
KENT FOSTERING SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND POLICY



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Section 1

Policy and Performance Framework

Introduction

This Statement of Purpose sets out the framework for Kent Fostering Service. Kent Fostering Service is run in accordance with the principles outlined in the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services and the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011). As a Local Authority provision, Kent Fostering Service adheres to Kent County Council's policies and procedures for Integrated Children's Services. These give written guidance to staff to enable an efficient and effective service to be delivered.

Kent Fostering Service is committed to establishing and maintaining standards and ensuring quality outcomes for our vulnerable children and young people.

Legislative and Policy Framework

Kent Fostering Service is run in accordance with the principles outlined in the:

- Children Act 1989
- Fostering: National Minimum Standards (2011)
- The Care Planning and Fostering regulations 2015
- The Care Standards Act 2015
- The Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 & Amendments July 2013.
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Volume 2; Care Planning, Placement and Case Review 2010
- Family & Friends Guidance (2010)
- Transition to Adulthood Guidance (2010) including Staying Put
- Independent Review of Determinations (Adoption & Fostering) regulations 2009
- Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006

Procedures

There are a number of procedures that inform the delivery of fostering services by Kent County Council. These include:

- [Promoting Positive Behaviour & Safer Care Policy](#)
- [Family Time with Parents/Adults & Siblings](#)
- [Kent & Medway Safeguarding Children Procedures](#)
- Guidelines for Social Workers on Foster Carers Wishing to Adopt
- [Staying Put Policy](#)
- [Staying Together Policy](#)
- Permanency Policy, Guidance & Prompts
- [Family and Friend Care Kinship Policy Procedures and Guidance](#)
- [Special Guardianship/Policy Procedures and Guidance](#)
- [Statutory Guidance on Promoting the Health of Looked After Children](#)

Kent County Council (KCC) Policy Statement

KCC recognises that a child's needs are best met by a nurturing family and is committed to finding appropriate alternative family homes for children who are not able to remain within their own family.

KCC is committed to finding children homes with approved KCC foster families and has developed and invested in a dedicated and comprehensive Fostering Service that actively works to exceed the standards required to meet the diverse needs of all children and young people coming into care.

KCC is also committed to children and young people living with local foster families to allow them to have time with their families and friends, continue at the same school and thrive within their own community. Wherever possible children will live within 10 miles of their local community (other than where there is a risk that means they need to live outside of their community).

Each child/young person will have access to foster care services which recognise and address their needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality. Decisions as to where a child lives will consider the child's assessed racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic needs and match these as closely as possible with the ethnic origin, race, religion, culture and language of the foster family.

Aims and Objectives

The main aim of Kent Fostering Service is to provide stable and high-quality foster homes for children of all ages that value, support and encourage them to grow and develop as individuals. Kent Fostering continues to develop the Service and work collaboratively with our stakeholders especially our foster carers to improve our support and retention of foster carers.

In addition to promoting their health and general well-being the Service is also committed to ensuring that every foster carer recognises the importance of the educational achievement of children in care and work with KCC in raising their academic attainment. The Service also recognises that a small number of children may not achieve formal academic qualifications but will encourage foster carers to help children and young people to reach their maximum educational ability.

Structure of Kent Fostering Service (structure chart attached as [Appendix 1](#))

Kent Fostering Service has two Heads of Service, Mark Vening, Head of Fostering West and Maria Cordrey, Head of Fostering East, with Caroline Smith, Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting as the Registered Manager.

The Kent Fostering Service has five area Fostering Support Teams, two Assessment and Panel Teams, a Fostering Review Team, a Disabled Children's Fostering Team and a Placement Stability Team. Within the Service, training and development, initial enquiries and the recruitment of foster carers are managed by the Kent Fostering and Supported Homes Development Team. The Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting and the Heads of Fostering are responsible for decision making on all new approvals including Connected Persons.

This structure is to promote joint working and support to foster carers, children and young people. The Fostering Support Teams supervise foster carers, promote training for carers and facilitate support groups.

The Total Placement Service identify all new homes for children who are looked after and undertake matching considerations to ensure that all children live with appropriately skilled carers. The Fostering Teams are responsible for the completion of placement plan arrangements and ensuring safe care plans and delegated authority are completed.

Kent Pledge

The Fostering Service supports the Kent Pledge to Children in Care.

'The Kent Fostering Service understands that being in care and leaving care is not always easy and that it can bring extra challenges and pressures for you. If we are going to get it right for you, we need to make a real difference to help you do your best and have success in your life. Our pledge includes a number of things we will do that will help make sure that your time in care is a positive experience.'

These are based around six themes:

- A sense of belonging.
- An adult who is always there for you while you are in care.
- A good education.
- Good memories for the future.
- Getting ready for being an adult.
- Championing your needs and interests.

Services Provided by the Kent Fostering Service

Kent Fostering Service has a range of fostering services for children who need them which include:

- Foster homes for individuals and sibling groups
- Bridging homes
- Emergency homes
- Task Centred foster homes
- Homes for permanent and long-term foster care
- Fostering arrangements for parents and their children.
- Respite
- Specialist Short breaks for disabled children
- Disabled Children's foster homes
- Connected persons foster homes
- Sessional workers

See [Kent Fostering](#) for further details and information on these services.

