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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

The vision of Staffordshire County Council Looked After Children & Disability Service is to ensure that all children and young people in care are safe, secure and achieve their full potential. Within the Fostering Service we aim to do this by providing and supporting safe, stable and positive experiences of care. Our aim is to ensure that each child has a secure identity by making the most of educational opportunities, being healthy and emotionally well as well as by enjoying a network of social relationships within which they feel valued.

As foster carers you play a vital part in ensuring that children in care have a safe and positive experience whilst being cared for. For some children & young people the plan may be to return home or be placed with relatives whilst others may move on to adoption or remain in permanent foster care.

This handbook contains a range of information and guidance which will help & support you to achieve good outcomes for children & young people in your care. Where guidance is given this is based on the Fostering Service policies and procedures.



USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS & ADDRESSES

ADOPTION & FOSTERING RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING TEAM (STAFFORD)

Staffordshire Place 1, Stafford ST16 2LP

Tel: 01785 895363

FOSTER CARER SUPPORT TEAM (NORTH)

Staffordshire Place 1, Stafford ST16 2LP

Tel: 01785 278573

FOSTER CARER SUPPORT TEAM (SOUTH)

Bird Street, Lichfield, WS13 6PN

Tel: 01543 512083

FOSTERING CENTRAL

Staffordshire Place 1, Stafford ST16 2LP

Tel: 01785 278573

FAMILY AND FRIENDS TEAM

Staffordshire Place 1, Stafford ST16 2LP

Tel: 01785 895949 (DUTY)

INTENSIVE FOSTERING PROJECT

Staffordshire Place 1, Stafford ST16 2LP

Tel: 01785 277332

ADOPTION TEAM

Red Gables, 59 High Street, Uttoxeter, ST14 7JQ

Tel: 01889 256400

ADOPTION SUPPORT TEAM

Red Gables, 59 High Street, Uttoxeter ST14 7JQ

Tel: 01889 256400

Post Box Contact: 0845 3300401

THE PLACEMENT SERVICE (DUTY)

Tel: 01785 277724

FOSTER CARER & ADOPTER RECRUITMENT & ENQUIRY LINE

0800 169 2061

EMERGENCY DUTY SERVICE

0345 604 2886

CAMHS (CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE)

CAMHS – WEST

Children's Services, The Bridge, St George's Parkway, off Crooked Bridge Road, Stafford ST16 3NE

Tel: 01785 221665

Fax: 01785 258556

CAMHS – BURTON (EAST)

1ST Floor, Cross Street Clinic, Burton on Trent, DE14 1EG

Tel: 01283 505820

Fax: 01283 505810

CAMHS – LICHFIELD (EAST)

Holly Lodge, St Michaels Hospital, Trent Valley Road, Lichfield WS13 6EF

Tel: 01543 414555

Fax: 01543 442017

CAMHS - NEWCASTLE

The Ashlands, 35 North Castle Street, Newcastle, ST5 1AZ

Tel: 0300 7900235

Fax: 01782 613619

CAMHS - TAMWORTH

Argyle Street Clinic, Tamworth B77 3EW

Tel: 01827 51183

Fax: 01827 312098

CAMHS – LEEK & MOORLANDS

Eaton House, Buxton Road, Leek ST13 6EG

Tel: 01782 652660

SUSTAIN+

161 Eccleshall Road, Stafford ST16 1PD

Tel: 01785 244545

Email: sustain+@sssft.nhs.uk

Weekend Contact Number: 0300 790 7000

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICE PROJECT

Rachel Munday-Crates

rachel.mundaycrates@staffordshire.gov.uk

01785 253878

SAFEGUARDING THROUGH ADVOCACY (NSPCC)

0844 8920273

COMPLAINTS SERVICE:

Tel: 01785 278601

Staffordshire County Council, Head of Customer Feedback & Complaints, Wedgwood Building
Tipping Street, Stafford ST16 2DH

complaints&customerfeedback@staffordshire.gov.uk

Joint Finance Unit (Payments Non Mileage)

01785 277180

FOSTERING NETWORK

Advice & Mediation Worker: Bethan Houston

bethan.houston@fostering.net

01905 622459

07918684985

Fosterline: 0800 0407675

Legal Advice Line: 0870 164 8020

TARGETED TEENAGE SUPPORT – TEENAGE PREGNANCY PREVENTION

Alison Rutherford

01785 895132

YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE

North: 01782 297615

South West: 01785 277022

South East: 01543 510103

FAMILY RIGHTS INFORMATION

www.frg.org.uk

Family Rights Group, Second Floor, The Print House, 18 Ashwin Street, London E8 3DL

T: 020 7923 2628

F: 020 7923 2683

For advice:

email: advice@frg.org.uk

or

Phone the advice line: 0808 8010366

Opening hours: Monday - Friday

9.30am-3.30pm

GRANDPARENTS ASSOCIATION

www.grandparents-association.org.uk

The Grandparents' Association, Moot House, The Stow, Harlow, Essex CM20 3AG

Advice and information line: 0845 434 9585

Or email info@grandparents-association.org.uk

USEFUL WEBSITES

Staffordshire Fostering Service: www.care4child.org

Staffordshire County Council: www.staffordshire.gov.uk

Fostering Network: www.fostering.net

British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) www.baaf.org.uk

Department of Education www.education.gov.uk (government policies including Every Child Matters and the National Minimum Standards)

Information about the Virtual school: www.education.staffordshire.gov.uk

Equality and Human Rights Commission: www.equalityhumanrights.com

Office for the Children's Rights Director for England (CRD): www.rights4me.org

Healthy Lifestyles: www.nhs.uk/Change4Life

Young people's information about Staffordshire Young People's Youth Service:
www.youthbox.info

Basic Computer Skills and Information: learn.go-on.co.uk

Information about Bullying: www.kidscape.org.uk

Information about Benefits for Care Leavers: www.dwp.gov.uk

Sexual Health Information: www.brook.org.uk

Substance misuse information: www.talktofrank.com

Information about leaving care: www.nyas.net

Information about sexuality: www.stonewall.org.uk

Advocacy and children's rights: www.voiceyp.org & www.whocarestrust.org.uk

Staffordshire's Foster Carers Association: www.staffsfca.co.uk

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN HEALTH TEAM:

Springfields Health & Wellbeing Centre

Off Lovett Court

Rugeley

Staffordshire

WS15 2QD

Designated Nurse

Angela Jervis

Named Nurse

Sarah Borton: 01889 571399
07961 247669
sarah.borton@nhs.net

Nurse Advisor

Jacqui Harvey: 01889 571368
07791370353
jacqui.harvey@ssotp.nhs.uk

CHILDREN IN CARE EDUCATION CO-ORDINATORS:

Headteacher, Virtual School for Looked After Children

Sarah Rivers: 01785 854195
07800 544092
sarah.rivers@staffordshire.gov.uk

Lichfield & Cannock: Denise Grimshaw 01543 512056

Tamworth & East Staffordshire: Paul Wilkie 01283 239761

LOCAL SUPPORT TEAMS

Biddulph

Biddulph ASO, Town Hall, High Street, Biddulph ST8 6AR

Tel: 01782 297810

Leek

Leek ASO, County Services Building, Fountain Street, Leek ST13 6JR

Tel: 01538 483129

Kidsgrove

Kidsgrove Town Hall, Liverpool Road, Kidsgrove ST7 4EL

Tel: 01782 485262

Madeley

Civic Office, Merrial Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme ST5 2AG

Tel: 01782 296290

Chesterton

Civic Office, Merrial Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme ST5 2AG

Tel: 01782 296290

Uttoxeter

Red Gables, 59 High Street, Uttoxeter ST14 7JQ

Tel: 01889 256400

Paget

Burton ASO, St Paul's Square, Burton-on-Trent DE14 2EQ

Tel: 01283 239617

Stapenhill

63 Branston Road, Burton-on-Trent DE14 3BY

Tel: 01283 239586

Tamworth

Tamworth ASO, Marmion House, Lichfield Street, Tamworth B79 7BZ

Tel: 01827 475555

Burntwood

Burntwood ASO, Sycamore Road, Chasetown, Burntwood WS7 4RR

Tel: 01543 510410

Lichfield

The Old House, Eastern Avenue, Lichfield WS13 7SQ

Tel: 01543 510100

Rugeley

Springvale Office, Walhouse Street, Cannock WS11 0DY

Tel: 01543 512333

Cannock - West

Springvale Office, Walhouse Street, Cannock WS11 0DY

Tel: 01543 512333

Cannock - East

Springvale Office, Walhouse Street, Cannock WS11 0DY

Tel: 01543 512333

South Staffordshire - North

Wolverhampton Road, Codsall WS8 1PX

Tel: 01902 696575

South Staffordshire - South

Wolverhampton Road, Codsall WS8 1PX

Tel: 01902 696575

Stafford North

Wedgwood Building, Tipping Street, Stafford ST16 2DH

Tel: 01785 276800

Stafford South

Wedgwood Building, Tipping Street, Stafford ST16 2DH

Tel: 01785 276800

SAFEGUARDING UNITS**Biddulph**

Biddulph ASO, Town Hall, High Street, Biddulph ST8 6AR

Tel: 01782 297810

Leek

Leek ASO, County Services Building, Fountain Street, Leek ST13 6JR

Tel: 01538 483129

Kidsgrove

Kidsgrove Town Hall, Liverpool Road, Kidsgrove ST7 4EL

Tel: 01782 485262

Madeley

Civic Office, Merrial Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme ST5 2AG

Tel: 01782 296290

Chesterton

Civic Office, Merrial Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme ST5 2AG

Tel: 01782 296290

Uttoxeter

Red Gables, 59 High Street, Uttoxeter ST14 7JQ

Tel: 01785 256400

Paget

Burton ASO, St Paul's Square, Burton-on-Trent DE14 2EQ

Tel: 01283 239666

Stapenhill

63 Branston Road, Burton-on-Trent DE14 3BY

Tel: 01283 239440

Wilnecote

Tamworth ASO, Marmion House, Lichfield Street, Tamworth B79 7BZ

Tel: 01827 475555

Glascote & Rawlett

Tamworth ASO, Marmion House, Lichfield Street, Tamworth B79 7BZ

Tel: 01827 475555

Burntwood

Burntwood ASO, Sycamore Road, Chasetown, Burntwood WS7 4RR

Tel: 01543 510410

Lichfield

The Old House, Eastern Avenue, Lichfield WS13 7SQ

Tel: 01543 510100

Rugeley

Springvale Office, Walhouse Street, Cannock WS11 0DY

Tel: 01543 512333

Cannock - West

Springvale Office, Walhouse Street, Cannock WS11 0DY

Tel: 01543 512333

Cannock - East

Springvale Office, Walhouse Street, Cannock WS11 0DY

Tel: 01543 512333

South Staffordshire

Wolverhampton Road, Codsall WS8 1PX

Tel: 01902 696575

Stafford North

Wedgwood Building, Tipping Street, Stafford ST16 2DH

Tel: 01785 276800

Stafford South

Wedgwood Building, Tipping Street, Stafford ST16 2DH

Tel: 01785 276800

CARE PLANNING & COURT TEAM**Lichfield**

The Old House, Eastern Avenue, Lichfield WS13 7SQ

Tel: 01543 510100

Newcastle & Moorlands

Brackenberry, Cross Heath, Newcastle ST5 9PS

Tel: 01782 269280

Stafford

Wedgwood Building, Tipping Street, Stafford ST16 2DH

Tel: 01785 276800

Tamworth

Tamworth ASO, Marmion House, Lichfield Street, Tamworth B79 7 BZ

Tel: 01827 475555

THROUGH CARE TEAM**Central Through Care Team**

Wedgwood Building, Tipping Street, Stafford ST16 2DH

Tel: 01785 276800

Burton and Tamworth

2-3 St Pauls Square, Burton-on-Trent DE14 2EQ

Tel: 01283 239656

Stafford and South Staffs

Wedgwood Building, Tipping Street, Stafford ST16 2DH

Tel: 01785 895466 or 01785 895275

Cannock and Lichfield

Lombard Court, Lombard Street, Lichfield WS13 6DP

01543 510830

Newcastle & Moorlands Through Care Team

Floor 2, The Civic Offices, Merrial Street, Newcastle-under-Lyme ST5 2AG

01782 485285

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

1. Legislative Framework

- 1.1 The Fostering Services: Regulations, Guidance and Standards (2011) provide the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act (2000) for the conduct of fostering services.
- 1.2 The framework is designed to set out the aims and objectives of the service as a whole, and the services and facilities which are provided.
- 1.3 Ofsted will undertake inspections of the Fostering Service and may interview or visit foster carers as part of the inspection process.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The *Statement of Purpose* for Staffordshire County Council's Fostering Service has been compiled in accordance with Standard 16 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (2011).
- 2.2 The information is intended for a wide audience including children in foster care and their parents, prospective and approved Staffordshire foster carers; staff employed by the Fostering Service and in Families First, and other agencies and professionals who are interested in, or involved in work relating to the Fostering Service. The Statement of Purpose can be found on the fostering website www.care4child.org.
A copy of the summary is given to parents by the child's social worker when their child becomes Looked After.
- 2.3 The Children's Guide to the Fostering Service sets out the aims of the service; how a child can access an independent advocate and how they can make a complaint. In addition, there is an *interactive* children's guide which is accessible and user friendly for all children, including children with disabilities. This guide is one of a number of documents that can be given to children and young people upon becoming looked after.
- 2.4 Both the Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guide will be reviewed annually and published on the SCC Fostering website.

