

2022/2023

**Statement of Purpose**

**Southwark Fostering Service**



## Southwark Council Fostering Service: Statement of Purpose 2022/2023

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## *Introduction*

National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011, section 16, requires that Southwark Fostering service has a clear statement of purpose which is available to, and understood by, foster carers, staff and children. It must be focused on how the service will meet outcomes for children and must also be available to any parent or person with parental responsibility. All reference to 'foster carer' throughout this document includes all Southwark registered foster carers and temporarily approved foster carers. This Fostering Statement of Purpose details our; vision; aims and objectives; the way we recruit, approve, train, support and work collaboratively with foster carers; the diversity of our foster care service; services that support fostering and foster carers and the structure of the Fostering Service. All of which underpin the provision of a service that meet the needs of Southwark children in care.

This document is intended to provide information to:

- Children's Social Care staff who are involved in providing services to looked after children and young people
- Foster carers and people who are being assessed as foster carers
- Speaker Box (Southwark's Children in Care Council)
- Independent and voluntary sector organisations providing services to foster carers and to looked after children in Southwark
- Partner agencies who support children in our care
- Any parent or person with Parental Responsibility

Alongside this document, guides for children and young people have been produced to provide looked after young people with information about their rights, how to access information and advice and how to make a complaint, should they wish.

## *Aims and objectives of the service*

Our purpose is "to provide high quality care for children in safe, secure and nurturing families, by means of recruiting and developing highly skilled foster carers supported by reflective, challenging and enabling social workers – in order to give children and young people the best possible childhood to help them become valued members of society, maximising their life-long opportunities."

The Fostering Service works in partnership with colleagues within the Council and other multi-agency partners, to help meet the Council's responsibilities as a corporate parent. These relationships are based on respect and a shared commitment to promoting the best possible outcomes for all looked after children and young people.

We recognise that in order to recover from early adversity, looked after children need to form trusting relationships with caregivers who are sensitive and attuned to their needs. The Fostering Service has chosen to adopt the Secure Base Model of therapeutic care in recognition of the importance of positive attachment experiences for children. We aim to provide a secure base by matching children with carers who can meet their physical, emotional, spiritual and learning needs, promote a positive sense of identity and give young people ambition and hope for the future.

Southwark's Fostering Service aims to meet the requirements of the:

- National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011
- Fostering Services Regulations 2011.
- National Care Standards Act 2000.
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 which amend the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 with respect to the assessment and approval of foster carers for looked after children.
- The Children and Families Act 2014 and the Training, Support and Development Induction Standards for Foster Care.

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

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

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

*Recruitment and assessment of foster carers*

- to have a recruitment strategy in place that supports the recruitment of a sufficient range and quantity of local foster carers
- to respond in a friendly, prompt, professional and respectful manner to anyone enquiring about becoming a Southwark foster carer
- to recruit, train and supervise an appropriate number of experienced independent social workers, who will be able to deliver high quality assessments of prospective foster carers
- to carry out thorough assessments and preparation of prospective foster carers
- to treat prospective foster carers as a valued resource. In the event of a prospective carer not being found suitable, to explain sensitively, honestly, and in plain language the reasons for the decision, and to notify the applicant of their rights to appeal
- to support an effective Fostering Panel, by maintaining a membership of suitably qualified, experienced and knowledgeable panel members, chaired by an experienced independent person.

### *Supporting and valuing our foster carers*

- to work within the framework of a professional supervision agreement, to maintain open communication, mutual respect and good working relationships with all our foster carers, keeping the needs of children and young people as the central concern
- to provide information about the child at the start of every placement, and ensure that a Placement Agreement Meeting takes place within five working days
- to support foster carers in contributing to care planning and to constructively challenge decisions and proposed care plans for children when they feel the need to do so
- to ensure that foster carers are aware of Southwark's complaints procedures and are supported in using the complaints procedures when necessary
- to ensure that foster carers have access to the wide range of multi-disciplinary support services available in Southwark
- to provide a range of training courses and learning opportunities for foster carers, and to develop individual learning and development plans which recognise differing learning needs and styles
- to ensure that the Annual Review of Approval is carried out within a year for every foster carer, including carers who have not fostered in the preceding year