The Aims of Kent Fostering Service

The aims of Kent Fostering Service are to ensure:

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of foster care provision.
- Promotion of a stable and safe environment ensuring that children and young people are protected from abuse and neglect.
- Children are entitled to grow up in a loving environment that can meet their developmental needs.
- Promotion of educational attainment, progress and school attendance of all children and young people living with a foster family.
- Children will be supported to develop their emotional, intellectual, social, creative and physical skills through the accessible and stimulating environment created within the foster home.
- The promotion of the health, personal care and developmental needs of all the children and young people in foster care.
- Positive regard for the child's racial, religious and cultural needs. Children should have equal access to local family-based care regardless of race, religion, ability or disability.
- Children's views, wishes and feelings are acted upon, unless this is contrary to their interests or adversely affects other members of the fostering household.
- Anti-discriminatory practices that promote equal opportunities for all and value diversity of both foster children and carers regardless of, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, age, religious beliefs, disability or marital status.
- The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.
- The significance of family time for children in care and of maintaining relationships with birth parents and the wider family, including siblings, half-siblings and grandparents, is recognised, as is the foster carer's role in this.
- Acknowledgment and recognition of the contribution that can be made by family and friends as carers.
- Foster carers have a right to full information about the child.
- Partnership between all those involved in fostering children is essential for the National Minimum Standards to deliver the best outcomes for children. This includes other statutory agencies, fostering service providers and foster carers and forms part of Kent County Councils Foster Carer Charter.

Section 2

Recruitment, Assessment and Management of Foster Carers

Recruitment

Initial Enquiries Team

Dedicated advisers will offer a gateway into the Service and provide the following functions:

- Dedicated telephone line/answer phone so all enquires are routed direct to the advisers
- Provide consistent responses to enquiries
- Initial screening to see whether those enquiring meet minimum criteria for acceptance for assessment
- Collate and send out packs and application forms
- Receive and acknowledge applications
- Input details of enquiry/application into database
- Track application during assessment process and provide ongoing link/liaison
- Collection of data in relation to applications and timescales
- Send out our quarterly newsletters to potential fostering families who have signed up to receive ongoing information about the events and developments within our Service.

Timescales

- Initial enquiries will be responded to within one working day
- Information packs emailed within one working day
- Initial home visit will take place within ten working days following receipt of application
- The period from application to Panel should meet the National Minimum Standard of eight months. The Service aims to assess new applicants within six months.
- The Service endeavours to complete assessments for foster carers transferring from other agencies within four months.

Advertising

A dedicated Recruitment Co-ordinator will use a range of media in liaison with the Communications team (newspapers, radio, posters social media and website) and Digital Services which includes:

- Social media platforms
- Campaigns
- External advertising
- Editorials (particularly in relation to campaigns)
- Website
- Posters
- Leafleting
- Community presence including use of banners

Advertising will target those most likely to be interested in caring. Information will be made available through Education Services including schools, health providers and Local Authority information and locations.

KCC strives to provide homes for children with carers from similar backgrounds. There is a particular shortage of carers from black and minority ethnic families and these applications will be particularly encouraged by specific advertising and promotions.

The Fostering Recruitment Strategy outlines the requirements for the Service.

Refer a Friend Scheme

Kent has a continuing need to increase and replenish its bank of foster carers and since it is recognised that the best way of finding new foster carers is through existing carers – often relatives or friends – a payment will be made to any existing carer who is fostering for KCC who successfully introduces new carers to the Service. The payment will be made when the new carer is approved.

Information

General information about the Service is available on the website, social media platforms and through the Initial Enquiries Team via telephone, e-mail and Facebook. The information pack, brochure and an application form will be sent out to prospective carers via email or post.

Information Open Events

Prospective carers can attend the monthly information events (which are published on the website and social media) to hear about the Service from existing carers and fostering staff. It is also an opportunity to ask questions.

Conditions for Approval as a Foster Carer

Recruitment is undertaken according to the statutory requirement that the welfare of the child is the primary consideration.

Statutory Checks

All adult applicants and their household will be required to undertake checks which include:

- DBS Check (Disclosure and Barring Service)
- KCC systems checks to see if children or adults are known to the Local Authority
- Other Local Authority Checks or Certificates of Good Conduct if you have lived in other areas of the country or abroad respectively.
- Local Authority Designated Officer.
- Health
- Schools if you have children of school age
- Previous partners
- References (personal and employment)
- Financial
- Social media

Relationships

Applications are welcomed from couples in stable and enduring relationships and single adults. Applications from couples are unlikely to be accepted where the duration of their relationship has been for less than 1 year.

Age

Whilst there is no upper or lower age range, applicants will need to show that they have a broad experience of life to meet the demands of this challenging role. Applicants will also need to show that they are fit and healthy enough with high energy levels and mobility to care for the young people who are fostered.

Accommodation

The assessment of an applicant's home will consider the safety of the child and whether there is sufficient space for all the family. It is expected that all foster children will have their own bedroom unless the child is able to share with a sibling of a similar age and gender or is very young. These arrangements will only be agreed following a risk assessment. It is expected that a carer will have security of tenure.

Communication

Applicants must have a personal telephone number and email address. They must have the use of a smart device or laptop to access online information such as the [Foster Carers Handbook](#), complete and submit diary records and to support children with homework.

Pets

Applicants must not usually have more than two dogs in the household or keep dangerous pets. A risk assessment of all animals will be undertaken and for any household where there are more than two dogs, agreement for an assessment to continue or for an approved carer to continue to foster, must be obtained by the Heads of Fostering.

Weapons

Applicants must keep any dangerous weapons secure and in compliance with the relevant regulations.

Financial security

Applications from people on all levels of income including families on State Benefits are welcome. Applicants must understand that registration as a foster carer is not a form of employment and therefore there are no guarantees regarding income. Foster carers are self-employed and most will only be paid when they have a child living with them.

