

THURROCK FOSTERING STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2019-2020

1 INTRODUCTION

Thurrock Fostering Service is registered with Ofsted and complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, Fostering Minimum Standards (2011) and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010

The fostering service compiles an annual Statement of Purpose which sets out the aims and objectives of the service as a whole. This Statement of Purpose relates to the Fostering Service provided by the Fostering Placement Support Team and the Placement Assessment Team in the Fostering, Adoption & Placements Service. The Statement of Purpose is formally approved by elected members and it is reviewed at least annually.

The Statement of Purpose is available to anyone working for the Fostering Service, to children who may be placed in foster care, their parents and legal guardians and to anyone wishing to foster.

The Statement of Purpose is also available on the Thurrock website at www.thurrock.gov.uk/fostering.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

In Thurrock we take our role as Corporate Parent seriously. We want to make sure that all our looked after children and young people benefit from our efforts to maximize their full potential.

We believe that:

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- All children are entitled to grow as part of a stable and loving family.
- Where it is safe for them to do so, children should be brought up by their birth family.
- Children should be matched, wherever possible, with families who reflect their ethnicity, culture, language and religion. These factors have to be balanced against the need to be in a permanent placement, within a reasonable time frame.
- Team work in partnership with colleagues across services is important to ensure that delays in achieving permanence are minimised.

This means in Thurrock:

- Children and young people's best interests come first. The best interests of children are our paramount consideration and we will actively seek out their views, wishes and feelings.
- All children should have an enjoyable childhood and benefit from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills supporting them to lead a successful life.
- Services will be built around children's needs, and will be inclusive, accessible and welcoming.
- A sense of identity is important to a child's well-being. We recognise, positively value and promote each child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language, and sexuality.

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- The particular needs of children who have a disability or who have complex needs are fully recognised and taken into account.

In addition:

- Decisions on use of resources will increasingly be taken jointly.
- Resources will be pooled wherever it makes sense to do so.
- Services will be jointly commissioned and provided where it is in children's interests to do so.
- We will integrate service delivery when this demonstrates added value.
- We will work with local communities, networks, groups and organisations that have a key role in promoting the well-being of children and providing services and support to them and their families.
- Services are evidence based and provided by a skilled workforce.

The Fostering Service seeks to provide a range of placements, including for parent and child, to meet the diverse needs of and to improve outcomes for children and young people looked after by Thurrock. We will do this by ensuring that children are suitably matched with fully trained, skilled and well-supported Foster Carers able to provide a high quality of care.

In Thurrock the Fostering Service is provided by the Fostering Assessment Team which undertakes the assessments of Foster Carers and Special Guardians, and the Fostering Placement Team, which

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undertakes support and supervision functions for foster carers once they are approved.

That Foster Carers and supervising Social Workers are key members of the team around the child and placement.

We are dedicated to the continuous improvement of our services for looked after children. In adhering to the NMS, we want them achieve the following outcomes:

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- We want our children and young people's wishes and feelings to be heard, recorded with evidence of being acted on.
- We want our children and young people to feel able to tell us what is working for them and what is not.
- We want our children and young people to be living in a place where they feel safe.
- We want our children to know that we will look for them if they run away and worry about them until they are found. Just as any parent would do.
- We want our children and young people to maintain contacts with their birth family where it is safe for them to do so.
- We want our children and young people to be able to form and maintain appropriate friendships.
- We want our children and young people to achieve their maximum potential in terms of educational achievement and life opportunities.
- We want our children and young people to have access to suitable leisure opportunities and to achieve their full potential in any areas where they excel.
- We want our children and young people to be both physically and emotionally healthy.
- We want our children and young people to become well-adjusted adults who will be able to live independently and to contribute to society through the workplace and the community in which they live.

In order to achieve these outcomes we will

- Make sure that we are looking after the right children at the right time for them and in the best possible placements.
- Recruit and assess Foster Carers who can meet the

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diverse needs of looked after children and young people including parents with child.

- Run an effective and efficient Fostering and Adoption Panel with sound decision making processes.
- Ensure that we match children with carers who can meet their assessed needs and support those carers to do this.
- Listen to our children and young people and act upon any of their concerns raised.
- Work closely with colleagues from other services including health and schools to support our children's needs.
- Ensure there is an updated statement of purpose and children's guide each year.
- Ensure all staff are suitable to work with children, and that they are qualified and supported in continual professional development.
- Provide learning development and continual professional development for Foster Carers.
- Supervise and support carers to the highest standards
- Handle allegations and suspicions of harm according to the procedures, supporting our children and young people so that they feel safe whilst any investigation is being carried out.
- Ensure our Foster Carers are supported if they become subject to allegations and suspicions of harm.
- Pay foster carers appropriately and on time.

