

# CLA Service

## Southwark Fostering Services

Statement of Purpose 2011-2012

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## 1. Introduction

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 require all Fostering Services to provide a written Statement of Purpose setting out the aims and objectives of the service and details of the service and facilities provided. The Statement of Purpose has to be reviewed and updated every year.

The statement is intended to provide a clear description of the service for the information of foster carers, service users, Council staff, elected members (councillors), professionals in other agencies and members of the public.

This statement of purpose has been endorsed by the senior management group of the Children's Services Department and by the Corporate Parenting Committee.

Copies of the statement of purpose will be provided to

- Children's Services staff who are involved in providing services to looked after children and young people
- Foster carers and people who are being assessed as foster carers
- Speakerbox (Southwark's Children in Care Council)
- Southwark Foster Care Association
- Independent and voluntary sector organisations providing services to foster carers and to looked after children in Southwark

In addition the document will be placed on Southwark's web site.

Children and Young People's versions of the Statement of Purpose are also to be found on the website and are provided to looked after children and young people.

## 2. Aims and objectives of the service

Southwark's Fostering Service is committed to providing excellent standards of care to looked after children and young people so that they will have the best possible chance of being happy and successful in their lives.

The Fostering service will work in partnership with colleagues within the council and in other agencies in planning and caring for looked after children in order to meet the Council's responsibilities as a corporate parent. All the relationships that the fostering service has with other agencies and with foster carers should be marked by respect and a shared commitment to delivering the best possible support to looked after children and young people.

Southwark's looked after children and young people are an extremely diverse group and Southwark therefore needs to have foster carers who are capable of meeting these diverse needs. Southwark takes the view that the most important thing in helping children is foster care is what foster carers do, and the relationships they build with the looked after children and young people in their care.

**The aims of the service can be summarised as:**

- to provide a sufficient number of high quality foster placements that will fully meet the diverse needs of Southwark's looked after children and young people
- to provide a consistently high quality service and support to Southwark's foster carers by employing suitably experienced, skilled and qualified social work staff, business support staff and managers and by commissioning appropriate support services.

**To achieve these aims the Fostering Service has the following key objectives:**

**Recruitment and assessment of foster carers**

- to have a recruitment strategy in place that supports the recruitment of a sufficient range and quantity of local foster carers to meet the diverse needs of Southwark's looked after children and young people
- to respond in a friendly, prompt, professional and respectful manner to anyone enquiring about becoming a Southwark foster carer
- to develop and maintain quality partnerships with a limited number of independent organisations who will be able to deliver high quality assessments of prospective foster carers
- to carry out thorough assessment and preparation of prospective foster carers focussed on relevant competencies and ability to meet the needs of looked after children
- to treat all prospective foster carers with care and respect at all times and, in the event of a prospective carers not being approved, to explain sensitively and in plain language the reasons for the decision
- to maintain and support a Fostering Approval Panel consisting of the right mix of qualified, experienced and knowledgeable individuals and chaired by an suitably experienced independent person

**Supporting and valuing foster carer colleagues**

- to maintain good communication, mutual respect and excellent working relationships with all foster carers – always keeping the needs of the child or young person as the central concern
- to provide a written report at the beginning of each placement on the purpose of the placement that clarifies the roles and responsibilities of each professional involved
- to support foster carers to constructively challenge decisions and proposed care plans for children when foster carers feel they need to do so
- to ensure that foster carers are aware of Southwark's complaints procedures and are supported in using the complaints procedures when necessary
- to ensure that foster carers have access to the wide range of multi-disciplinary support services available in Southwark
- to provide a wide range of training courses for foster carers and supporting and encouraging foster carers to use these training opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge

- to hold an annual Review of Approval for every foster carer, using this an opportunity for two way feedback and to work out how the foster carer can best be supported and helped to develop their skills and knowledge
- to give practical support and advice to Southwark Foster Care Association so that it can be an effective voice in supporting individual foster carers and in promoting the needs of looked after children and young people

