

Early Help and Children's Social Care

Fostering Service Statement of Purpose

be the change
for children and young people in croydon

April 2020-March 2021 Version1



Delivering for Croydon

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Introduction

The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 Part 2 state that a fostering service must compile a written statement of purpose which sets out the aims and objectives of the service as a whole, and the services, and facilities which are provided.

This Statement of Purpose sets out the aims and objectives of Croydon Council Fostering Service. This document is made available, upon request, to foster carers and prospective foster carers, any child placed by the service, the parent of any child looked after and staff. It is also available on Croydon Council website.

The Statement of Purpose sets a framework for all of the business of the fostering service. It must be consistent with relevant legislation, Regulations, National Minimum Standards (NMS) and statutory guidance. The manager of the fostering service must ensure that the service is at all times conducted in a manner consistent with the Statement of Purpose. This document will be reviewed at least once annually. Any amendments due to changes in legislation or guidance will be incorporated into a new statement of purpose.

The Statement of Purpose makes reference to the Croydon Foster Carer Charter. Croydon Foster Carer Charter has been jointly produced by Croydon Foster Carers and London Borough of Croydon Fostering Service. It is a shared agreement setting out the mutual expectations and responsibilities of both Foster Carers and Croydon Council. The charter confirms The Corporate Parenting commitment to provide the best care for the children we look after. The Charter is a statement of Croydon's commitment to ensuring that, unless the child's needs require otherwise, the children in our care will be looked after in a family environment which is safe and nurturing and which supports them to achieve their full potential as individuals. The Charter is our recognition of the crucial daily role that foster carers have in the lives of the children they have welcomed into their homes and families.

The Statement is informed by:

- **Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Volume 4: Fostering Services**
- **Care Planning Regulations**
- **Fostering Services [England] Regulations 2011.**
- **The Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011**

1.1 Values, Aims and Objectives

1.1. Croydon Council Fostering Service is committed to providing quality safe care for every looked after child who lives with a Croydon foster carer

Values - Children:

- In line with the values and priorities set by the Council, the fostering service aims to work in partnership with children in care, parents, foster carers and colleagues across the Council, and with other agencies to ensure that children in care have the same opportunities as all children within the borough.
- This is achieved by offering placement choice so that children are matched to a carer who can meet their needs and enable children and young people to have positive experiences to support them to be safe, healthy and develop social relationships.
- The Fostering Service is committed to reducing the number of children placed with independent fostering agencies and continues to invest resources to increase the number and quality of Croydon fostering households. The service works closely with children's services within social care, feedback from children, young people and foster carers to meet the needs of children, to continuously improve and develop the service.
- The service is committed to recruiting, maintaining, supporting and training foster carers from wide range of diverse backgrounds. The diverse needs of Croydon's children and young people, in terms of sexuality, ethnicity and disability require the service to address these issues with foster carers during the assessment process, who are then supported to meet the individual needs of any child in the care.

The Aims of the Croydon Fostering Service are:

- To ensure that the right home is found for the child at the right time and without delay, with clear action plans agreed to ensure the placement meets the child's assessed needs and Croydon foster carers are able to care for and support children to meet all their outcomes
- To have a robust, transparent and efficient process to recruit foster carers.
- To recruit, assess, and approve more foster carers, within the nationally prescribed time-scales, who can meet the needs of every child referred to the fostering service
- To ensure that a good match is achieved in for children and that any gaps are supported by a robust plan to address these
- To provide children, young people fostered, and foster carers with handbooks which are a guide to foster care.
- To provide a comprehensive fostering support and supervision service to foster carers to enable a child to remain with a foster family and to ensure that the child reaches their full potential.

- To provide opportunities for foster carers to increase their skills and knowledge in fostering through the provision of training and development.

1.2 Named Person:

Registered Person: Robert Henderson, Executive Director, Children, Families and Education Department.

The **Registered Manager** is temporarily covered by Rodica Cobarzan, Service Manager, and Fostering Service.

The **Fostering Agency Decision Maker (ADM)** Vanessa Strang, Head of Service Social Work for Children looked after and care leavers.

1.4 Organisation and Structure

The Fostering Service is part of Croydon's Children, Families & Education Department. The Head of Service for social work with children looked after is responsible for the Fostering Service.

The Fostering Service and social workers are responsible for the support, supervision and development of approved foster carers.

The current structure of the Fostering Service is designed to meet the requirements of the Fostering Services' National Minimum Standards and the Children Act 1989 and associated regulations and guidance relating to the delivery of Fostering Services.

