



Statement of Purpose

Oxfordshire Children, Education & Families

Fostering Service

2023-2024

A statement of purpose sets out what services are provided for children who are placed by the fostering service, including those additionally provided by education and therapeutic agencies.

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/fostering

Statement of Purpose, for Oxfordshire Children, Education & Families

1. Introduction

This Statement of Purpose fulfils the requirements of Standard 16 of the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards 2011 and Chapter 4 of the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4. There is a requirement that all Fostering Services provide a written Statement of Purpose setting out the aims, objectives and details of the service and facilities provided. The Statement of Purpose is reviewed and updated every year.

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

Copies of the Statement of Purpose will be provided to:

- Children's Services staff who are involved in providing services to Children We Care For and young people.
- Foster carers and people who are being assessed as foster carers
- Oxfordshire's Children in Care Council
- Oxfordshire Foster Care Association

In addition, the document will be placed on Oxfordshire's fostering website <http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/fostering>

2. Aims and Objectives

Oxfordshire's Fostering Service is determined to provide an outstanding service to all children in foster care and a standard of care that meets or exceeds their needs. Oxfordshire recognises the central importance of foster care as a vehicle for transforming the lives of children in public care. Foster carers are regarded as making a hugely valuable contribution and should, therefore, be provided with first rate preparation, training and support to carry out their role to maximum effect.

As a responsible Corporate Parent, Oxfordshire is committed to listening to the voice of each child and young person, assessing their needs and comprehensively planning to meet them. The Fostering Service will work in effective partnership with their families, foster carers, colleagues within the County Council, and other agencies, with the objective of delivering the best possible care and support to Children We Care For and young people.

2.1 The aims of the service can be summarised as:

- (a) All fostered children to be provided with a well-planned, stable and high-quality placement that will enhance their life chances.
- (b) The service will be responsive to the needs of children who require a fostering placement, recruiting sufficient carers to offer placement choice.
- (c) To provide excellent support and service to foster carers, by suitably experienced, skilled and qualified social work staff, managers and administrative support staff.
- (d) To provide a progression pathway for foster carers that supports them to consider fostering more challenging and harder to place children.

2.2 To achieve these aims the service is based on the following objectives:

The provision of well planned, stable and high-quality placements to meet children's needs and improve their outcomes.

- Children are entitled to grow up in a safe, loving environment that can meet their developmental needs.
- A child/young person's wishes and feelings will be considered, and children/young people will be encouraged to participate in decisions about their care.
- Family and friends play a unique role in enabling children and young people to remain with adults they know and trust if they cannot, for whatever reason, live with their parents.
- Local placements to promote continuity and maintain family networks will be provided wherever possible.
- Children should have an enjoyable childhood, benefiting from excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills leading to a successful adult life.
- Placement stability and consistency of care is promoted in every possible way to give all children /young people a settled experience in fostering. We "never give up on a child" and placements should only be allowed to end in a planned and considered way.
- Each child is valued as an individual and given personalised support in line with their individual needs and background in order to develop their identity, self-confidence and self-worth.

- Each placement will meet the requirements of the child's care plan and wherever possible reflect the child's racial, cultural, religious and linguistic background.
- Siblings will be placed together, in line with the recommendation of a Together or Apart assessment, wherever possible, consistent with their needs and in line with their Care Plan.
- The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.
- The significance of contact for Children We Care For and maintaining positive relationships with birth parents, the wider family and other significant people is valued, as is the foster carer's role in this.
- Children in foster care deserve to be treated as a 'good parent' would treat their own children and to have the opportunity for as full an experience of family life and childhood as possible, without unnecessary restrictions.
- Young people are enabled to 'Stay Put' in their foster families beyond their eighteenth birthday up to age 21, subject to this being in the best interests of the young person and with the full agreement of the foster carers.
- The educational achievements of Children We Care For and young people are promoted, and foster carers enabled to call upon the support of the Virtual School in helping to improve the educational achievement of young people in their care.
- Foster carers are supported in promoting the emotional and physical health of young people, so that they reach their full potential.

2.3 The recruitment and assessment of foster carers

A recruitment strategy is in place that supports the recruitment of a sufficient number and range of local foster carers to meet the needs of Oxfordshire's Children We Care For. A prompt, professional and respectful response is provided to anyone enquiring about becoming an Oxfordshire foster carer.