If you would like this information in large print, Braille, audio tape/disc, or any other language, please ring 01785 278426.

3. Aims and Objectives of the Service

- 3.1 Staffordshire Families First Services' primary aim is to provide services to children and families to promote the health, education and development of children in ways that meet the best interests of the child. For children looked after, our aim is to ensure that they achieve their potential by providing and supporting safe, stable and positive experiences of care.
- 3.2 The Local Authority believes that children are best cared for by their own family. Where this is not possible, or not in the best interests of the child, we believe that children should be able to experience family life in a suitable family, on a temporary or permanent basis.
- 3.3 Our aim is to ensure that children feel secure in their placements with carers appropriately trained, supported and capable of providing quality care to meet their needs and maximise their life chances. This will include ensuring that the child has a secure identity, making the most of educational opportunities as well as ensuring the child is healthy, emotionally well and enjoys a network of social relationships within which the child feels valued. Our aim is to

promote outcomes for children by providing safe, secure placements and by being aspirational and ambitious for them.

- 3.4 Placement choice and the stability and effectiveness of foster care placements are fundamental to children's long-term life chances. The Fostering Service aims to provide and support appropriate family placements, either directly, or by commissioning services from other agencies to meet children and young people's assessed needs and also being sensitive to differences such as race, religion, culture, language sexuality, gender and disability.
- 3.5 The Fostering Service works in partnership with children, parents, carers, and all those involved and concerned with the child's welfare and best interests to ensure that the best possible outcomes are achieved.

4. Principles and Standards of Care

- 4.1 Staffordshire Fostering Service offers a wide range of placements for children and young people of all ages.
- 4.2 Key Principles:
- All applicants to foster for Staffordshire are checked, prepared, assessed and approved in accordance with the relevant fostering regulations; guidance and standards.
 - The Fostering Panel considers all applications to foster; the first annual review of the carer's approval and subsequent reviews; all changes of approval and reports concerning allegations against carers.
 - A foster carer agreement is signed by all carers at the point of approval and reviewed annually following the Foster Carer Review.
 - Approved foster carers have a named fostering social worker and are supported and supervised in line with the Fostering Supervision and Support Policy and the requirements of the placement.
 - Placements are carefully matched, taking into account the needs of the child, the experience of the carer and the impact on the fostering household.
 - Foster carers are provided with as much information as possible prior to placement, including a comprehensive risk assessment and 'matching' document to support the placement.
 - Foster carer profiles will be shared with the children prior to placement by the child's Social Worker.
 - Foster carers, children in care and their parents will have access to the County Council's Complaints Service.
 - Children will have access to an advocacy service.
- 4.3 This Statement of Purpose is underpinned by the principles and standards of expectation set out within:
- [‘The Staffordshire 'Pledge' to Looked After Children](#)
 - [The Foster Carer's Charter](#)

5. Management Structure and Staffing Arrangements

- 5.1 The County Manager (Fostering) is the Registered Manager of the Fostering Agency and is responsible for the strategic development of the Fostering Service and for ensuring that it meets and complies with statutory requirements and national standards. The County Manager is supported in this task by the County Manager (Adoption and Kinship Care).

County Managers are part of the Families First Looked After Children Service Management Group and contribute to the wider strategic planning and development of children's services, ensuring that issues relating to fostering are promoted, and any implications considered.

- 5.2 The Fostering Service organises some tasks centrally, but the main responsibility for the delivery of individual support to foster carers and children is with **six fostering teams**.
- 5.3 All teams are managed by a Team Manager, who each hold a relevant social work qualification and either already have a management qualification, or have undertaken management and leadership training.
- 5.4 The Fostering Service Social Workers are registered the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC). Each social worker has a recognised social work qualification (BA (Hons) in Social Work, CQSW, CSS or DipSW). 25 Social Workers also hold the full PQ Award and 11 are working towards it. Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW) undertake a programme of training, supervision and support that is directed by the Principal Social Worker for Staffordshire.
- 5.5 All staff members are experienced in working with children and families and are skilled in undertaking needs led assessments.
- 5.6 All teams members have access to PCs, email facilities and are supported by a dedicated administrative team. Some staff have access to a pilot mobile-working programme enabling mobile access to the Families First records management system. The aim of the service is that all staff will have access to mobile working arrangements.
- 5.7 Team Meetings are held regularly and are used to promote development; to share information, consult and to obtain feedback on issues relevant to the Service.
- 5.8 Service days are held at regular intervals to ensure that all staff are involved in discussions about new developments, performance management issues and key changes in legislation, regulations and innovations.
- 5.9 The Management Team meets on a fortnightly basis to discuss all business relating to the Fostering Service, to ensure the standardisation of service delivery across the teams, consider developments, both internally and in nationally, and to review and evaluate the overall performance of the Fostering Service.

Fostering Teams: Roles and Functions

6. The Adoption and Fostering Recruitment, Training and Reviewing Team:

- 6.1 This team consists of a team manager, social workers, and senior family support workers, a qualified marketing and recruitment officer and business support staff. The team has countywide responsibility for the following functions:
 - Development and implementation of a comprehensive recruitment strategy in order to attract a range of applicants to foster.
 - Production of recruitment and publicity material.
 - Responding to initial enquiries about fostering and adoption and undertaking initial assessment visits.
 - Delivery of the 'Foundations to Foster' preparation course.
 - Delivery of preparation training for prospective adopters.
 - Co-ordination and delivery of a comprehensive post approval training package for all foster carers.
 - Responsibility Training Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers.

- Managing and chairing the Annual Reviews of foster carers.
- Co-ordination of support groups for foster carers, including additional groups for male foster carers.
- Co-ordination of the Countywide Foster Carers' Forum held twice a year.
- Support to the Foster Carers' Advisory Group.
- Co-ordination of a support group for sons & daughters of foster carers.
- Production of newsletters for foster carers and for children in the foster home – one edition per school term.
- Organisation of social events, including the summer barbeque, Christmas parties and individual awards events for foster carers and fostered children.
- Maintenance of the website www.care4child.org and the electronic foster care forum.

7. **Assessment, supervision and support of general foster carers**

- 7.1 There are two fostering teams covering Staffordshire. These teams are based in Lichfield and Stafford and each has a team manager, social workers, family support workers and business support staff.
- 7.2 The **Fostering Central Team** undertakes panel functions and advice, fostering assessments (including Task Centred, IFA Transfer and Supported Lodgings) and fostering sufficiency.
- 7.3 The **Fostering North Team** is responsible for the supervision and support of the foster carers in the North of the County including the supervision of Family & Friends regulated placements. The **Fostering South Team** is responsible for the supervision and support of the foster carers in the South of the County including the supervision of Family & Friends regulated placements. These teams are responsible for the following fostering activities:
- Providing regular and consistent individual supervision and support to fostering households.
 - Undertaking annual reviews of foster carers' continued suitability to foster.
 - Management and development of carer's skills through the implementation of the TSD Standards, Personal Development Plans and support of foster carers; the aim being to increase the carer's expertise and to improve outcomes for children.
 - Promoting the aim of the Payment for Skills appraisal scheme for foster carers.
 - Contribution to the Placement Service and placement matching.
 - Providing effective fostering support plans, that promotes individual children's placement plans.
 - Family finding systems to search for appropriate permanent placements for children through in-house resources or external providers.
 - Promoting and supporting carer's attendance at foster carer support groups.
 - Provision of essential equipment and developmental toys for carers.
 - Undertaking support carer assessments.
 - Undertaking long- term fostering and special guardianship assessments of approved foster carers.

8. **The Intensive Interventions Team**

- 8.1 This team consists of a team manager, team co-ordinator, social workers, senior family support workers and business support staff. The team supports placements providing intensive interventions.

This includes:

- 8.2 The **Resilience Project** whose remit is to recruit and assess foster carers to provide single placements for young people aged 10-15 years, moving from residential care into a family setting, or where residential care would be the only other option. Psychological screening is used to identify those best placed to care for these most challenging young people, whilst the young people are screened to identify those who would benefit from the resilience model of care. Carers recruited to the scheme will already have some relevant professional childcare experience, either as an established foster carer with a proven track record of sustaining and supporting a child with complex needs; or who have worked with children in a professional capacity, e.g. as a residential social worker. Resilience foster carers' work with young people usually aged between 10-15 years who are currently placed in a residential setting.
- 8.3 The **Remand Scheme** which provides family-based placements to young people placed in custody on a remand basis.
- 8.4 **Wrap Around Support.** The (WRAP) team is made up of senior family support workers with diverse skills and experience including, a family therapist, specialist education, youth offending and residential experience. The team includes a team co-ordinator and business support worker. WRAP offers support to all existing fostering households (including Family & Friends) who are experiencing challenging and difficult placements. The Team Co-ordinator is responsible for chairing stability meetings which may lead to a referral path to WRAP for time-limited (up to 12 weeks) focussed and identified work. The WRAP Programme uses the model of Social Learning Theory Intervention.

9. The Family & Friends Team

- 9.1 The team offers the full range of fostering services to family & friends carers; assessment, supervision and support. Family & friends carers also access (alongside general carers) all central activities and support provided by the Recruitment & Training Team.
- 9.2 The team is involved in the care planning process, preparing reports for court and foster/permanence panels and promoting permanence through special guardianship or long-term fostering.
- 9.3 The team provides induction training and support groups for kinship carers.
- 9.4 The team works closely with Families First's Targeted Services to provide individual support to families moving onto special guardianship arrangements.
- 9.5 Additionally, the team works closely with specialist safeguarding colleagues and is responsible for the assessment and supervision of *private foster* carer arrangements.

10. The Disability Fostering Team

- 10.1 The Family Link Team offers short-term breaks to disabled children. Children are matched with carers who have the skills and abilities to meet their individual needs and who offer regular, planned breaks, often over many years. Additionally, the team is responsible for the supervision and support of approved fostering households who are looking after children on a full-time basis and who have a permanent and substantial disability or complex health needs.
- 10.2 Staffordshire County Council has a duty to provide short stay services under the Children & Young Person's Act (2008). These services are available to any person under the age of 18 and who are, therefore legally defined as a child (CA, 1989). Each child must meet

Staffordshire's disability eligibility criteria and will therefore have a permanent and substantial disability or complex health needs.

- 10.3 The team consists of a team manager, social workers, an occupational therapist and a senior family support worker. The team provides a county-wide service and has an office based in Lichfield.
- 10.4 The team works closely with Independent Futures (Staffordshire's all age disability service). Referrals to the service for short stays are processed through the two Disability Resource Panels, both of which meet on a monthly basis and are managed by Independent Futures. Time limited or emergency placements can be agreed by the IF Team Manager.
- 10.5 The service was established to create family-based placements for children, who were most in danger of exclusion from services. Level 5 short stays are based on a single placement at any one time with up to six children being matched, dependent upon their needs and the size of the support package to the child. Some of the households are adapted properties and make use of adapted vehicles.
- 10.7 Additionally, the team has a full-time occupational therapist that is able to provide clinical assessments children referred, as well as assessments of all homes of approved family link carers. The resource assists with the matching of children and stability of placements.
11. As part of Families First, Looked After Children & Disability Service, the Fostering Service works in close, day-to-day partnership with the following:
 - **The Placement Service:** This team has a service co-ordinator; a placement officer and clerical support. Their remit is to deal with all emergency and urgent requests for new or alternative foster placements, including the search for placements through the independent sector and for ensuring all placements are risk assessed and matched, as far as is possible. The Fostering Service works as part of the Placement Service to make effective use of internal and external resources.
 - **Supported Lodgings** is run by the Fostering & Adoption Recruitment & Training team who are responsible for the recruitment, assessment, training and support of supported lodgings' placements. The aim is to match 16-18 year old care leavers with suitable households to support them to develop independence skills, before they move into their own accommodation.