The teams are committed to improving practice and service delivery and to recruiting and retaining quality permanent staff to facilitate this. All staff are provided with thorough induction and support from experienced and skilled manager's to promote these values and to work within the Council's equalities policies. The staff group is also provided with the Whistleblowing policy as part of their induction which

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makes clear the responsibility of all staff to report areas of poor practice.

2.1 Our Commitment to Equality and Diversity

The Fostering Service is committed to furthering equality, promoting diversity and eliminating discrimination in all its forms. We are committed to placing the needs of children first; to recognise children, young people and carers as individuals, and to treat our service users, carers and partner agencies with dignity and respect. We are also is committed to raising the profile of equality and diversity issues across the Council.

The Fostering Service actively and consciously values diversity and difference, and seeks to provide a high quality service and fair and equal treatment for all our carers, children and young people. Our approach to promoting equality and diversity is to provide bespoke services, with due consideration and sensitivity to the complex needs of children and young people and families.

3. THE SERVICE

Thurrock Fostering Service is based in Thurrock Civic Offices alongside all other Children's Social Care Social Work Teams. The fostering service is part of the Fostering, Adoption and Placements Service which is part of the wider Children Looked after Service.

3.1 The Structure of the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service consists of four teams:

- **Recruitment Team** (the initial recruitment of foster carers and adopters)
- **Placement Assessment Team** (including private fostering arrangements, connected persons assessment and special guardianship assessment)
- **Fostering Support Team.**(the supervision and support of approved carers)

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- **The Placements Team** (searching for internal and external placements)

These four teams undertaking the following responsibilities;

- Recruitment and assessment of all task focused foster carers, Connected Person's Foster Carers (friends and family carers), and Special Guardianship assessments.
- Supporting task focused foster carers and Connected Person's Foster Carers.
- Providing external placement resource to children and young people who cannot be accommodated by in-house foster carers.
- Providing family contact and support services to children in care.
- Provide adoption services and post adoption and post Special Guardianship support.

3.2 Leadership and Management of the Fostering Service

All managers and Social Workers hold recognised social work qualifications, Health Care and Professions Council registration, post-qualifying training and other relevant experience working with children and families. The Service is committed to continuous professional development of all staff and therefore encouraged to attend internal and external training to develop and refresh their skills.

The staff group has a wide range of knowledge, skills and experience and is continually seeking to develop these to promote service improvement. The staff group is culturally and racially diverse and is reflective of the population that we serve

Thurrock Council's Fostering Service offers advice, undertakes assessments and provides support for all areas of permanency including adoption and special guardianship.

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3.2.2 Senior Leaders and Agency Decision Maker

The Executive Director for Children's Services is Rory Patterson.

Sheila Murphy Assistant Director – Children's Social Care, has overall responsibility for the Fostering Service.

The Strategic Lead for Children Looked After is Janet Simon. Janet is also the **Agency Decision Maker** for the Fostering Service

Tel: +44 (0) 1375 652231

Email: jsimon@thurrock.gov.uk

Janet's qualifications include a Post Graduate Diploma Social Work and she is registered with the Health and Care Professions Council. Janet has worked in management roles since 2006.

The Service Manager responsible for the Fostering Service is Dan Jones

Tel: +44 (0) 1375 652763

Email: drjones@thurrock.gov.uk

Dan is a qualified and registered Social Worker, he has an LLB Law gained in 2003 from Cardiff University, a Bsc Social Work gained in 2010 from the University of Lincoln and a post graduate certificate in Applied Social Work Practice: Children and Families from the University of Bedfordshire. Dan has previously worked for the NSPCC, Central Bedfordshire Council, and Buckinghamshire County Council. He has experience in all aspects of Fostering and Adoption services as well as experience in therapeutic and harmful sexual behaviour services

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3.3.3 Team Manager, Recruitment Team

Carole Parker is the manager of the Recruitment Team. Carole is a qualified HCPC registered Social Worker. Carole has been working as a Qualified and HCPC Social Worker since 2000. Carole's previous experience includes working in both Local Authority and Private Sector, Carole's experience encompassed working as a Residential Social Worker, undertaking family assessments, working with adolescent and post 16, and as a Registered Manager of children's homes (CH EBD), ensuring the homes were appropriately safe and sensitive to the needs of the young people being looked after.

Carole has managed placement teams since 2003 and in September 2012 joined Thurrock as Manager of the Placement Team. Carole's team has responsibility in providing placements for young people between the ages of 0-18, in foster placements, residential, and 16+ supported accommodation, as well as being part of various panels relating to placements. Carole's Team works closely with placing Social Workers, also assisting in the monitoring of providers, ensuring that young people's needs are being met, working closely with the commissioning service around 16+ provisions and improving their life skills.