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

- to promote the concept of the "team around the looked after child" so that all the important adults and professionals involved with the child work constructively together
- to ensure that the ethnic origin, cultural background, religious faith and language of every child is recognised, valued and promoted when placement decisions are being made
- to consider carefully what services may be needed at the start of a new placement to support the carer and ensure placement stability
- to enable looked after children and young people to maintain and develop positive relationships with their birth families and other significant people
- to place siblings together insofar as this is practically possible and consistent with their needs
- Further develop and promote the use of the Staying Put scheme. Enable young people to stay in their foster families beyond their eighteenth birthday where this is in their interests and agreed by their foster carers
- to actively seek the views of young people regarding their placements and ensure they know where to obtain information and advice
- to ensure that young people participate fully in decisions about their care plan and day to day care. Take steps to enable children and young people to access advocacy and independent visitors

- to support children and young people and their families to constructively challenge decisions and proposed plans in regard to their care. Ensure they are aware of Southwark's complaints procedures and are supported in using the complaints procedures when necessary
- to work together with foster carers, CYP social workers and education professionals to promote the educational achievements of looked after children.
- to support foster carers in promoting the emotional and physical health of young people
- to fully meet the requirements of the Fostering Regulations, National Minimum Standards, corporate policy and accepted best practice standards

### *Principles and standards of care*

- Children's safety and welfare are paramount
- Staff and foster carers will do everything possible to ensure that every child or young person can reach their full potential.
- Children and young people will be placed in foster families that celebrate and value their cultural, racial, ethnic and religious identity
- Children and young people have the right to continuity in their lives and every effort will be made to avoid unplanned placement moves
- Looked after children and young people will be helped to maintain positive contact with birth family members and other significant people, where this is in their interests
- Foster care is a partnership between the carers, supervising social workers and the child or young person's social worker, working together for the young person's best interests
- The Fostering Service will work in an open, positive and respectful way with children, their parents and extended families, foster carers, children's social workers and colleagues in schools and other agencies
- Foster carers, children and young people and their parents should be able to challenge decisions and plans proposed by the fostering service and are made aware of the procedures whereby they can exercise their right of challenge
- Formal decisions relating to individual children and young people in foster care should be taken in full consultation with them, their parents and their foster carers.
- Young people leaving care must be offered a continuing service that recognizes that young people may continue to need various kinds of advice, practical help and emotional support into adulthood
- The responsibilities of the placing agency to the foster carers, the purpose and goals of each placement and the responsibilities of all parties must be stated in writing

- The Fostering Service will provide quality and consistency in the provision of training, support and information to foster carers to enable them to meet the individual needs of children and to develop their own skills as carers
- Services will be administered in a fair manner consistent with the Council's equality and valuing diversity policies.

### *Management and staffing structure*

Fostering is part of the Permanence and Resources Service, which has lead responsibility for ensuring all children in Southwark's care achieve permanence, either within their birth families or with suitable alternative carers. This responsibility is shared with Assessment and Intervention, Safeguarding and Family Support, All Age Disabilities and Care and 16 plus Services. The list of current staff and their relevant qualifications and experience will be made available to the Ofsted Inspection Service on request.

Permanence and Resources is part of the Children's Social Care division. The Director of Children and Families reports directly to the Corporate Parenting Committee and Council Scrutiny Committee (groups of elected members) who support and challenge the work of the division.

The Fostering Service is made up of three teams, under the overall leadership of the Service Manager Fostering.

- Two Fostering teams– undertake the same tasks. They welcome and induct all newly-approved foster carers, and support all foster carers where children are placed on a temporary basis. They also work with foster carers who wish to provide a permanent home for a looked after child or young person. If a child's permanence plan is to remain
- Connected Persons and Special Guardianship team – responsible for assessing family and friends as either foster carers or special guardians in order to provide continuity and stability for children who cannot remain with birth parents.

In addition the team has access to clinicians from the Southwark Clinical Service, who offer direct consultation to staff and foster carers, along with training and workshops to help carers reflect on children's behaviour and consider their own response in managing this.

Each team is led by a Team Manager and is responsible for supervising and supporting up to seventy foster carers. Each practice group has a senior social worker, and up to six supervising social workers.

A Practice Co-ordinator and a Family Support worker provide support to the two teams and the Training Lead.

Following the introduction of a Systemic Practice model, all the practice groups meet fortnightly for reflective case discussions and group supervision. This enables the whole group to gain an understanding of the foster carers and to provide support in the absence of the allocated SSW.