Working carers

Whilst it is the usual expectation that the primary carer will not be employed full-time outside of the home, we welcome applications from carers who are able to work flexibly to ensure that they are able to be available at all times to care for a child in case they are ill or unable to go to school. This includes being able to facilitate the school run, family time and attending planning and other meetings relating to a child/ren including medical appointments. Carers will also need to be available to attend training and support groups

and supervision with their fostering social worker. Applicants can undertake some part time work alongside the fostering role if this is sufficiently flexible to be able to always prioritise children and young people's needs and meet all professional expectations of a foster carer. Their ability to do so will be fully assessed. Consideration will also be given to other caring commitments and how these can be balanced with the fostering role.

Childminding

The assessment of applicants who are childminding will carefully consider the ability of the applicant to manage the competing needs of children who are childminded alongside foster children, as well as all professional requirements of the fostering role (i.e., attending meetings, training, support groups and record keeping) including the numbers of children an applicant is registered to childmind and what type of fostering is likely to be compatible with this. Applicants who are registered childminders must inform OFSTED and all parents of children they childmind of their approval as a foster carer.

Applicants' Children

Applicants will want to ensure that becoming a foster carer will not negatively affect the welfare of any other children living with them. KCC is committed to including and supporting the welfare of carers' children in relation to other children who come to live with them. The foster carers' children will be supported and seen regularly by their fostering social worker and their views considered within annual reviews and by our Children WHO Care Council.

Health

A medical will be undertaken for all applicants. Health factors that may impact on applicants' capacity to care for children will be considered during the assessment. These issues are important regarding how they may impact on the applicant's capacity to care for child/ren. All medicals will be reviewed by the Agency Medical Advisor.

Smoking / Vaping

Due to the known health risks associated with secondary smoking and suspected risks from vaping, KCC's aim is to provide a smoke free care environment for children in care. Existing carers are therefore pro-actively encouraged to stop smoking and vaping and any applications from people who wish to care for children under the age of 5 or for children and young people who have respiratory problems, will not be considered if they have smoked or vaped in the previous six months. Children who may be suffering from heart conditions or glue ear will also not be placed in homes where the foster carers smoke or vape.

In addition, successful applicants will be expected to have a smoking policy that precludes smoking and vaping indoors and that promotes a healthy understanding of the risks to health of both passive and active smoking. Applicants will also be required to demonstrate how they will encourage young people not to smoke when they themselves, smoke or vape.

Foster carers should not encourage children/young people to smoke or purchase tobacco or vapes under the legal age limit. Where carers are aware that young people in their care may be smoking or vaping, they should advise the child's social worker.

Medication and Drugs

Where carers are prescribed medication for purposes of treatment, they must ensure that they are properly secured in a locked medicine cabinet and present no risk to fostered children/young people. If the medication needs to be kept in the fridge, a lockable cash box is a useful way of keeping them secure.

The illegal use of drugs by foster carers whilst they are responsible for the care of children/young people is expected to result in de-registration. Such matters will be referred to the relevant Service Manager and Fostering Panel.

Foster carers must not collude in any way with a young person in their care taking drugs. Carers must advise a young person's social worker of any concerns they have regarding their use of drugs.

Alcohol

Foster carers must ensure that if they are drinking alcohol that this does not result in the inability to be responsible for children in their care. Foster carers should be aware that many children/young people will associate alcohol with inappropriate care because of their personal experiences and therefore may be fearful when they see carers drinking. Foster carers should not allow or encourage children/young people to drink or purchase alcohol under the legal age limit. Where carers are aware that young people in their care may be drinking alcohol, they should advise the child's social worker. Foster carers must be aware that whilst they are responsible for the care of other people's children, they must take account of their own alcohol consumption.

Transport

Providing transport for children in care is an integral part of the role of foster carers. If approved, applicants will be required to transport children to school, medical appointments, family time and other meetings as required. They will need to have access to a car that is properly taxed, insured, maintained and equipped at all times to meet the requirements of the role. Where a carer does not drive they will need to evidence that they can transport children as required.

Applications Will Not Be Accepted from People Who

- Are in a household with a transient resident population, for example a guest house or one taking students or renting rooms
- Wish to continue to be approved to foster for another Local Authority or independent agency
- Privately foster

Relative & Friend/Connected Persons Applicants

Relative/friend carers will be required to meet the same rigorous standards as mainstream applicants although there is some discretion within the assessment for these carers where it is in the best interests of the child for whom they wish to care for to live with them.

Relatives and friends will be treated with respect, along with an acknowledgement of the difficulties which has led to the child becoming looked after. The child's social worker will complete a short viability assessment of the prospective carers to ensure that there is a

degree of confidence in the arrangement that is being offered. A full fostering assessment will then be completed jointly by a fostering social worker and the child's social worker prior to the child living with the carers. In an emergency, where it is necessary for the child to live with the family or friend immediately, a temporary assessment will be undertaken by the child's social worker and temporary approval will be agreed by the Nominated Officer. Full approval must be given by the Fostering Panel and the Decision Maker no more than 16 weeks after the child starts to live with the carers unless there are exceptional circumstances when an 8-week extension can be made. If the carers are not approved in this time, then the child must move to an alternative carer.

Relative and friend carers may undertake the training that is offered to all foster carers. This includes the Skills to Foster training along with the mandatory training. Where this is completed, the full fostering payment (i.e. maintenance and reward) will be made. If training is not undertaken, then only the maintenance payment in accordance with the age of the child will be made.

Recruitment of Connected Person Carers Outside Kent

The Fostering Service will undertake to recruit, assess and supervise foster carers from other parts of the country where it is clearly in the child's best interest to be placed with relatives or friends and away from their home community.

Social Services Employees who Foster

When considering an application to foster, the worker needs to consider the Corporate Conflict of Interest Policy and discuss it with their line manager.