12. Conflict of Interest

- 12.1 The Children Act (1989) Guidance & Regulations Vol. 4 (4.12) allows for foster carers, or for a member of their household to work for the Fostering Service; however, care is taken to avoid any actual or perceived conflict of interest.
- 12.2 In general terms, anyone working within the Fostering Service **will not** be considered as a foster carer. Staff working within the County Council in areas that have traditionally been referred to as Children's Social Care; will also normally not be considered, as a conflict of interest may occur. However, all cases will be considered on an individual basis and judged on merit and in the child's best interests by the County Managers for Fostering and Adoption and Kinship Care.

13. Placements

13.1 Staffordshire Fostering Service offers the following placements:

Task Centered: These foster carers provide emergency (same day) and planned placements arranged by the Placement Team. The placements are carefully matched and are for a time-limited period. The carers will contribute to the assessment of the child's long-term needs and be involved with preparing and supporting a child to return home or move to a permanent placement, in line with the Permanency Plan agreed for the child at the 2nd Statutory (Looked After) Review.

Long-Term: These carers provide permanent or long-term placements with foster carers, who are committed to caring for children until they reach independence, and for providing ongoing support into adulthood. For children who are aged 12 and under, the match with foster carers is made by the Best Interest Panel.

Resilience: These carers provide single placements for young people aged 10-15 making the transition from residential care into a family setting, until they reach independence.

Remand: The remand scheme provides family-based placements to young people placed in custody on a remand basis.

Family & Friends: These carers provide placements for a child or young person who is a relative or friend, (a 'connected person') and who is approved as a foster carer specifically for them. These foster carers have equal access to support and training opportunities.

Emergency Duty: These are foster carers whose approval is extended to take emergency placements outside office hours for a maximum of 72 hours (excluding bank holidays).

Disability Short Break/Stays: The Family Link Scheme links disabled children with carers who can provide them with short stays on a regular basis. This can be anything from a few hours a week to a few days a month with the same carer.

Short Break: These carers provide short breaks for children in care. The short-term placements are planned to support the aims of the child's Care Plan either for a return home or to support the child's main placement.

Mother and Baby: These foster carers provide placements to young people in care and their baby. These carers will support the needs of both the young person and their baby. The Foster Carer will work in partnership with the young person and the children's Social Workers to provide care, support and assessment, as required.

Supported Lodgings: Provides supported lodgings' placements within families, for 16-18 year old care leavers

Support carer's arrangements (back-up carers). These arrangements are assessed and the 'arrangement' is agreed as appropriate to support exiting, approved fostering households. The support carers are identified from within the foster carer's support network. The support carers can provide short-stays to support a fostering household for anything from day-care through to regular overnight stays and holidays.

14. Recruitment

14.1 **Sufficiency:** The Fostering Service will continue to recruit more foster carers for children in our care to ensure there is sufficient placement choice to enable children to be appropriately matched with foster carers, and to ensure that our carers reflect the diverse population of Staffordshire.

- 14.2 The Fostering Service will also ensure that it has sufficient numbers of supervising social workers for foster carers; to offer advice, support and supervision. We will ensure that any vacancies are recruited to without undue delay and that interim measures are put in place so that carers are supported.
- 14.3 **Recruitment:** The Fostering Service will with the County Council Communications Team to ensure that we have a strong market presence and effective recruitment and campaigning plans. Our comprehensive and targeted recruitment strategy is supported by:
- A dedicated recruitment and marketing officer for fostering and adoption.
 - Its staff being trained in a cultural value, modes marketing model
 - A strong web presence.
 - An active Facebook site and Twitter feeds.
 - Targeted and locality campaigns e.g. shared care week; fostering fortnight, and Staffordshire Day.
 - Partnership with local commercial initiatives.
 - A regional recruitment campaign with neighbouring local authorities.
 - Extensive advertising on radio, backs of buses, and billboards.
 - Advertising in professional publications and local newspapers.
 - Editorial and articles in local papers.
 - Sponsorship of flower beds.
 - Incentive /sponsorship schemes to encourage applications from foster carers' own network.
 - 'Reggie' the recruitment bus which was designed to address some of the unique recruitment challenges that exist in a large geographic County. This enables recruitment messages to reach all communities in Staffordshire, including those on the extremities of the County.
 - Open, twice monthly recruitment information meetings.
- 14.4 **Enquiries:** all initial enquiries are received by the Recruitment & Training team. Enquiries can be made via a free-phone number with an answer phone facility out of hours. Enquiries can also be made on the www.care4child.org website. The team also takes initial enquiries regarding the Foundations Scheme.
- 14.5 An information pack is sent **within one working day** with invitations to attend an **Information Meeting**. Information meetings are held fortnightly and following the meeting, if potential foster carers are interested they are asked to complete a detailed information record.
- 14.6 Enquirers will be offered an appointment for a home visit **within 5 working days**. The visit enables the potential applicant to obtain more information about fostering, after which they will be invited to participate in the Preparation Training – '*Foundations to Fostering*'. '*Foundations to Fostering*' is made up of an '**Introduction to Fostering** for Staffordshire' workshop, and then 10 follow-on modules.
- 14.7 In two-carer households, both carers will complete the training. After the 'Introduction to Fostering' workshop, applicants must complete the 'Notice to Proceed' before their 'Form F' assessment can start.
- 14.8 Approved foster carers, who are transferring from another agency, would also complete the 'Introduction to Fostering for Staffordshire', although this does not need to be completed prior to their assessment commencing.

15. Assessment Process (not including family & friends foster carers):

15.1 When a person applies to become a foster carer, the Fostering Service may assess their suitability to foster. There is a two-stage assessment process, and the allocated Social Worker will arrange to visit the applicants **within 10 working days** from receipt of the notice to proceed.

15.2 At **Stage 1**, Staffordshire Fostering Service will obtain the following information from the applicants:

- The applicant's full name, address and date of birth.
- Details of the applicant's health, supported by a medical report. The applicants will be given (Coram BAAF) Form AH to arrange a medical examination through their GP, the cost of which will be covered by the Local Authority. Completed medicals are sent to the Medical Advisor for comments about the applicant's fitness, and their suitability to foster.
- Particulars of other adult household members.
- Particulars of children in the applicant's family (whether or not they are members of the household) and any other children in the household.
- Particulars of the household's accommodation.
- The outcome of any request or application made by the applicant, (or any member of the applicant's household), to foster or adopt children, or for registration as an early or later year's provider, under Part 3 of the Child care Act (2006), including particulars of any previous approval or refusal of approval to foster.
- The name and address of any fostering service that the applicant has been an approved foster carer for, in the preceding 12 months.
- Names and addresses of four persons who will provide personal references for the applicants; (three, if a single applicant) and one extended family member for each applicant; who will be asked to complete a pro-forma reference and be interviewed by the Assessing Social Worker. The referees **must** know the applicants well and be able to comment upon all aspects of their lives.
- In relation to the applicant and each member of their household aged 16 or over, an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Certificate. Following receipt of a positive DBS check, a manager's positive DBS Disclosure Risk Assessment pro-forma will be completed and considered by the County Manager (Fostering).
- Details of any current and any previous marriage, civil partnership, or similar relationship.
- Consultation with the Local Authority in whose area the applicant lives, if this is different to the Fostering Service.
- Staffordshire will also request references and will undertake a visit to previous partners with whom the applicant has parented; also any significant partners.

15.3 Stage 1 is completed, 10 days following all the above information becoming available to the Fostering Service. If at any point during Stage 1 of the assessment process, the Fostering Service's Agency Decision-maker (County Manager), decides that the applicant is not suitable to foster, they must write to the applicant, informing them of this decision and giving full reasons for it. The applicants will be advised about how to make a complaint.

15.4 **Stage 2** of the assessment may be carried out in parallel to Stage 1 in order to avoid unnecessary delay. Staffordshire uses the 'Form F' (Coram BAAF) assessment report to present the findings of the full assessment. The assessment requires the full participation

of the applicants, and social workers will complete an assessment plan with the applicants and arrange to visit, as required (usually 8-10 visits are needed). The assessment plan and agreement will identify dates for visits and the areas to be covered, including information to be provided by the applicants and a planned date to attend the Fostering Panel.

15.5 The assessment will collate information about the applicants and their family's motivation to foster, as well as their capability to foster. The assessment will take into account:

- Lifestyle
- Mental, physical and emotional well-being
- Ability to be resilient and flexible
- Understanding of the fostering task and the needs of children in care
- Ability to manage and care for a child in care and to work with birth families and the team supporting the child.
- Ability to meet cultural, ethnic, religious, health, and educational needs
- Ability to provide suitable accommodation
- Impact of fostering on the family
- Ability to provide safe and stable care
- Ability to understand confidentiality and to keep clear and accurate records.

15.6 Preparation training will run in parallel with the assessment. The preparation training marks the start of 'portfolio building' for the **'Training Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers'** (TSD Standards). All foster carers are supported to complete the TSD Standards **within 12 months of approval (18 months for family & friends carers)**. Applicants will begin to accumulate evidence for their portfolio during this training and assessment period.

15.7 Assessment Form F reports must be completed and have a panel recommendation **within eight months** from the date of the application. Staffordshire aims to complete the assessment **within 20 weeks**.

15.8 **Family & Friends assessments** follow a similar process. Applicants will be contacted immediately and a referral for either a 'viability assessment' or a full assessment will be made by the child's Social Worker. A fostering social worker from the Family & Friends Team will also be allocated, and a full assessment is completed **within 12 weeks** of the referral being received. Family & Friends applicants are given an information pack and guidance on the assessment and approval process.

16. Fostering Approval (Including Family and Friends)

16.1 The completed assessment report will be shared with the applicants and presented to the fostering panel with a recommendation whether the applicant is suitable to foster, and what the terms of their approval should be. The recommendation to panel will set out the type of placement, number and age range of children to be placed. Or, approval may be limited to specific children (for example, family & friends approvals).

16.2 The Fostering Panel meets on a weekly basis to consider all applications. The fostering panel is made up of children's social care representatives and independent representatives who have a relevant background and experience that support their role (e.g. fostering, care experience, health, education etc.)

16.3 Applicants are invited to attend the fostering panel with the assessing social worker and if applicable the child's social worker. Written information about the Panel's role and function will be available beforehand and applicants will meet the Chairperson prior to attending the panel meeting.

- 16.4 The Fostering panel will make a recommendation about the suitability of the applicant to foster and the terms of their approval.
- 16.5 The County Managers for Fostering and Adoption and Kinship are the Agency Decision Makers and receive the recommendation of the panel. All information including the Panel minutes will be made available to the Agency Decision Maker to enable them to make a considered decision **within 7 days of receipt of the recommendation and final set of minutes**.
- 16.6 The foster carer or prospective foster carer will be informed orally of the decision **within two working days and in writing within five working days**, clearly stating the terms of the approval. Carers will be required to sign the Foster Carer Agreement before they can take a placement.
- 16.7 In circumstances where the agency decision maker is minded not to approve an applicant, the applicant can either make representation to the agency or through the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) and will be given information regarding the process to be followed.

17. Post Approval Support and Supervision

- 17.1 Approved foster carers will receive a hard copy of the **Foster Carer Handbook** which sets out the expectations of and relationship with the division. An electronic version will be placed on the website www.care4child.org and will be updated at least annually.
- 17.2 Newly approved foster carers are required to complete the **Training, Support & Development Standards for Foster Care**. This is part of the framework of induction, core training and continuing professional development that will equip foster carers with the essential skills and knowledge to meet the needs of children in their care.
- 17.3 Carers will be expected to evidence that they have met the induction requirements by achieving a **Certificate of Successful Achievement** on completion of a portfolio of evidence of competency within the first 12 months of approval (18 months for Family & Friends Carers). Foster carers will be expected to annually update and develop their knowledge and skills through their **Personal Development Plan** which will contribute to the foster carer review process. Foster Carers are required to maintain an ongoing 'portfolio' of training and development which demonstrates how they are meeting the skills required of them by the Fostering Service.
- 17.4 Foster carers' personal development plans set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development needs and experience.
- 17.5 The Fostering Panel considers the **foster carers' annual review** and recommends to the agency their ongoing approval, variation or de-registration. Foster carer reviews are independently chaired and involve the foster carer and fostering social worker, who provide written reports. The views of the children and young people in placement and their social workers inform the review. Views of the carer's own children are also invited. The review focuses on the performance of the carer, identifies training requirements and makes recommendations for future approval.