- Carers are well prepared for the fostering task by a thorough assessment that focuses on their ability to meet the needs of Children We Care For.

- The Fostering Panel will be maintained and supported in accordance with the Regulations and will consist of the right mix of qualified, experienced and knowledgeable individuals, chaired by a suitably experienced independent person.

2.4 High quality support and service to foster carers

- The central importance of the child/young person's relationship with their foster carer is acknowledged and foster carers are recognised as core members of the team working with the child.
- Foster carers have a right to full information about any child/young person placed.
- The approach of the Fostering Service will be open and accessible, treating all carers with fairness and respect and as fellow professionals.
- Effective two-way communication is recognised as essential to good working relationships.
- Working with a range of multi-disciplinary support services, children, young people and their carers are provided with the services and support to meet their needs.
- All foster carers are valued. They are provided with a high standard of supervision, support and guidance through individual sessions with their supervising social worker and support groups.
- A wide range of training courses are accessible to foster carers. Encouragement and support is provided to foster carers to use these training opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge.
- Practical support and advice is given to the Oxfordshire Foster Care Association so that it can be an effective voice in supporting individual foster carers and in promoting the needs of Children We Care For and young people.
- All foster carers will be made aware of Oxfordshire's complaints procedures and are supported in using the complaints procedures when necessary.
- To ensure the increased professionalisation of the service, foster carers are supported to see themselves on a progression pathway where they might take on more demanding roles as they grow in confidence

3. Management, staffing and service structure

The Fostering Service is part of Children's Services under the overall leadership and direction of the Director of Children's Service. The Corporate Parenting Panel is a

group of people who meet regularly to oversee services provided to Children We Care for and Care Leavers. It includes elected members, senior Children's Services managers, Foster Carers and representatives from the Children in Care Council, Health and The Virtual School.

Fostering Service staff structure

- Director of Children's Services
 - Deputy Director
 - Corporate Parenting Manager
 - Fostering Service Manager
 - Fostering Panel Advisers
 - Fostering Panel administrators
 - Therapeutic Foster Care Programme manager
 - Programme Supervisor
 - Senior Practitioner
 - Family Therapist
 - Support Workers
 - Skills Coaches
 - PDF caller
 - North Fostering Team Manger
 - Senior Practitioner, County Family Finding Lead
 - Support and Supervision Social Workers
 - Assistant Team Manager, Family & Friends
 - Family & Friends Assessment Team Social Workers
 - Team administrator
 - South Fostering Team Manager
 - Support and Supervision Social Workers
 - Assistant Team Manager, Family & Friends
 - Family & Friends Assessment Team Social Workers
 - Team administrator
 - City Fostering Team Manager
 - Support and Supervision Social Workers
 - Private Fostering
 - Assistant Team Manager, Family & Friends
 - Family & Friends Assessment Team Social Workers
 - Team administrator
 - Recruitment Manager
 - County Recruitment Team
 - Supported Lodgings
 - Enquiry Officer

3.1 The Fostering Service consists of:

The Corporate Parenting Manager has overall responsibility for the management of the Fostering Service.

The Fostering Service Manager provides the operational management of the service.

The Safeguarding & LAC QA Service Managers have the role of Agency Decision Maker (ADM).

The Independent Chair of the Fostering Panel is responsible for the leadership of Fostering Panel.

The Fostering Panel Advisers are responsible for the management and operation of the panels. They are assisted by two administrators.

The Fostering Teams recruit, train, assess and provide support to prospective mainstream foster carers and family and friends foster carers. There are three teams, to cover all parts of the county. Staffing consists of 5 team managers, 1.5fte Assistant Team Managers, 37fte qualified social workers, 8.7fte (other roles not SW qualified) and administrators. These teams include specialist workers who are responsible for recruiting and assessing specialist foster carers for disabled children, including carers for the short break scheme. Within the City Fostering Team there is a Supported Lodgings Scheme for young people who are leaving care and two specialist workers for Private Fostering.