- It can be considered for a Children and Families Social Worker to be assessed as a foster carer for the geographical area in which they live. Fostering Social Workers and Fostering Social Worker Assistants will not be assessed as a foster carer for the authority in which they are employed.
- During the assessment process, the assessing social worker will pay particular attention to any conflict of interest between work and fostering. He/she should seek the views of the applicant's line manager to ensure that areas of potential conflict have been fully discussed. Areas could include access to information, demands of their job, or conflict for the person as either a worker or foster carer if allegations are made against them.
- The type of child, age and number of children are considered during assessments, but special attention needs to be given to this to ensure that work and fostering are compatible.

Assessment and Preparation of Prospective Foster Carers

The process of approving a foster carer should usually take no more than eight months in accordance with the National Minimum Standards. It is the Service target to aim to reduce this to six months wherever possible. The process is divided into two stages as per the Fostering Services Regulation 2013.

Initial Visit

Once an application has been accepted a fostering social worker will undertake an initial home visit within 10 working days. This visit will take place at the home of the prospective applicant/s. The assessment process and the criteria for approval will be clearly explained to applicants at the initial visit

Stage 1 of the Assessment

DBS Check

These will be instigated following the initial visit. Formal checks in the form of Enhanced Disclosures from the Disclosure and Barring Service must be undertaken for all applicants and members of their household aged 16 and over.

Previous offending behaviour will be scrutinised and applications are unlikely to be progressed if any member of the household has been cautioned for, or convicted of:

- Offences against children
- Driving disqualification within the last 5 years
- Any offence involving harm to another in the last 10 years

Other Checks

Checks will also be undertaken within KCC's own information systems (including the LADO) and those of other Local Authorities where the prospective carer has lived in the previous 10 years. If any of the applicant's own children or any other child they have cared for have ever been subject to a Child Protection Plan, legal proceedings or compulsorily removed from their care this will preclude the application from proceeding.

All applicants will be required to provide the following information:

- Proof of identity including a recent photograph e.g., driving licence, passport or birth certificate;
- A full employment history, together with a satisfactory written explanation of any gaps in employment;
- Where a person has previously worked in a position whose duties involved work with children, so far as reasonably practicable, verification of the reason why the position ended; a formal reference will also be taken;
- A letter from landlord confirming; a) that the applicant has sought and gained permission to undertake fostering, where permission is required by the terms of any lease or tenancy agreement and b) that the applicant is not in arrears with their rent payments and that they are not in breach of the terms of their lease or tenancy;
- For applicants who own their property a mortgage statement confirming regular payments and that there are no arrears will need to be provided;
- Documentary evidence of any relevant qualification;
- A social media check will be undertaken to include Facebook and other social media sites.

References

In addition to the statutory references a minimum of four personal references will be taken up for fostering applications, however if further information is required then additional references can be requested. References will be obtained from all adult children parented, step parented or cared for by the applicant/s and from all significant ex partners. A minimum of three of the personal referees will be interviewed by the Fostering Social Worker as well as adult children and ex partners unless this is agreed as not being appropriate in discussion with the Assessment Team Manager.

Assessment Process

All eligible applicants will be assessed to determine whether they are suitable to become a Kent foster carer. Each application will be considered on its merits with the welfare of children being paramount.

Interviews will normally be carried out in the applicant's home, following a standard assessment format, to determine their suitability to offer care. The assessment process should be completed within eight months from application however the service aims to complete within six months.

Kent Fostering Service will need to satisfy itself that applicants have good mental and physical health and vigour. Factors to be considered include:

- Motivation
- Mental, physical and emotional well being
- Lifestyle
- Understanding of the fostering task
- Understanding of the needs of looked after children.
- Ability to manage and care for a child who may have emotional, health, developmental, behavioural and or educational needs.
- Ability to work with child's birth family.
- Ability to meet the ethnic, cultural, religious, health and educational needs of the child.
- Suitability of accommodation.
- Ability to balance the needs and lifestyles of the people in the household
- Provide a healthy and safe place to live
- Understand and respect confidentiality and privacy
- Keep clear and accurate records
- Commitment to professional development to include ongoing training and attendance at support groups
- Access and ability to use basic computer communication systems

Preparation of Applicants

All applicants, other than those recruited for specific children as relatives or friends of the child, must attend the Skills to Foster training prior to presentation to the Fostering Panel. The primary focus of this course will be the fostering task in relation to the needs of children who have experienced trauma and loss requiring a home. Feedback, including from young adults who are care experienced and participate in some of the preparatory training will be included in the assessment report to panel.

Approval Process

The Fostering Panel will hear all applications presented and will make a recommendation. The recommendation is considered by the Agency Decision Maker who will make the final decision. The function of Kent Fostering Panels is determined by the Kent Fostering Panels Terms of Reference. Applicants are required to attend the Panel.

Review of Panel Decisions

Applicants will be informed verbally and in writing if they have been approved as foster carers, together with their terms of approval once they have been presented to the panel and decision maker. If the decision is not to approve, the applicant/s will be informed verbally and in writing and will be given 28 days to make written representations asking that the decision be reviewed.

The applicant can request a review of the decision by either the fostering panel or the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). The applicant can only apply once for one of these options. A final decision will then be made by the Agency Decision Maker.

Where applicants have asked in writing for a review of the decision, they may attend panel to present their written representations in person. Where applicants attend panel they may bring a friend or colleague to provide support, however due regard to third party information and confidentiality will always be paramount and panel chairs will have discretion with regard to a supporter being present for all of the panel. Applicants may not bring legal representation to panel under any circumstances.

Foster Carer Agreement (Terms and Conditions)

Following approval an agreement between Kent Children's Social Services and the foster carers will be drawn up in accordance with standard procedures. The agreement sets out the terms and conditions for Kent foster carers, the Fostering Service and Kent Children's Social Services. Fostering social workers will ensure that newly approved foster carers understand fully the expectations of them under the terms and conditions of the agreement.

