Essex Fostering Service
Statement of Purpose
April 2018
Foreword

It is vital that as a Local Authority, Essex County Council strives for the best possible Fostering Service to provide safe, stable and first-rate foster care where children and young people are valued, supported and encouraged to grow and develop as individuals. We aim to comply with the principles outlined in the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011, the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, the 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. This Statement of Purpose details our aims and objectives; the way we recruit, approve, train and support foster carers; the diversity of our foster care service and other services that support fostering and foster carers; and the staffing and management structure of the Fostering Service, all of which underpin the provision of an efficient service. Through the Fostering Service the County Council aims to place children in care in families who will support them to achieve their full potential. The Fostering Service and its remit form part of the overarching Sufficiency Strategy for children looked after by Essex County Council.

Cllr. Dick Madden, Cabinet Member for Children and Families

Signed:

Date: 3 May 2018

Helen Lincoln Executive Director for Children and Families

Signed:

Date: 3 May 2018
Introduction

This document sets out the Statement of Purpose of Essex County Council’s Fostering Service. It relates to the county wide operations of the Fostering Service. There are four distinct quadrants comprising 5 fostering teams Colchester, Tendring, Mid, South and West who support and supervise approved foster carers. The service also comprises 1 centralised team covering Fostering Recruitment and Assessment.

The Fostering Service Statement of Purpose is intended to provide information to a wide audience including:

- Essex County Council staff
- Foster carers and prospective foster carers (including foster carers’ own children)
- Children and young people placed with Essex County Council foster carers
- Local authorities / health and social care trusts – which place, have placed, or are considering placing children with Essex County Council foster carers
- Colleagues from other social care agencies
- General public

Essex County Council’s Fostering Service aims to meet the requirements of:

- The Care Standards Act 2000
- The Fostering Services Regulations 2011 as amended by The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010
- The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (England and Wales)
- The Children and Families Act 2014

The Statement of Purpose is reviewed and updated at least annually by the Lead Cabinet Member for Children and Families and the Fostering Management Team.
Section One

Our vision

Our vision is to provide a safe, stable and caring environment which exceeds required standards in meeting the needs of all children and young people in care, enabling them to realise their potential and to enhance their life opportunities.

Aims

To provide:

• support and care for children and young people

• high standards of care in a family environment for all children and young people placed within the service

• children and young people with stable placements that allow them to fulfil their potential whilst giving respect to and promoting their racial, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds

• the opportunity where carers and young people are in agreement and it is agreed to be in the young person’s best interest for the young person to “Stay put” in their foster home until their 21st birthday

• consideration for the gender, sexuality, disability and heritage of children and young people when considering making placements

• a recruitment strategy for foster carers which encompasses and promotes a diversity of backgrounds thus allowing the service to appropriately match placements for children and young people

• 24 hour support for all foster carers, children, and young people

• a partnership approach in providing services to carers, children and young people and their families that will include local authorities, health and social care trusts and other agencies

• a service consisting of managers, practitioners and support staff who are appropriately qualified, safeguard checked, registered with their professional regulatory bodies, and supported in all areas of professional development

• a commitment to develop and provide ongoing training, learning and development opportunities to all foster carers and their own children.
Objectives

Our vision for the service needs to be communicated to and owned by all participants and included in all appropriate documents.

To ensure that the Fostering Service has a detailed knowledge of needs such as age, disability, ethnicity, and location that will inform a targeted foster carer recruitment strategy.

To ensure that there is meaningful consultation with children and young people, carers, parents and staff. Central to this will be the need to create a strategy for listening to children and young people that informs decisions relating to their welfare and to service development.

To provide increased placement choice ensuring appropriately matched placements throughout the service. This includes monitoring and reviewing placement availability.

To agree and implement strategies that will ensure the retention and continued support of foster carers, special guardians and Connected Persons/Family and Friends carers. This should include working in partnership with all Families and Children’s Services teams, therapeutic services, corporate parenting and other appropriate lead agencies.