The Oxfordshire Therapeutic Foster Care programme is a locally implemented programme for children aged 3-11 years old. The programme aims to enable a small number of children who have the most complex emotional, behavioural and developmental needs to be placed in short term therapeutic foster placements where they will learn the skills needed to live in families on a permanent basis, either returning to live with birth families or moving on to permanence through adoption or fostering. The team is made up of a Programme Supervisor who coordinates the individual therapeutic programmes for the children and is the education lead, a Supervising Social Worker who supports the foster carers, a Family Worker who works with the birth family or long-term placement and Skills Coaches who work with the children individually. The programme is overseen by the OTFC Team Manager who also oversees the work of specialist support to mainstream placements including family support workers, the Fostering Toolkit and the Mockingbird family model.

In 2022 the enhanced programme was introduced for adolescence stepping down from residential settings. The placements in this programme are long-term arrangements.

The Recruitment Team, is responsible for dealing with enquiries from the public and the first stages of the application process for foster carers. This team also organises marketing and recruitment campaigns to encourage local people to apply to foster and to recruit foster carers for specific children. The team consists of an enquiry officer and a dedicated marketing and community officer.

<https://intranet.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/team-content/fostering>

Foster Carer Coordinators Experienced carers who work alongside fostering staff and provide a range of support, including training, to other foster carers. We have nine Foster Carer Coordinators

3.2 The Fostering Service works in close association with:

Brokerage Team: Oxfordshire has a Brokerage Service based within the Local Authority Joint Commissioning Team. The teamwork in partnership with social workers and partners to match children and young people requiring a placement with approved carers whose details are held on the Foster Carers' register. Brokerage are responsible for matching detailed referrals along with assessments of the young person's needs and outcomes with the strengths of the approved carers. The foster care placement types provided include: emergency, relief, short term, long term, parent and child, therapeutic foster care etc. Emergency placement requests are dealt with by the Emergency Duty Team after core hours. Carers who are f Skill Level 3 and above also have access to on call manager support after 5 p.m.- 11 p.m. weekdays and from 8 a.m. – 11 p.m. at weekends.

Where possible, placements are identified in-house. In the absence of appropriate placements within the County, alternative placements are explored with Independent Fostering Agencies, and the team along with Joint Commissioning is responsible for the managing and review of these contracts with providers.

Children We Care For social work teams: Each child we care for has an allocated worker who is responsible for the child or young person's care plan. They lead on assessing needs, care planning and supporting children in foster care.

Oxfordshire's Attach Team (Attaining Therapeutic Attachments for Children): provides help for children and foster carers if a therapeutic intervention is required. The team also provides training and group interventions to a wide variety of people including carers, parents and professionals working with young people to promote care and services which are informed by an understanding of the significance of attachment relationships. The team consists of clinical psychologists, a family therapist and specialist senior practitioners.

3.3 Safeguarding team

Independent Reviewing Officers chair the reviews of children we care for, confirm their care plans and oversee that plans are implemented in a timely and appropriate fashion.

Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) role is outlined in *Working Together 2010* and is in place to ensure that allegations against people working with children are progressed in a timely and appropriate way. The LADO should be made aware of all cases in which it is alleged that a person who works with children has:

- Behaved in a way that has harmed a child or may have harmed a child; or possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates s/he is unsuitable to work with children.

This includes any allegation relating to a foster carer.

Medical Advisers in the Community Paediatric Team based at the John Radcliffe hospital provide specialist medical advice for foster carers, social workers and the Fostering Panels.

The Designated GP and Designated Nurse for Children We Care For provide a medical service to children in foster care.

Oxfordshire's Virtual School provides support to Children We Care For in their educational attainment, training and preparation for employment.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and Primary CAMHS can provide specialist mental health services for children in foster care.

Volunteer Independent Visiting and Advocacy (VIVA) service can be contacted on 01865 328670 or viva@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Below are listed the key managers and the Chair of the Fostering Panels:

Name	Title
Anne Coyle (interim)	Director of Children's Services
Jean Kelly Anne Coyle (interim)	Deputy Directors of Children's Services
Sarah Duerden	Corporate Parenting Manager
Jackie Giles	Service Manager, Fostering

Tracy Brawley	Agency Decision Maker
David Taylor	Agency Decision Maker
Justine Manning	Agency Decision Makers
Kim Brown	Fostering Team Manager, North
Pratishtha Srivastava and Kate Chapman	Fostering Team Managers, City
Wendy Queralt	Fostering Team Manager, South
Clare Campling	Programme Manager, Therapeutic Foster Care
Yashi Shah	Fostering Panel Chair
Jo Upton Jo Church	Fostering Panel Advisers
Deb Osborne Liz Ashley-Cox	Fostering Panel Administrators