### **Meeting the needs of children and young people**

- to promote the concept of the “team around the looked after child” so that all the important adults and professionals involved with the child work constructively together to make sure the child’s needs are fully met
- to ensure that the ethnic origins, cultural background, religious faith and language of looked after children will be fully recognised and positively valued and promoted when placement decisions are being made. Also, any additional or special needs that children may have will be carefully considered when making foster placements and in supporting placements.
- to enable looked after children and young people to maintain and develop positive relationships with their birth families and with other significant people, so long as this is in the best interests of the child or young person
- to place siblings together insofar as this is practically possible and consistent with their needs
- to do everything possible to enable children / young people to experience placement stability and consistency of care
- to enable young people to stay put in their foster families for a period of time beyond their eighteenth birthday subject to this being in the best interests of the young person and with the full agreement of the foster carers
- to ensure that children and young people are enabled to participate fully in all decisions about their care plan and their day to day care including taking positive steps to enable children and young people to have access to advocacy and independent visitors
- to support children and young people and their families to constructively challenge decisions and proposed plans in regard to their care and ensuring they are aware of Southwark’s complaints procedures and are supported in using the complaints procedures when necessary
- to promote the educational achievements of looked after children and young people and enabling foster carers to call upon the support of the CLA Education Support team in helping to improve the education achievement of young people in their care
- to support foster carers in promoting the emotional and physical health of young people, so that they are able to develop and maintain positive self esteem and identity, promote their physical and mental wellbeing and achieve their full potential

- to fully meet the requirements of the Fostering Regulations, National Minimum Standards corporate policy and accepted best practice standards

### **3. Principles and standards of care**

- The child's safety and welfare are paramount and the experience of being looked after by Southwark should not disadvantage any child or young person.
- Staff and foster carers have a professional and personal duty to do everything possible to ensure that every child or young person has the opportunity to reach their full potential.
- Children and young people will always be placed in foster families that reflect as closely as possible the child's cultural, racial, ethnic and religious background
- Children and young people have the right to continuity in their lives so that their identity can be maintained and developed, their physical and mental well-being promoted and their full potential achieved.
- Every effort should be made to enable looked after children and young people to maintain positive contact with their birth parents, brothers and sisters, extended family members and other significant people, subject to this being in the best interests of the child / young person.
- Foster care must be a partnership between the carers, supervising social workers and the child or young person's social worker all working together in the best interests of the child or young person.
- The Fostering service will embrace a partnership approach based on working in an open, positive and respectful way with children, their parents and extended families, foster carers, children's social workers and colleague professionals in schools and in other agencies
- Foster carers, children and young people and their parents should be able to challenge decisions and plans proposed by the fostering service and are made aware of the procedures whereby they can exercise their right of challenge.
- Formal decisions relating to individual children and young people in foster care should be taken in full consultation with them, their parents and the foster carers.
- Young people leaving care must be offered a continuing service that recognizes that all young people continue to need various kinds of advice, practical help and emotional support into adulthood.
- The responsibilities of the placing agency to the foster carers, the purpose and goals of each placement and the responsibilities of all parties must be stated in writing.
- The Fostering service will provide quality and consistency in the provision of trainings, support and information to foster carers to enable them to meet the individual needs of the child and to develop their own skills as carers
- Services will be administered in a fair manner consistent with the Council's equality and valuing diversity policies.

## 4. Management and staffing structure

The Fostering service is part of the Children's Services Department under the overall leadership and direction of the Director of Children's Service. The Director of Children's Services reports to the Chief Executive (the most senior officer of the Council) and also to the Corporate Parenting Committee (a committee of councillors).

Children's Specialist Services is a large and complex range of services. All those services that are particularly concerned with meeting the needs of looked after children and children with disabilities are organised as a Business Unit under the direction of the Head of Service (Children in Care and Disabled Children).

The staff in the fostering service work very closely with their colleagues in the CLA social work teams and with the Children's Services Quality Assurance Unit (Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Co-ordinators).

The fostering service consists of

**The Short term team** which is responsible for supporting and supervising all short term and emergency foster carers

**The Adoption and Permanency Team** which is responsible for supporting long term and kinship foster carers

**The Fostering Recruitment Manager** who is responsible for the assessment of new foster carers

**Family Link** which recruits and assesses specialist carers who provide regular short breaks (sometimes known as respite care) for children and young people with disabilities

**Independent Annual Review of Approval Chairs** who chair annual review of approval meetings and make recommendations to the Fostering Panel

**The Fostering Panel** chaired by an Independent Panel Chair. The Fostering Panel makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker on matters concerning the approval of foster carers.

**Agency Decision Maker** - this is the senior manager who makes the final decisions about the approval of foster carers after taking account of all the information available and the recommendations of the Fostering Panel.

**Care Link** - a multidisciplinary team including social workers, family therapists and clinical psychologists. Care Link is a part of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and plays an important part in supporting foster carers and children and young people who are in foster care

Southwark will always try to place looked after children and young people with Southwark approved foster carers. Sometimes, however, this is not possible and children and young people may be placed with foster carers who are approved and supported by **Independent Fostering Agencies** (IFA). Southwark has contracts with a range of approved IFAs. When required, placements with IFAs are negotiated by the Placements Team (part of Children's Services Commissioning Unit).