18 Post Approval Training

- 18.1 The Fostering Service has a strong commitment to the ongoing training of foster carers, recognising the valuable contribution it makes to their development, helping them to understand the fostering task, increasing their knowledge and skills, and underpinning the

safe and appropriate care of children. This has been further reinforced by the TSD Standards' expectations that carers continue to engage with, and with core and continuing professional development training and learning opportunities.

- 18.2 The training catalogue is reviewed and updated annually and currently offers 45 titles, providing approximately 750 training opportunities to carers. The training can be in the form of workshops or courses that take place over one or two days, or more intensive training arranged over a number of weeks. The training covers subjects of a general and also specialist nature. The fostering service also offers a range of e-learning modules to enable carers to access essential information through the internet or via CD/memory sticks.
- 18.3 Foster carers are also able to access multi-agency child protection and safeguarding courses and a range of child care courses, being trained alongside social work staff. Bespoke arrangements have been made available to carers to undertake specific, relevant courses, the content of which can then be cascaded to others.

19. Support

- 19.1 Support for foster carers is given a high priority in Staffordshire and the services available to carers include:
- Supervision and support from a named fostering social worker.
 - A Mentoring scheme for foster carers
 - Local support groups who meet on a monthly basis – there are nine groups across the county.
 - 'Men in Foster Care' Support group.
 - Sons and Daughter Support Group
 - Out of hours support via the Emergency Duty Service.
 - Out of hours support provided by the WRAP team
 - Mentoring scheme for Sons and Daughters
 - Membership of the Fostering Network.
 - Access to Fostering Network Advice & a Mediation Worker.
 - Provision of equipment, necessary for fostering.
 - Financial support through agreed allowances.
 - Additional insurance cover.
 - Interest free loans towards adaptations/extensions to carer's property and for the purchase of larger vehicles.
 - Use of a 'people carrier' for set periods of time to give support to carers who require a larger vehicle due to fostering.
 - Handbook for foster carers.
 - Newsletter for foster carers and foster children.
 - Up to date information through the website and text .
 - A Foster Carers Advisory Group
 - Foster Carer's Forums.
- 19.2 In order to improve the life chances for children, the following lists some of the services that are available to children in placements:
- SUSTAIN Plus (CAMHS specialist service for children in care): whose aim is to provide a timely response to the needs of children and young people looked after and their carers, and whose placements are under stress, or in danger of disruption.
 - Head teacher of the Virtual School for Looked After Children, and education co-coordinators and mentors, linking into specific education services.
 - Named Nurses for Looked After Children.
 - Access to drugs advisory workers.

- The Voice Project.
- Advocacy Service.
- Access to SOVA mentors.
- 'Celebration of Achievements' evening.
- Teenage Pregnancy Support.

20. **Staying Put**

- 20.1 Staffordshire County Council is committed to preventing social exclusion among care leavers and has developed a 'Staying Put' policy in order to ensure that, when appropriate, they can continue to live with former foster carer(s) after their 18th birthday and make the transition to independent living at a pace that suits their needs.
- 20.2 The primary aim of the policy is to allow young people to remain with their carers past their 18th birthday to promote a gradual transition from care to independent living. This recognises that many young people in care experience delayed maturity, and that their 18th birthday may be an inappropriate point to leave foster care.
- 20.3 The [Staying Put Good Practice Guide 2014](#) provides information, for practitioners and managers, in making and supporting staying put arrangements. The provision of financial support is available designed to enable a staying put carer to meet the aims and objectives of the arrangement.

21. **Comments, Compliments and Complaints**

- 21.1 Staffordshire County Council welcomes feedback on the services it provides to children, birth parents and foster carers, to enable improvements to be made.
- 21.2 There is a complaints procedure which is accessible to all service users and carers, and there are three stages to the procedure:

Stage 1 - Local Resolution:

The complaint is addressed at the point of service delivery by the responsible Team Manager. There is a 10 working day timescale for responding to Stage 1 complaints with the option to extend to 20 working days with the agreement of the complainant.

Stage 2 – Investigation:

If the complainant remains unhappy with the Stage 1 outcome they can request to proceed to Stage 2. This must be made to the Head of Customer Feedback and Complaints, advising why they remain unhappy and the desired outcome from the investigation. A Complaints Investigating Officer (CIO) or an external Investigating Officer (IO) will be assigned to the complaint and an Independent Person (IP) will work alongside the CIO to ensure an independent and objective view. There is a 25 working day timescale for completing the investigation although this can be extended to 65 with the agreement of the complainant. A response will be provided by the relevant Strategic Lead following consideration of the reports.

Stage 3 - Review Panel:

If the complainant remains unhappy with the outcome of the investigation at Stage 2 they can request an independent Stage 3 Review Panel. The complainant must outline in writing why they remain unhappy and the desired outcome from the panel. The Panel is made up of three independent people who will review the investigation undertaken.

22. Contact Details for Further Information

For further information contact:
County Manager Fostering Service,
Looked After Children Services (Families First)
Staffordshire Place 1
Stafford
ST16 2LP

For a complaint or representation re the Fostering Service contact:
Staffordshire County Council
Complaints and Representations
Staffordshire Place 1
Stafford
ST16 2LP
Tel: 01785 278601

For Ofsted contact:
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

FOSTERING SERVICES REGULATIONS AND NATIONAL MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR FOSTERING SERVICES

Fostering Services operate within the legal framework of the Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards for Fostering April 2011. The National Minimum Standards and the Fostering Service Regulations 2011 form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of the Fostering Service.

Ofsted regularly inspect all Fostering Agencies to ensure that these standards are being met.

NATIONAL MINIMUM STANDARDS 2011 (NMS)

The underpinning values of the NMS are:-

- The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of their care.
- 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.
- Children are entitled to grow up in a loving environment that can meet their developmental needs
- Every child should have his or her wishes and feelings listened to and taken into account.
- Each child should be 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.
- The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account
- The significance of contact for looked after children, and of maintaining relationships with birth parents and the wider family, including siblings, half-siblings and grandparents, is recognised, as is the foster carer's role in this.
- 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.
- The central importance of the child's relationship with their foster carer should be acknowledged and foster carers should be recognised as core members of the team working with the child. Foster carers have a right to full information about the child.
- It is essential that foster carers receive relevant support services and development opportunities in order to provide the best care for children.
- Genuine partnership between all those involved in fostering children is essential for the NMS to deliver the best outcomes for children; this includes the Government, local government, other statutory agencies, fostering service providers and foster carers.

1) The child's wishes and feelings and the views of those significant to them

- Children's views, wishes and feelings are acted upon, unless this is contrary to their interests or adversely affects other members of the foster care household.
- Children understand how their views have been taken into account and where significant wishes or concerns are not acted upon, they are helped to understand why.
- Children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support.

- The views of the child, the child's family, social worker and Independent Reviewing Officer are sought regularly on the child's care (unless in individual cases this is not appropriate).
- Children have access to independent advice and support from adults who they can contact directly and in private about problems or concerns, which is appropriate to their age and understanding. Children know their rights to advocacy, how to access an advocate and how to contact the Children's Rights Director.
- Children can take up issues in the most appropriate way with support, without fear that this will result in any adverse consequences. Children receive prompt feedback on any concerns or complaints raised and are kept informed of progress.
- The wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring foster carers and developing the fostering service.

2) Promoting a positive identity, potential and valuing diversity through individualised care.

- Children are provided with personalised care that meets their needs and promotes all aspects of their individual identity.
- Foster carers are supported to promote children's social and emotional development, and to enable children to develop emotional resilience and positive self-esteem.
- Foster carers meet children's individual needs as set out in the child's placement plan as part of the wider family context.
- Children exercise choice in the food that they eat, and are able to prepare their own meals and snacks, within the context of the foster family's decision making and the limits that a responsible parent would set.
- Children exercise choice and independence in the clothes and personal requisites that they buy and have these needs met, within the context of the foster family's decision making and the reasonable limits that a responsible parent would set.
- Children develop skills and emotional resilience that will prepare them for independent living.
- Children receive a personal allowance appropriate to their age and understanding that is consistent with their placement plan.

3) Promoting positive behaviour and relationships

- Foster carers have high expectations of all of the foster children in their household.
- Foster carers provide an environment and culture that promotes, models and supports positive behaviour.
- Children are able to develop and practice skills to build and maintain positive relationships, be assertive and to resolve conflicts positively.
- Children are encouraged to take responsibility for their behaviour in a way that is appropriate to their age and abilities.
- Foster carers respect the child's privacy and confidentiality, in a manner that is consistent with good parenting.
- Foster carers have positive strategies for effectively supporting children where they encounter discrimination or bullying wherever this occurs.
- Foster carers receive support on how to manage their responses and feelings arising from caring for children, particularly where children display very challenging behaviour, and understand how children's previous experiences can manifest in challenging behaviour.

- All foster carers receive training in positive care and control of children, including training in de-escalating problems and disputes. The fostering service has a clear written policy on managing behaviour, which includes supporting positive behaviour, de-escalation of conflicts and discipline.
- Each foster carer is aware of all the necessary information available to the fostering service about a child's circumstances, including any significant recent events, to help the foster carer understand and predict the child's needs and behaviours and support the child within their household. The fostering service follows up with the responsible authority where all such necessary information has not been provided by the authority.
- The fostering service's approach to care minimises the need for police involvement to deal with challenging behaviour and avoids criminalising children unnecessarily.

4) Safeguarding Children

- Children's safety and welfare is promoted in all fostering placements. Children are protected from abuse and other forms of significant harm (e.g. sexual or labour exploitation).
- Foster carers actively safeguard and promote the welfare of foster children.
- Foster carers make positive relationships with children, generate a culture of openness and trust and are aware of and alert to any signs or symptoms that might indicate a child is at risk of harm.
- Foster carers encourage children to take appropriate risks as a normal part of growing up. Children are helped to understand how to keep themselves safe, including when outside of the household or when using the internet or social media.
- The service implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment.
- Foster carers are trained in appropriate safer-care practice, including skills to care for children who have been abused. For foster carers who offer placements to disabled children, this includes training specifically on issues affecting disabled children.

5) Children Missing from Care

- The care and support provided to children, minimises the risk that they will go missing and reduces the risk of harm should the child go missing.
- Foster carers know and implement what the fostering service and the responsible authority's policy is in relation to children going missing.
- Foster carers are aware of, and do not exceed, the measures they can take to prevent a child leaving without permission under current legislation and Government guidance.
- Children who are absent from the foster home without consent, but whose whereabouts are known or thought to be known by carers or staff, are protected in line with the fostering service's written procedure.
- The fostering service and foster carers take appropriate action to find children who are missing, including working alongside the police where appropriate.
- Children are helped to understand the dangers and risks of leaving the foster home without permission and are made aware of where they can access help if they consider running away.

6) Promoting good health and wellbeing

- Children's physical, emotional and social development needs are promoted.
- Children understand their health needs, how to maintain a healthy lifestyle and to make informed decisions about their own health.
- Children are encouraged to participate in a range of positive activities that contribute to their physical and emotional health.
- Children have prompt access to doctors and other health professionals, including specialist services, when they need these services.
- Children's health is promoted in accordance with their placement plan and foster carers are clear about what responsibilities and decisions are delegated to them and where consent for medical treatment needs to be obtained.
- Children's wishes and feelings are sought and taken into account in their health care, according to their understanding, and foster carers advocate on behalf of children.
- Foster carers receive sufficient training on health and hygiene issues and first aid, with particular emphasis on health promotion and communicable diseases.
- Foster carers receive guidance and training to provide appropriate care if looking after children with complex health needs.
- Medicines kept in the foster home are stored safely and are accessible only by those for whom they are intended.
- Foster carers are trained in the management and administration of medication. Prescribed medication is only given to the child for whom it was prescribed, and in accordance with the prescription. Children who wish to, and who can safely keep and take their own medication, do so.
- Foster carers keep a written record of all medication, treatment and first aid given to children during their placement.
- Any physical adaptations or equipment needed for the appropriate care of the children are provided to foster carers.

7) Leisure activities

- Children develop their emotional, intellectual social, creative and physical skills through the accessible and stimulating environment created within the foster home. Children are supported to take part in school based and out of school activities.
- Children pursue individual interests and hobbies. They take part in a range of activities, including leisure activities and trips.
- Foster carers understand what is in the child's placement plan and have clarity about decisions they can make about the day to day arrangements for the child, including such matters as education, leisure activities, overnight stays, holidays, and personal issues such as hair cuts.
- Foster carers are supported to make reasonable and appropriate decisions within the authority delegated to them, without having to seek consent unnecessarily.
- Children have permission to take part in age appropriate peer activities as would normally be granted by a reasonable parent to their children, within the framework of the placement plan. Decision-making and any assessment of risk to the child should be undertaken on the same basis as a reasonable parent would do.
- Children are encouraged and enabled to make and sustain friendships, which may involve reciprocal arrangements to visit friends' homes.