4. Functions of the Fostering Service

4.1 Recruitment and Approval of Carers

Preliminary information about fostering can be obtained from Recruitment Officers on 08007835724 (freephone)

<https://intranet.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/team-content/fostering>

Oxfordshire has developed a recruitment strategy, in conjunction with its carers and staff, which is designed to help deliver targeted campaigns based on researched needs for certain types of carers. Examples of current strategies include targeted recruitment of carers for siblings, teenagers, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and disabled children. The Department has developed a range of recruitment materials and is staffed by an experienced recruitment officer, Maria White tel: 01865 323127 and an Enquiry Officer. Recruitment work is carried out in partnership with the carer co-ordinators, a small group of experienced foster carers with an interest in imparting their knowledge and skills to others at the early stage of the fostering process.

The first stage of the recruitment process is designed to help prospective carers explore the complexities involved with the task so that they are well informed and in receipt of sufficient knowledge to make an informed choice. This process is a preliminary to the assessment.

4.2 Information about the Fostering Service

The County Council's website provides full information on Oxfordshire's fostering service for the public.

Oxfordshire Children's Guide to Fostering has been produced in three versions; one for very young children, one for over fives and one for older children. These booklets provide information for children about being in foster care.

Information Leaflets and booklets include:

- Information leaflet for prospective foster carers on fostering given to all prospective foster carers on enquiry
- Booklet for foster carers undertaking preparation groups based on skills to foster
- Leaflet on short break care
- Leaflet on therapeutic foster care
- Leaflet on family and friends care
- Information for birth parents of children we care for
- Fostering Toolkit
- Allowances, fees and expenses booklet

5. Assessment of new foster carers

Oxfordshire has three fostering teams throughout the county each with a designated geographical area. When an initial enquiry is received from a member of the public via the Recruitment Team the next stage is an in-depth phone call to explore what the enquirer might have to offer and to answer any questions. Subsequently, an initial home visit is made by a qualified social worker from the team covering that location. Detailed information is given to applicants about the fostering process and the timescales specified for each stage.

Where the enquirer and the Fostering Service believe that it is appropriate to move forward, an application form is completed. This process is in two stages; the first will be to gather statutory checks and references. If these indicate a positive assessment is likely then a home study is completed. This involves around eight visits to the applicants' home to meet with them and other members of their household. The purpose of these visits is to:

- Assess their suitability to become foster carers
- Prepare the applicants for the fostering role.

Oxfordshire aims to complete assessments within six months and begin to gather information for the full assessment at the same time as they complete Stage 1 checks.

At the end of the process, the assessment will have explored the applicants' knowledge of childcare, assessment of their general parenting skills, their ability to work in partnership with the Department and the families of children we care for and their commitment to learning about positive behaviour management.

5.1 Pre-approval training of prospective carers

All prospective carers are required to attend preparation groups, known as the Skills to Foster course. Preparation groups are run for prospective mainstream foster carers and family and friends foster carers; these always include the active contribution of an experienced foster carer. A variety of venues and times are offered, and the groups run regularly during the year depending on demand. There is additional specialist training for those providing care to children and young people with a disability.

6. The Fostering Panel

There are three independent Fostering Panels; with Panel meetings taking place most weeks. Panel capacity has responded to the increased need of the department. The Panel is constituted to meet the requirements of the Fostering Service Regulations. The Panel consists of a central list of members with a diverse range of personal and professional backgrounds, relevant to fostering. New panel members are provided with an induction and annual appraisals are undertaken with all panel members. Regular training is also provided. The Fostering Panel has an independent Chair to provide an objective stance. The Panel collectively provides a key quality assurance function in relation to the local authority.

Panel recommendations are passed to the Agency Decision Maker and letters then sent out according to prescribed timescales. The Fostering Panel strongly encourages all prospective and approved foster carers to attend when their cases are being presented as, Panel believes, this symbolises the importance of partnership working. Minutes are taken of all Panel business.

6.1 Approvals

All Oxfordshire carers are approved by the Agency Decision Maker. Applicants usually attend with their assessing social worker. Panel members understand that applicants are often apprehensive about attending and do all they can to put applicants at their ease. Applicants are asked questions about their motivation to become carers and give consideration to the terms of approval most suitable for them, such as the age, gender and number of children to be placed.