The social workers in the Fostering Service are known as “**supervising social workers**” as their main task is to supervise and support foster carers. Sometimes they are still referred to by their former title of “fostering link worker”. All supervising social workers hold a recognised social work qualification and are registered as social workers by the General Social Care Council (GSCC).

The **Team Managers and Service Manager** also hold social work qualifications and have undergone additional training in management.

Names and contact details of key managers and Fostering Panel Chair

Name	Designation	Contact Details
Ms Romi Bowen	Director of Children’s Services	<a href="mailto:Romi.bowen@southwark.gov.uk">Romi.bowen@southwark.gov.uk</a>
Mr Rory Patterson	Deputy Director (Children’s Specialist Services)	<a href="mailto:Rory.patterson@southwark.gov.uk">Rory.patterson@southwark.gov.uk</a> Tel 020 7525
Mr Chris Saunders	Head of Service (Children in Care and Disability) and Agency Decision Maker	<a href="mailto:Chris.saunders@southwark.gov.uk">Chris.saunders@southwark.gov.uk</a> Tel 020 7525
Mr Paul McCarthy	Service Manager (Foster Care and Disability)	<a href="mailto:Paul.mccarthy@southwark.gov.uk">Paul.mccarthy@southwark.gov.uk</a> Tel
Ms Maureen Nawrat	Team Manager (Short Term Team) and Fostering Panel Advisor	<a href="mailto:Maureen.nawrat@southwark.gov.uk">Maureen.nawrat@southwark.gov.uk</a> Tel
Currently vacant post – being covered by Paul McCarthy	Fostering Recruitment Manager	
Ms Sue White	Team Manager (Long Term and Kinship Care)	<a href="mailto:Sue.white@southwark.gov.uk">Sue.white@southwark.gov.uk</a> Tel 020
Ms Jackie Cook	Head of Service (Quality Assurance)	<a href="mailto:Jackie.cook@southwark.gov.uk">Jackie.cook@southwark.gov.uk</a>
Ms Elizabeth Murphy	Manager of Care Link	<a href="mailto:Elizabeth.murphy@slam.nhs.uk">Elizabeth.murphy@slam.nhs.uk</a>
Ms Dawn DeLeon	Independent Chair of the Fostering Panel	Contactable through the Fostering Panel Advisor <a href="mailto:Maureen.nawrat@southwark.gov.uk">Maureen.nawrat@southwark.gov.uk</a>

## 5. Services provided

### 5.1 Recruitment

The fostering service has access to a Marketing Officer who designs and coordinates recruitment campaigns. A Fostering website has been created to give potential foster carers information on Southwark fostering and allows them to register their interest online. A free phone has been set up for enquiries (Tel 0800 952 0707).

The recruitment strategy is designed to attract prospective carers who are able to meet the identified needs of the children and young people who require placements, based on the age, ethnicity and cultural needs. In addition to this the strategy also identifies the need to increase specialist professional foster carers to offer placement to young people with more complex needs.

The strategy uses statistical and current census information about the borough in order to target the recruitment drive to specific audiences.

Foster carers are recruited through general advertising both locally and in national newspapers, and through meetings with local community groups, churches and professionals organisations within Southwark. Specific recruitment for individual children and other activities are coordinated by the long term fostering team. Southwark Council is the largest single employer in Southwark and regular information is distributed to Council staff inviting enquiries from people who are interested in becoming foster carers.

Existing foster carers are extremely important in encouraging new prospective carers to come forward for assessment. Southwark acknowledges the important role that foster carers often play in encouraging friends, neighbours and family members to consider becoming foster carers. A special recognition payment is made to any foster carer who is instrumental in bringing a new foster carer into the service.

## **5.2 Assessment of new foster carers**

Southwark aims to expand its pool of approved foster carers in order to better meet the needs of looked after children and young people. Southwark places a very high proportion of its looked after children in foster placements but there is not always sufficient choice when making placements and sometimes it is necessary to place children and young people some distance from the borough through lack of sufficient placements within or close to the borough. In addition, it is vital that new foster carers are approved in order to replace carers who are retiring or leaving fostering for other reasons.

Southwark has therefore set a target of recruiting at least 20 new fostering households per year from 2011/12. The approach to recruiting and assessing foster carers was reviewed during 2010/11 and led to the creation of a new Fostering Recruitment Manager post and the development of partnerships with a number of independent social care organisations from whom Southwark now spot purchases full fostering assessments. The aim is to be able to respond quickly and professionally to all enquiries and to allocate new assessments to specialist and highly experienced assessors who will generally complete and deliver an assessment to the Fostering Panel within five months.

The assessment process consists of the following stages. Greater detail is contained in section 7.

