

Fostering Service Statement of Purpose

1st April 2009 – 31st March 2010

1. Context

The Slough Borough Council Fostering Service is an integral part of Slough's Education and Children's Services. It operates within the legislative requirements of:

- The Children Act 1989 and 2004 and accompanying regulations.
- The Care Standards Act 2000 and accompanying National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2002.
- The Fostering Services Regulations 2001.
- The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995.
- The Human Rights Act 1998.
- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.
- Other relevant legislation and Department of Health guidance, circulars and letters.

Slough Borough Council and its Fostering Service also have endorsed, and operate in line with the requirements and expectations of:

- UK National Standards for Foster Care.
- The Code of Practice on the Recruitment, Assessment, Approval, Training, Management and Support of Foster Carers 1999.
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- The current Slough Children and Young People's Plan.
- Other relevant interagency local strategies and plans required by statute.
- Slough Borough Council's internal policies and procedures.

2. Key Service Aims

- a) Slough's Fostering Service exists to provide substitute family care to meet the needs of Slough children and young people who are unable to live within their families of origin on a temporary/short or long term basis. The Service also supports children with disabilities within their families of origin when this can be achieved by regular periods of family-based short breaks.

- b) The Service aims to provide (directly or via work with partner agencies) services which meet the specific individual needs of children in the care of Slough, as identified through the assessment, care planning and reviewing processes of the Education and Children's Services Department's Looked After Children's system. The Service will seek to meet the five outcomes of the Every Child Matters agenda and the aims of Care Matters for every child by providing appropriate support to foster carers. The Service is committed to consulting with children, young people, their parents and foster carers, and to ensuring that their views are taken into account in both individual care planning and service development.
- c) The Service regards foster carers as members of the professional care team. It is committed to providing carers with the support and training necessary to enable them to offer high quality care to all children and young people who receive family placement services.

3. Standards of Care

The standards of care within the Service are constantly monitored to ensure compliance with the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2002) and the UK National Standards for Foster Care (1999).

The Service has a set of standards for use when commissioning services from external fostering agencies. These include a requirement that agencies are accredited, provide geographically appropriate placements (i.e. generally within 20 miles of Slough), provide adequate support to carers, have systems and services in place to ensure that children and young people have access to appropriate education, health and therapeutic provision and that they constitute a cost-effective use of financial resources. All such standards also are applied to the in-house fostering service.

4. Services Provided

The Fostering Service currently offers:

- a) A general fostering scheme, providing planned and emergency foster care for individual children and sibling groups of all ages, across the full range of short term, longer term and relief care placements.
- b) A specialist family-based short break scheme to support children and young people with disabilities and their families offering breaks during the day/evening and overnight stays.
- c) A supported lodgings scheme offering transitional semi-independent accommodation to young people over the age of sixteen where carers support them to gain practical skills to enable them to move on to full independence.
- d) Support to private foster carers, known to the service and the delivery of awareness-raising campaigns for carers or parents considering entering into a private fostering arrangement. (The receipt of notifications and the assessment of private foster carers is undertaken by the Children in Need Service.)

The Fostering Service is able to support these services by providing:

- i. A Family Placement Team with a wide range of skills, including specialist workers with skills relevant to developing and supporting services for children with disabilities, older young people and children from the Borough's ethnic communities in order to continue to develop services that are appropriate and accessible to all potential service users.
- ii. Close links with the Department's Children and Families Social Care Teams to ensure integrated planning and provision for individual children and young people and to ensure effective targeting of service development work.
- iii. Assessments of prospective carers in line with national standards, including preparation group work and individual assessments.
- iv. A Fostering Panel, constituted and administered in line with regulatory requirements, which considers and makes recommendations about the approval of all prospective new carers, matches children to long-term placements and advises on service development.
- v. Annual reviews of the registration and performance of all approved carers.
- vi. An out-of-hours telephone support service to carers.
- vii. A monthly drop-in service where foster carers can discuss any issues regarding their role or the emotional well-being of the children in their care with a therapist from the Wellbeing Service.
- viii. All foster carers are allocated a named Supervising Social Worker. These workers provide ongoing support, information and advice to all the Borough's carers while providing for their development and maintaining a supervisory and monitoring role.
- ix. A planned programme of training is provided for all foster carers which includes support to carers to achieve the new training and development standards by 2011.
- x. A clearly defined and effectively administered payments scheme which was reviewed in November 2008 and which meets the full maintenance costs of caring for children and young people, plus a professional fee payment which recognises the carers' skills and knowledge.
- xi. Children and young people in the care of Slough and their carers have access to specialist support, including Pathways Education Support and the Wellbeing Service which includes the provision of counselling, art therapy and play therapy for children in care. Foster carers are expected to attend all meetings where the education and welfare of children is discussed and to support the implementation of any recommendations.