6.2 Annual Household Reviews of Approval

In addition to hearing all new fostering applications, approved foster carers' first annual reviews are also presented to the Fostering Panel. Subsequent reviews are also considered where there is a significant change to a carer's terms of approval or there are serious standard of care concerns where termination of approval may be considered.

6.3 Termination of Approval

Occasionally the Fostering Service will form the view that the standard of care provided by a carer does not meet the required level. Depending on the severity of the issue additional training or support may be provided in the first instance. However, the matter may be presented to the independent Fostering Panel for their advice and recommendation. Panel will give the carer an opportunity to express their views and will consider all the information provided to it. The foster carer will be encouraged to access advice and support from the Fostering Network in these circumstances. If Panel reaches a recommendation that the carer is unsuitable to foster, the ADM forms a decision (Qualifying Determination). If this is to terminate approval, a letter is then sent to the carer stating this and giving reasons. The foster carer then has 28 days within which to make representation to the decision maker to appeal the decision via another OCC panel with different membership, or to apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for an independent review on behalf of the Secretary of State.

7. Placement Finding

Where the care plan is long term fostering, all family options have been exhausted and the local authority has obtained a Full Care Order, a Family Finder will be allocated from the Fostering Service for all children under 14 years of age. They will take the lead in identifying a placement in conjunction with the child's social worker, the Placements, Care and Support Brokerage Team (Placement Service) and the County Lead Family Finder.

Permanency and Transition Panel is held in the three areas 3 monthly, monitoring timescales for children's permanence plans.

8. Support to Foster Carers

8.1 Supervising Social Workers

All approved Foster Carers have their own Supervising Social Worker from the Fostering Team whose duties include:

- Supervision to carers on a minimum six weekly basis
- Making an unannounced visit, at least once a year
- Organising training with carers, including child specific training to meet the health and other related needs of disabled children
- Organising the provision of equipment as appropriate, and adaptations to carers' homes in long-term placements
- Arranging for support from the children's disability team or foster carers of disabled and other children with complex needs
- When possible, attending placement meetings, child protection meetings and placement reviews for children placed with their carers
- Giving oral and written information to the Fostering Panel about the carer
- Helping to ensure that placements are appropriate for the child, carer and the carer's family
- Arranging for medical checks to be updated
- Arranging for DBS and other legal checks to be updated
- Undertaking the carer's annual household review and ensuring the carers training and support needs are identified and addressed.
- In conjunction with the carer, young person and their Social Worker, contribute to the end of placement report
- Monitoring the carer's progress in relation to caring for children, as set out in the Fostering National Minimum Standards
- Take the lead responsibility when a concern or allegation is made about a foster carer and sign post the carer to independent support if applicable through such organisations as the Fostering Network.

8.2 Foster Carer Support Groups

Groups contain an element of training as well as support. These are run locally on a regular basis for both mainstream and family/friend carers; some meetings take place in the evening and some during the day depending on the area. Details of the groups are sent out to carers on a regular basis in the Foster Carer Newsletter and can also be obtained by contacting the Fostering Teams.

8.3 Foster Carer Coordinators

Foster Carer Coordinators are experienced foster carers who provide support, training and mentoring to other foster carers. As part of their role they will make initial contact with all newly approved carers. We currently have six foster carer co-ordinators countywide.

8.4 Oxfordshire Foster Care Association

This the local Foster Care Association, which is part funded by OCC. The OFCA arranges social events, foster carers forums and acts as an advocate for carers with the Department over issues of finance, training etc. Regular communication is sent out on behalf of the OFCA to let carers know more about the association and their current activities. The social events are for the carers, foster children and birth children, these events include pantomime tickets at Christmas and premier football tickets.

A monthly Recruitment and Retention Board takes place with representatives from the OFCA, fosters carers, staff and managers to receive feedback and to plan actions and developments for the service.

www.ofca.info

8.5 Learning and Development

The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services rightly place considerable emphasis on foster carer learning and development.

8.6 Training, Support and Development Standards

The Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care have been developed to ensure that people working with children, young people and their families have the best possible training, qualifications, support and advice. The Training, Support and Development Standards consist of seven standards designed to support carers and give them a framework for training.

New Foster Carers are expected to complete the seven Standards within 12 months of being approved as Foster Carers (or within 18 months for family and friend carers). Where carers might struggle to meet these requirements, i.e. because English is not their first language, they are provided with additional supports, such as a mentor to work with them on a one-to-one basis.