1. Initial Enquiry received and logged
2. Response to Initial enquiry by telephone
3. Initial Home Visit by a senior social worker to the applicant(s)
4. Outcome of initial home visit notified in writing
5. Applicant(s) submits a formal written application to become approved as a Southwark foster carer
6. Allocation to an independent assessor
7. Applicant(s) attend Pre-approval training
8. All references, health and safeguarding checks are taken up by fostering team
9. Assessment is presented to Fostering Panel
10. Agency Decision maker decides whether to approve as a foster carer and range of approval
11. Applicant(s) notified in writing of the outcome of the assessment

12. Applicant(s) allocated a supervising social worker

### **5.3 Supervising social workers**

Supervising social workers (and a Social Services Officer) support foster carers in order to help them carry out their responsibilities to the highest possible standard. This includes a minimum of a six weekly visit and weekly telephone calls. Supervising social workers are provided with mobile phones to make it easier for foster carers to contact them when they are out of office.

In practice, supervising social workers often visit much more regularly than six weekly, particularly when there are difficulties in placements or new placements being made. Supervising social workers are also required to make at least one unannounced visit each year.

Supervising social workers receive regular supervision from their line managers to help them plan how best to support foster carers, always keeping the welfare and best interests of looked after children as the central concern.

During periods when their supervising social worker is on leave or absent for other reasons, foster carers can access the fostering duty service if necessary.

## **6. Assessment and approval of foster carers**

### **Who can apply to become a Southwark foster carer?**

Southwark welcomes enquiries from all suitable people who are interested in becoming foster carers. There are many myths and misunderstandings about who can and who cannot be a foster carer. The Fostering Service therefore takes every available opportunity to stress that,

- the essential requirement is the ability to give children a full experience of family life, keep them safe from harm and help them to grow and realise their potential
- it is not necessary to be a home owner – but fostering does require having a spare room that is suitable as a bedroom for a foster child (the exception being specialist foster carers who only care for babies for short periods)
- the service requires and warmly welcomes foster carers from all racial, ethnic and religious groups, reflecting the diversity of Southwark's looked after children and young people
- foster carers need to be over the age of 18. There is no upper age limit but in practice it is unusual to start an assessment of someone who is over the age of 60 unless it is with a view to becoming a friends and family foster carer
- having health problems will not necessarily rule anyone out from being a foster carer, but foster carers have to be reasonably healthy and fit to be able to meet the needs of any child who might be placed with them
- foster carers can be single, married, in civil partnerships, or living with a partner
- a person's sexual orientation is not a barrier in any way to becoming a foster carer

- Certain criminal convictions will rule a person out – these include serious offences of violence and offences in regard to children or vulnerable adults. However, not all offences will necessarily prevent a person from becoming a foster carer. The circumstances relating to any cautions or convictions will need to be explored fully in the assessment
- Being a smoker in itself will not prevent a person from becoming a foster carer – but foster carers are positively encouraged and supported to stop smoking. Foster carers must never smoke within the foster home as passive smoking is harmful to children and seeing a foster carer smoking sets a bad example for young people.

### **Responding to Initial enquiries**

All initial enquiries about becoming a foster carer, however they are received, will receive a response from a fostering social worker within 3 working days. Usually this will be by telephone and the social worker will clarify

- Is the person interested in a particular type of fostering (such as teenagers, children with special needs, young babies etc)?
- Does the person have any paid employment?
- What is the family composition?
- What is the person's race and ethnicity?
- Does the person have a spare room suitable for a foster child?

### **Initial Home Visit**

Following this discussion the Fostering Recruitment Manager will decide whether or not to offer an Initial Home Visit. If it is decided not to offer an initial home visit at this stage the reasons for this will be explained to the person.

An Initial Home visit will usually take place within 10 working days of the telephone conversation (assuming this is convenient for the prospective carer). Initial Home Visits are carried out by the Fostering Recruitment Manager or a senior social worker. An Initial Home Visit will usually last for up to two hours, during which time the social worker will

- Provide information about fostering for Southwark and the diverse needs of Southwark's looked after children and young people
- Look around the home to assess its suitability for fostering
- Obtain information about family background and composition
- Ask for information about the current employment and employment history of all adult members of the household
- Enquire about personal history and experiences relevant to Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) competencies for foster carers
- Enquire about any convictions or cautions for criminal offences in regard to all relevant members of the household
- Provide information about the fostering assessment and pre-approval training process.

### **Common Reasons for not proceeding with a full assessment**

Sometimes, as a result of discussion during the initial home visit, the person concerned will decide that fostering is not right for them, or not at the present time.

It sometimes becomes clear at the initial home visit that the home is not suitable for fostering. This may be because it is not possible to provide a suitable bedroom for a foster child or it may be that there are serious health and safety hazards present in the home.