3.3.4 Team Manager, Placement Assessment Team

Julia Sutton is a qualified and HCPC registered Social Worker. Julia has been working as a Qualified and HCPC Social Worker since 2000. Julia's previous experience includes working in the Children with Disabilities Team for Essex and the Looked after Children's Team in Thurrock since 2000, where she was the Social worker for children aged 0-18 undertaking statutory duties. In 2006 Julia became the Practice Manager for the Fostering & Adoption Team and in 2009 became the Team Manager of the Fostering Recruitment & Assessment Team.

Julia's roles includes; The recruitment, training and assessment of Foster Carers, Private Fostering, Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's), Temporary Approvals, Overseas and Step parent adoption, Fostering & Adoption Panel Advisor, management of Complaints & Allegations within the Fostering Service, Fostering

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Annual Reviews, Reviews of SGO's, Management of 6 Social Workers, a Family Support Worker, Fostering & Adoption administrators.

3.3.5 Team Manager Fostering Support Team

Loice Kawonde is the interim Team Manager of the Fostering Support Team

Loice has 9 years social work experience, most of which has been in frontline Assessment and Court work. Loice has been a Team manager for 5 years across a range of childcare teams. Loice has previously managed a fostering team for another local authority and has an overview of Fostering services for approved carers here in Thurrock

3.3.6 Team Manager, Placements Team

Carole Parker is also the team manager of the Placements Team. Her details are as above.

3.4 Staffing of the Fostering Service

Currently there is currently 30 staff working in the Fostering Service. They include;

- 1 Service Manager
- 3 Team Managers
- 10 Senior Social Practitioners
- 1 Qualified Fostering Social Workers
- 1 Business Development Officer
- 6 Business Support / Administrators

3.4.1 Student Placements

We are committed to the development of trainee social workers are willing to offer

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placement opportunities to students from all backgrounds. However, due to the specialist nature of Fostering Service, we are able to offer student placement opportunity to only Final placement students.

3.5 Monitoring of the Fostering Service

We are committed to providing the highest standard of care for children. We monitor our performance through Fostering standards are monitored through

- Feedback forms for children
- Feedback forms from social workers
- Feedback from foster carers
- Foster Carer supervision
- Foster Carer annual reviews
- Fostering Panels
- Allegations and complaints/compliments
- Case Audits
- Management Oversight and Case Supervision
- Performance Data
- Ofsted

4. FOSTERING SUPPORT SERVICES PROVIDED

The Fostering Service is providing a range of Foster Carers and variety of fostering arrangements for children and young people in Thurrock.

4.1 Baby (Birth to 24 months) Foster Carers

These are carers who provide fostering services to children from birth up to 2 years old. Baby carers must be available full time but are not required to have a

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spare bedroom provided that they have adequate space and can fit a cot in their own bedroom.

4.2 Permanent and task focused Foster Carers

These are carers who make commitment to provide accommodation, care and support to children and young people, either S20 accommodation, Interim Care Order, Care Order until they reach adulthood.

4.3 Respite, Short Term & Bridging Foster Carers

These are carers who take children on 'a single period' fostering usually up to three months or slightly longer. It includes placements where the plan is for a child to return home or move to an alternative permanent placement. These carers are usually task centred and are expected to work with a range of professionals to achieve the expected outcome. There are exceptional circumstances where a child may remain with such carers in medium to long terms. However, in such cases, it would be done in consultation and agreement with the Foster Carer.

4.4 Advanced and Therapeutic Foster Carers

These are specialist foster carers providing bespoke therapeutic care to children and young people (CYP) displaying extreme emotionally challenging behaviours. These are children and young people have high levels of emotional and care needs. Carers in the categories are paid an enhanced fee and are required to be available full time and work with a range of clinicians and professionals who are providing therapy and treatment to the children.

They support the children's 'therapy/treatment 'after treatment' care which is very demanding therefore undertake specialist learning, guidance and support that enables the carers to understand the language and the behaviour of traumatised CYP.

Therapeutic Foster Carers are required to take this role full time and must be

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available to take children either in emergency or at short notices. They are prepared for and should be able to provide care and support to all categories and age groups of CYP including those that very limited information is available to the Family Placement Service. All therapeutic carers are required to undertake specific courses and training in addition to existing core training offered to all foster carers.

4.5 Parent and Child Placements:

These Foster Carers are specifically trained to care for children and their parents (mother and baby or father and baby) in the foster carer's household. There are rare occasions where the arrangement includes both parents. Parents and child carers are trained to support parents on how to appropriately parent their children.

The approach to supporting parents who are care leavers would be, wherever possible for Foster Carers to support them in transition towards moving into the community with their children. This would be based on a model that assists, guide and direct them to care for their own children with minimal intervention except where their child is or likely to be at risk. The general expectation would be for such parents to receive allowances including all the entitlements of the child and to provide for, and meet the child's needs as they would have done in their own accommodation. It should be noted that in certain cases only the baby or the mother are looked after. However, such arrangements would be clarified before the arrangement commences.