To develop strategies to improve collective responsibility for the placement of Essex children and ensure that all parts of Children and Families Services and other partner agencies understand the core function of the Fostering Service and how they can contribute to achieving this. All staff have a clear role which ensures an effective delivery of the Fostering Services Regulations and Standards with the aim of achieving good outcomes for children and young people.

To ensure compliance with Fostering Services Regulations 2011, as amended by The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013. National Minimum Standards and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010

To review the structure of the Fostering Service when necessary to ensure that services are provided in the most efficient and timely way.
Section Two

Recruitment and Approval

The Service provides a dedicated Recruitment and Assessment Team that deals with all aspects of recruiting and assessing potential carers across the county. This includes operating and managing advertising campaigns with the Essex County Council communications team, recruitment events, Skills to Foster training, maintaining a dedicated 0800 recruitment line and website, and all aspects of the assessment and safeguard checking of prospective carers. The team also undertakes assessments of friend/family or connected persons and where appropriate will continue these assessments through to Special Guardianship Order assessments.

Assessment Process

The process for managing enquiries has recently changed to include two new initial enquiry workers who now manage the “front door” promptly and provide ongoing communication with potential applicants. If the enquirer(s) wish to proceed, a home visit by a social worker is arranged by the Recruitment Team and is undertaken alongside a current approved foster carer. At this point the potential carer(s) will complete an application form if they wish. Consent will be taken to complete checks and enquiries to assess their initial suitability to become foster carer(s). The process for assessing a person’s suitability to foster consists of two parts. These can be carried out concurrently but the information required within stage 1 must be sought as soon as possible and the decision about whether an applicant has successfully completed stage 1 must be made within 10 days of all of the information in that stage being received.

Once the prospective carer(s) indicate a wish to proceed they will be invited to attend the Skills to Foster training.

The safeguard checks we process whilst applicants attend the training are as follows:

- Disclosure and Barring Service checks on all members of the household aged 18 or over and regular visitors to the household. This will involve disclosure of information about any criminal convictions or cautions and other information which may be held by the police or government agencies relevant to the protection of children. The applicant(s) will also be required to have a medical examination completed by their GP and the report will be made available to the Essex County Council Medical Adviser for his (her) comments about the health of the applicant(s) and any impact on their potential to foster.
The applicants will be assigned an Assessing Social Worker. The applicants will begin their assessment by giving detailed information about themselves and their family composition. Further safeguard checks will be undertaken at this stage; these include:

- verification of identity and personal history;
- Essex County Council database checks including enquiries to other Social Care Departments and Child Protection Registers;
- Enquiries to other agencies including NSPCC and Probation where appropriate.

The applicant(s) will be required to identify at least three personal referees who will provide written references and be interviewed as part of the assessment process. The Assessing Social Worker will carry out a full assessment. This will consist of the social worker visiting the home of the applicant(s) generally on six to eight occasions to meet and collect information about all members of the household and the skills and experience of the applicants in relation to fostering. The information obtained will form the basis of an assessment report. Essex County Council uses the Form F format published by CoramBAAF (Coram and British Association for Adoption and Fostering) The Form F assessment report which takes into account the assessment of confidential references is shared with the applicant(s) and then presented to the Fostering Panel. Applicants are invited to attend the Panel when their application is being considered. The Panel makes recommendations about the suitability of the applicant/s to be approved as foster carers. The agency decision maker (Head of Service) receives the recommendation of the Fostering Panel and on behalf of the Service makes the final decision about approval. Applicants will then be informed verbally and in writing of the Service’s decision. The assessment process can take on average five to six months and every effort is made to ensure no avoidable delays occur. All information is held on file and can be viewed on request. References from external agencies and personal references, which are provided in confidence, cannot be accessed without permission of both the subject and the relevant referee.

**Professional Development for Foster Carers**

It is recognised that fostering has become increasingly demanding and complex. Essex County Council is committed to providing good quality training that is accessible and relevant to all our foster carers. Training and learning are viewed as an important element of Essex County Council’s support to foster carers and comprehensive pre approval and post approval training and learning are provided.