- Children can stay overnight, holiday with friends, or friends and relatives of their foster carer, or go on schools trips, subject to requirements of the care/placement plan, if foster carers consider it appropriate in individual circumstances. CRB checks are not normally sought as a precondition.

8) Promoting educational attainment

- Children, including pre-school children and older children, have a foster home which promotes a learning environment and supports their development.
- Children have access to a range of educational resources to support their learning and have opportunities beyond the school day to engage in activities which promote learning.
- Children are supported to attend school, or alternative provision, regularly.
- Children are helped by their foster carer to achieve their educational or training goals and foster carers are supported to work with a child's education provider to maximise each child's achievement and to minimise any underachievement.
- Foster carers maintain regular contact with each child's school and other education settings, attending all parents' meetings as appropriate and advocating for the child where appropriate.
- Foster carers engage and work with schools, colleges and other organisations to support children's education, including advocating to help overcome any problems the child may be experiencing in their education setting. Foster carers have up-to-date information about each child's educational progress and school attendance record.

9) Promoting and supporting contact

- Children are supported and encouraged to maintain and develop family contacts and friendships, subject to any limitations or provisions set out in their care plan and any court order.
- Foster carers are given practical help to support appropriate contact, including financial help where needed, alongside support to manage any difficult emotional or other issues that the child and foster carer may have as a result of contact.
- When deciding whether to offer a placement, the fostering service works with the responsible authority in giving consideration to how the child's contact with family and significant others will be supported, particularly where a child is placed at a distance from home.
- Foster carers understand what decisions about contact are delegated to them, in line with the child's care plan, and make those decisions in the child's best interests.

10) Providing a suitable physical environment for the foster child

- Foster carers are trained in health and safety issues and have guidelines on their health and safety responsibilities. Avoidable hazards are removed as is consistent with a family home.
- Foster carers understand the service's policy concerning safety for children in the foster home and in vehicles used to transport foster children. The service's policy is regularly reviewed in line with the most recent guidance from relevant bodies.

11) Preparation for a placement

- Children are given free access to the household facilities as would be consistent with reasonable arrangements in a family home. Foster carers explain everyday household rules and expectations to children.
- Foster carers are supported to maintain links with children moving on, consistent with their care plan.

12) Promoting independence and moves to adulthood and leaving care

- Children are supported to:
 - a. establish positive and appropriate social and sexual relationships;
 - b. develop positive self-esteem and emotional resilience;
 - c. prepare for the world of work and or further or higher education;
 - d. prepare for moving into their own accommodation;
 - e. develop practical skills, including shopping, buying, cooking and keeping food, washing clothes, personal self-care, and understanding and taking responsibility for personal healthcare;
 - f. develop financial capability, knowledge and skills;
 - g. know about entitlements to financial and other support after leaving care, including benefits and support from social care services.
- Foster carers contribute to the development of each child's care plan, in collaboration with the child, including the pathway plan for an "eligible" child, and work collaboratively with the young person's social worker or personal adviser in implementing the plan.
- The fostering service ensures there are comprehensive arrangements for preparing and supporting young people to make the transition to independence. This includes appropriate training and support to foster carers caring for young people who are approaching adulthood. Arrangements are consistent with the young person's care plan, including their placement plan, pathway plan and transition plan for children with disabilities and special educational needs
- The fostering service has a policy and practical arrangements which enable children to remain with their foster carer(s) into legal adulthood, for example so that s/he may develop appropriate life skills before being required to move to more independent accommodation. Any such decisions are agreed with foster carers at a placement meeting and are detailed in a child's placement plan.

13) Recruiting and assessing Foster Carers who can meet the needs of children and young people in care

- The fostering service recruits, assesses and supports a range of Foster Carers to meet the needs of children they provide care for and is proactive in assessing current and future needs of children.

14) Foster Care Panels and the Fostering Service's Agency Decision Maker

- The Foster Care Panel and Agency Decision Maker make timely, quality and appropriate recommendations/decisions in line with the overriding objective to promote the welfare of children in foster care.

15) Matching the child with a placement that meets their assessed needs

- The responsible authority has information and support from the fostering service which it needs to facilitate an appropriate match between the Carer and child, capable of meeting the child's needs and consistent with the wishes and feelings of the child, so maximising the likelihood of a stable placement.

16) Statement of purpose and children's guide

- Children, their parents, Foster Carers, staff and the responsible / placing authority are clear about the aims and objectives of the fostering service and what services and facilities it provides.
- The fostering service's operation meets the aims and objectives in the Statement of Purpose.

17) Fitness to provide or manage the administration of a fostering service

- The fostering service is provided and managed by those who are suitable to work with children and have the appropriate skills, experience and qualifications to deliver an efficient and effective service.

18) Financial viability and changes affecting business continuity

- The fostering service is financially sound.
- Where a service is to close or substantially change, there is proper planning, to make the transition for children, Foster Carers and staff as smooth as possible.

19) Suitability to work with children

- There is careful selection of staff, fostering households, volunteers and the central list of persons considered suitable to be members of a Foster Care Panel and there is monitoring of such people to help prevent unsuitable people from having the opportunity to harm children.

20) Learning and development of foster carers

- All new foster carers receive an induction.
- All foster carers, including all members of a household who are approved foster carers, are supported to achieve the Children's Workforce Development Council's Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care. Short break carers who are approved foster carers are supported to achieve the Training Support & Development Standards for Short Break Carers. Family and friends foster carers are supported to achieve the Training, Support and Development Standards for Family and Friends Foster Carers⁷.
- Foster carers are able to evidence that the Training, Support and Development Standards have been attained within 12 months of approval (or within 18 months for family and friends foster carers).
- Foster carers maintain an ongoing training and development portfolio which demonstrates how they are meeting the skills required of them by the fostering service.
- Foster carers' personal development plans set out how they will be supported to undertake ongoing training and development that is appropriate to their development needs and experience

21) Supervision and support of foster carers

- The fostering service supports their foster carers to ensure they provide foster children with care that reasonably meets those children's needs, takes the children's wishes and feelings into account, actively promotes individual care and supports the children's safety, health, enjoyment, education and preparation for the future.
- The fostering service ensures foster carers understand the nature and level of support which will be provided to them by the fostering service.
- There is an effective out of hours advice and support service for foster carers.
- Peer support, foster care associations and/or self help groups for foster carers are encouraged and supported.
- Foster carers are provided with breaks from caring as appropriate. These are planned to take account of the needs of any children placed.
- All foster carers have access to adequate social work and other professional support, information and advice, to enable them to provide consistent, high quality care to the child. This includes assistance with dealing with relevant services, such as health and education. Consideration is given to any help or support needed by the sons and daughters of foster carers.
- The role of the supervising social worker is clear both to the worker and the foster carer.
- Each approved foster carer is supervised by a named, appropriately qualified social worker who has meetings with the foster carer, including at least one unannounced visit a year. Meetings have a clear purpose and provide the opportunity to supervise the foster carer's work, ensure the foster carer is meeting the child's needs, taking into account the child's wishes and feelings, and offer support and a framework to assess the carer's performance and develop their competencies and skills. The frequency of meetings for short break foster carers should be proportionate to the amount of care provided.
- Current and prospective foster carers are able to make a complaint about any aspect of the service which affects them directly. Records are kept of representations and complaints, how they are dealt with, the outcome and any action taken. These records are reviewed regularly so that the service's practice is improved where necessary.

22) Handling allegations and suspicions of harm

- All foster carers, fostering service staff and volunteers understand what they must do if they receive an allegation or have suspicions that a person may have:
 - a. behaved in a way that has, or may have, harmed a child;
 - b. possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child; or
 - c. behaved towards a child in a way that indicates he or she is unsuitable to work with children.
- The fostering service ensures that the required actions are taken, or have been taken, in any relevant situation of which it is aware.*
- A copy of the fostering service provider's child protection procedures is made available to foster carers
 - As soon as possible after an investigation into a foster carer is concluded, their approval as suitable to foster is reviewed. There is a clear policy framework which outlines the circumstances in which a foster carer should be removed as one of the fostering service provider's approved foster carers, in the interests of the safety or welfare of children. This is available to foster carers.

- Investigations into allegations or suspicions of harm are handled fairly, quickly, and consistently in a way that provides effective protection for the child, and at the same time supports the person who is the subject of the allegation. Fostering services follow the framework for managing cases of allegations of abuse against people who work with children as set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children.
- Fostering services ensure that a clear distinction is made between investigation into allegations of harm and discussions over standards of care. Investigations which find no evidence of harm should not become procedures looking into poor standards of care - these should be treated separately.

23) Learning, development and qualifications of staff

- Children and Foster Carers receive a service from staff, volunteers and Foster Care Panel members and decision makers who have the competence to meet their needs.

24) Staff support and supervision

- Staff and volunteers are supported and guided to fulfil their roles and provide a high quality service to children.

25) Managing effectively and efficiently and monitoring the service

- The fostering service is managed ethically, effectively and efficiently, delivering a service which meets the needs of its users.

26) Records

- Information about individual children is kept confidential and only shared with those who have a legitimate and current need to know the information, and to those parts of a child's record or other information that they need to know.
- Entries in records, decisions and reasons for them, are legible, clearly expressed, non-stigmatising, distinguish between fact, opinion and third party information and are signed and dated.
- Information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. Children are actively encouraged to read their files, other than necessarily confidential or third party information, and to correct errors and add personal statements
- The foster carer understands the important supporting role they play in encouraging the child to reflect on and understand their history. The child, subject to age and understanding, is encouraged to keep appropriate memorabilia (including photographs) of their time in the placement. The fostering service makes this role clear to their foster carers and ensures they can record, and help children make a record of (subject to age and understanding), significant life events.

27) Fitness of premises for use as fostering service

- The premises and administrative systems are suitable to enable the service to meet the objectives of its Statement of Purpose.

28) Payment to Carers

- Payments to Foster Carers are fair and paid in a timely way.
- Foster Carers are clear about the fostering service's payment structures and the payments due to them

29) Notification of significant events

- All significant events relating to the health and protection of children in fostering placements are notified by the registered person to the appropriate authorities.

30) Family and Friends as Foster Carers

- Family and Friends Foster Carers receive the support they require to meet the needs of children placed with them.

31) Placement Plan and Review

- The fostering service supports foster carers to play an active role in agreeing the contents of each child's placement plan, in conjunction with the responsible authority.
- The foster carer is given a copy of the child's placement plan as soon as this is provided.
- The foster carer is supported to contribute effectively to the review of their care plan, which includes the placement plan.
- The foster carer is supported to assist the child to put forward their views, wishes and feelings as part of each review process, and the fostering service helps to ensure that these are fully taken into account by the child's responsible authority.
- Foster carers are supported to explain the child's care plan, and any changes to those plans, to the child.
- Children are assisted to secure an independent advocate to support them in providing their views, wishes and feelings to statutory reviews.

(Standards 2.5 / 2.7 / 9 and 12 do not apply in the case of the short break care provided under the Disability Fostering Team)

Full copies of the regulations and standards can be found on the internet;

<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/fostercare/a0071234/regs>

THE FOSTER CARER'S CHARTER

The government introduced the Foster Carer's Charter in March 2011 alongside the introduction of the new National Minimum Standards for Fostering. As part of this Staffordshire County Council was asked to produce its own local Foster Carer's Charter a copy of which is below:-

Children Come First

In order to demonstrate that children and young people come first, Staffordshire County Council, the Fostering Service, Foster Carers and all members of the team supporting the child will:

Ensure that services are provided to children and their families that enable young people to fulfil their potential regardless of their economic or social background, home circumstances, ethnicity, gender, ability or health.

Our over-riding objective is to work together with children, young people, their family and their foster carers to ensure positive outcomes are achieved.

Children and young people in foster care shall experience as full a life as possible as part of a loving foster family. Foster carers will be supported to make everyday decisions as they would for their own children, so that children in care feel part of the foster family and do not stand out as looked after children.

Children and young people must be given every support to develop their own identities and aspirations, fulfil their potential and take advantage of all opportunities to promote their talents and skills. Above all, children and young people should be listened to and their views acted on.

Staffordshire County Council and the Staffordshire Fostering Service Must:

Recognise that the child's relationship with their foster family can make the biggest difference in the child's life.

We will:

Listen to what foster carers say, respect their views, take them into account and include them in decision making.

Support foster carers to contribute their views.