Parent and Child arrangements in court proceedings where the local authority is taking steps to safeguard the child shall be supported and monitored with carers taking an approach which assist the local authority to provide evidence to court in relation to carer's observation, records and judgement of mother / father's parenting capacity. Foster Carers will therefore be given training around observation skills, record keeping as well as court attendance and evidence giving.

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4.6 Connected Persons Foster Carers (Family and Friends carers):

These Carers are approved to look after a specific named child(ren). These carers are usually family members or friends who knew a child or children before they were accommodated by the local authority.

The Family Placement Service values the role of Connected Person's Foster Care wherever possible as it keeps the child or young person within the family network. This arrangements start on the basis of Temporary Approval of Carers under Regulations 24 of Care Planning and Placement Review Regulations 2010.

A full assessment and approval of Connected Person's Foster Carers shall be done in accordance with Standard 30 of the National Fostering Minimum Standards, 2011. All approved Connected Person's Foster Carers shall be supported and managed under the same regulations, statutory guidance and legislation as other registered Foster Carers.

5. RECRUITMENT OF FOSTER CARERS

Thurrock Fostering Service undertakes recruitment activity throughout the year to ensure we recruit sufficient Foster Carers to meet the needs of our children looked after population and the Council's sufficiency duty. Thurrock Foster Carers are actively involved in recruiting new Foster Carers to ensure applications are considered and processed in a timely manner. Information days for potential Foster Carer's are held regularly at the Civic Offices, Lakeside shopping Centre and other venues across the Council to help interested but unsure applicants to learn more about the fostering task and the assessment and approval process.

The strategy for the recruitment of Foster Carers is based on the identified needs of our looked after CYP. This is based on the annual Sufficiency Strategy which assists the recruitment team in focusing on particular communities to ensure we meet the diverse needs of our looked after population.

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You may contact the Recruitment Team on **0800 652 1256** for further information on the next information session or look on Thurrock Council Fostering Service website.

5.1 Initial Enquiry and Acceptance of Application

When an enquiry is received from a potential Foster Carer, an information pack is sent out within forty eight hours of that enquiry with details about the different types of fostering and the assessment process. A follow up call is made by the duty Social Worker usually within three working days and arrangement is made for a home visit to discuss the application or to answer any additional questions a potential applicant may have.

Each applicant household over the age of 18 must give consent for Thurrock Fostering Service to undertake the following references and statutory checks:

- Disclosure and Baring Service checks – DBS (police references are obtained on all members of the household aged 18 years and over)
- Medical and health checks (the applicant's doctor will be asked to complete a health assessment report that will be forwarded to the Fostering Panel's medical advisor for review and comment)
- Local Authority checks (information held on children services database)
- Schools and employers checks
- Details of former partners where relevant
- References from all employers where the prospective carer(s) have work with children or other vulnerable groups
- A file review and references if carer(s) were previously approved by another fostering agency
- NSPCC checks
- Housing checks and reports

A decision to progress any application to stage two will be made upon receipt of all checks and references. However, there may be occasions where the stage one

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and two shall progress simultaneously. In such situation, the applicant would be clearly informed and process shall comply with the Independent Review Mechanism principle shall apply, if a decision is made to terminate the assessment at a later stage in the stage two processes.

5.2 The Assessment of Prospective Foster Carers:

Successful applicants from the stage one process are required to attend Skills to Foster training as part of the assessment process. Thurrock Fostering Service has a procedure in place for the assessment of foster carers that details the process to be followed when assessing potential carers. It includes the requirement to complete and provide all the information as outlined in the Fostering Regulations 2011 & 2013

The assessment is carried out by a qualified social worker from the Placement Assessment Team. Whenever an assessment is completed, there is a mandatory requirement for the report to be shared with the applicant(s) to confirm factual accuracy of the information sourced or gathered. Applicants are required to comment and sign the report to verify that they have read and agreed with the contents before they can be invited to attend the Independent Fostering Panel.

The assessment team aim to complete Stage one and two processes within 4-6 months upon receipt of a completed application. Every effort is made to ensure there no delays and applicants are given up to date progress of their application every month until the assessment is completed. Applicant Foster Carers will see an initial draft of their assessment to correct any factual errors. All reports are signed by the applicant and the report author.

5.3 Approval of Foster Carers

All completed applicant foster carer's assessments are presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel for consideration and recommendation. Applicant Foster Carers attend the panel with their assessing Social Worker to answer questions by Panel members. The draft recommendations are communicated verbally to the

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applicants by the chair of the Independent Fostering & Adoption Panel on the day of the panel meeting. The Panel recommendations then go to the Agency Decision Maker for the final decision of an applicant's suitability.