The Fostering Service is led by the Fostering Service Manager with three social work teams who provide a support, supervision and development service to Croydon's approved foster carers.

Foster Care recruitment is currently provided through a contract partnership arrangements with Coram I until November 2020, when this will be returned to the local authority fostering service.

Relevant qualifications and experiences of staff.

All Social Work Managers and Social Workers hold social work qualifications and are registered with the HCPC and have relevant experiences working with children and families.

1.5 Services provided

The fostering teams provide a range of fostering services:

- **Task focused or short term foster carers** who provide placements for children and young people at the point of need and in accordance with their Care Plan, either to return to birth family or to move to a permanent placement.

- **Permanent or long-term foster carers** who make a commitment to care for a child or young person until they reach independence.
- **Connected persons carers, often known as family and friend's carers** are foster carers approved to look after a specific child or children. These carers are family members or friends usually with a pre-existing relationship with child or children before they became looked after by Croydon.
- **Regulation 24 foster carers, are family and friends foster carers who are temporarily approved to look after a child know to them**
- **Foster to Adopt foster carers** are approved adopters, temporarily approved as foster carers for a named child, where the intention and Local Authority care plan is that the child will be adopted by this family.
- **Parent and Child Foster Carers**

1.6 The Fostering Task

The task of securing high quality foster care includes:

- advertising for and recruiting prospective foster carers;
- Quality assuring the assessment of prospective carers under Regulation 26 (The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011) for approval by the Fostering Panel or, in the case of family and friends carers or connected persons conducting planned assessments for temporary approvals in accordance with Regulation 24 (The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010) assessments;
- Consultation with other professionals, foster carers and families around making appropriate placements for children and 'matching' children with carers who can meet their needs;
- Family-finding for children needing permanent placements,
- Support and supervision of foster carers in their work with children, children's families, departmental social workers and other professionals;
- Attendance at various professional meetings to ensure that foster carers are actively supported in carrying out a child's individual care plan;
- Completion of annual reviews on foster carers;
- Delivering a programme of on-going learning and development opportunities and training for foster carers;

- Support & training in completing the Children Workforce Development Council standards for foster carers (TSD);
- Contributing to investigations into complaints and allegations made against carers and supporting them through the process;
- Providing daily Fostering Duty Service from 9am-5pm, Mon-Fri;
- An out of hours support service for Foster Carers requiring advice about a child in their care during evenings and at weekends;
- Working in partnership with the Croydon Foster Carers Association.

Procedures and processes for recruiting, approving and reviewing Foster Carers

From 1st November 2018, the Local Authority commissioned Coram BAAF on a two year contract to undertake the recruitment and assessment of foster carers. Coram are responsible for the complete process from marketing to approval, with a clear handover procedure in place to ensure that newly approved foster carers experience a seamless transition from the assessment service to the supervision and support service they will receive from Croydon's fostering service. Supervising social workers are allocated and meet applicants before panel. The contract aim is to achieve the approval of 30 new fostering households per annum.

The priority of the year was to develop a robust recruitment and assessment framework for Croydon foster carers. The second year is to support the service to build an in-house fostering recruitment service which will be transferred to the Council at the end of the second year.

1.7 Recruitment of foster carers

There is a clear two staged approach, known as Stage One and Stage Two. This is followed to support applicants to find out more about fostering and to assess their suitability to care for looked after children and become registered foster carers. To ensure a smooth and timely approach. Croydon fostering service, through the commissioned Coram service have agreed that Stage One and Two will run simultaneously.

Stage One

Includes undertaking a range of statutory and reference checks and offering preparation training

Stage Two

Involves the in-depth assessment, also known as the Home Study.

Interested applicants can find out about fostering by telephone, completion of an on line application form, visit Bernard Wetherill House or attend one of the frequently held information sessions held at the Town Hall.

Details of this process are described in the Croydon Information Pack for Foster Carer Applicants which is available online on the Croydon Website, www.croydon.gov.uk/fostering. The Croydon Fostering Service also has a dedicated free phone number (**0800 112 3644**) and an email address: iwanttofooster@croydon.gov.uk.

The aim is to provide applicants ongoing support, advice and information at each stage of the preparation process, whilst also assessing in a transparent way their suitability to become registered foster carers and provide safe and quality care to Croydon's looked after children and young people.