As part of the professional development of foster carers, Essex County Council provides training to:
• help foster carers develop and refine the skills they need for their job;
• improve knowledge;
• establish an explicit, positive framework of values, which promotes equality of opportunity;
• encourage foster carers to reflect and look at the effects of discrimination in all parts of the community, recognising that they care for children in the context of wider society, and that for many children discrimination is a fact of everyday life;
• ensure that all foster carers are competent and confident in safe caring and in protecting children from harm;
• encourage foster carers to take responsibility for their own professional development through the creation of individual training profiles;
• enable foster carers to fulfil the expectations agreed in their Personal Development Plan (PDP).

Introductory Training: Pre-Approval Skills to Foster

The preparation training (Skills to Foster Training Programme) is comprised of 6 sessions which take place over 3 days. This is a compulsory part of the assessment process (not compulsory for Connected Persons). The course sessions are:

• What foster carers do?
• Identity and life chances
• Working with others
• Safer Caring
• Understanding and caring for children
• Transitions

Post Approval Training

Essex County Council is committed to a post approval training programme for our carers. The training programme includes programmes available through distance learning and e-learning as well as face to face courses. This includes modules that should be included as part of the initial induction of foster carers as well as more advanced courses supporting foster carers to receive formal recognition of their skills, knowledge and experience. For mainstream foster
carers there are twelve core modules that primary carers are expected to undertake within the first 12 months of approval and secondary carers are expected to complete eight of these:

- First Aid*
- Attachment, Separation and Loss
- Introduction to Fostering in Essex County Council and Record Keeping
- Practical Techniques for Promoting Positive Behaviour/Practical Techniques for Managing Positive Behaviour and Relationships with Teenagers*
- Achieving Health and Wellbeing of Children in Care
- Health and Safety
- Protecting Children and Young People*
- Child Development/Adolescent Child Development
- Education Matters
- Safer Caring
- Equality and Diversity in Foster Care
- Workshop to raise awareness of Prevent (WRAP) – Radicalisation – can you identify who is at risk?*

We have the same expectations of Short Break Carers but the time frame for completion is 18 months in recognition that many of them are working full time in addition to their fostering role.

Connected Persons/Family and Friends carers are expected to complete 4 of the above modules and the second carer is also expected to complete these within a 12 month time period. These modules are shown by a * above.

All carers are also expected to complete the medication workbook before they take on their first placement. This is reviewed on an annual basis. The Personal Development Plan (PDP) outlines the ongoing expectation of foster carers regarding their development. All carers are expected to complete a minimum of 3 modules/learning activities a year.

In addition to this there are a number of other face to face modules, e-learning modules and distance learning modules that carers can access. Foster carers’ training is included within the Children and Families Training Programme which is published by the Essex Social Care Academy. This is available for all foster carers to access. In addition to the above training the Fostering Changes programme is provided in some quadrants, depending on staff availability. We are exploring options with ESCA regarding help with facilitating the Fostering Changes programme in all quadrants on a regular basis.
Other Areas of Development

There are other opportunities for foster carers to develop and gain skills. The Fostering Service encourages carers to become involved with training events, information evenings, and support groups as well as taking on active roles within the Essex Foster Carers Association.

Training, Support and Development (TSD) Induction Standards

The Training, Support and Development Standards (formerly CWDC) provide guidance for foster carers on the requirements for their training and development and continuous professional development.

There are three TSD induction workbooks for carers, one for Foster Care, one for Short Breaks Care and one for Family and Friends Care.

All existing foster carers and short break carers who have not been approved in the past 12 months should have completed these unless they have an agreed extension in writing. All new foster carers and short break carers have 12 months to complete these from when they are approved as foster carers. All new Connected Persons/Family and Friends carers have 18 months to complete these from the time when they were approved as foster carers.

Workshops are available for foster carers who wish to have some additional input into the completion of these books. Foster carer development programmes are also linked with the TSD standards although there is an expectation that carers need to evidence their learning in addition to attending a course.

Cross referencing grids are completed by assessing social workers for all new carers to show which outcomes have been met through the assessment process. There is a grid for each book and the appropriate one should be signed off to show that the carers have fully evidenced the applicable outcomes through that process.