The Agency Decision Maker makes this determination within 7 working days of receipt of recommendation and minutes from the Panel.

5.4 Pre-Panel Information to Applicants and Post Panel Feedback

An information pack which outlines the roles, functions and membership of the fostering panel shall be made available to prospective applicants as soon as they are notified that their application is being presented to the independent Fostering and Adoption Panel by the Panel Administrator. Applicants who attend the Panel are required to complete a survey about their experiences of attending the Panel. This is for quality and assurance purposes to ensure the panel process is fit for purpose.

5.5 Fostering Agreement & Induction

Each approved Foster Carer is required to sign a Foster Carer's Agreement and undertake mandatory induction training before commencement of their fostering career. The fostering agreement outlines the contractual relationship and agreement between carer and the Authority. The inductions set out expectations of the Foster Carers' role.

- The assessing Social Worker where possible will remain the allocated Social Worker until a supervising Social Worker is allocated.

6. MATCHING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FOSTER CARERS

When a placement is required the Placement Team receives a placement request report which identifies the needs of the CYP and has additional information which assists in looking for the best possible match with a fostering household. This is crucial for successful match between a child and foster carer(s).

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There is an established procedure in place to be followed in the matching process. The Family Placement Service seeks to ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs.

Other information such as the child's care plan and recent written assessments of the child and their family are used to help make the right matches. Matches are achieved by means of information sharing and consideration involving all relevant professionals, the child and her/his family and potential carers, their families and other children in placement.

Matching criteria considers the child's assessed needs including but not limited to racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, disability and linguistic needs and matched as closely as possible with the ethnic origin, race, religion, culture and language of the foster family.

A planned introduction between the child and a new Foster Carer must take place within 7 days before the placement start date. However, this is not always possible when emergency placements are made therefore efforts shall be made to reduce emergency placements to its barest minimum.

7. TRAINING OF FOSTER CARERS

The Fostering Service is committed to providing continuous professional development and training opportunities for foster carers. The service believes that quality training is an integral part of a fostering career and begins during the assessment process with a 'Skills to Foster' course. Once approved, all new foster carers are expected to complete a minimum of four mandatory Core Training Programmes each year, which aims to provide the basic skills and information that new carers need to perform their fostering task effectively. Specialist Foster Carers, (e.g. Therapeutic, Parent and Child, Advanced) are required to undertake further in their area of specialisation training in addition to the mandatory core

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training.

Carers training needs shall be identified jointly with the carer's supervising Social Worker as part of the annual review process. Any training attended shall be added into the foster carer's training profile and considered as part of each carer's annual review process. The trainings may also count towards their professional qualification award and the mandatory Training Support and Development Standards (TSDS) for newly approved foster carers.

Thurrock recognises carers skills set and value their experiences. We therefore encourage and involve foster carers in helping deliver training events. We aim to offer 'Training for Trainers' course for those who wish to undertake this task. We believe that this is an important way for carers to learn from each other, promoting partnership working between themselves, social care staff and other professionals.

8. SUPPORT PROVIDED TO FOSTER CARERS

Foster carers receive at least monthly visits from an allocated supervising Social Worker. The allocated worker is expected to be aware of the demands of each placement and would be available to offer telephone support which includes a minimum of one unannounced visit annually. Each carer's supervising Social Worker has a duty to assess the needs of the carer and identify whether or not additional support and training may be required. Recordings are made about each supervisory visit using an agreed format and copies shared with carers for factual accuracy and information for sharing purposes.

Foster Carers can also contact the Fostering Duty Social Worker if their allocated worker is unavailable. The Foster Carer's have access to Supervising Social Worker support via the Out Of Hours rota, Monday to Friday until 10.30 pm and weekends between 9 am – 4.30pm. Thurrock Council also operates an Emergency Duty System (EDT) which is also available to all foster carers.

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All Foster Carers have access to a Therapist as part of the Therapeutic Support Sessions at Oaktree. This is available when they have new children or young people in placement. Foster Carers may also access Therapeutic Support Sessions at any point if there are any concerns and difficulties in placement either via a self-referral mechanism or being referred by a supervising Social Worker.

The Foster Carers attend regular formal and informal support group meetings. All Foster Carers have automatic membership subscription with Fostering Network and are encouraged to join the Thurrock Foster Carers Association – THE ONE TEAM

9. ANNUAL REVIEW AND SPECIAL REVIEWS

All Foster Carers shall be reviewed in accordance with the Fostering Service Regulations 2011. The Family Placement Service is committed to a transparent Annual Foster Carer Review (AFCR) process which shall include self-assessment foster carers, consultations and feedback from all members of foster carers household, children Social Workers and the Reviewing Officer. The first annual review shall be presented to the fostering panel for approval. Thereafter, every third review shall be presented to the Panel unless there is an allegation, cause for concern or change of circumstance of the foster carer which will automatically triggers a special review process. All special reviews shall be presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel

All panel recommendations in relation to Annual Review process shall be presented to the Agency Decision Maker for a decision on re-approval. All successful applicants shall receive a written confirmation within 10 working days from the Panel date. The Service Manager shall approve all Reviews which are not presented to Independent Fostering Panel.