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

*The Fostering Team also works with*

**Independent Reviewing Officers:** chair foster carers’ annual review of approval (ARA) meetings and make recommendations to the Fostering Panel

**The Fostering Panel:** makes recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker on matters concerning the approval of foster carers.

**The Agency Decision Maker:** a senior manager who makes the final decisions about the approval of foster carers, taking account of the available information and the recommendations of the Fostering Panel. The Agency Decision Makers for Adoption and Fostering Decisions are Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Care, Helen Woolgar and Director for Children and Families (DCS), Alasdair Smith.

**Carelink:** a multidisciplinary team of social workers, family therapists and clinical psychologists. Carelink is a part of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and plays an important part in providing therapeutic support to foster carers and children and young people who are in foster care.

**Contact Service:** a pool of drivers, support workers and contact supervisors who facilitate contact between looked after children and their birth families, and work with foster carers and young people to preserve placement stability.

Southwark will always try to place looked after children and young people with Southwark approved foster carers. Sometimes, however, this is not possible and children and young people may be placed with foster carers who are approved and supported by **Independent Fostering Agencies** When required, placements with IFAs are negotiated by the Access to Resources Team (ART).

*Names and contact details of key managers and Fostering Panel Chair*

Name	Designation	Contact Details
Mr Alasdair Smith	Director, Children and Families (DCS)	<a href="mailto:Alasdair.Smith@southwark.gov.uk">Alasdair.Smith@southwark.gov.uk</a>
Ms Helen Woolgar	Assistant Director Safeguarding and Care and Agency Decision Maker	<a href="mailto:Helen.Woolgar@southwark.gov.uk">Helen.Woolgar@southwark.gov.uk</a>
Ms Elaine Reid	Head of Service Permanence and Resources	<a href="mailto:Elaine.Reid@southwark.gov.uk">Elaine.Reid@southwark.gov.uk</a>
Mr Andrew Fowler	Head of 16 Plus and Agency Decision Maker	<a href="mailto:Andrew.Fowler@Southwark.gov.uk">Andrew.Fowler@Southwark.gov.uk</a>
Mr Khalid Campbell	Fostering Service Manager	<a href="mailto:Khalid.Campbell@Southwark.gov.uk">Khalid.Campbell@Southwark.gov.uk</a>
Ms Asanti Khm-Sankofa	Team Manager	<a href="mailto:Asanti.Khm-Sankofa@southwark.gov.uk">Asanti.Khm-Sankofa@southwark.gov.uk</a>



Name	Designation	Contact Details
Silvana Clarke	Team Manager	<a href="mailto:Silvana.Clarke@southwark.gov.uk">Silvana.Clarke@southwark.gov.uk</a>
Ms Daisy May James	Team Manager	<a href="mailto:Daisy-may.James@southwark.gov.uk">Daisy-may.James@southwark.gov.uk</a> 020 7525 5183
Ms Emma Hiley	Team Manager SG & Connected Persons team	<a href="mailto:Emma.Hiley@southwark.gov.uk">Emma.Hiley@southwark.gov.uk</a>
Dr James Hanley	Senior Clinical Services Manager	<a href="mailto:James.hanley@southwark.gov.uk">James.hanley@southwark.gov.uk</a> 020 525 1133
Ms Jane Tilton	Manager, Recruitment Hub	<a href="mailto:Jane.Tilton@southwark.gov.uk">Jane.Tilton@southwark.gov.uk</a> 07946 447654
Ms Clare Ryan	Service Manager QAU	<a href="mailto:clare.ryan@southwark.gov.uk">clare.ryan@southwark.gov.uk</a>
Ms Linda Ryan	Manager, Care Link	<a href="mailto:Linda.ryan@slam.nhs.uk">Linda.ryan@slam.nhs.uk</a> 07976 782033
Ms Shirley Walker	Independent Chair of Southwark Fostering Panel	Contactable through the Panel Administrator - Melissa
Ms Melissa-Jo Smith	Panel Co-ordinator	<a href="mailto:MelissaJo.Smith@southwark.gov.uk">MelissaJo.Smith@southwark.gov.uk</a>
Mss Sarah Hall	Panel Advisor	<a href="mailto:Sarah.Hall@southwark.gov.uk">Sarah.Hall@southwark.gov.uk</a>

## ***Services provided***

### ***Recruitment***

The Recruitment Manager works with the Communications Team to design and coordinate recruitment campaigns. A fostering web page has been created to give potential foster carers information on fostering for Southwark and allows them to register their interest online. Regular online information events are held as well as attending community events to promote fostering for Southwark.