Essex has a TSD co-ordinator who is responsible for providing advice and support to carers and staff regarding the completion of the books. The TSD co-ordinator has a quality assurance role and is also the responsible person for signing off the TSD workbooks.
Support for Foster Carers

Each foster carer is supported and supervised by an allocated Supervising Social Worker. The Supervising Social Worker’s role includes support, supervision and liaison within Children and Families Services and with other agencies. Supervising Social workers visit carers regularly and visits are more frequent if required. During these visits Supervising Social Workers read logs completed by the foster carers concerning the children in placement and discuss any matters arising. During such visits the Supervising Social Workers will also be aware of any health and safety, child protection, and standards of care issues which need to be addressed. Supervising Social Workers offer support when foster carers have difficulties within their own lives which impinge on the fostering task. Supervising Social Workers will also liaise with other parts of the organisation on behalf of foster carers. They may, for example, contact benefit advisers and those in other organisations such as health visitors and occupational therapists who advise about equipment and adaptations to enable disabled children to be looked after in a family setting.

Each Quadrant Fostering Team now has a Placement Social Worker who liaises regularly with foster carers when making arrangements for in house foster placements. They arrange a placement with a carer in consultation with the Supervising Social Worker and ensure that the foster carer is supported on the day of placement by a follow up phone call. The Supervising Social Worker chairs the Placement Planning Meeting held for each new placement to ensure that the child’s, the foster carer’s and the birth family’s needs are met in the best way possible. The Supervising Social Worker ensures that all parties, including the child’s social worker, are communicating clearly and any support needs for the foster carer are identified. Foster Carers are invited to give written feedback prior to their annual household review on the quality of support they have received. This feedback is monitored by fostering managers, the Fostering Panel and the Head of Service. Part of the role of the Supervising Social Worker is also to undertake at least one unannounced visit to foster carers each year.

Other Support for Foster Carers

- Emotional Well-being and Mental Health Service (EWMHS);
- After hours support Line for foster carers;
- Emergency Duty Service;
- Carers’ support groups;
- Foster carer’s own children support groups;
- Essex Foster Carers Association;
- Therapeutic support groups for those on the Therapeutic scheme
- The Fostering Network professional membership
Please see Section 3 – **Services which Support Fostering**  
There are also Foster Carer Support Groups that operate in all quadrants.

## Review of Foster Carers

Household reviews are undertaken annually on each fostering household or more frequently where there is a change of circumstances requiring this. For each Review the following feedback is requested:

- the foster carer(s);
- the child’s parents;
- the child’s social worker;
- the foster carer’s own children;
- others living in the household
- the Independent Reviewing Officer
- health professionals
- education professionals

End of placement reports from previous placements completed by the child’s social worker are also considered.

The Review considers:

- current household members;
- changes of circumstances since previous review;
- placements during the last year;
- status of statutory checks;
- visiting including unannounced visit;
- significant incidents including Child Protection and/or Standards of Care concerns;
- health and safety;
- comments on foster carer’s log;
- support needs of foster carer household;
- supervising social worker’s overall report;
- training and development;
- consideration of approval and future use.

If the terms of a foster carer’s approval needing to change, the report is often considered by the Fostering Panel and the carer is invited to attend.
Refusal or Termination of Approval

Prospective foster carers, when the Decision Maker following Fostering Panel proposes not to approve them or existing foster carers when termination or a change of approval is proposed by the Decision Maker, can make representations to the Fostering Service or ask for an independent review of their case. The Fostering Service leaflet for carers and prospective carers attending Panel explains the processes available. Applicants can ask panel to reconsider their case or alternatively can ask for an independent review from the national Independent Review Mechanism.

Quality Monitoring

The quality of the work of the Fostering Service is monitored at all levels through the staff supervision system. In addition, the Panel Professional Adviser and the Fostering Panel provide a ‘quality control’ for foster carer assessments, and feedback from consumers comes via foster carer reviews, child care reviews and the complaints procedure. The Fostering Service undertakes monthly case file auditing of foster carer files.