1.7.1 Information Meeting

All enquirers are invited to attend an information meeting run by Fostering Social Workers and current foster carers who can discuss their fostering experiences. This is not required although applicants are encouraged to attend these valuable sessions.

The purpose of these sessions is to provide people with basic information about fostering, explain what Croydon Council is looking for and outline the preparation and assessment process. At the meeting, details of attendees are recorded and feedback is sought to support continued development of the service and to help evaluate the effectiveness of recruitment methods.

1.7.2 Initial Telephone Assessment

This is completed by one of the assessment social workers to gather more details from applicants, establish their current circumstances and to provide them with more information about fostering for Croydon.

When there is the potential to progress further, an assessing social worker will undertake an initial home visit to gather more information about the applicant and to provide them with further details. If this is possible or the service and the applicants, they are invited to submit their application which triggers the start of Stage One.

1.7.3 Skills to Foster Group Training

The main purpose of the training is to provide more details about the role and tasks of fostering. Direct information is provided by way of presentations, films, there are small and large group discussions and exercises, and applicants are encouraged to participate fully in the discussions through case studies.

An important secondary purpose is evaluation and applicants are informed at the beginning that the facilitators' observations will form part of the assessment process. Applicants may also be counselled out at this stage as the groups will encourage

them to explore their own motivation, strengths, and abilities to foster, helping them to decide whether fostering is right for them.

The training and groups are co-led by a Social Worker from the fostering team and experienced foster carers.

1.7.4 Statutory Checks and References

The Fostering Service provides administrative support in managing all statutory checks; Medicals and DBS. The Service will take appropriate action on DBS disclosures as soon as possible and before they are presented to the Fostering and Permanence Panel.

Written references are required from three personal referees who must be interviewed by the assessing Social Worker. A report attached to the Form F should give details of these interviews, including the workers' assessment of the references.

Other checks include:

- The applicants' employer (continuity of employment must be addressed and any gaps investigated);
- Previous partners;
- The applicants' children's school;
- A full medical history;
- Evaluation of financial stability.

Criminal Records (DBS checks).

Regulation 26(5) prohibits the approval of any person as a prospective foster carer where they or any member of their household is known to have a conviction or caution for specific offences. All offences must be brought to the attention of the Head of Service and the Fostering Service Manager who will decide whether or not to proceed with the assessment.

1.7.5 The Assessment of Foster Carer applicants using objective, robust, fair, and transparent criteria.

All applicants are assessed by an individual process to establish their suitability to be registered as a foster carer. . The Foster Carers' Report (Form F or Form C for connected persons) will be used to record the assessment and the format for assessment interviews will normally follow the guidelines. Applicants are encouraged to engage fully in the preparation of the assessment, including providing evidence and completing certain sections themselves where possible.

Under the Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011, the expectation is that prospective foster carers' completed reports will be presented to the Fostering Panel within eight months of application. However, within Croydon the aim is to achieve this within a five month timescale.

The completed Foster Carers' Report (Form F/Form C) is shared with the applicant(s), who will retain a copy. If applicants are unhappy with any of the content of the report, the assessing worker should seek first to deal with this by negotiation. If this is not possible, the applicants are invited to submit their own comments in writing for presentation to the Fostering and Permanence Panel. All applicants are expected to attend Panel in person.

1.8 The Fostering and Permanence Panel

The Fostering and Permanence Panel is chaired by an independent person, who ensures that the panel is able to fulfil its quality assurance function free of undue influence. The Panel is constituted from a central list in line with Fostering Regulations and the requirements of the National Minimum Standards. The Panel meets three times a month or, as and when required and is supported by a Panel Adviser and Administrator.

1.8.1 The statutory functions of the panel are:

- To consider applications for approval & to recommend whether a person is suitable or not to become a foster carer & to recommend the number & age to be placed.
- To consider the first annual review of the foster carer & other subsequent annual reviews that is referred to it.
- To ensure the assessments undertaken by the assessor is balanced and of sufficient quality.
- To advise & monitor the effectiveness of procedures. To offer advice & make recommendations on any other matter or cases referred to panel by the Fostering Service.
- Consider Standard of Care issues and make recommendations as necessary.
- Consider matching of children with foster carers where the plan is for children to remain in long term foster care.

Decisions are made by Croydon's Agency Decision Maker, Head of Service for Social work with children looked after, after considering the recommendations of the panel.