A fostering assessment is a detailed and lengthy process and sometimes prospective foster carers decide that it is too intrusive or time consuming a process.

At the initial home visit the social worker will always explain the range of safeguarding checks including enhanced Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks on all adult members of the household that are an essential part of the assessment process. The social worker will always ask if anyone in the household has any cautions or convictions for criminal offences. It may be that some serious offences come to light at this stage and this could lead to a decision not to proceed.

### **Informing applicant about outcome of initial home visit**

The social worker making the initial home visit will inform the applicant(s) in writing within 5 working days of the outcome of the initial home visit. If the decision is NOT to proceed with a full assessment, the reasons will be given in writing.

### **Appealing or making a complaint about a decision not to proceed with a full fostering assessment**

An applicant may write to the Service Manager (Fostering) to request a review of a decision not to proceed to a full assessment. The Service Manager will review the information available and will respond in writing within 5 working days.

An applicant who is unhappy with the way in which an initial fostering home visit has been conducted may also lodge a formal complaint using the Council's Complaints Procedure (further information about making a complaint can be found on the Council's website).

## **6.1 Assessment processes**

Since April 2011 Southwark has been commissioning assessments of new foster carers from a small number of independent organisations that have a strong track record in this area. These organisations have contracts with Southwark that set out mutual expectations and the quality standards that Southwark expects for fostering assessments. The social workers who carry out foster carer assessments are all highly experienced in the field of fostering and have undergone specialist training. Assessors receive regular supervision and consultation from an experienced manager throughout the course of the assessment.

Southwark aims for foster carer assessments to be completed and presented to the Fostering Panel within five months from the date of allocation to the assessor. In some circumstances, it may take longer - for example, if the applicants have personal problems that arise during the assessment process, or if there are unavoidable delays in obtaining all the necessary references and safeguarding checks.

Southwark uses the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) Form F (2008 version) to record the assessment. The Form F consists of a number of sections that, taken together, sets out in writing all the relevant information about the applicant(s) that is required by the Fostering Panel. This includes detailed information about the applicant(s) in respect of,

- Family background
- Education and employment background
- Any relevant health issues
- Experience of parenting or caring for children
- Support network (extended family, friends, neighbours, faith groups etc)
- Home and accommodation available for fostering
- Local community resources
- Pets (if applicable)
- Ability to meet the needs of looked after children
- Understanding and commitment to meeting children's identity needs, being mindful that Southwark is a diverse multicultural community
- Outcome of all safeguarding checks and personal references

Throughout the assessment the assessor will be working with the applicant(s) to identify specific evidence that the applicants have the necessary attitudes and competencies to be able to meet the needs of looked after children and young people.

Southwark recognises that fostering is a challenging and complex activity and requires foster carers to have a wide range of skills and abilities. Southwark does not expect carers to have experience or competence in every conceivable area. Rather, it is about identifying

- the relevant competencies that the applicant already has and that can be evidenced
- Areas where the applicants will need further training and support
- How best to help the applicants develop confidence and skills

The social worker carrying out the assessment will typically visit the applicant(s) at their home on seven or eight occasions over a five month period. The applicant(s) may be asked to do preparatory work for assessment interviews, for example completing a chronology, reading an article about fostering, or keeping a diary to record a typical week in their family life.

The assessor will also meet with three personal referees and will aim to interview any former cohabiting partners and any grown up children who may have left home.

At the end of the assessment process the assessor will draw together all the relevant information and the assessor's analysis and recommendations into a Form F report. The draft report is shared with the applicant(s) and they are invited to add their comments. The final report is then submitted to the Fostering Recruitment Manager for a final check before it is copied and sent to all those members of the Fostering Panel who will be considering the application.

### **Pre-approval training**

Applicants are required to attend a four day preparation and training group which involves looking at the key elements of fostering. The preparation group programme is based on the "Skills to foster"

format designed by Fostering Network but developed to meet Southwark's specific needs. Two supervising social workers facilitate the group. There are sessions involving foster carers who can talk about their experiences, and other professionals such as clinicians from Care Link, Education Support Team, child protection specialists and senior managers.

Areas covered in the training include the roles and responsibilities of a foster carer, child protection, safe caring, managing difficult behaviour, managing and promoting contact, valuing diversity, health and safety, working with children who have been abused and legislation relating to Looked After children.

The report also includes references for people who know the applicant and a range of checks are undertaken on their suitability, including enhanced CRB checks and checks with the local authority where they reside. CRB checks are also taken out on all family members and frequent visitors over the age of 16. This information is used to produce a report giving as accurate picture as possible of the prospective carer and their family. The report also includes recommendations for type of placement the applicant and the assessor believes they are best suited to, along with an analysis of the carer's strengths and limitations.