Section Three

Services

Essex Fostering Service provides placements for children and young people who need to be looked after in accordance with the Children Act 1989, the Care Standards Act 2000 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

There are five locality teams across the four quadrant areas and one centralised team covering Recruitment and Assessment. The recruitment is carried out by a county wide team based around the County and takes responsibility for training and assessing prospective foster carers, undertaking assessments of friend/family and connected persons and Special Guardianship assessments. Quadrant teams are based in Colchester and Clacton, Basildon, Chelmsford and Harlow and cover the surrounding areas. They are responsible for supervision of foster carers living in these areas. The foster carers provide short and long term care for children and young people aged 0-18 years, including children with
disabilities. The quadrant teams’ Supervising Social Workers support and supervise foster carers. These quadrant teams also support Connected Persons/Family and Friends carers. There are four Quadrant Service Managers responsible for the children in care teams and the fostering teams locally and one Service Manager is responsible for the centralised fostering team Special Guardianship Order Support and complaints and allegations.

Essex has a fully fee paid fostering service. All foster carers are paid a fostering allowance for each child looked after. There is a fee paid structure with three different levels, Standard, Intermediate and Advanced which recognises all foster carers’ particular skill levels and the complexity of placements they can take, and includes all Connected Persons/Family and Friends carers. There is a Fee Paid Short Breaks Scheme which provides short breaks for children and young people with very complex medical needs or those on the autistic spectrum. The service has a Therapeutic Fostering Scheme to provide family placements for children and young people with the most complex needs. There is a PACE bed scheme to provide placements for children who have been arrested who need a foster placement overnight.

The fostering teams in each quadrant are responsible for matching children with long term foster carers and through the Placement Social Workers for all in house placements. The foster carers, who provide care to children with disabilities either through full time placement or short breaks, are supervised by the quadrant fostering teams.

0800 Free Central Recruitment Line

There are two initial enquiry workers in the Fostering Recruitment team who respond to enquiries from members of the general public interested in becoming foster carers. The Quadrant fostering teams have Placement Social Workers based locally and managed centrally by the External Resources Service who undertake placement searches for all children requiring foster care. Every effort is made to match children’s needs as carefully as possible. A detailed matching process identifies the child or young person’s needs and a risk assessment is completed on all placement requests. Where it is not possible to find an appropriately matched placement for children and young people within an Essex foster home, the Access to Resources team liaises with external providers. This involves the use of a Regional Preferred Provider list through the Eastern Region contract (ER). The Fostering Service operates an out of hours telephone support service for all foster carers in Essex. Many Children with Disabilities foster placements are made directly through close liaison with the locality Children with Disabilities teams to ensure the most suitable placement of children with physical needs or learning disabilities.
Services which Support Fostering

Children’s Fieldwork Teams

The child care services are currently structured under the headings of:

- Assessment and Intervention
- Family Support and Protection
- Children in Care and Leaving Care
- Children With Disabilities

Collectively they fulfil a range of functions to vulnerable children and their families. Where children are no longer able to reside with their own families, the teams work closely in partnership with the Fostering Service to ensure that they are cared for appropriately in alternative placements.

The Adoption Service

The Adoption Service supports all areas relating to the adoption process including:

- recruiting, preparing and assessing prospective adoptive parents;
- supporting adoptive families before and after placement and adoption order;
- preparing children for adoptive placements;
- supporting the children’s social worker where adoption is the plan from planning, through to placement and Adoption Order;
- family finding for children whose care plan is adoption;
- managing the four Adoption Panels;
- managing direct and indirect (Letterbox) contact between birth family members and adopted children;
- Providing intermediary services for birth family members;
- Supporting adopted people to access their birth and adoption records.
Foster Carers Support Line

To ensure that foster carers have access to knowledgeable out of hours support there is a Support Line which is run by the Fostering service. The service is operated 24/7 out of normal office hours.

Fosterline

0800 040 7675
enquiries@fosterline.info

To make a text phone call dial 18001 01527 836910

Language Line facilities are available. Please call Fosterline to request this service.

Emergency Duty Service

Tel (mobile) 08456061212 (out of hours)

This is a countywide out of hours social work service which can provide advice and support to foster carers and, where appropriate, direct social work intervention (available evenings, overnight, weekends and public holidays).