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

Foster carers are recruited through advertising, targeted recruitment events, via word of mouth and through meetings with local community and faith groups, and professional organisations within Southwark. Specific recruitment for individual children and other activities are co-ordinated by the Achieving Permanence team. Southwark Council is the largest single employer in Southwark and regular information is distributed to Council staff inviting enquiries from staff who may be interested in becoming foster carers. Southwark council is a fostering friendly employer and achieved Fostering Friendly accreditation with the Fostering Network in October 2019.

Existing foster carers are extremely important in encouraging new prospective carers to come forward for assessment. Southwark acknowledges the important role that foster carers often play in encouraging

friends, neighbours and family members to consider becoming foster carers. A special recognition payment is made to any foster carer who is instrumental in bringing a new foster carer into the service.

### *Assessment of new foster carers*

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

The aim of the recruitment hub is to be able to respond quickly and professionally to all enquiries and to allocate new assessments to specialist and highly experienced assessors who will generally complete and deliver an assessment to the Fostering Panel within six months.

The assessment process consists of the following stages:

1. Initial Enquiry received and logged
2. Response to Initial enquiry by telephone
3. Initial Home Visit by a social worker or recruitment manager to the applicant(s)
4. Outcome of initial home visit notified in writing
5. Applicant(s) submits a formal written application to become approved as a Southwark foster carer
6. Allocation to an independent or in-house assessor or recruitment Social Worker
7. Applicant(s) attend pre-approval training
8. All references, health and safeguarding checks are taken up by fostering team
9. The prospective foster carer is presented to Fostering Panel, who will recommend their approval to the Agency Decision Maker (or not if they do not think they are suitable to be approved as a foster carer)
10. Agency Decision maker decides whether to approve as a foster carer and range of approval
11. Applicant(s) notified in writing of the outcome of the assessment
12. Applicant(s) allocated a supervising social worker

### *Assessment and approval of foster carers*

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

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

- the essential requirement is the ability to give children a full experience of family life, keep them safe from harm and help them to grow and realise their potential
- it is not necessary to be a home owner – but fostering does require having a spare room that is suitable as a bedroom for a foster child (the exception being specialist foster carers who only care for babies for short periods) and a secure tenancy

- the service requires and warmly welcomes foster carers from all racial, ethnic and religious groups, reflecting the diversity of Southwark's looked after children and young people
- Foster carers need to be over the age of 21. There is no upper age limit but in practice it is unusual to start an assessment of someone who is over the age of 65 unless it is with a view to caring for an older child or becoming a friends and family foster carer
- having health problems will not necessarily rule anyone out from being a foster carer, but foster carers have to be fit enough to be able to meet the demands of fostering
- foster carers can be single, married, in civil partnerships, or living with a partner
- a person's sexual orientation is not a barrier in any way to becoming a foster carer
- fostered children sometimes need their carers to be available during the day. We will not rule out people who work, although some flexibility may be needed for some types of placements
- some criminal convictions will rule a person out – these include serious offences such as violence or fraud, and any offence against a child or vulnerable adult. However, other less serious offences will not necessarily prevent a person from becoming a foster carer. The circumstances relating to any cautions or convictions will need to be explored fully in the assessment and balanced with the applicant's strengths and current circumstances.
- in Southwark we discourage our foster carers from smoking, so any new applicant will be encouraged to give up smoking during the assessment process and before they are approved.

### *Responding to Initial enquiries*

All initial enquiries about becoming a foster carer, however they are received, will receive a response from a member of the recruitment hub within 3 working days. Usually this will be by telephone. The social worker will clarify:

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

### *Initial Home Visit*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

At the initial home visit the social worker will always explain the range of safeguarding checks including health, local authority and enhanced DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks which need to be made on all adult members of the household. These are an essential part of the assessment process as they help to highlight any factors which may indicate an applicant is not suitable to foster.

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

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

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

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

An applicant who is unhappy with the way in which an initial fostering home visit has been conducted may also lodge a formal complaint using the Council's Complaints Procedure.