## **6.2 The Fostering Panel and approval**

Southwark's independent Fostering Panel consists of people with a wide range of relevant personal and professional experience. The panel is constituted in line with the Fostering Regulations. It is headed by an Independent Chair to ensure that a thorough and objective approach is taken in considering applications from prospective new carers and variations of terms of approval.

The role of the panel is to consider approvals of new applicants and annual reviews of both current short and long term foster carers and any terminations of approval. In addition, the panel also considers proposed long term matches for specific children and foster carers.

Applicants seeking approval to become foster carers are presented to the fostering panel by their assessing social worker. The assessment report is always shared with the applicant prior to the panel meeting and applicants are encouraged to comment in writing on the written assessment, indicating any areas of the assessment with which they may disagree.

Applicants are always invited to attend panel along with their assessing social worker. Southwark believes that having applicants attend panel is an important part of making the whole process as open and transparent as possible. It is acknowledged that attending a Fostering Panel can be a stressful experience for applicants; the Panel Chair and Panel members will therefore do everything possible to make it a positive and non-threatening experience for the applicants.

## **6.3 Annual Reviews of Approval**

The fostering placement regulations requires foster carers to be reviewed annually, when the suitability of the carer to continue to foster is considered. Additional reviews can be called at any time if there is a change in circumstances or an issue of concern arises.

Annual Reviews of Approval are chaired by an experienced independent Chair. Information and views are sought from any children and young people who have been in placement and also from their social workers. Foster carers are helped to prepare for their Annual Review meeting by their supervising social worker and they are encouraged to arrange for a support person (for example

someone from Southwark Foster Care Association) to be present at the review meeting to support them if they feel that would be helpful.

In the case of a carer's first annual review or when there have been significant changes or concerns then the fostering panel will consider the report that is prepared following the annual review and make recommendations to the agency decision maker.

## **6.4 Termination of Approval**

### **Resignation as a foster carer**

If a foster carer makes the decision to give up fostering for Southwark, their approval will be terminated 28 days after the fostering service receives written notice and their name will then be removed from Southwark's Register of Foster Carers. The Fostering Panel is routinely informed of all resignations.

### **Becoming approved by another fostering agency**

The Council respects the right of any foster carer to decide to cease to be a Southwark foster carer and to become approved by another fostering agency. In these circumstances Southwark will allow the new agency to have access to all relevant background information concerning the foster carer's work as an approved Southwark carer.

### **Termination of approval due to unsuitability**

If the managers of the fostering service form the view that a carer is no longer suitable to continue to be an approved foster carer, the matter will be taken without unnecessary delay to the fostering panel for careful consideration and the panel will make recommendations to the agency decision maker. The foster carer's views and feelings will be taken fully into account at all stage of the process. The foster carer will be provided with support from their supervising social worker and also from Southwark Foster Care Association during this process. Southwark will consider funding support from a suitable independent person or from The Fostering Network. The agency decision maker will provide written notice of the proposed decision giving reasons and explaining that the foster carer has 28 days within which to make representation to the decision maker or to apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for an independent review on behalf of the Secretary of State.

In all cases, the panel will consider how to safeguard and protect the interests of the children placed with carer and ensure that any necessary placement moves are managed sensitively, focussing on the children's needs.

## **7. Support to foster carers**

### **7.1 Supervision of foster carers**

Foster carers are managed and supported by supervising social workers from the short term fostering team, from the Family Link team and, in the case of long term and friends and families foster carers, from the Adoption and Permanency Team.

The supervising social worker will visit at least every six weeks, and more often when a child is first placed, to help the foster carer meet the children's needs in placement. They will work jointly with the child's social worker to ensure that the child's health, education, leisure, identity, cultural, religious and racial needs are met.

Supervising social workers will work jointly with the child's social worker and ensure that the carers are fully involved in planning and decision making for the children and young people placed with them, to facilitate constructive and participatory working relationships.

## **7.2 Foster Carer Support Groups**

Foster carers are encouraged to attend support groups which will enable them to share discuss issues and share experiences with other foster carers. These groups change and develop over time in response to the needs of foster carers. They may be informal, involving only foster carers, or they may be more formal, facilitated by a member of the fostering team or another professional. Foster carer support groups play an important role in enabling foster carers to develop their networks, obtain support and learn from the knowledge and experience of other carers. One of the senior practitioners in the fostering team has a special responsibility for supporting and developing foster carer support groups.