8.7 Learning and Development Programme

All foster carers both mainstream and family and friends have access to training via Integrated Business Centre and are able to locate and book courses available online themselves. On-going training is discussed regularly with carers during supervision and learning needs identified. Training is delivered locally and is scheduled for various times, weekdays evenings and weekends to suit demand. Some training is mandatory:

- First aid
- Safeguarding
- Foster carer Induction Standards
- Moving and Handling (for carers approved to take children with disabilities).

- Further mandatory training is required for carers depending on which skill fee level they are currently on.

Other core training available includes the following:

- Advocacy Skills
- An Introduction to Counselling and Listening Skills
- Assessing the Risk to Children & Young People of Domestic Violence
- Assessing Parent-Infant Relationships
- Attachment Theories
- Basic Child Development
- Calming and defusing
- Child Protection – Generalist Safeguarding
- Delegated Authority and Record Keeping
- Direct Work with Children and Young People
- Emergency Paediatric First Aid
- Managing Physical Interventions

- Missing children, Child Sexual Exploitation and Risky Behaviours
- Record Keeping
- Safe Caring
- Caring for Children that have been neglected • Caring for Children that have been Sexually Abused
- Why do Children Behave the way they do?
- Substance Misuse in young People
- Children Looked After and the Law
- Healthy Outcomes for Children Looked After
- Preparing Young people for Independence
- Making the Most of Supervision

As part of the Therapeutic Foster Care support arrangements, the Service runs the Fostering Toolkit, a training programme for mainstream foster and kinship carers.

Where possible, the Department is happy to offer its training courses to carers from other Local Authorities or Agencies. In addition to formal training, Supervising Social Workers address individual topics with their carers and provide reading matter or other appropriate materials.

Mockingbird Family Model

The Mockingbird family model is a model of foster care which focusses on creating a sense of extended family and community around the children we care for and young people, building on peer support for foster carers and providing opportunities for young people to develop relationships with a number of trusted adults and with other young people in care.

The aim of the model is to strengthen placements and provide continuity of care. The model supports young people to engage in activities and support contact with siblings. An essential component of the model is the support to foster carers aiming to build on and maintain foster carer resilience and increase retention.

Within Oxfordshire we currently have four hubs running for both foster and family and friends' carers, as well as Special Guardians and adopters.

Big Brother Big Sister Programme (BBBS)

Big Brother Big Sister is a volunteer mentoring programme for young people aged 6-12 years. It is based on a US model and piloted in Oxford in 2017 by the Oxford Hub and Oxfordshire County Council Children's Services. It is based on the previous experience of two long-term volunteers within the service, who have added capacity to social workers by providing support to children in the service. We matched our first cohort of volunteers in Summer 2017 and currently we have around 52 volunteers.

The aim of the programme is to create long term mentoring and friendships that support children to thrive in life, helping to build their self-esteem and achieve their potential through a wide range of activities and with a positive adult role model. Big Brothers and Sisters are matched with young people and usually spend time with them once a week for up to 4 hours. The volunteers have a direct link with the child's key worker and provide weekly contact sheets.

8.8 On-line Learning

There is increased take-up of on-line learning for carers who find it difficult to attend training events, perhaps due to child-care or work commitments. Akamas is a main provider of such training.

Opportunities for online learning increased due to the Covid pandemic, this has continued alongside face-to-face learning also being available.

8.9 Disability

Short break carers access training from the core training identified above. They are required to complete mandatory training in Safeguarding, First Aid and Manual Handling. Manual Handling training is done on an individual basis with child's Occupational therapist and child specific training for health needs is carried out by a health professional on an individual basis.

8.10 Financial support

- During this year Oxfordshire introduced a new 4 tier skills level payment structure according to a foster carer's skills and experience.
- The fostering allowance is centred around a maintenance allowance, which is based on the government recommended rate for Southeast England. This allowance will enable the carers to meet all of the usual needs of the fostered child.

- In addition, a number of further allowances are paid for Birthdays, Christmas/Celebrations and Summer Holidays. There may be an allowance available for specific items. Please see separate Allowance Leaflet.
- Foster Carer allowances and fees are reviewed annually.