### *Assessment processes*

The Recruitment Hub has one full time Social Worker and employs a number of highly experienced independent assessing social workers to carry out assessments. They receive regular supervision and consultation from the recruitment manager throughout the course of the assessment.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The assessor will also meet with three personal referees, including one family member, and will aim to interview any former cohabiting partners and any adult children who may have left home.

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

### *Pre-approval training*

Applicants are required to attend a three day preparation and training group which involves looking at the key elements of fostering. The preparation group programme is based on the "Skills to Foster" format designed by Fostering Network. Two supervising social workers facilitate the group. Some sessions involve foster carers and other professionals.

Areas covered in the training include the role of a foster carer, child protection and safe caring, attachment theory, the Secure Base model of care giving, managing behaviour, promoting contact, valuing diversity, and caring for children who have been abused.

The report also includes references from people who know the applicant well as well as the checks which are made on all adult household members and frequent visitors. This information is used to produce a report giving a detailed picture of the prospective carer(s) and their family. The report also includes recommendations for the type of placement the applicant and the assessor believes they are best suited to, along with an analysis of the carer's strengths and limitations.

### *The Fostering Panel and Approvals of Foster Carers*

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

The role of the panel is to consider approvals of new applicants, to receive the first annual reviews of approved foster carers, and any recommendations for termination of approval. In addition, the panel also considers proposed long term matches for specific children and foster carers.

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

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

### ***Annual Reviews of Approval***

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

Annual Reviews of Approval are chaired by an experienced independent chair. Information and views are sought from all children and young people who have been in placement and their social workers, as well as the views of foster carers and their families. Foster carers are helped to prepare for their Annual Review meeting by their supervising social worker.

In the case of a carer's first annual review or when there have been significant changes or concerns, the fostering panel will consider the report that is prepared following the annual review and make recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker. The Fostering service have introduced a 3 yearly return to fostering panel. Whilst not required by fostering regulations this step is seen as contributing to good practice and provides an additional layer of oversight and monitoring.

### ***Termination of Approval***

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## *Support to foster carers*

### *Supervision of foster carers*

Foster carers are supervised and supported by supervising social workers (SSWs)

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

SSW's will also monitor the carer's practice, speak regularly to the young people in placement, and agree a training and development plan with the carer. The SSW and the foster carer will have a supervision agreement which sets out how they will work together and how they will resolve differences or difficulties.

### *Foster Carer Support Groups*

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

### *Training*

Training is an integral part of the foster carer's role and begins during the preparation and assessment process. Southwark takes the development of foster carers very seriously and all carers are expected to attend ongoing and core training. The service now has a Training Lead, an experienced senior social worker, who co-ordinates and commissions training for foster carers at all levels of development and ensures that the department's chosen therapeutic care giving approach – the Secure Base - is integrated into all training sessions.

All foster carers have a training profile which is reviewed yearly at the time of their annual review. Foster carers' fees are paid on three levels, and will be linked to their training and development record.

Foster carers must keep a Training & Development portfolio, which shows how they meet the skills they require to foster. All foster carers are expected to complete the Training, Support and Development Standards within 12 months of becoming approved as a foster carer, (or 18 months if a Connected Persons carer). This programme involves attending workshops and completing a personal portfolio that evidences that they meet the relevant standards.

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



### ***Financial support***

Southwark foster carers receive an age-related weekly allowance which is set at a rate which has been recommended by the Government as being sufficient to meet the needs of a child in foster care. The allowance is intended to be used to cover the day to day costs of caring for a child in placement, plus a reasonable contribution towards household expenses and the replacement of larger items such as furnishings and carpets. The Payments for Foster Carers is set out in the Payments to Foster Carers Policy which is updated annually..

Foster carers receive a setting up grant and additional payments for holidays and for special festivals. Foster carers are also given a grant every three years towards the cost of a computer for the use of the looked after children.

### ***Mentoring***

Newly approved foster carers may be offered support from an established foster carer who can provide practical help and advice.

### ***Respite breaks***

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

### ***Foster Carers' Handbook***

The handbook contains information for foster carers regarding the expectations of foster carers and the support available to them. It also provides guidance with regard to child development, safeguarding, health and safety, training and development and the statutory framework for fostering.