Ensure that our services to foster carers meet all the requirements of the regulations and National Minimum Standards.

Value foster carers skills and their expertise equally to those of other professionals.

Treat carers with respect as a colleague and respect their confidentiality.

Make sure foster carers and fostered children are empowered to be active and informed participants in all placement and care planning decisions.

We will:

Provide comprehensive information for foster families and fostered children about each other before placements are made.

Support foster carers and fostered children getting to know each other before placements are made.

Make sure foster families have all the information they need to provide safe care.

Provide foster carers with good quality, reliable and current information on all financial matters.

Provide all foster carers with an up to date Fostering Handbook.

Provide foster carers with access to all relevant policies and procedures.

Placement information records will be clear, comprehensive and of a high quality. Foster carers and fostered children will be fully aware of the detail of the child's care plan.

We will:

Make sure that, other than in exceptional circumstances, a placement plan will be drawn up and agreed with foster carers and fostered children before a placement is made.

Written copies of the care plan will be provided prior to placement and regularly updated.

Support carers to attend all statutory reviews, permanency planning meetings and any other relevant meetings.

Make sure placement plans include contingency planning arrangements.

Staffordshire foster carers will be respected by all professionals involved as a core member of the team around the child

We will:

Make sure that foster carers are fully informed about the plans for the foster child, are invited to meetings and their contribution valued.

Promote the role of the foster carer as an active, competent and essential member of the team around the child.

Make sure that foster carers are supported to make reasonable and appropriate decisions on behalf of their foster child.

We will:

Make sure that all plans for the child are clear from the beginning of a child's placement so that everyone understands who is responsible for what.

Support a foster carer to make day to day decisions for foster children so that foster children are not treated differently to their peers and can feel part of the foster family.

Provide foster families with high quality support, learning and development opportunities to ensure that every placement can evidence good outcomes for children and young people.

We will:

As a minimum provide foster carers with high quality supervision, monthly visits and weekly phone contact from their supervising social worker.

Value and support sons and daughters who foster.

Provide access to an experienced mentor.

Provide out of hours support from a qualified social worker.

Review support needs regularly and act on all requests for additional support in a timely manner.

Formally review carers support needs, progress and achievements on an annual basis and regularly provide honest and open feedback, challenging practice where necessary.

Provide up to date Personal Development Plans.

Promote higher learning opportunities and provide a comprehensive catalogue of training events, activities and local support groups including sons and daughters groups and activities.

Support carers to achieve their CWDC (Children's Workforce Development Council) Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care certificates of successful completion within set timescales.

Hold Foster Carer Forums to disseminate Best Practice.

Support the consultation role of Foster Carers' Advisory Group and promote carers participation in the future development of services for children in care.

Develop carers fostering career pathways within a Payment for Skills framework.

Make sure all allowances and fees are paid in a timely manner.

Recognise that foster carers have a right to be treated fairly no matter what the circumstances.

We will:

Provide comprehensive and clear information to foster carers within the Foster Carers Handbook about Dealing with Allegations, Complaints and Concerns. This will include information about what happens with allowances and fees if you are not able to foster.

Provide independent advocacy and support for all foster carers to ensure they have access to external supports.

Be clear about timescales and be clear and open in all discussions with carers.

Consult with carers before any changes to the terms and conditions of their fostering approval is made.

Facilitate open and honest, two way, dialogue with foster carers as the basis of our working partnership.

We will:

Consult with you in a meaningful way on matters that affect you.

Give you timely feedback from our consultations.

Facilitate regular meetings between foster carers' representatives, councillors and senior officers within Staffordshire County Council.

Foster Carers Must:

Treat the foster child as they would their own child and be a 'pushy parent' in advocating for all aspects of the child's wellbeing, health and development.

They will:

Work as an integral part of the team around the child.

Seek to resolve problems quickly using all their available support networks, formal and informal.

Advocate for the child's best interest at all times and ensuring good quality information is shared, confidentiality is maintained and by challenging any disadvantage.

Ensure the foster child feels part of the foster family by including them as appropriate in family decision making and supporting their inclusion in all the family's activities.

Respect fostered children and young people and promote the Staffordshire Pledge to young people and children in care in respect of their education, diversity and wellbeing, leaving care opportunities and family relationships.

Work in partnership with all members of the team around the child and the fostering service.

They will:

Always prioritise the needs of the children and actively seek support to do so.

Inform the supervising social worker and Child's social worker of achievements and success.

Inform the supervising social worker and child's social worker about any difficulties and concerns that arise promptly and seek to resolve any difficulties in partnership.

Adhere to all conditions within the Foster Carer agreement.

Meet the standards set out in Fostering Regulations and Guidance, National Minimum Standards for Foster Care.

Comply with policy and procedures and guidance.

Access learning and developmental opportunities throughout their fostering career and make sure that they have the skills and knowledge required to develop practice in order to transform the lives of the children they foster.

They will:

Maintain an effective and relevant Personal Development Plan continually reflecting on learning needs.

Undertake a range of training and learning opportunities for at least 21 hours each year.

Attend support groups.

Where possible attend the Foster Carers' Forum events access the Foster Carer forum website and attend the Fostering Service celebration events.

Maintain open and honest dialogue with Staffordshire County Council.

They will:

Support consultation and discussions to inform the development of the fostering service.

Support the work of the Foster Care Advisory Group.

Representatives will meet with councillors to give an account of the challenges and achievements of being a Staffordshire Foster Carer.

CHILDREN IN CARE PLEDGE

This Pledge, or set of promises, was developed with children and young people who are in the care of Staffordshire County Council. This pledge will commit both the Council and its staff and foster carers to delivering the key promises.

Staffordshire's Pledge to Children & Young People in Care.

The pledge is a set of promises made to children in the care of Staffordshire County Council. All adults who work for and with the Council have a duty to make sure you are safe and happy. This Pledge shows how we promise to do this. This Pledge has been written by Staffordshire's Children in Care Council.

Keeping You Safe:

- We will do everything we can to keep you safe and protected from harm so you feel valued, cared for and supported.

Your Health & Wellbeing:

- We will do everything we can to support you to be physically and emotionally healthy. Where appropriate we will ensure you have access to high quality emotional or therapeutic support.

Your Views, Wishes & Feelings:

- We will offer you opportunities to share your views, wishes and feelings and we promise to listen to them and tell you how they have influenced the decisions we make.

Your Education & Learning:

- We will do everything we can to ensure you have the very best education and training possible, so you can reach your full potential where you can get a good job and have high aspirations for later life; where you are able to explore your passions & interests.

Where You Live:

- We will do everything we can to make sure you have a home where you feel safe, happy and healthy, and where you feel cared for and supported.

Places To Go & Things To Do:

- We will provide you with opportunities to take part in new experiences and activities which you enjoy whilst giving you the support to learn new talents and hobbies where you can aspire to be the very best.

Leaving Care:

- We will prepare you for independence where you feel safe, happy, healthy and where you will feel you are able to confidently live independently as part of the community.

Throughout Everything We Do:

- Every looked after Child, Young Person or Care Leaver will be treated fairly. We will respect and treat you as an individual. We will do everything to support and inspire you to reach your full potential.
- Through everything we do we will support you to develop strong and meaningful relationships with your family, friends, carers and relevant others so you have the very best support available.

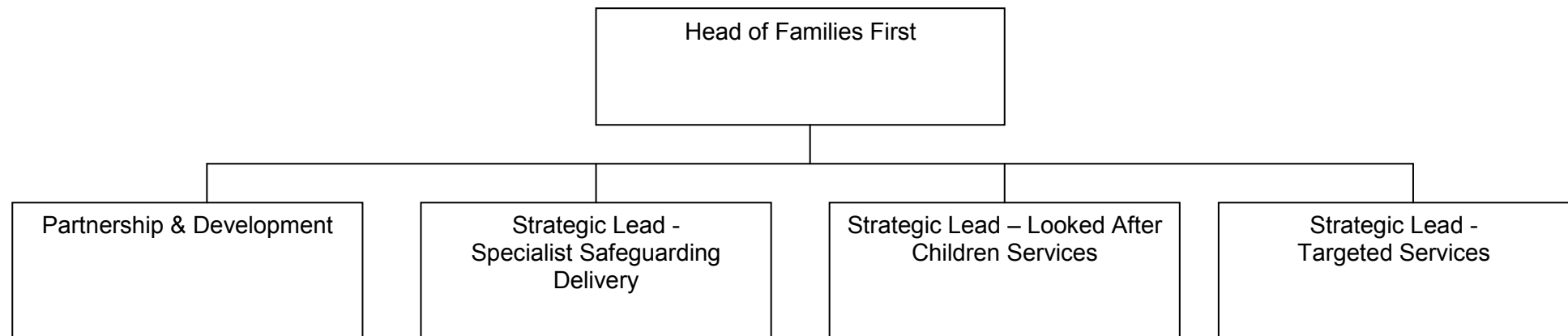
If you would like further information please contact the Children & Young People's Voice Project on 01785 253878 or email cvp@staffordshire.gov.uk. You can also find more information on our website www.staffordshire.gov.uk/cvp

STRUCTURE OF THE SERVICE

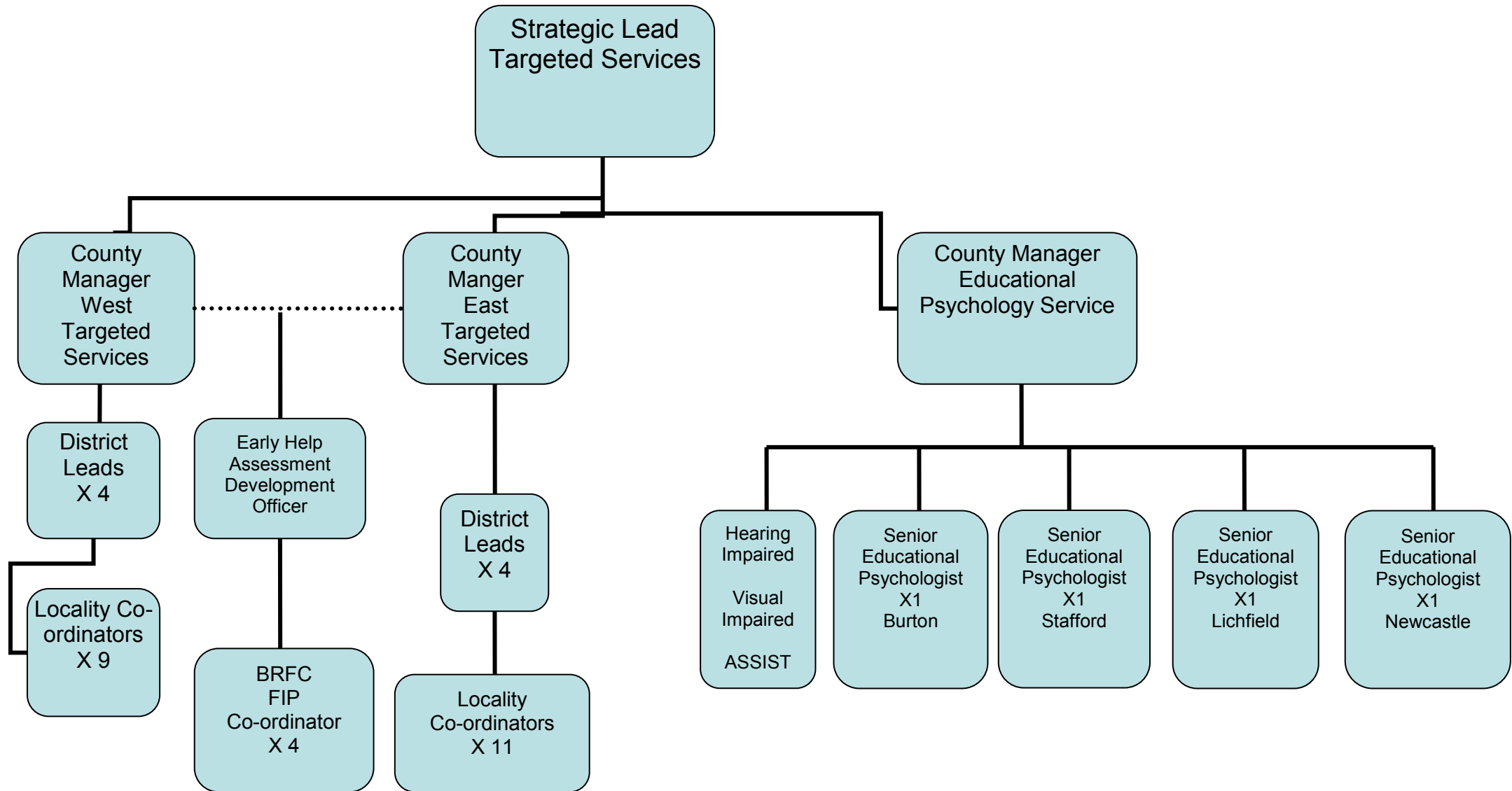
WHERE DOES THE FOSTERING SERVICE FIT IN THE COUNTY COUNCIL?