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All approved Foster Carers shall be issued a Fostering Agreement which will set out the terms of their fostering arrangement with the council. The validity of each agreement shall not exceed 12 months from the date of issue. The statuses of all foster carers (General, Advanced and Therapeutic) shall be subject to annual reviews.

10. ALLOWANCE AND PAYMENTS SCHEME

The Allowance and Payment Scheme comprises is made up of two elements:

The **Boarding Out Allowance element** is designated for the care of the child. The allowance is payable to all foster carers who are subject to Fostering regulations and are caring for Thurrock Council' Looked after Children. It is structured to meet a child's needs over the medium to long term (see allowance s documentation). The same allowance is payable to Connected Person's Foster Carers who have been approved to care for a 'named child' still frequently- being a family member or family friend, sometimes referred to as a 'Family and Friend foster carer.'

The **Fee payment** is a reward payment to foster carers who meet the following additional requirements:

- Have been approved and registered as Foster Carer following a full competency based form F assessment.
- Have completed the compulsory *Skills to Foster Training* and upon approval, evidence ongoing work in Training, Support and Development Standards (TSDS) portfolio. (NOTE: the fee payment may be suspended if a Foster Carer has not completed a mandatory TSDS, one year after approval without acceptable mitigation and shall only be reinstated after the portfolio has been successfully completed.
- If a connected person carer (Family & Friend) – has completed the

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compulsory Skills to Foster training programme as part of with a full BAAF form C assessment. (NOTE: Temporary Approved carers Shall not receive competency payments)

- Have met the National Minimum Standards for Fostering and are committed to continuing personal and professional development to better meet the needs of children and young people placed with them. This is applicable to all foster carers including Therapeutic Foster Carers who have successfully completed the accredited courses for their fostering portfolios.
- Fully co-operate with the requirements of the fostering role, including attending reviews, record keeping, and working together with the Supervising and Child's Social Worker, schools and other professionals.
- Advanced and Therapeutic carers who are not available take children because of the decision to accept a **preferred age only** shall not paid competency during the period they are not fostering.

N.B. The fee payment scheme is currently under review.

10.1 The Boarding Out Allowance

The allowance is intended to contribute towards the general costs associated with the care of the child or young person and their day to day needs. The allowance is aimed at maintaining an expected standard of care for the looked after child or young person.

The allowance includes items that are purchased directly to meet the child's needs such as food, clothing and social activities. It also covers indirect costs such as family transport, family outings and any additional general household maintenance costs such as utilities and cleaning materials.

It is understood that the needs of children and young people of the same age group can vary widely and foster carers are responsible for using their discretion to ensure that the child or young person's overall needs are met. For example, some expenditure on items may not change from month to month e.g. food. However

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expenditure on items such as clothing and utilities may vary. The carer is expected to budget for these variations in expenditure.

If the carer's expenditure on the child or young person differs significantly from the proportions set out in the table above, the Supervising Social Worker should arrange to discuss the carer's expenditure at a supervisory visit. This will assist the foster carer to budget accordingly or assist the Social Worker to determine if any additional financial support is required.

- **Food** - Children and young people should receive dinner money or a packed lunch as is appropriate to their needs and preferences. They should be provided with breakfast before school and a meal in the evening. Healthy drinks and snacks should be made available within reason.
- **Health and hygiene** - Young people who have reached puberty will need an allowance to buy toiletries such as tampons, deodorant and shaving equipment etc.
- **Clothing** - It is important that children and young people are provided with sufficient shoes and clothes appropriate to their age. Carers should provide opportunities for children and young people to be involved in choosing and buying clothes as they get older. It is expected that foster carers would provide young person aged thirteen and over with money to buy some clothes for themselves from the basic allowance with guidance.
- **Pocket money and savings** - It is important that children have some understanding of the responsibilities of looking after their own money from the age of seven years. Prior to this, children's pocket money should be spent under the supervision of the foster carer or kept as savings. The child's social worker will be responsible in partnership with the foster carer for determining the exact amount of pocket money and savings as this will sometimes need to be considered in light of what is reasonable within the fostering family and the child's level of maturity. Carers are expected to

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help children to learn about savings as part of preparation for adulthood. It is therefore important for the carer to assist the child in opening up a savings account, such as a post office account, into which the child can save an element of their pocket money.