8.11 Relief breaks

From time to time foster carers require a break from fostering. Where possible these are taken between placements. Where this is not possible, planned relief care is provided by other approved carers. Where possible, time for introductions is built in so that the child becomes familiar with the relief carer before the break occurs. Some relief is offered on a regular basis, such as one weekend a month so that the child/young person becomes used to joining the other household. Relief care is not usually provided for carers approved for the zero to two age band as babies and toddlers need the consistent care of one care giver.

8.12 Foster Carers Handbook

The handbook contains comprehensive guidance and information for foster carers. Available on OCC Fostering website www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/fosteringhandbook

8.13 Other support provided for foster carers (and young people)

- Day care consultation service to field social workers and other agencies
- Access to psychology services for carers
- Support from Foster Carer Coordinators
- Access to education supports
- Access to health supports and resources, e.g. drug advice, sexual health advice and counselling
- Holiday provision
- Brokerage Service
- Dialectical Behaviour Therapy
- Specialist Services for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children
- Access to out of hours support is available through the Department's Emergency Duty Team
- Carers on Skill Level 3 and above Out of Hours "on-call" service
- Newsletter for Foster Carers

- Social events for carers and children
- Therapeutic Foster Care
- Membership of Fostering Network.

8.14 Through contractual agreements the Service also provides:

- Advice and Mediation Service to carers and staff involved in fostering with Fostering Network

9. Placement types

9.1 Relief Fostering

Relief placements are when a child joins a fostering household for a limited number of overnight stays, either as a one off or as part of a regular schedule of visits. The most common pattern is one weekend every month, but it can be for as long as two weeks. There are two sorts of Relief Care; relief provided by foster carers for other carers, and, relief provided for children and young people living with their birth families who need a break. Ideally relief care is planned to extend the social/recreational horizons of the child, so they enjoy the placement, whilst their primary carers get a chance to recharge their batteries. Relief care can sustain foster placements as carers occasionally need time to themselves.

Relief carers are sometimes those who are new to fostering and are finding their way into the role. Alternatively, they may have work or other commitments that do not allow for them to consider full-time fostering. Relief carers need a particular set of skills; their role is to work to an existing care plan and to back up the primary carer. Most often relief placements are planned in advance and roles and delegated responsibilities are carefully worked out and agreed in a Placement Plan.

9.2 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. This is the most regularly used type of placement that the service offers.

Many 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 achieve permanency with an alternative family through adoption, Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Order. 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. Sometimes children need to be placed in an emergency, at any time of day or night.

Short-term and emergency carers need to be skilled at settling distressed children and providing a reassuring environment. For those offering placements for children under school age it is critical that one carer is at home full-time. Over school age it is necessary for the practicalities of school holidays and child sickness to be well-thought through.

9.3 Long term Fostering

Long-term fostering is when a carer takes on a child permanently, i.e. until the age of 18. This is a good care plan for some children where adoption is not appropriate, such as, those with close links to their birth family. Long term fostering allows a child to have a full, committed experience of family life without surrendering ties to their family of origin. Some long-term fostering placements end when a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Order is made. We have a dedicated Senior Practitioner to raise the profile of Long-Term Fostering and permanence for Children We Care For.

There is a Long-Term Linking Panel Adviser with responsibility for co-ordinating the formal linking of children with their long-term carers. These cases are heard at Fostering Panel where they are almost always an extremely meaningful occasion.

9.4 Oxfordshire Therapeutic Foster Care Programme

OTFC is a locally implemented programme aimed at improving outcomes for looked after children. The programme aims to enable a small number of children who have the most complex emotional, behavioural and developmental needs to be placed in short term therapeutic foster care placements where they will learn the skills needed to live in families on a permanent basis, either returning to live with birth families or moving on to permanence through adoption or fostering. This programme is now extended to adolescents under our Enhanced Programme, with a focus on young people staying their foster home until they move into the leaving care pathway.

9.5 Family and Friends (Connected Persons) Fostering

Oxfordshire is committed to placing children with family or friends with whom a child is already familiar, rather than with a foster carer s/he does not know, if at all possible. Children's teams identify families and friends to care for children by exploring the social network of the child to find out if there are 'family and friends' who might care for the child in the short term. There is provision to make a placement with a relative or friend for up to sixteen weeks for a child who is looked after, without going to Fostering Panel

beforehand, but these placements must be assessed and presented to Fostering Panel within stipulated timescales.