Staffordshire Fostering Service is managed as part of Staffordshire County Council's "People" portfolio. "People" comprises services including, education, services for older adults, services for adults with disabilities and services considering children's health and Families First. The Families First Service is a new way of working that brings together the full range of County Councils professionals that help children, young people and their families.

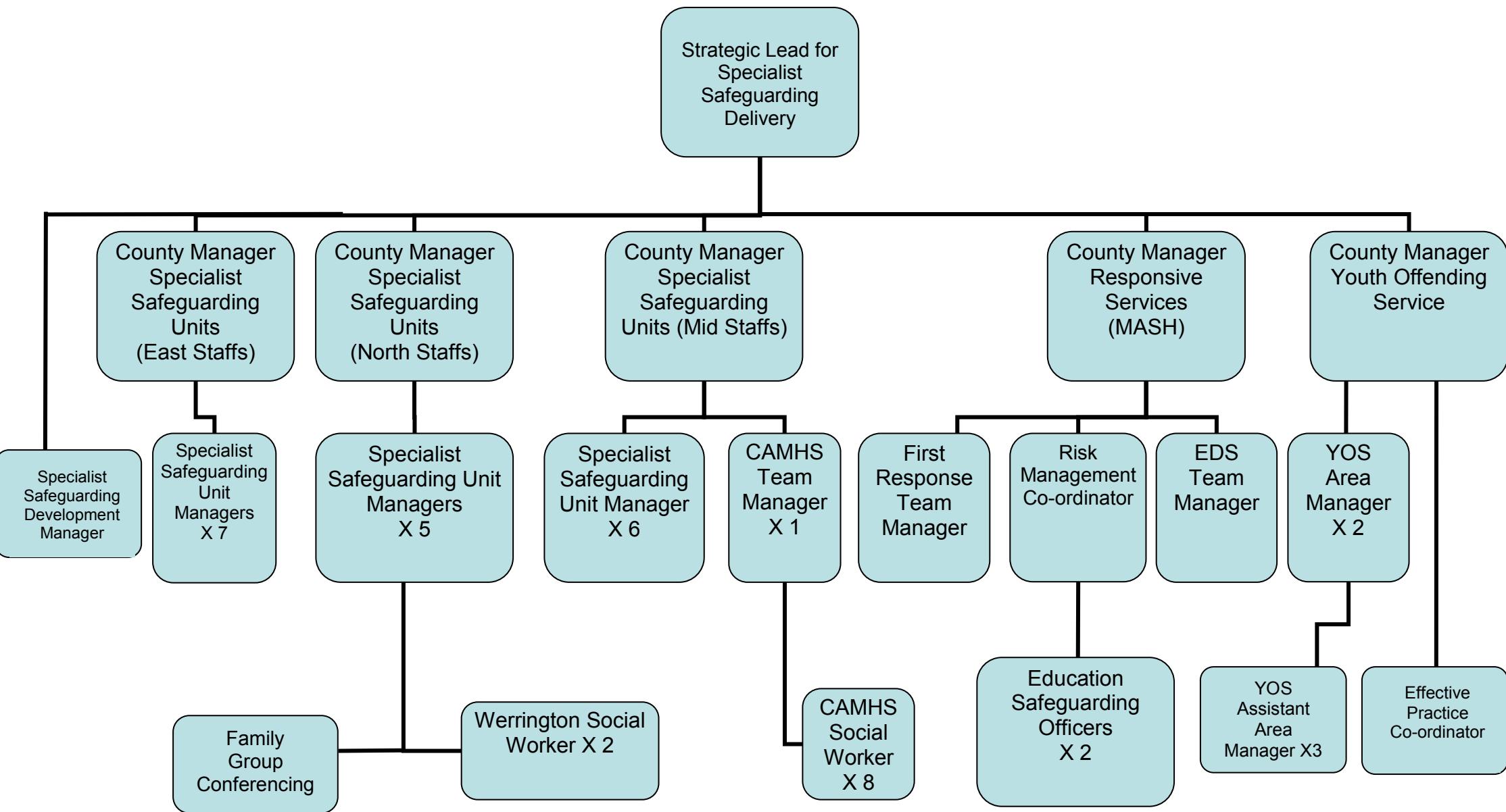
Fostering is part of the Looked After Service within Families First. Families First also includes Safeguarding and Targeted Services which includes Local Support Teams and Early Years provision to support children, young people and families who need advice and assistance but who do not need intensive social work support.



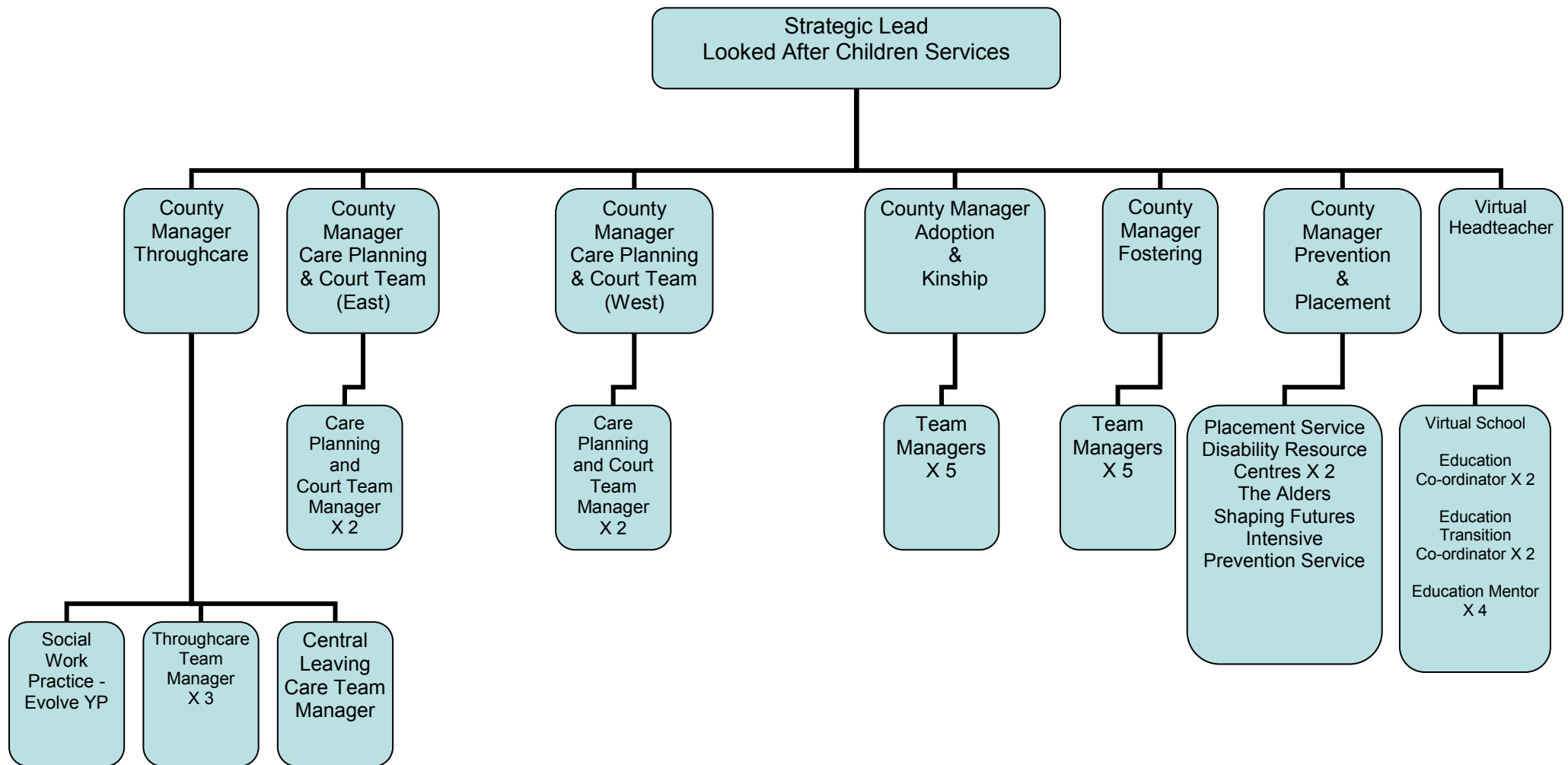
Families First - Targeted Services



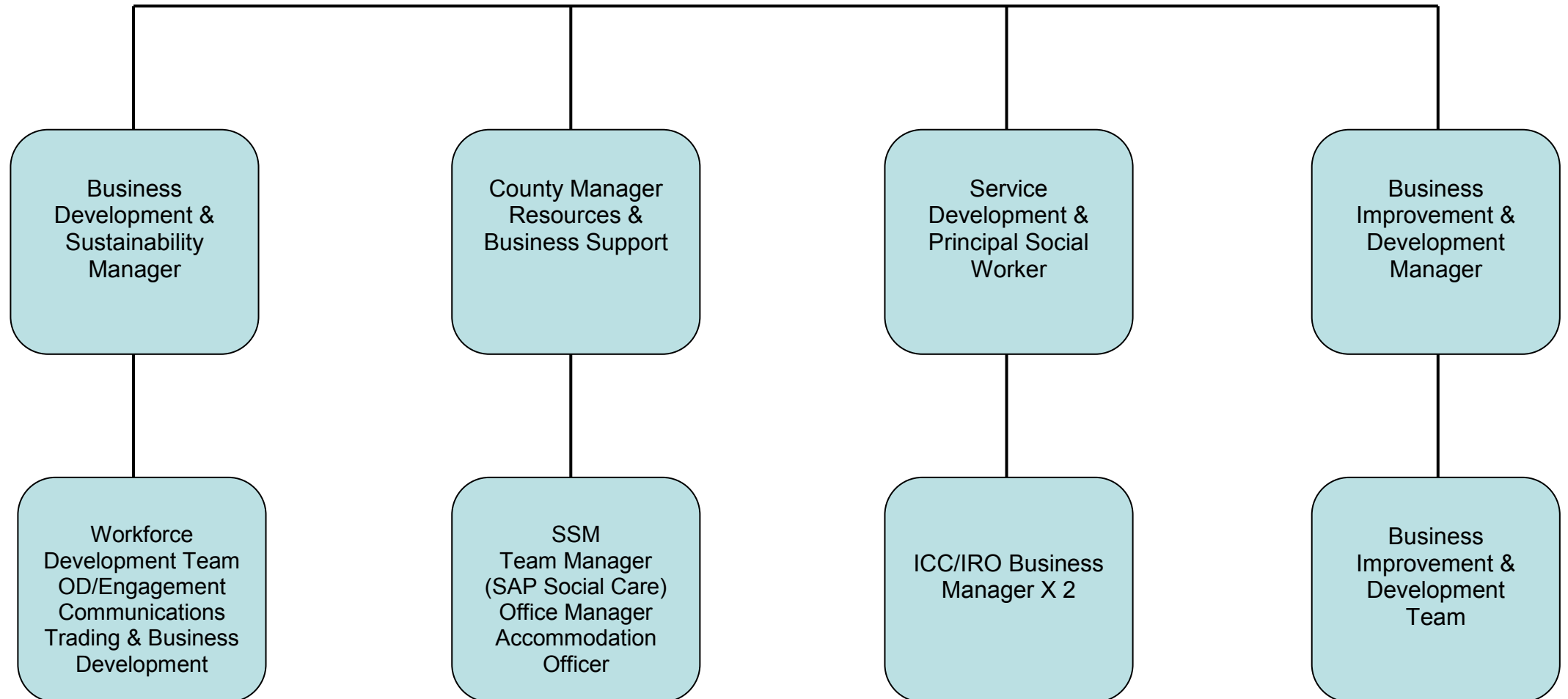
Families First - Specialist Safeguarding Delivery



Families First - Looked After Children & Disability



Families First - Partnership & Development



EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

The County Council operates an Equal Opportunities Policy, foster carers, social workers and all staff in the County Council are expected to promote the Equal Opportunities Policy. The Policy states that:-

We acknowledge our responsibility to address the imbalances caused by discrimination and disadvantage. In doing so, we will ensure that all communities have opportunities to work with us, access our services and be involved in what we do. We will pursue this aim through continuously striving to improve the way in which we:

- Recruit, employ and develop our employees;
- Provide services;
- Involve communities;
- Work with our partners.