Management and Development of Foster Carers

Following approval the area fostering support teams have responsibility to manage, supervise, support, develop, monitor and review its carers.

Foster carers have the most important role to play within the Fostering Service and are critical to KCC efforts to achieve positive outcomes for children in care.

KCC actively seeks to recognise the very important contribution made by foster carers through provision of supervision, training and formal recognition. These include:

- Regular contact with the fostering teams
- Mentor for new foster carers
- Local support groups
- Mandatory and optional training opportunities, with funding provided for childcare where necessary

- Local Area Advisory Groups
- County Fostering Advisory Group.
- Ambassadors Group

Supervision and Monitoring

The Kent Fostering Service is responsible for ensuring the quality of care provided to children and young people who are looked after and foster carers will receive regular supervision by a named member of staff in the fostering support team. New carers will be allocated a “mentor” (experienced carer) and provided with details of support groups and KFCA (Kent Foster Care Association). Foster carers can expect to have formal supervision with their Fostering Social worker on a 4 - 6 weekly basis. Additional supervision will be discussed as felt necessary. The primary responsibility of the fostering team in supervising foster carers is to ensure the welfare of the child.

Fostering social workers will also carry out as a minimum one unannounced visit a year as part of their monitoring and quality assurance function and use this opportunity to check the fostering home.

Holiday Entitlement

Kent Foster Carers are entitled to 14 nights (16 days if Skilled or Advanced Level) holiday allowance per year (1st April – 31st March) for each child in placement (pro rata if the child is in placement for part of the year). They are supported in taking this 14 (or 16) night break (either in one period or several shorter periods) using either an assessed and agreed Relief Carer (a relief care arrangement) or another Kent County Council approved Foster Carer (carer to carer respite) and receive the reward payment for this.

Review of Approval

Foster carers' approval is reviewed on an annual basis, or more frequently where required. Continued approval of foster carers is not automatic and where issues of concern have arisen the decision regarding whether approval continues may be referred to the Fostering Panel. For all new foster carers, the first annual review will be presented to the Fostering Panel.

Foster carers will receive unannounced visits from the social worker for any looked after child living with them as well as unannounced visits from the Fostering Service.

DBS checks will be renewed every three years (or earlier if required). Other checks may be carried out at the point of review if necessary, including medical updates.

Fostering Review Team

Independent senior practitioners will chair foster carer reviews, co-ordinate the completion of the report and ensure feedback is obtained from children, young people and other relevant professionals.

Carer Support Groups

Monthly support groups are held within the local area and facilitated by the fostering support team. There is an expectation that all carers will attend a minimum of eight support groups each year.

Foster carers are encouraged to develop networks of support including with the Kent Foster Care Association (KFCA).

Equipment

In exceptional circumstances and based on the child's individual needs, the Fostering Service may facilitate reimbursement of costs for essential nursery equipment. The Fostering Service will also facilitate provision of any specialist equipment required to accommodate the needs of disabled children.

Participation and Activity Days for Children and Young People

Foster carers will be expected to support the children / young people in their care, to attend a minimum of three participation activity days per year, organised through VSK (Virtual School Kent), OYPC (Our Young People's Council) or KFCA (Kent Foster Care Association).

Training

Kent Fostering provides a training pathway for all foster carers which includes qualification based training and specialist programs to support them in their role. All foster carers will be required to complete the evidenced based Training Support and Development Standards workbook within the first year of approval (first 18 months for connected persons). Training is delivered both in person and virtually.

A foster carer's training needs will be identified as part of their Personal Development Plan and is intended to develop their skills and knowledge to ensure they can meet their obligations under the Foster Carer Agreement. Failure to attend training that has been identified as appropriate could place continued registration as a foster carer at risk.

Kent foster carers will be presented with certificates for the training courses they attend and the Fostering Service will maintain a training record for each carer.

Foster carers will be consulted and involved in the design of training.

Managing Complaints, Standards of Care Concerns and Allegations Against Foster Carers

Foster carers are required to meet high standards of care. They are not permitted to use any kind of physical punishment and KCC expects high standards of behaviour from them at all times, regardless of the difficulties presented by some of the children they look after.

Children in care in any form of substitute care are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation and have the same right to protection from abuse as all other children.

However, it is not always clear at the start whether allegations made against carers are a child protection matter, standard of care concern or complaint. Complaints, Standards of Care and allegations will be dealt with following the [Allegations, Standards of Care and Complaints Against Foster Carers Procedures](#).

Support Arrangements for Carers Subject to Complaint, Standards of Care or Allegations

It is recognised that being the subject of a complaint, standards of care concern or allegation can be an extremely stressful experience for foster carers. The impact on foster carers and their families will vary in relation to the nature of the allegation, standard of care or complaint, potential consequences, previous experiences and the extent of additional stress placed on them.

KCC has commissioned Foster Talk to provide telephone support 24/7, offering practical and legal advice. The Fostering Service will also allocate a trained foster carer to provide peer support. Peer supporters will be experienced foster carers who have been specifically trained in allegations, standards of care and complaints. Each area support team will hold a list of peer support carers in their local area.

Managing Whistle Blowing and Complaints by Foster Carers

KCC has a 'whistle blowing policy' in relation to staff practice. The principles of the policy should be followed in relation to confidential disclosures made by foster carers and are summarised as follows:

Should a foster carer become concerned about poor practice and feel that it is not appropriate to discuss the concerns with the person in question, in the first instance, he/she should:

- With regard to significant concerns about another foster carer, speak to his/her own supervising social worker who will follow up accordingly. This should happen immediately, as in some situations prompt action may be needed.
- With regard to significant concerns about a member of staff, contact the staff member's immediate line manager directly.