Many children/young people first placed with Family and Friends Foster Carers leave care when an order is made by the courts, such as a Special Guardianship Order or a Child Arrangement Order. Oxfordshire has a full policy on Family and Friends Foster Care available on request.

9.6 Short Breaks for children with disabilities

This service provides regular, planned, short breaks for children/young people with disabilities with approved foster carers. Disabled children have a full assessment carried out and the report is presented to the Disability Priority Panel which identifies the appropriate service and the level at which it is to be provided. Following this the child's name is placed on the Record of Need (R.O.N.) until an appropriate short break carer is identified. The Record of Need is reviewed regularly.

Children/young people receive a short break of a weekend every month. This allows for a relationship to build up between the child/young person and the carer and sometimes short break carers are able to provide longer periods of care or back-up care in a crisis. Where a child/young person has particular health needs, specific training is provided prior to a placement. Specialist qualified social workers assess and support foster carers who provide short breaks under this scheme.

9.7 Parent and child fostering

Oxfordshire's fostering service has some approved foster carers who are able to provide specialist placements for a parent and child, most often this means young mothers and their babies, but it is recognised that sometimes the primary carer is the father. In some cases, both the parent and child will both be Children We Care For. In other situations, it may be just the child who is looked after, either under s20 of the Children Act or under a Care Order.

The parent and child foster carer has a primary responsibility to ensure the welfare and safety of the child. At the same time, the foster carer plays a crucial role in supporting the parent and in helping him / her to bond with their child and to develop their confidence and skills as a parent.

9.8 Fostering for Adoption

The service is committed to an approach in planning for children where the number of placements for any child pre-adoption is kept to a minimum. We now have a policy and procedure fully in place in that a number of carers have been granted dual approval and a number of concurrent placements have been made, where it is

envisaged that children will not need to move from foster carers who are approved adopters.

10. Complaints by foster carers

All complaints by foster carers are taken seriously. Foster carers are entitled to use the Departmental Complaints Procedure. Complaints will be resolved informally where possible, by the Supervising Social Worker or their manager. When this is not possible, it may be helpful to seek a second opinion from outside the team. Carers should be advised that, if not satisfied with the response, they may take it to the Service Manager, Corporate Parenting Manager or the Department's Complaints Officer:

Comments and Complaints Team Joint Commissioning Oxfordshire County Council Freepost RRYR-XTBE-GBTZ County Hall New Road Oxford OX1 1ND

01865 323589 07788 571577 commentsandcomplaints@oxfordshire.gov.uk

In this eventuality, carers are encouraged to use the Fostering Network's Advice and Mediation Officer, Bethan Houston email: Bethan.Houston@fostering.net

11. Systems for Monitoring and Evaluating the Service

The Department has a number of systems in place for monitoring and evaluating the service, as follows:

- Supervising Social Workers, foster carers and managers receive regular supervision in order to maintain the high standards expected of carers and workers
- All reports read and signed by managers; their signature represents a check on the quality of the information provided
- Annual unannounced visits are made to all carers
- The Agency Decision Maker reviews all Annual Reviews completed by the fostering service for all approved foster carers
- Tracking systems are in place to monitor timescales from initial enquiry to approval
- Feedback forms are provided to all enquirers in their information packs, at the information session, and after their preparation training groups
- Monthly evaluations of Fostering Enquiries inform the development of our recruitment & Enquiry Process

- Annual consultations are held with approved foster carers
- The Fostering Panel routinely ask all prospective/approved carers and social workers presenting to give feedback
- The Fostering Panel will also provide feedback to presenting Social Workers on the quality of their assessments as part of their quality assurance role.
- Written feedback is encouraged and exit interviews have been reintroduced and are completed by the Fostering Panel Advisers.

12. Ofsted

Ofsted is responsible for the regulation and inspection of Children's Social Care Services including Local Authority Fostering Services. The National Minimum Standards and Fostering Regulations are designed to set minimum acceptable standards for the safe running of Fostering Services. Details are available on the website.

OFSTED, National Business Unit, Royal Exchange Buildings

St Anne's Square, Manchester M2 7LA 0300 123 1231 www.ofsted.gov.uk

If you need this information in another language, large print, Braille, on audio cassette, computer disk or by email, please telephone the Fostering Recruitment and Enquiries Team. Tel 01865 323127 or 323128