### ***Other support services***

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

- The CLA Education Support Team and the Virtual Head (CLA) for children's educational needs
- Carelink (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service)
- The Clinical Service
- The Youth Offending Service (YOS) which works with young people who have committed offences or who are at risk of offending and can provide support and advice to foster carers
- The Designated Doctor and specialist nurses for looked after children and young people
- The Emergency Duty Team for support and assistance outside office hours
- The Fostering Team Out of Hours telephone advice and support service to foster carers
- Speaker Box – the Children's Rights team, who can ensure that children and young people are involved in decisions about their future
- Specialist services for young people with substance misuse problems

- Contact service which enables children and young people to enjoy positive helpful contact with their birth families while they are in foster care.

### ***Fostering Network***

All Southwark Foster Carers have membership to The Fostering Network paid for by the Local Authority . The Fostering Network provides newsletters and regular information, consultation, updates on national developments and training. A helpline is available to members on 020 7401 9582 from 10.00am - 3.00pm Monday to Friday or you can email them at [info@fostering.net](mailto:info@fostering.net) Foster Carer members of The Fostering Network can access a 24-hour legal helpline for expert advice on allegations and help with any legal queries on 01384 885734 and a completely confidential stress support service on 01384 885734. (Please ask to be put through to the stress helpline) The Fostering Network also provides independent support for foster Carers if there has been an allegation against them. All Southwark Foster Carers facing an allegation can access independent support, via their supervising social worker. The Fostering Network will allocate an independent support worker within a day or two to provide their expertise and guidance until the allegation or complaint against is resolved.

### ***Placement types***

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

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

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

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

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

### ***Teenage Fostering and Staying Put Placements***

There is increasing recognition of the vulnerability of looked after teenagers and care leavers and Southwark Fostering Service is developing new ways of working with and supporting teenage foster carers and promoting “Staying Put” placements. In particular, carers may need specialist training in order to help them continue to provide a secure base and to help prepare young people for living independently. Such training will include Child Sexual Exploitation, managing challenging behaviour, promoting emotional and physical health, gang membership, and sexual health and relationships.

Teenage and Staying Put carers work closely with their SSW, care social worker and personal advisors to help young people to prepare for independent living.

### ***Long term Fostering***

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

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

### ***Connected Persons (sometimes referred to as Family and Friends) Foster Care Placement with Connected Persons Policy***

Southwark has published a family and friends care policy explaining the way in which the Council supports family and friends carers.

Southwark Council believes that in some cases a placement with a family member or friend can have a better outcome for a child. The young person is able to maintain a connection to the family of origin and gains a sense of continuity and identity through this. The Fostering Service works with colleagues in other parts Children’s Social Care to promote the placement of children with connected persons, where this is believed to be the best placement option.

The Connected Persons and SGO team is responsible for assessing and supporting Friends and Family carers following the approval of a viability assessment by the Head of Service for Safeguarding. Carers will then start to receive the age-related fostering allowance for each child in their care, while the carers are assessed as foster carers. The assessment covers the same broad areas as for other foster care assessments, as outlined in section 6.1 above, but there is a special focus on the quality of the relationship between the prospective connected foster carer and the child or young person.

Once a connected carer is approved as a foster carer by the Fostering Panel (under Regulation 27) they will receive the fostering fee in addition to the child’s allowance.

### ***Support and services provided to Connected (Family and Friends) foster carers***

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

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

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

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

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

### ***Parent and Child placements***

Southwark's Fostering Service is continuing to work to develop a responsive approach to requests for Parent and Child placements, recognising that there are a variety of situations where such a placement may be needed. Traditionally Southwark foster carers have looked after young parents, e.g. carer leavers, by helping them to bond and care for their babies independently. However there is scope for developing the service further, for example through training and supporting a small group of carers to assess parenting capacity and provide written reports to the courts.

The Parent and Child foster carer's primary responsibility is to ensure the welfare and safety of the child, and in some cases this may result in the foster carer taking temporary responsibility if the parent is unable to safely care for him or her.

### ***Complaints and allegations in respect of foster carers***

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

The Fostering Team Managers are responsible for managing allegations, liaising with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) and making sure that the person against whom an allegation has been made is kept informed of the progress of the investigation, and receives independent support during the investigation.

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

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

## *Ofsted*

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

Compliance, Investigation and Enforcement

Ofsted

Freshford House

Redcliffe Way

Bristol

BS1 6NL

08456 404040