Essex Foster Carers Association

The Essex Foster Carers Association, Burgess Well House, Coval Lane, Chelmsford, CM1 1JE, Telephone: 0300 777 1234, Email: carer2carer@essexfca.org. Website: www.essexfca.org This is an organisation run by Essex Foster Carers, which provides support and advice to foster carers. All Essex Foster Carers and Connected Persons/Family and Friends Carers are automatically members of the EFCA. The Association also has regular meetings with the fostering managers and with Quadrant Directors and acts as a voice for foster carers.
Allegations Support

When foster carers are subject to allegations relating to child protection or standards of care issues, support is offered through The Fostering Network Service. This service can be accessed through the carer’s supervising social workers who can make the referral.

Fostering Network
Fostering Network Support line
Tel: 02076202100
(Mon-Fri 12:00 - 04:00 pm)

General Info & Benefits Helpline
Tel: 02072611884

Finance Helpline
Tel: 0800801531

Customer Care Team – Complaints and Compliments (Have Your Say)

The customer care functions carried out by the Children and Families service are concerned with responding to enquiries and expressions of concern about the general performance of the service and its handling of individual cases. These contacts include requests for information, comments (negative or neutral), compliments and complaints. The Customer Care Team (CCT) acts as a central point for the administration of the various functions that arise from contacts received from members of the public, elected and appointed representatives and other agencies. Such contacts may be received by phone, face-to-face, by letter, email, fax or web form. They may be received directly or via another part of the Council (e.g. Executive Director for Children and Families/Member enquiries. The different types of contact that Have Your Say receives and is required to handle are:

- complaints from members of the public, about the services provided to them (or services they want, but feel they have been denied);
• comments (neutral or negative) from members of the public, about services provided to them or to the wider community;

• compliments (positive comments) from members of the public, about services provided to them or to the wider community;

• enquiries from members of the public about the handling of specific cases with which they have some association;

• enquiries from members of the public about broader aspects of the work of Family Operations (these fall under the Freedom of Information Act whether the customer expresses their enquiry in this manner or not);

• enquiries from privileged persons or bodies (e.g. MPs, elected members, central government departments, inspection bodies, head teachers about individual cases);

• enquiries from privileged persons or bodies about broader aspects of the work of Family Operations;

• requests from the Local Government Ombudsman or Information Commissioner’s Office to deal with complaints made to them by a member of the public (i.e. referral to local procedures);

• requests from the Local Government Ombudsman or Information Commissioner’s Office for information required to facilitate their own investigation of complaints against Family Operations;

For further information contact Customer Care Team, Family Operations via Contact Essex on 03330 139815 or 03330 139817.

As of 2013 the Fostering Service is no longer subject to specific inspections of fostering. The Fostering Service is inspected as part of the inspection of services for children who need help and protection, children looked after and achieving permanence. Inspection reports can be found at: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Section Four

Number of Foster Carers, Number of Fostered Children and Young People

Essex County Council is committed to providing a range of foster carers who will meet the needs of children and young people who need foster placements. As a Service we are constantly in the process of recruiting new carers and our dedicated Recruitment Team has a recruitment strategy to address this. As of end of March 2018 we have a total of 476 carer households. There were
1014 children in care in Essex; of these 541 children were living in Essex County Council foster homes.

Carers come from a wide variety of backgrounds and as a fostering service we recruit carers from all cultural, religious, ethnic, racial, and linguistic backgrounds. This enables the fostering service to match foster carers with the specific identified needs of the children and young people.

Section Five

Staffing

1 x Head of Service Adoption and Fostering + 4 Directors of Local Delivery
5 x Service Managers
1 x Fostering Panel Advisor
1 x TSD Co-ordinator
9.5 x Team Managers
20 x Senior Practitioners
36 x Social Workers
12 x Outreach Workers

Management Structure of Fostering Service

Executive Director for Children and Families
Head of Service Fostering, Adoption and External Placements
Directors of Local Delivery
Quadrant Service Managers
Service Manager Fostering
Colchester Team Manager
Tendring Team Manager
Mid Quadrant Team Manager
South Quadrant Team Managers
West Quadrant Team Manager
Recruitment Team Managers