1.8.2 Presentation of Assessment Report to the Fostering Panel

The Assessing Social Worker must attend the Fostering and Permanence Panel in person to present the Prospective Foster Carers Report. Applicants are expected to attend the Panel. The Panel will make one of three recommendations:

- Recommend to the Agency Decision Maker approval of the applicant as a foster carer.
- Recommend to the Agency Decision Maker that the applicant is not approved as a foster carer.
- Defer - Ask for further information on any relevant matter.

Foster carer applicants are given written information explaining the panel process and are positively encouraged to attend. Their feedback is sought as Croydon and the Panel is a learning organisation and seeks to continually consider any developments and improvements they may need to make. The feedback is collated and considered by the service and panel at bi annual business meeting.

1.8.3 Applicants Not Approved By Panel

The Agency Decision Maker will write to all applicants whose applications were not recommended for approval by the Panel and will advise the applicants of their Qualified Determination.

The letter will give the reasons for this and advise the applicants of the various appeals routes available including the **Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)**.

1.8.4 Connected Persons Assessment.

Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) 2010 provides for the temporary placement of a child with a relative or friend who is not an approved Carer for a period of up to sixteen weeks. If the child is to remain beyond sixteen weeks, a further 8 weeks extension, Regulation 25 can be agreed by the Head of Service for Social Work for children looked after and care leavers.

Immediate placements under Regulation 24 may only be made provided that prior to placement;

- the accommodation has been inspected;
- Police check 87a or DBS is received and checked for suitability;
- information has been obtained about all other members of the household;
- the Carer is a relative or friend or other person connected to the child (a friend being normally defined as someone previously known to the child and a connected person someone who knows the child in a more professional capacity);

- notification in writing setting out the terms of the approval, followed by a written agreement made between the Carer and the Local Authority covering the matters set out in schedule 5 to the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011; and
- The authority is satisfied that the placement is the most suitable way of performing their duty under Section 22(3) of the Children Act 1989. The child's Social Worker will complete a referral form, initiate DBS and other checks; and refer the matter to the Fostering Service. The Manager leading on recruitment and assessment will then allocate a Social Worker to carry out a Regulation 24 assessment of the friend and family carer with a view to seeking specific approval at the Fostering Panel within sixteen weeks. In exceptional circumstances temporary approvals can be extended for up to twenty four weeks.

1.9 An equal opportunities policy that covers all aspects of fostering:

The Croydon Council Fostering Service works to the Council's Equality and Diversity Strategy, which is available to all staff via the Council's Intranet service.

The Fostering Service will treat all service users fairly, openly and with respect throughout the assessment and recruitment process. Applicants wishing to be approved as foster carers will be considered irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation or disability and on the basis of being able to parent and to meet the needs of looked after children.

1.10 Foster Carer Annual Reviews

1.10.1 The Fostering Services (England) Regulation 2011, Regulation 28 requires that carers be reviewed at least once a year. A review can be held at other times if there has been a significant change in circumstances or if concerns arise.

The review considers the foster carer's previous year of fostering and makes a recommendation about their continued fostering registration. Reviews are carried out in the carer's home, the meeting is chaired by a fostering reviewing officer who will consider the recommendation of the social worker and will make their own recommendation based on the evidence in written reports and the discussion held in the review meeting. All registered foster carers in the household must attend the review meeting.

1.10.2 The views of children, their social workers, independent reviewing officer, birth parents and the fostering family will be sought in the annual review. Health and safety checks will be completed annually and police and medical references updated every second or third year.

1.10.4 The Local Authority is working to improve the quality and timeliness of all annual reviews. Two Fostering Reviewing Officers were appointed in March 2019.

1.10.5 The first review is presented to the Fostering and Permanence Panel and then every three years thereafter.

1.11 Continuous Professional Development

1.11.1 A comprehensive training programme is provided for all carers which is reviewed annually. Foster carers have access to LSCB and online line training available to borough staff.

1.11.2 The Training Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers (TSD).

All carers are expected to complete the Standards within the first year of registration. Ongoing workshops are delivered throughout the year supporting the foster carers in completing the Training and Development Standards for Foster Carers.

Carers are expected to complete a minimum of 30 hours training in their first year of approval and a minimum of 20 in subsequent years. A Personal Development Plan (PDP) will be completed annually with all Croydon foster carers and reviewed at their annual review meeting.

1.12 Support, Supervision and Development of Croydon Foster Carers

1.12.1 All registered Carers will have an allocated Supervising Social Worker who is responsible for ensuring that Carers receive an appropriate level of support and supervision to successfully undertake their work in supporting, meeting the needs and improving the outcomes for children in their care.