Examples of significantly poor practice that could prompt a confidential disclosure include:

- Neglect or emotional, physical, or sexual maltreatment of a child
- Providing a poor standard of care to a child
- Conduct which may be an offence or breach of law
- Health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as other employees
- Discrimination of any kind.

Every effort will be made to protect the confidentiality of any carer who raises a concern and does not want their name to be disclosed. It must be appreciated that the investigation process may reveal the source of the information and a statement by the individual may be required as part of the evidence for any formal proceedings.

Concerns expressed by foster carers should be recorded in writing. The extent and nature of investigation will depend on the circumstances of the specific concern; however, foster carers can expect to receive feedback regarding an investigation and outcome.

Foster carers are also able to make a formal complaint about any aspect of the services provided by Kent Children's Social Services. Further detail regarding how to make a formal complaint is included in the Foster Carers Handbook.

Termination of Approval of Foster Carers

On rare occasions KCC may also wish to terminate a foster carer's approval. Grounds for termination of approval include:

- Consistently poor care of a child, or a pattern of poor care affecting a number of children
- Conviction for any offence which indicates that a child could be at risk in the individual's care
- Evidence that a foster carer has neglected or emotionally, physically, or sexually abused a child
- Consistent and significant failure to comply with Kent County Council policies and procedures, including attendance at required training
- Financial misconduct in relation to any fostering payments made or financial support provided for a child's benefit
- Serious physical or psychological ill-health of a carer that prevents him/her being able to care for a child appropriately

Where there is an allegation against a carer which is unfounded or unsubstantiated the local authority reserve the right to consider the implications for children and young people, should the carer continue to foster.

Section 3

Referral, Placement and Support of Looked After Children

Safeguarding

Children's safety and welfare will be promoted and they will be protected from abuse and neglect and learn appropriate boundaries in relationships with others. The aim is for the child to develop a sense of belonging and feel secure. Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family, which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.

The fostering service will work in partnership with other agencies concerned with safeguarding including health and education to promote the welfare of children.

Children will be helped to understand how to keep themselves safe including when outside of the household or when using the internet or social media.

Prospective foster carers will have a health and safety assessment of their home and will be expected to address any deficiencies before a child lives with them.

Foster carers will be trained in safe care practice and a specific safe care plan will be drawn up for each child living in their care. This will include consideration of how other members of the family and household can contribute to safe care.

KCC Procedures for Allegations and Complaints against Foster Carers will be followed where there are any concerns.

Valuing Diversity

KCC will recruit and assess carers who will be able to meet the diverse needs of children in Kent.

Each child/young person will have access to a Fostering Service that recognises and addresses their needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality. Placement Plans and decisions will consider the child's assessed health, racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic needs and match these as closely as possible with the ethnic origin, race, religion culture and language of the foster family.

If a child has to move to a foster carers home in an emergency and no suitable match is available, steps should be taken to achieve a better match within six weeks if it is considered to be in the child's best interest to do so.

Where a child / young person from a transracial or trans community moves into a foster home, KCC will provide the foster carer with additional support and information to enable the child to be provided with the best possible care and develop a positive understanding of their heritage. Additional training may be offered to foster carers to enable them to meet the child's needs.

Disabled Children

When families are recruited and matched with disabled children careful consideration will be given to the child's culture and specialist advice will be taken during the assessment, preparation and placement planning process. This may include access to interpreters, specialist equipment, and assistance with transport. An occupational therapist will complete an assessment of accommodation for all new applicants, looking to care for disabled children.

Preparing for a Child / Young Person

The Permanency Procedures and guidance should be followed for all children irrespective of the planned length of time living with a foster family and a permanency planning meeting should ideally happen prior to entry into care or if this cannot be achieved within five working days of the child moving into the carers home. The child's social worker and the fostering social worker will ensure that the child is helped to understand what to expect from living in the foster home and is given the appropriate children's guides. When English is not the child's first language or there is learning, hearing or communication impairments, assistance will be provided to ensure that counselling and preparation is appropriately given.

Information about the foster carer and their household will be given to the child before they begin living with a foster family and they should be enabled to visit the foster home in advance if at all possible. In an emergency, at a minimum, the foster carer's profile will be emailed by the Fostering Support Team to the child's social worker so this can be discussed with the child before they arrive.

Children will be encouraged to bring favourite possessions with them.

Foster carers will be able to explain household rules and expectations to the child, including access to household facilities.

Gathering of memorabilia for the child will begin at the point that the child starts living in their foster home. When a child is leaving a foster home, they will be helped to understand why and supported in the move to their new foster carers, independent living accommodation or birth family home. Foster carers will be supported to maintain links with children in line with their care plan.

Information Provided to Foster Carers

Placement referral information, matching and risk assessment details should be given to carers at the point a child starts to live with them. A placement arrangement meeting including permissions for delegated authority should ideally be completed prior to a child moving into their care but must be completed within 5 working days.

Promoting Positive Behaviour

Foster carers will receive training to enable them to understand the feelings and behaviours of children in care and are expected to follow the [Promoting Positive Behaviour policy and procedures](#). Training in safe methods of restraint will be available to carers who care for children with complex needs. In accordance with the policy, carers should not use restraint without training (other than when necessary to safeguard the child or others from physical harm and only in exceptional circumstances). Foster carers are expected to promote and model positive behaviour.

Children who are in foster care will be encouraged to make friends, participate in sports and outdoor activities, stay overnight with friends and explore the world appropriately without excessive constraints.

The Wishes, Views and Feelings of Children

Children's wishes, views and feelings will be considered with regard to their age and understanding unless this is contrary to their interests. Where it is not possible to act upon their wishes, they will have clear explanation and support.