## **7.3 Southwark Foster Carers Association**

Foster carers also have their own organisation, the Southwark Foster Carer's Association. The purpose of SFCA is to promote fostering and to represent the views and needs of Southwark's foster carers. SFCA has an elected committee and a Chair. The committee meets regularly with the Service Manager and Head of Service. The SFCA sends out regular information to members and hosts get togethers for foster carers. SFCA is able to provide "buddying" and support for foster carers who are experiencing particular difficulties, for example if they are the subject of a complaint or an allegation.

## **7.4 Training**

Training is an integral part of the foster carer's role and begins during the preparation and assessment process. Southwark takes the development of foster carers very seriously and all carers are expected to attend ongoing and core training. All foster carers have a training profile which is reviewed yearly at the time of their annual review.

Foster carers must keep training and development portfolio which shows how they meet the skills they require to foster. All foster carers are expected to complete the foster carers Children's workforce Development Council (CWDC) programme within 12 months of becoming approved as a foster carer. This programme involves attending workshops and completing a personal portfolio that evidences that they meet the relevant Training, Support and Development Standards of the CWDC.

Most of the core training provided to Children's Services staff is available to foster carers, who can apply online on "My Learning Source" (MLS). Applications to attend core training (including training provided by the Local Safeguarding Children Board) should be discussed first of all with the supervising social worker.

## **7.5 Financial support**

Southwark foster carers receive weekly allowances to help with the costs of caring for children in placement. These allowances vary depending on the age of the child.

Allowances can be enhanced to take account of the additional costs involved in caring for children who have special or additional needs or who are particularly challenging. Decisions about enhancements are made by the Service Manager.

Foster carers receive additional payments for holidays and for special festivals. Southwark regularly reviews the level of allowances paid with the aim of ensuring that Southwark's foster carers receive financial support that is comparable with neighbouring local authorities.

## **7.6 Mentoring**

Newly approved foster carers get extra support from an established foster carer who can provide practical help and advice.

## **7.7 Respite breaks**

Through discussion with the supervising social worker, respite breaks can be arranged for foster carers in certain situations to enable them to have short breaks from caring for a foster child, usually through making arrangements for the child to stay for a short period with another foster carer.

## **7.8 Foster Carers Handbook**

The handbook contains comprehensive information and guidance for foster carers and is regularly reviewed to ensure it is kept up to date.

## **7.9 Other support services**

Foster carers can also call on support from other services such as:

- The CLA Education Support Team and the Virtual Head (CLA) for children's educational needs
- Care Link (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service)
- The Youth Offending Service which works with young people who have committed offences or who are at risk of offending and can provide support and advice to foster carers
- The specialist nurses for looked after children and young people
- The Emergency Duty Team for support and assistance outside office hours
- The Fostering Team offers an out of hours telephone advice and support service to foster carers
- The Children and Young People's Participation Officer, who can ensure that children and young people are involved in decisions about their future.
- Specialist service for young people with substance misuse problems
- Contact service which enables children and young people to enjoy positive helpful contact with their birth families while they are in foster care.

## **8. Placement types**

The fostering team makes use of a variety of different placement types to ensure placements are able to meet the individual needs of children who are looked after. Thorough assessment of a child's particular needs by their social worker can help the Fostering teams to choose the right placement. In making any placement the key questions are always

- Will the placement meet the child's needs?
- What impact will the proposed placement have upon other children in the household?
- What level and type of support will the foster carer require?

### **8.1 Short Term and Emergency Fostering**

Short term foster carers look after a child or young person for a limited period of time while arrangements are made for the child to return to their birth family or to an alternative permanent placement.

Most children will return home to the care of their parents or members of their extended family while others may move to long term foster placements or become adopted. Short term foster carers play a crucial role in caring for children and young people who are going through a period of crisis and uncertainty.

### **8.2 Teenage Fostering**

Some foster carers are specifically approved to care for teenagers who are being prepared for independence. This may involve a foster carer offering a brief period of care for an adolescent and helping with a particular problem or difficulty.

These carers will work closely with CLA social workers and with Personal Advisors from the After Care Teams to help young people to prepare for independent living.

### **8.3 Long term Fostering**

For some children, particularly older children, who maintain close and significant relationships with birth parents or relatives, long term fostering may be a more appropriate placement choice than adoption. In these cases, existing foster carers can be approved as long-term (or permanent) carers for the child. This provides the child or young person with a sense of security and stability and of being "claimed" by the long term foster care family. Long term foster carers usually support the child or young person in maintaining contact with their birth family, where this is consistent with the best interests of the child or young person.

The fostering service will sensitively discuss with the foster carer the options of applying for a Residence Order or Special Guardianship Order where this would be in the best interests of the child in terms of providing the child with legal, placement and emotional permanence.