The Family Placement Service has an expectation that carers will open a savings account in the child's name for the sole purpose of saving the minimum amount of funds as set out in the allowance breakdown. This savings account is maintained and held by the carer until such time when the child leaves the placement. If the child moves placement, the savings book is then given to the supervising social worker who will ensure that it follows the child to their next place of abode. Where a foster carer is concerned about providing a child or young person with pocket money they should be referred to the supervising social worker, who will discuss ways to address the concerns.

10.2 Fostering Allowance and Fee Payment

As noted above, the fostering allowance and payment rates are made up of the fostering boarding allowance and the fee payment for carers who have met the competency requirements. Competency payments for Advanced or Therapeutic Carers reflect the additional skills required to manage children presenting extremely challenging behaviours.

11. PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

The Fostering Support Team prepares and encourages Foster Carers to promote and support each child's education achievement whilst in placement. Foster Carers are supported through training and ongoing support to provide home environments that stimulate, encourage and value the experience of learning and educational achievements. It is our expectation that the CYP Social Workers shall consult and include Foster Carers in the educational plans for the children in their placement. This includes attending PEP's, Education Review Meetings, Parents

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Evenings and School Activity /Open Days.

The Family Placement Service, where require will liaise with the Virtual School to provide access and support to learning mentors/additional tuition to support looked after children with education.

12. CONTACT

The Family Contact Team (Oaktree) is the hub for all family placement contact activities. Oaktree staff and the CYP Social Worker are responsible for coordinating and supporting family contact arrangements. Foster Carers are also expected and may be requested to supervise contact in their homes or community subject to a risk assessment. It is also important that Foster Carers are aware of the names and details of the child's network of friends and, if appropriate, supported and its consistency encouraged and maintained.

Foster Carers will actively support, promote and facilitate safe contact between children, young people and their family and friends so that children can experience, as close as possible, normal family life. Foster Carers are also encouraged and supported to promote contact and friendships as set out in the children placement plans.

13. CHILDREN'S HEALTH

The service promotes the health and development needs of children and young people living in foster care. We ensure that health care information for each child is provided to Foster Carers prior to the child being placed and no later than 7 working days, if the information is not readily available at the point of placement. We ensure that foster carers are aware of health, illness or medication issues

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relating to child/children placed.

The service also ensures that the carer is given a copy of the child's Initial Health Assessment Action Plan. It is an expectation that all children and young people placed are registered with a GP and dentist close to the foster's home, if they are not already registered. Foster Carers are aware of their obligation and responsibility to support children to attend medical, dental and other health care appointments.

14. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The service recognises the rights of children and young people and discusses with foster carers the rights of a child. All young people in foster care have access to a named person responsible for seeking and promoting their rights. Children shall be consulted and their views incorporated in the delivery of service to ensure effectiveness in the day to day running of the Family Placement Service. The person shall provide ongoing support and advocacy for looked after young people as well as ensuring that they are provided with a copy of the children's guide and complaint procedure.

15. SAFEGUARDING

The service complies with the Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) Child protection procedures and its own associated procedures in all areas of child protection. The SET Procedures reflect all relevant law, regulation, statutory and non-statutory Government guidance and best practice; including the key government document 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018'.

Thurrock Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy (2015) sets to deliver training to all carers and professionals, raising profiles and gathering intelligence in conjunction

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with the police and other partner agencies with the aim to protect children and young people from sexual exploitation and offering support to children and young people who are being exploited.

The service monitors children and young people missing from care; all children reported missing will have a return debriefing interview and will be monitored by the Risk Assessment Group meeting (RAG).

All relevant training, child protections procedures, safe caring, children missing from care are reviewed for each individual household during the monthly supervision and as part of the annual review process.

16. FOSTER CARERS RECORDINGS

Foster carers are expected to keep a separate daily log for each child in placement. Foster Carers are offered training on keeping records, their importance and implications. These issues are also explored in managing allegations training.

17. REVIEW OF STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In accordance with the Fostering Service Regulation, 2011, this Statement of Purpose shall be reviewed annually.

18. STAKE HOLDER CONSULTATION

The Thurrock Family Placement Service is a listening service and opened to further learning and development. We shall therefore peer review our practices with best performing fostering agencies. We shall also make concerted effort to solicit suggestions, feedbacks, comments and views from all relevant persons, professionals and key partners.

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Although not limited to them, the following are considered as stakeholders and extension of the service and as such the views shall be solicited formally through consultation meetings, surveys, surgeries, and commentary from:

- i. Foster Carers
- ii. Care Leavers
- iii. Fostered children and young people
- iv. Children' Social Workers
- v. Parents and carers Supervision Social Workers
- vi. Independent Reviewing Officers
- vii. Health Professional
- viii. Education Professionals
- ix. Open Door
- x. Councillors
- xi. Panel Members
- xii. Family and Friends carers
- xiii. Birth Children of Foster Carers
- xiv. Children in Care Council
- xv. Thurrock Foster Care Association
- xvi. Thurrock Safeguarding Board

19. PREPARATION FOR ADULT LIFE

The Family Placement Service provides training to foster carers to help develop their skills on how best to help young people prepare for adulthood and independent living. Carers are expected to provide young people with positive life experiences, information, skills and advice that will support them in this objective. Young people preparing to leave care are referred by their social workers to the Leaving Care Team where practical advice and support is offered.

