support groups for foster carers arranged via the fostering support teams and on an individual basis through supervision as necessary.

Training for foster carers is on-going and each carer has an individual plan identified within their annual review and is monitored by the supervising social worker and the training officer.

Their training plan is reviewed at the carer's annual fostering review, and ongoing training is encouraged via supervision.

As part of the 'Payment for skills' fee structure, there is also a requirement that carers attend the mandatory training associated with their skill level.

Foster carers also have the benefit of being able to access appropriate training available to Birmingham Children's Trust employees.

## **Supervision and support**

All foster carers are allocated a supervising social worker from Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency, whose role is to supervise and support the household. All supervising social workers and their foster carers sign a supervision agreement that details the expectations of both parties.

Foster carers receive monthly supervision visits or support, and more frequently as necessary. An unannounced visit is carried out at least once per year.

Carers are expected to maintain written recordings about each child placed and these are discussed during supervisory visits. Records are kept of all visits and copies are provided to foster carers.

Every foster carer is required to collate and provide a life story work and narrative of their looked after child/young person's life, milestones and experiences within the duration of placement with their foster carer.

Supervising social workers attend placement planning meetings, pre-disruption and disruption meetings, adoption introductory meetings and children in care reviews wherever possible.

During office hours, carers can contact their supervising social worker for advice, information and support whenever necessary. If the supervising social worker is unavailable the duty social worker or Team Manager will respond to urgent requests.

Outside of office hours carers can contact duty managers from Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency until Midnight seven days a week, 365 days a year. After midnight carers can contact the Emergency Duty Team which has access to a Duty Team manager from Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency available 24 hours.

Carers are provided with necessary equipment to meet the needs of the child and all relevant safety standards.

Carers can access independent support when being investigated for complaints and allegations including BFCA and Fostering Network.

## **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.

Most newly approved carers will commence their fostering career at level two or three. Once a carer gains more evidence-based experience, knowledge, skills and completes the mandatory training, they can then be assessed and considered to progress to a higher skill level. This is achieved by completing the core value competencies and receiving a recommendation from their supervising social worker and progressions panel.

## **Review of Foster carers**

Foster carers are reviewed annually, and this is authorised via identified independent professional ADM.

Newly approved foster carers are reviewed at the fostering Panel on the completion of their first full year.

Foster carers will be reviewed at fostering panel more frequently if, for example, if there is a major change in their circumstance or they are subject to a complaint or allegation, fitness to foster.

The annual review is completed by the supervising social worker, following discussion with all members of the foster family and is also informed by reports from all placing social workers and feedback from children in placement or who have been looked after during the year. Child care social workers are expected to contribute to the carer's annual review by completing a feedback form and education, health, Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) or professionals also have the opportunity to contribute. Foster carers also contribute to their reviews via a feedback form and attendance at the Panel.

Other professionals involved in the child's care plan such as IRO, the Looked after Children Education Services (Virtual Schools Support Services), health professionals are all encouraged to provide feedback for the fostering review.

This report is presented to the fostering panel for recommendations regarding approval, de-registration or change of registration as required.

The review process is interactive, and the format enables the recording of significant events, changes within the household, the number and range of children between reviews, specific issues within the placements, standards of care, abilities and knowledge of carers, provision of a safe caring environment, working as a team, and the development of the carer and outcomes for our children and young people looked after.

The carer's own children are seen individually if appropriate and their views recorded. A health and safety checklist is completed. The supervising social worker's comments are recorded and plans, and actions required are identified and consolidated for the coming year.

## **Independent Review Mechanism**

All potential and current foster carers are provided with the option to request an Independent Review when they do not agree with decisions regarding their approval, or terms of approval, made by the Fostering Panel and Independent Decision Maker.

The Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM) has the following timescales:

- Applicants have 40 days from the agency decision to contact the IRM.
- The IRM will set up a panel within 3 months of the application

Contact details are:

IRM  
Contract Manager  
Unit 4  
Pavillion Business Park  
Royds Hall Road  
Wortley  
Leeds, LS12 6AJ

Tel: 0113 202 2080

[irm@baaf.org](mailto:irm@baaf.org)

Applicants who receive a qualifying determination will receive information in writing about the options available to them prior to a final decision being made.

Birmingham Children's Trust Liaison Officer is Kathy Scott  
[Kathy.M.Scott@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk](mailto:Kathy.M.Scott@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk)

## **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. Foster carers can be provided with support from the Birmingham Foster Care Association (BFCA) or the Foster Talk if required.

There were 17 allegations made against foster carers between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016.

## **Information about the Complaints and Representations Procedure**

The Birmingham Children's Trust (which Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency is part of) has a Rights and Participation Service that will help children and young people by providing an advocate for a young person in need of support.

This service along with the Children in Care Council also provides a forum for collecting the general views of young people and children about Birmingham Children's Trust Foster Agency.

Prospective foster carers are advised of Birmingham Children's Trust Fostering Agency complaints and representations procedures and given information in an appropriate language on how to make a complaint. Our procedure is available to all foster carers, children and families. Foster carers may complain on behalf of a child as well as on their own account.

Any complainant may receive assistance on request from an independent supporter. Complainants may also contact Ofsted.

In cases of a serious complaint or allegation regarding a foster carer, we notify Ofsted and any other responsible authorities.

**Complaints received:** There were 14 complaints involving BCC Foster Agency between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016.

### ***Customer Relations Service***

***PO Box 16465***

***Birmingham***

***B2 2DG***

***Tel: 0121 303 5161***

***Email: [cypfsscuserrelations@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk](mailto:cypfsscuserrelations@birminghamchildrenstrust.co.uk)***

### **The registration authority**

Ofsted is responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting fostering services under the provision of the Care Standards Act 2000.

Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) is an independent, non-governmental public body responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting fostering services.

Ofsted aims to:

- Promote service improvement
- Ensure services focus on the interests of their users
- See that services are efficient, effective and promote value for money

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**Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)**

**Birmingham's 2014 single inspection of Local Authority children's services and review of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) is available on request or by visiting:**

**<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/local-authorities/birmingham>**

**Children's Commissioner for England:**

**Anne Longfield OBE**

**The Office of the Children's Commissioner  
Sanctuary Buildings  
20 Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT  
Telephone: 020 7783 8330  
[Info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk)**

The **Children's Commissioner**, Anne Longfield, promotes and protects **children's** right to make life better for **children** and young people in England.

**Date: March 2018**

**Review Date: April 2019 and Jan 2020**

**Completed – Michelle Gardiner  
Registered Manager and Assistant Head, Birmingham Children's Trust Foster  
Agency**