5. Outcomes achieved in 2008/9

- It has been acknowledged that the local authority was not recruiting sufficient new foster carers to provide a full range of placements that meets the needs of children coming into care in Slough. However, the appointment of a part-time Recruitment Officer in 2008/9 facilitated a number of successful campaigns to recruit carers. (Please refer to attached Recruitment Strategy.)
- Following identification of the need to provide a semi-independent accommodation scheme for young people in care or leaving care, a successful recruitment campaign was held to obtain carers for a new supported lodgings scheme. Two carers have now been approved and a third is currently being assessed.
- Staff continued to hold workshops to support foster carers to comply with the new training, support and development standards for foster carers, which came into force in April 2008. All carers will need to have completed their portfolios by 2011.
- Ofsted inspected the Fostering Service twice in 2008/9 and awarded ratings of good for fostering and satisfactory for private fostering. Since then a review has taken place and private fostering has been reconfigured with a new policy and practice put into place.

6. Management Structure

The Family Placement Service recognises the differing needs of children and young people who require short-term, long-term and permanent alternative family placements and comprises of a Fostering Team and an Adoption & Legal Permanency Team. The Fostering Team and its managers provide specialist knowledge and skills in the provision of short-term fostering, long-term fostering, short breaks for disabled children and caring relative foster placements. The Adoption and Legal Permanence Team and its managers provide specialist knowledge and skills in the provision of adoptive placements and the assessment and support to a child's family members or friends seeking Residence Orders or Special Guardianship Orders.

The teams are co-located and share administrative, recruitment and other support systems. All staff are required to serve on a duty rota during the working day and have the opportunity to join the provision of an out-of-hours advice line for foster carers. The staff work closely together to provide a consistent, coherent and flexible service, which benefits from ring-fenced areas of specialist provision and management.

In order to make substantial savings in 2009/10 council budget, the post of Recruitment Officer was deleted, together with the equivalent of one full-time social worker post in the Fostering Team. The available advertising budget will enable the Service to have an additional member of staff for limited periods to support specific recruitment campaigns throughout the year.

The staffing structure is as follows:

7. Staff

The Fostering Service is part of the Education and Children's Service's integrated Children in Care and Leaving Care Services – managed by Ellis Rivers, Group Manager.

Fostering Team:

| POST | RELEVANT QUALIFICATIONS | EXPERIENCE |
|---|--|---|
| Team Manager | Qualified social worker GSCC registered NVQ4 in management | 18 mths. in Fostering Team Previously team manager of fieldwork team. |
| Assistant Team Manager | Qualified social worker GSCC registered | 22 mths. in Fostering Team Previously social worker in fieldwork team. |
| Social Worker (MS) | Qualified social worker GSCC registered | 5 years in Fostering Team Previously social worker in fieldwork team. |
| Social Worker (MP) | Qualified social worker GSCC registered | 20 mths. in Fostering Team Previously social worker in fieldwork team. |
| Social Worker (SS) | Qualified social worker GSCC registered | 6 mths. in Fostering Team Previously social worker in fieldwork team. |
| Carer Co-ordinator, Home from Home Short Break Scheme | Occupational Therapist | 17 years in Fostering Team |
| 0.5 Social Worker, Home from Home Short Break Scheme | Qualified Social Worker GSCC registered | 18 mths. in Fostering Team, following qualification. |

Additional hours:

The establishment of the Fostering Team also contains 10 hours per week social work time to assess and support carers in the new supported lodgings service. Currently, these hours are being used to employ a sessional worker to undertake this role and to undertake assessments of other potential foster carers.

Adoption and Legal Permanence Team:

| | |
|--|---------------|
| Team Manager | Julia Brown |
| Assistant Managers | 1.5 full time |
| Expert Practitioner (Adoption Support) | 1 |
| Social Workers | 4 posts |

Shared staffing resources:

| | |
|------------------------|---------|
| Social Work Assistant | 1 post |
| Administrative support | 2 posts |

8. Foster Carers 2009/10

Statistical table attached.

9. Children Placed 2009/10

Statistical table attached.

10. Financial investment 2009/10

Slough Borough Council is committed to continuing to develop its Fostering Service and has sustained sufficient funding to achieve this. Funds are allocated from core and development funding to fund allowances to carers at the agreed rates and to support the activities detailed in the 2009/10 recruitment and retention strategy.

11. Complaints and Representation

All Foster Carers and Children and Young People in Care using the Service are provided with written information about complaints procedures, including contact details if they wish to make a complaint. The Children's Guide to the Fostering Service is issued to all children and young people in placement and includes contact details.

No complaints were received regarding foster carers for the year 2008/9.

12. Process for recruiting, approving, training, supporting and reviewing carers

12.1. Recruiting

The Service produces an annual carer recruitment strategy designed to maximise capacity and meet identified need. This is attached.