The Placement Support Team's principle is to improve choices for young people

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through Staying Put, Supported Lodging and other bespoke provisions that will meet the individual's needs. Each young person is therefore consulted by the supervising social worker about their considered options when the preparation for Pathway Planning is started. It is the service's expectation that Foster carers are always consulted and involved in the process of moving children and young people on to begin their adult life.

20. ALLEGATIONS, COMPLAINTS CONCERNS AND COMPLIMENTS

The Fostering Team has a policy that deals with allegations, complaints and concerns against Foster Carers Procedure. All complaints are recorded and reviewed in line with procedural guidelines. Foster carers also have access to the council's complaints procedure. Staff and carers are provided with safeguarding training as part of the ongoing professional training and development programme. The Family Placement Service aims to respond to any allegation or complaint within 14 days but not exceeding 28 days.

We however recognise that there are some allegations and complaints that may require complex investigation which could take longer than 28 days. In such cases, the registered fostering manager shall write to the person(s) involved in the process, explaining the nature and complexity with anticipated timelines. This shall be followed up with periodical updates, keeping all parties informed with progress until the matter is concluded. Depending on the nature of allegation or complaint, for example, child protection enquiry, the regulator (Ofsted) and the Local Safeguarding Board of the Area Authority shall be notified accordingly.

The Family Placement Service welcome compliments and well as constructive feedback on what we do well as well as areas we should improve. All compliments and feedback should be sent to the registered Manager of the Fostering Service.

21. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS PROCEDURE

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- 21.1** In seeking to constantly improve the quality of the fostering services, Thurrock Council welcomes and encourages feedback from service user's providers and partner agencies as an opportunity to learn lessons and put matters right. We also welcome comments or compliments as a way of learning about our practice and use them as an integrated part of our Quality Assurance processes.
- 21.2** Thurrock Council recognise that children, their birth parents, foster carers, applicants and special guardians are best placed to identify the strengths and deficiencies of the adoption service and, therefore to inform the changes and developments needed to ensure continuing improvement.
- 21.3** The majority of such complaints will be dealt with under a complaints procedure established in line with **The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006** and the statutory guidance "**Getting the Best from Complaints**".
- 21.4** There is a framework in place for responding to and ensuring that the views of the parties in the adoption process are heard. All parties are advised of Thurrock Council's complaints procedure
- 21.5** In most situations, areas of potential tension or conflict can be minimised through careful planning, open communication and early discussion/negotiation involving the child's social worker and/or the social worker, as appropriate.
- 21.6** Any of the parties in the fostering process can use the complaints procedure if they have a dissatisfaction or concern with the service provided. This includes a complaint by:
- Any child who has been placed with our approved foster carers.
 - A birth parent of a child who has been placed with our approved carers including connected persons
 - Foster Carers

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- Applicants during the preparation and assessment process and after approval whilst awaiting a placement.
- One person on behalf of another e.g. a parent/advocate on behalf a child.
- Anyone granted a Special Guardianship Order or is seeking one.

21.7 Applicants to become Foster Carers who are turned down for approval on the recommendation of the Fostering panel and/or the decision of the agency decision maker are able to ask for their case to be referred to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). Details of this process with timescales will be made available to applicants during preparation and assessment.

The IRM has the following timescales:

- Applicants have 40 working days from the date of the letter confirming the panel's decision, to decide to contact the IRM.
- The Fostering agency will be contacted to produce relevant documentation within
- 10 working days.
- The IRM will set up a panel within 3 months of the application.

Contact details for the IRM are as follows:

The Independent Review Mechanism Contract Manager

Unit 4, Pavillion Business Park,

Royds Hall Road

Leeds, LS12 6AJ

Tel: 0845 450 3956

Email: irm@irm.org.uk

www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk

21.8 Information about the complaints procedure can be obtained from:

Complaints,

Thurrock Council,

Civic Offices,

New Road,

Grays,

RM17 6SL

Tel: 0800 021 3016

Email: complaints@thurrock.gov.uk

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Information is also available on <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/how-to-complain/children-and-young-peoples-social-care-complaints>

Thurrock Council has applied a clear policy defining complaints and how they are dealt with.

22. THE REGISTRATION AUTHORITY

22.1 OFSTED is responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting adoption services under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000.

22.2 Thurrock Council's Adoption Service is regulated and inspected by:

OFSTED

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester M1 2WD

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Web: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

This statement of purpose is subject to annual review