The wishes and feelings of disabled children and young people with special educational needs or complex needs will be fully recognised and considered when decisions are made about them. The wishes of pre-verbal or non-verbal children will be established carefully by their social worker, based on their behaviour and other means of communication. Children and young people where English is not their first language or who have disabilities that may impact on their communication, will be provided with interpreters, signers or other support as needed. Foster carers must be supported to communicate with the child or young person.

Information for children should be translated into a medium that they can understand.

The child's social worker will assist the child to complete their feedback on the care, support and living arrangements provided by their foster carer for the foster carer's annual review and when they move out of the foster carers home.

Children will be supported and enabled to contact their Independent Reviewing Officer on request and will be given information on how to access the independent complaints service.

Health

Children will have prompt access to doctors and other health professionals, including mental health and specialist services when they are needed. The child's health will be promoted in accordance with their placement plan, health assessments and health plan. Foster carers are required to attend health appointments with the child and to notify the child's social worker if for any reason an appointment has to be cancelled. An Initial Health Assessment (IHA) must be requested by the children's social worker within five days of a child moving in with their foster carer and completed within 28 days. Foster carers must support and facilitate the IHA.

Foster carers are required to complete the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire's on an annual basis and return to Virtual School Kent. All children must be registered with a GP, a dentist and with an optician if necessary. Foster carers will have access to training on the administration and recording of medication.

Foster carers should have written permission from someone with parental responsibility to administer first aid and non-prescription medication and will be clear through the placement plan about what decisions are delegated to them and when consent for medical treatment needs to be obtained. Foster carers will also receive training on administration of medication, health promotion and first aid.

Children will be supported to make informed decisions about their own health and a healthy lifestyle. The wishes and feelings of children will be sought and considered in their health care, according to their understanding.

Leisure

Carers must create a stimulating environment to develop the emotional, intellectual, social, creative and physical skills of children. Children will be supported to take part in school based and out of school activities including individual interests and hobbies, this will include trips. Children will be supported by their foster carer to attend as a minimum three participation events per year.

Savings and Pocket Money

All foster carers will follow the [policy for savings and pocket money](#) for children in their care.

Promoting Educational Attainment

Children will be supported to attend school and in their learning during and beyond the school day. Carers must attend parents' meetings and advocate for the child with schools, colleges and other educational establishments.

Family Time Arrangements

Whilst a child/young person is living with a foster carer, family time will be promoted with parents, relatives (especially siblings) and friends of the child unless this is not in the child's interests. Family time will be set out in the placement and care plan. The wishes

and feelings of the child will be taken into consideration.

[Kent's Family Time Policy and Procedures](#) set out the considerations and requirements regarding family time and should be used to inform such plans.

Recruitment and assessment of foster carers will consider their ability to manage the level of family time a child needs. A foster carer will be prepared to understand the effects of unauthorised family time, including through online social networks and offered support in case this happens.

Family time should be facilitated within a foster carers home unless in exceptional circumstances where a risk assessment and a family time agreement will be completed with the foster carer and birth family by the child's social worker and fostering social worker.

Siblings

Social workers will complete a sibling assessment prior to requesting a home with foster carers. In matching siblings with foster carers the permanency planning must be taken into account. If the care plan is to place siblings together, where this is not possible, foster carers will be identified that can actively promote direct face to face family time for the siblings.

Moving Out of a Fostering Home

Children will not be moved if the carer is willing to continue caring for the child unless it is decided through the child's care planning process, considered at a Child in Care review and takes the child's current wishes and feelings into account.

Placement Stability

Where it is identified that there may be a potential unplanned move from a fostering home or vulnerability, the fostering social worker will arrange a Placement Stability Meeting, chaired by the Fostering Team Manager and including the foster carers and child's social worker at a minimum.

Unplanned Moves

The child and carer's family will be supported in order to avoid an unplanned move from a fostering home, (i.e. where the child has to be removed from the current foster carers home). If, despite all efforts and following the Placement Stability Meeting, the move is to take place, the Service will provide support to facilitate the transition for both child/ren and the fostering family. The overriding consideration is the welfare of the child and help will be offered to ensure that the child moves in a planned way. The Disruption Procedures should be followed. It is expected that carers will give 28 days' notice that they are no longer able to care for the child (three months' notice for permanent fostering placements).

Children's social workers are asked to provide written feedback to the Fostering Service at the point a child moves out of the foster carers home and to inform a foster carers annual review.

Permanency

Kent County Council's permanent fostering processes provide a formal structure for decision making regarding foster care which are intended to provide the child/young person with stability to adulthood. While not offering the level of legal security that an adoption, Special Guardianship or Child Arrangements Order can provide, use of the formal process is intended to quality assure, safeguard and support the care provided to the child/young person.

Foster carers will be recruited to offer permanency for children and young people up until the age of 18 years or longer under a Staying Put arrangement. Children will be matched where possible to foster carers at the point of entry into care who can offer permanency through fostering should that become the agreed permanency care plan. Permanency planning meetings should commence pre-entry into care.

It is important for social workers to remember that the primary purpose of fostering is to care for children on a short-term basis to support a rehabilitation plan or other permanence plan. However, in some circumstances where returning to the birth family is not an option, it may become clear that it is in the best interests of a child to remain in a foster home where they have been successfully settled for some time. In these circumstances it may be appropriate for foster carers to provide permanency to children through applying to the Court for a Child Arrangement Order or Special Guardianship Order, or adoption. [Kent's Staying Together Policy](#) which supports permanence for older children and those with complex or diverse needs should be considered.

Procedure for Providing a Child with a Foster Home

All new requests for a placement for a child in care within Kent are made via the Total Placement Service (TPS) through Liberi. The team provides access to in house foster carers and both independent fostering and residential providers.