12.2. Approving

Foster Carers are approved in line with the standards set out in the UK National Standards for Foster Care. These include expectations in all cases that:

- a) Assessments of foster carers will follow the British Association of Adoption and Fostering recommended Form F format.
- b) Carers' competencies will be assessed on their ability to provide appropriate care and educational, emotional and social skills support for children and young people who are in the care of the local authority.
- c) Each applicant will receive clear information about the process of assessment.
- d) Information to prospective carers will include a list of the competencies that they will be expected to demonstrate.
- e) Prospective carers will receive the fostering allowances document, which explains the payments scheme along with the other support provided and the expectations of anti-discriminatory practice required of registered foster carers.
- f) The assessment and approval process will involve and consider all members of the applicant's household.
- g) We aim to complete assessments within six months of application.
- h) Each assessment of a potential carer will be carried out by an appropriately qualified Social Worker.
- i) A range of verified employment, health and personal written references will be obtained on the applicant's suitability as a foster carer and appropriate police, government and authority checks will be carried out.
- j) An assessment report will be prepared by the assessing social worker, including recommendation on the applicant's suitability as a foster carer and recommendations as to appropriate types of placements in respect of the applicant's abilities, experience, training and support needs.
- k) Each applicant will have access to a copy of the non-confidential sections of his/her assessment report before a decision on approval is made and will have the opportunity to make written comment if they wish to do so. The confidential section of the report is confined to third party information (e.g. references).
- l) Slough Fostering Panel will consider all applications and applicants will be informed of outcomes both verbally and in writing.
- m) All prospective carers will be given the opportunity to attend Foster Panel when their application is being heard.
- n) All prospective carers will be given information about the Independent Review Mechanism. (The Independent Review Mechanism (IRM), which has been in place for adoption was introduced in April 2009 for foster carers. This enables prospective foster carers to seek a review from the IRM if they are not approved as suitable to

foster a child. It also enables existing carers to seek a review if they have had their approval terminated or changed).

12.3. Training

In addition to regular Support Group Evenings and Saturday Conferences (see below), carers are able to access a wide range of training provided by the local authority and voluntary organisations (e.g. first aid).

Each carer has their own personal development plan which is reviewed annually.

The introduction of the Training Support and Development Standards from April 2008 has required all carers to complete a training programme in order to meet seven specific standards by April 2011. New carers have to complete this training within a year of their approval. Staff continue to hold workshops to support foster carers to achieve these standards and the local authority has recently bought an IT package to assist carers with achieving these standards and this will be rolled out in the early part of 2009. Training is also being provided by the Fostering Network to enable Supervising Social Workers to support carers to achieve these standards.

12.4. Supporting

The Service places a high priority on the support given to foster carers which is provided in the following ways:

- a) Each carer has an allocated Supervising Social Worker who visits the carer at least once every six weeks but more frequently if required.
- b) Fortnightly coffee mornings, including a drop-in consultation with a psychologist each month.
- c) Evening support groups every six to eight weeks, which provide a training session and an opportunity for networking.
- d) Fun days and trips for carers and children
- e) Two Saturday conferences per year for carers (with an activity day for the children) which usually include a presentation of long service awards.
- f) A Newsletter which provides the opportunity for express their views and for the service to pass on information and news.
- g) Membership of the National Fostering Network.
- h) Out of hours advice line.

12.5. Reviewing

Each foster carer has an annual review which is chaired by the Assistant Team Manager and signed off by the Team Manager. Prior to the review a report is prepared by the Supervising Social Worker which is shared with the foster carer. The views are also sought of the carer themselves, the children in placement, the carer's own children and the placing social workers.

All carers' first annual reviews are presented to the Fostering Panel.

13. Slough Borough Council Fostering Panel

The Panel considers and makes recommendations about the approval of foster carers, matches children to long-term placements, considers the assessments of private foster carers and generally advises upon and oversees the assessment and review of the Service's carers. It meets monthly (or more frequently if required).

In 2008/9 the Fostering Panel began to consider and, if appropriate, endorse the recommendations made in respect of the assessments of family members or friends seeking to care for children and young people under Residence Orders or Special Guardianship Orders. The local authority holds the view that care plans for these children and young people should be subject to the scrutiny of a panel, given that permanent care arrangements are being proposed.

The membership and practice conform to regulatory requirements. The Panel has 10 members who have been recruited to ensure that the Panel provides the necessary expertise and experience to fulfil its functions. These comprise of:

Independent Chair

Vice Chair

A Slough Borough Council Elected Member.

A representative from Pathways Education Support team.

A Looked After Children's Nurse.

A Foster Carer (from another local authority).

The Manager of the Family Group Conference Service

3 Social Work Members (with current Children & Families experience).

The Manager and Assistant Team Managers of the Fostering Team and the Adoption and Legal Permanence Team undertake the role of Panel Advisor as appropriate depending on the agenda items being considered by Panel.

Tina Ryan

Team Manager

Fostering, Short Break Scheme and Supported Lodgings

03.06.09