1.12.2 Supervising Social Workers will ensure that Carers have access to necessary support, advice and training to carry out their roles and responsibilities. This will vary from Carer to Carer, but will include all of the following:

- Complete a Foster Care Agreement with all Carers (Regulation 27 (5) Schedule 5 of Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011).
- Ensure the Carer has an adequate supply of equipment.
- Ensure that carers have an up-to-date copy of the Croydon Foster Carers' Handbook.
- Ensure that Carers are provided with up-to-date details of procedures and policies, including the Complaints and Suggestions Procedure, payment procedures and the service's insurance policy for Carers.
- Carers automatically become members of the Foster Talk and the Croydon Foster Care Association

- Visit the Carers on a six weekly basis and whenever reasonably requested by Carers or as deemed necessary by the agency to support and supervise a carer.
- Make at least one unannounced visit per annum.
- Carry out an annual health and safety inspection of the carer's home, or when the carer moves or has major work carried out on their home, and this is considered at each annual review.
- Ensure that the carer is recording placement details as stipulated by Croydon fostering service.
- Carry out an annual review of the Carer's approval.
- Identify, in conjunction with the Carer, complete a personal development plan with details of training needs/core requirements and identify purposes ways in which these may be met.
- Attend reviews, case conferences and other planning meetings in respect of children placed when requested by the carer or the IRO.
- Investigate any complaint by or against Carers' standards of care in accordance with relevant procedures.
- Ensure that lines of communication between the Carer and the child's Social Worker are open and effective.
- Respond promptly to telephone calls and correspondence from the Carer.
- Keep a record of their visits, share these with foster carers and record these on CRS.

1.12.3 Supervising Social Workers ensure that visits are arranged in such a way that there is adequate time to address the Carer's own role and development in addition to any visits which may be necessary in respect of individual placements. Carers' children are also provided with opportunities to discuss their experiences of fostering. Visits are expected at four weekly intervals.

1.13 **Foster Carer Charter**

Croydon Council has drawn up an agreed Croydon Foster Carer Charter that sets out the expectations and responsibilities of the Croydon Fostering Service, Croydon Foster Carers and other people involved in the care of looked after children. This is available to on the website.

1.14 Financial Allowance Policy

Approved Croydon foster carers, including connected carers and regulation 24 temporary carers (from the date of introduction of the new 2020 fostering allowance policy) are paid a weekly amount which is made up of a fee and a maintenance element. The fee element is paid to the carers as recognition of the skills, responsibilities and experience that they bring to the fostering task. The maintenance element covers the costs of caring for the child/children in their care. The policy covers costs for equipment etc.

1.16 Services for Children

Children's Guide

A new children guide to fostering is currently in draft to be completed by June 2020 following consultation with the children in care council.

1.17 Newsletter

A foster carer Newsletter is produced on a regular basis to keep carers informed of:

- Advice on practice
- Changes to policy
- General information on fostering
- Staff updates within the fostering team
- Training opportunities

1.17.1 Croydon Foster Carers Association

There is an established Croydon Foster Carers Association that is run and managed by the foster carers through a management committee. The Head of Service and Fostering Service Manager hold quarterly meetings with the association.

1.18. Support Group

A monthly foster carer support group is held, funded and supported with fostering team managers in attendance

1.19 Complaints & Allegations against Foster Carers

Where there are complaints about the standards of care provided by a foster carer these are managed by the service. If there are allegations of inappropriate behaviour by foster carers, these are managed through the procedures for allegations agreed by Croydon Safeguarding Children Partnership. The Local

Authority Designated Officer (LADO) process is also involved in the management of allegations against foster carers.

1.20 **Complaints from Foster Carers**

Complaints about the service are dealt with under the Corporate Services Complaints procedure which can be accessed via Croydon Council website or by calling Tel: 020 8726 6000 ext. 62753 or at complaints@croydon.gov.uk

1.21 **Registration Authority**

The address for the OFSTED Registration Authority is:
Clive House, 70 Petty France, London SW1H 9EX www.ofsted.gov.uk

1.22 **The system for reviewing the Statement of Purpose**

The Statement of Purpose is available to anyone working for the purposes of the fostering service, with children who may be in our care including families, professionals and legal guardians, and anyone wishing to become a foster carer.

The Statement of Purpose is available on the Croydon website.

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed annually. The information contained in this Statement of Purpose can be made available in alternative formats: Large print, Braille, audio tape or disk. We can also translate the information into other languages.

Please contact:

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