Once the referral is accepted a search will be undertaken to ascertain whether an in-house fostering placement is available that appears to be appropriate to meet the child's needs. If a potential placement is available or if there is a possibility of a placement by the required date, the social worker will be advised accordingly. Once the proposed placement has been accepted by the social worker, liaison regarding placement details, placement meetings etc. will take place between the fostering social worker, child's social worker and foster carer(s). Any move of a child(ren) to a new home will be undertaken by their social worker or a social worker within the children's team.

Where there is a child already in the proposed foster home, contact needs to be made with the social worker for that child to establish their views on the request for an additional child to live in the foster home.

Matching Carer and Child

An important part of the referral process will be the successful matching of carers and child. A good match will depend upon the quality of the information available to share with the potential carer. No information relating to the child or family should be withheld from the fostering team or foster carers. Where there are concerns about information sharing this needs to be reviewed with the Fostering Service in the context of a risk assessment in relation to the foster carer, their family and family networks. In the rare circumstances of withholding information, the decision to do this must be agreed by the

Service Manager and recorded on the child's file. The assessment of the child should be complete and up to date.

Matching will be recorded within the Placement Plan identifying any additional support to be provided to the foster carers to meet the needs of the child. The placement matching will highlight the strengths and vulnerabilities in the match and how these will be managed within the fostering home. The referral and matching form should inform the individual Safe Care Plan for the child/young person, the Placement Planning Meeting and Child in Care Reviews.

Planned Moves to a Fostering Home

The child's social worker will provide detailed information on the child(ren) and conditions of the placement required. They will be responsible for ensuring that wherever practical, each child will be consulted about the placement options available and, if possible, have a profile and or introductory visit to the carer, prior to moving in with the foster family.

Moving to a Fostering Home in an Emergency (Emergency Bed Scheme)

In an emergency and at short notice, and if satisfied that the fostering home will safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, the Fostering Service will arrange for a child to live with a foster carer for a period that can cover up to ten working days (as part of the Emergency Bed Scheme.) During this time the social worker will complete their sections of the Placement Information Referral and placement planning arrangements to ensure that the carer has sufficient information to enable them to care for the child.

Placement Planning Meeting

This is a crucial statutory meeting of all involved parties to ensure that essential information is exchanged and plans for the day-to-day care of the child are in place. It is a requirement of the Care Planning and Fostering Regulations (2015) that this meeting takes place before the child begins to live with a foster family or within five working days of moving in. As the Placement Arrangements Meeting is the forum for sharing information and negotiating care and family time arrangements, children can suffer because of delays. The fostering social worker will take the lead in coordinating and chairing the meeting and the carers will be in attendance, with the children's social worker ensuring that the child (if appropriate) attends all or some of the meeting, along with their parent/s so delegated authority can be discussed and agreed.

Financial Arrangements

Foster carers receive a maintenance payment for each child they care for; this should be spent on the day-to-day care of the child which includes contribution to household bills, leisure activities, transport, clothing and pocket money. There is an element built into the maintenance to cover birthdays, Christmas/religious holidays and festivals as well as annual holidays.

For carers who are eligible for the professional fee this will be paid according to the age of the child.

Travel claims should be submitted no later than three months following the date of the claim but must be made within the relevant financial year.

In exceptional circumstances a carer can receive an advanced payment of up to £100 at the point a child starts to live with them e.g. a child who has no belongings due to a move in an emergency situation.

Where a child meets the criteria, a solo or complex payment may be considered. This must be reviewed regularly and at a minimum of twice a year.

Payments to carers are set up by the Total Placement Service and are paid weekly. The Accounts Payable Team (03000 412666) should be advised immediately of any over payments and once identified the carer/s must make arrangements to pay this back. It is a carers responsibility to check remittance slips regularly to ensure they are receiving the correct payments. Where there are underpayments these should be reported immediately to the fostering social worker in order that this is rectified quickly.

Progression through the Payment for Skills Scheme is available to eligible carers which is identified through their annual review and considered and approved at the Payment for Skills Panel. Alternatively, this can be approved by the Fostering Panel and Agency Decision Maker when first approved and transferring with fostering experience from another agency.

Supporting a Child Living in Foster Care

The child's social worker or authorised representative is required by regulation to visit the child in the foster home:

- As circumstances may require
- When reasonably requested by the child or foster carers
- Within one week of moving in with foster carer(s)
- In the first year of moving in with foster carer(s) at intervals of not less than six weeks
- When a home has been formally agreed as permanent, visits from the second year onwards can be at intervals of not less than every three months
- Where a child lives with a temporarily approved relative or friend, visits must be weekly until the first review, and then at intervals of no more than 4 weeks until the carer is fully approved as a foster carer.

Where living arrangements have been made immediately or as an emergency (Placement Planning Meeting did not take place prior to a move to a foster family) the social worker is required to visit the child at least once every week.

On each visit the social worker is required to see the child alone (unless the child is of sufficient maturity and refuses). Even then they should be encouraged to meet with their social worker and to prepare a written report.

The child's social worker should also promote a positive working relationship with the foster carers.

Monitoring of the Service

Fostering standards are monitored through:

- Foster carer supervision
- Unannounced visits

- Foster carer annual reviews
- Fostering Panels
- Allegations and complaints/compliments
- Feedback forms for children
- Feedback forms from social workers
- Feedback from foster carers
- Ofsted
- County Foster Carer Advisory Board
- Local advisory groups
- Partnership working with Kent Foster Carers Association
- Quality Assurance and Auditing
- Management Oversight and Staff Supervision

Kent Fostering Service

October 2023

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for Corporate
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