### **8.4 Family and Friends Foster Care (sometimes referred to as kinship foster care)**

## **Family and Friends Care Policy**

Southwark has published a family and friends care policy explaining the way in which the Council supports family and friends carers. The policy includes information about family and friends foster care.

Southwark Council believes that being looked after by a relative or family friend can often produce better outcomes for a child than being placed with an ordinary foster family. The Fostering Service works with colleagues in other parts Children's Services to promote the placement of children with relatives or with people who are familiar to them as an alternative to being looked after by strangers.

Southwark's Kinship Care service, which is located within the Fostering Service, assesses and provides support to Kinship carers, offering training and support to enable them to care for the child. Kinship placements may be a short-term or long-term care option for a child or young person.

### **Connected person assessments**

The Fostering Service works with the CLA teams in assessing "connected persons" so they can be approved on a temporary basis as a foster carer in order for an immediate placement to be made.

A "connected person" is defined in the Regulations as a relative, friend or other person who has a connection with the child. In carrying out this urgent assessment the key focus is on determining whether the connected person can provide safe care and meet the needs of the child or young person, also it will be essential to consider the quality of any existing relationship between the child and the connected person.

### **Full assessment of connected persons as Friends and Family foster carer**

The Fostering Service commissions full assessments of prospective Friends and Family foster carers. The assessment covers the same broad areas as for other foster care assessments, as outlined in section 6.1 above, but there is a special focus on the quality of the relationship between the prospective friends and family foster carer and the child or young person.

### **Support and services provided to Friends and Family foster carers**

The support and supervision provided by the fostering service to friends and family foster carers (whether temporary or otherwise) is essentially the same as for other foster carers, including training, practical support and allowances and fees according to the published criteria.

## **8.5 Family Link (Short Breaks for children with disabilities)**

Family Link offers disabled children the opportunity to have short, planned, regular breaks with a Family Link carer. The service is for children and young people living in Southwark, aged between 0 and 18 who are either on the Register of Disabled Children or meet the registration criteria. The children may have a significant learning and/or physical disability, a sensory loss or a severe chronic medical condition.

A child will visit the Family Link carer's for either a day or overnight stay on a regular basis usually at weekends. Family Link carers are carefully matched with a specific child after gradual introductions. Carers receive an allowance depending on the amount of time the child spends with them.

Family Link carers are approved foster carers, they have an allocated supervising social worker and they are subject to an Annual Review of Approval in the same way as other foster carers.

### **8.6 Mother and baby placements**

Southwark's fostering service has some approved foster carers who are able to provide specialist placements for young mothers and their babies. In some cases the mother and the baby will both be looked after. In other situations it may be just the baby who is looked after, either under s20 of the Children Act or under a Care Order.

The mother and baby foster carer has a primary responsibility to ensure the welfare and safety of the baby. At the same time, the foster carer plays a crucial role in supporting the young mother and in helping her to bond with her baby and to develop her capacity as a young parent.

## **9. Complaints and Allegations in respect of foster carers**

The Fostering Service recognises that any allegation or complaint made by a child, or any other person, in respect of a foster carer must be taken seriously and investigated, although sometimes it does happen that false or mistaken allegations and complaints are made. The fostering service works closely with the Children's Services Quality Assurance Unit to ensure that a transparent and robust approach is maintained in regard to the prompt but thorough investigation of all complaints and allegations regarding foster carers.

The Service Manager (Foster Care and Disability) is responsible for managing allegations, liaising with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and making sure that the person against whom an allegation has been made is kept informed of the progress of the investigation.

At the end of the investigation a comprehensive summary of the allegation, investigation and outcome will be produced and a copy provided to the subject of the allegation. The foster carer's suitability to continue to foster will then be reviewed. Any serious substantiated allegation will always be notified to the Fostering Panel which will then make recommendations to the agency decision maker regarding continuation or variation of approval.

A summary of any allegation and its resolution will be kept on the foster carer's records, but unsubstantiated, unfounded or malicious allegations will not be included in references.

## **10. Ofsted**

Ofsted is the registration authority for Southwark's Fostering Service. Any query relating to the registration of this service should be communicated to Ofsted:

Compliance, Investigation and Enforcement  
Ofsted  
Freshford House  
REdcliffe Way

Bristol  
BS1 6NL  
08456 404040  
Email: [southist@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:southist@ofsted.gov.uk)

# Fostering Statement of Purpose 2011-12

## Approved

Signed .....

Romi Bowen

Director of Children's Services

Dated .....

Signed .....

Cllr Catherine McDonald

Cabinet Member (Children and Young People's Services)

Dated .....

**Document date:** October 2011

**Document to be reviewed:** October 2012