The **Public Sector Equality Duty**, of the Equality Act 2010, requires public authorities to;

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations
- Remove or minimise disadvantages
- Encourage people to participate in public life where their participation is low

The Equality Act 2010 introduces a term called “protected characteristics”. These are; age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, race, religion and belief, sexual orientation, civil partnerships and pregnancy and maternity. Public bodies need to ensure that no one is discriminated against and address these areas, when redesigning or developing a new service or policy. All employment practices need to be transparent and internal practices such as promotion, training and development opportunities must be fair and consistent.

We will do this by:

- Meeting all our responsibilities for equality and diversity in the relevant legislation and codes of practice
- Mainstreaming equality and diversity into everything we do; policies, strategies, plans and practices
- Challenging discrimination and tackle all forms of bullying and harassment

Providing services – we will;

- Deliver services throughout the County to people who need them, without discrimination and in ways that are tailored to needs
- Every customer will be treated in a professional manner, with courtesy and respect
- Make sure our employees are properly trained and supported to deliver high quality customer service in line with this policy
- Make sure that our services meet the needs of our diverse communities by presenting written information in plain English
- Provide interpretation and translation services as appropriate

A Full copy of the policy is available on the council’s website:

<http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/community/equalopportunities/equalopportunitiespolicy/home.aspx>

SECTION TWO

FOSTER CARERS

FOSTER CARER APPROVAL

Following preparation and assessment you have been approved as a Foster Carer for Staffordshire County Council. Your approval will include details of the category of fostering, the numbers, age range and gender. Your approval is reviewed initially after the first 6 months and thereafter annually.

FOSTER CARER AGREEMENT

The Foster Carer Agreement, which you signed following your approval at panel, outlines your responsibilities and those of the Department. You will receive and sign an updated copy each year following your Annual Review or when a change has been made to your approval. A full copy of the Foster Carer Agreement can be found in Appendix A.

The Foster carers agreement states that carers should notify us of the following:

- Any intended change of address
- Any change to the composition of the household, arrivals and departures.
- Any further request by carers to foster or adopt
- Any pending court cases, convictions or cautions of any nature relating to any member of the household over 10 years of age, or anyone who is a regular visitor to the household.
- Any intended child-minding
- Any other changes in personal circumstances and any other event affecting the foster carers capacity to care for any children placed, or the suitability of the carers household.

Can you please inform your supervising social worker of any changes to your household or those who are frequent visitors including:

- Convictions including custodial sentences
- Alcohol and drug misuse
- Mental health diagnosis
- Concerns in respect of adult children's birth children
- Domestic violence

DISCLOSURE & BARRING SERVICE (DBS) & MEDICAL UPDATES

DBS checks on everyone in your household aged 16 plus are updated every 3 years. Children who are placed with you as a looked after child or move onto Staying Put arrangements do not require a DBS check, even if they are over 16.

Medical updates are completed every 3 years via your GP or where there have been significant changes to your health; this does not usually require a medical examination.

PAYMENT FOR SKILLS

Staffordshire operates a Payment for Skills scheme. The basis of this scheme is that Foster Carers should be paid by reference to their skills and fostering experience rather than to the challenges & complexities presented by individual children placed with them. For more information please refer to Section Six of this Handbook.

SUPERVISION & SUPPORT OF CARERS

The role of the Fostering Social Worker

All Foster Carers are allocated a named Fostering Social Worker whose role is to offer support and supervision.

The Fostering Social Worker must have monthly contact and visit regularly (monthly) whilst a child is in placement and keep in regular contact when there is no placement.

The Fostering Social Worker is there to ensure that you have sufficient information about a child and are supported in your role as a Foster Carer. They also act as a liaison between the Child's Social Worker and you. It is important to understand that a child's needs remain the first priority for all those involved.

If, for any reason, your Fostering Social Worker is unavailable you are able to access support from another worker in their team if you need this. This is referred to as, "office cover".

If your social worker is absent for an indefinite period the Team Manager will make arrangements with you to agree who will support you in their absence.

SUPERVISION POLICY

What is Supervision?

Supervision in the Fostering Service is a formal arrangement for meetings between Carers and their allocated Social Worker. It is a policy of Staffordshire's Fostering Service that all Foster Carers have the right to regular supervision, as this is part of our commitment to creating a full and responsible partnership between carers and the Department.

Supervisory visits are distinct from support visits and have a set agenda. It focuses on the care that you are providing to children and young people and the progress they are making in placement. It also focuses on your household, identifying support/training needs and any other issues. Supervision will give you time to consider and focus on the outcomes for children in your care. You and your fostering social worker will be able to discuss the ways in which what you are doing is improving the health, happiness, success and safety of your fostered children.

The aim is to work with you to develop your fostering skills so that children's needs identified in relation to the 'Every Child Matters' 5 outcomes are met and to ensure that your support needs are fully addressed.

(For more information about outcome based accountability see the good practice guide in this folder)

Supervision is essentially a supportive and enabling two-way process:

- To ensure you understand how you can contribute to the Families First Services for children and young people
- To enable you to contribute effectively to the plans for children and young people for whom you are caring
- To enable you to be clear about what is expected of you in undertaking this role

- To ensure you understand what is involved and required of you regarding each child you care for.
- To give you appropriate feedback on your work
- To enable the Department to monitor and review the quality of services to children 'cared for' in foster care
- To support you by providing advice and oversight, or making this available from elsewhere as appropriate;
- To support your children by seeking their views on the effects of fostering on them, and providing advice and support either directly or making this available via other established networks
- To help you cope with the stresses the work may entail;
- To ensure that you are enabled to develop your skills and knowledge by having your training needs assessed, opportunities for development identified and when training has occurred considering how this has aided your understanding

Supervision meetings take place between you and your allocated Social Worker. Where partners are jointly approved as Foster Carers, it is expected that both of you will be present, whenever possible.

Where appropriate, the meeting may include others within the family network – immediate or wider family members. The views of your children are welcomed and these can be shared either directly or in a written form.

What Happens in Supervision?

Supervision must take place a minimum of four times during a year. They are formal meetings with an agenda and there will be a written record of what was said and agreed.

Your allocated Social Worker will explain the arrangements more fully to you and will ask you to sign a supervision agreement which specifies:

- Frequency of meetings
- Duration of meetings
- Venue of meetings

Supervision is an opportunity for you to think about the work you are doing as a Foster Carer, to raise problems or difficulties, and to find opportunities for developing your own skills and experience. It can be an opportunity for any of your children to talk about how 'fostering' is for them.

Issues and matters raised within supervision meetings can be reflected in your annual Foster Carer Review. You will receive a copy of the written record of the meeting and a copy will be held on your foster carer file. If requested foster carers can be provided with an immediate copy of the main points and agreed actions from their formal supervision.

Supervision creates possibilities to help you develop and grow in the work you do. Any areas of learning and training needs will be identified and a plan agreed as to how to address these.

YOUR OWN SUPPORT WITH CHILD CARE - USING BABYSITTERS AND DAY CARE

When using **baby-sitters**, you should use the same person/people, either a relative, close friend or another Foster Carer who have been DBS checked, so that the children know who is going to be looking after them. Baby-sitters need to be responsible adults over the age of 18 years.

Where **day care** is needed, it is best for children if they receive it informally from people who have a relationship with them and who have an understanding of the fostering task. This will usually be a member of the Foster Carer's own network.

Ofsted has informed agencies that for day care arrangements for children 0-8 payment can only be made with registered child care providers, which does not include approved Foster Carers. However carers are able to make reciprocal arrangements with other Foster Carers or use other members of their own networks, as long as no payment is made.

In some situations, some fostered children will access paid child care for example through a child minder or day nursery. This must be part of the plan for the child and set out in the Childs Placement Plan. These arrangements are agreed by the children's team only and are made to support the outcomes of the Childs Care Plan.

In addition to this, there are other circumstances where Day Care is appropriately sought such as:

- Attendance at meetings; e.g. court, planning meetings, training events
- Support to the placement if a child is out of school or there are additional pressures due to behaviour or health

All Foster Carers should

- Work with their Fostering Social Worker to help them to identify the Day Care supports within their own local network
- Foster Carers will be encouraged to form local networks with other foster carers to build reciprocal support networks

In circumstances where a Foster Carer has been unable to identify anyone from their own network and may need to access a registered child care provider, this must be discussed with their fostering social worker ahead of time who will try to assist in finding a solution.

Any funding would need to be agreed by the relevant fostering team manager prior to the arrangement taking place.

SUPPORT CARERS

In some circumstances, Foster Carers are able to identify members of their support network (for example a family member or close friend) who can offer more regular child care support than would ordinarily be the case with a babysitter. The agreement to this kind of support will depend on the needs of the children in placement. These **Support Carers** will need to be assessed to consider their suitability to undertake this role and the outcome of the assessment is presented to the Fostering Panel for their consideration. Support carers are not approved as foster carers. The use of support carers rather than respite has many advantages in that they will be people known to the child or children in placement. The support offered can be for a particular child with the carer or the support carer can be assessed to offer respite to any child in that foster home. If you would like this kind of support and can identify an appropriate support carer for your household please talk to your Fostering Social Worker.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Attending support groups is an important part of all Foster Carers development. You can attend whichever group you like or more than one. They are held regularly and are on different days so you can choose what suits you; we also offer the men's groups in the evening.

As well as being a forum to exchange views, to share ideas, learn from each other and to gain invaluable support from your peers, support groups also provide an opportunity to develop your knowledge and skills. All of the support groups throughout the county are

different and it is important that Foster Carers are able to devise the agenda for their group according to the individual group's priorities. Alongside this there is a general agenda which all of the support groups will cover which includes visiting speakers such as the Virtual Head Teacher, Health Colleagues etc.

Details of the current support groups can be found in the training catalogue, Foster Carers Newsletter and on the website via the Foster Carers Forum.

Dates and venues for groups can be found in the training catalogue.

Family & Friends Carers are also able to access specific support groups as can Disability Short Breaks Carers. Please contact your Fostering Social Worker or Disability Fostering Social Worker for details however any carer is welcome to attend the general support groups.

Some carers have asked to be supported in arranging informal support groups with fellow carers in their local area. If you are interested in arranging such a group please speak in the first instance to your Fostering Social Worker.

Foster carers are expected to attend support groups.

SONS AND DAUGHTERS

Training and support is also available to the Sons and Daughters of Foster Carers. There is a preparation training course available through the training and recruitment team, details of which are in the training catalogue. In each school holiday sons and daughters also have an opportunity to attend a support group. This usually lasts for around 4 hours and comprises an opportunity to meet with others to talk about issues related to being part of a fostering household along with the opportunity to participate in some fun activities.

FOSTER CARER'S ADVISORY GROUP

This is a group of carers who meet regularly in a variety of locations throughout the county usually in the evening. The group is involved in discussions around developments in the service along with feeding back issues to the Fostering Service Management team. If you are interested in getting involved in the Advisory Group please speak to your Fostering Social Worker.

KEEP AND KEEP SAFE

Staffordshire Fostering Services are excited to be included in the national roll out of KEEP training across the Fostering Workforce. KEEP has been developed by the Oregon Social Learning Centre and has proved to be a popular and successful intervention since its introduction into the UK in 2010.

The KEEP programme; (Keeping Foster and Kinship Parents Supported and Trained.) is designed for mainstream foster carers and Friends and Families carers with children aged between five and twelve years. It is a 16 week foster carer group which aims to increase the parenting skills of foster and kinship parents, decrease the number of placement disruptions, improve child outcomes, and increase the number of positive placement changes. KEEP Safe is a 20 week foster carer group.

KEEP is open to applications from all Staffordshire Foster Carers or Friends and Family carers who have a child in placement aged between 5 and 12 at the start of the training and anticipate that child remaining in placement with them for at least 1 month.

KEEP Safe is open to applications from all Staffordshire Foster Carers or Friends and Family carers who have a child in placement aged between 12 and 17 at the start of the training and anticipate that child remaining in placement with them for at least 1 month.

Following the completion of the course, a monthly support group is offered to ensure the training is embedded and carers are supported.

If you are interested in this training, please discuss in the first instance with your Fostering Social Worker as there is an application and shortlisting process. For more information, contact Mandy Taylor-Mellor, KEEP Lead Facilitator at the Fostering and Adoption Recruitment and Training Team, Tel. 01785 895009 or via [e-mail](#).

FOSTER CARER'S FORUMS

Once or twice a year you will be invited to attend a Foster Carer's Forum. These day events are intended to provide an opportunity to discuss developments in Fostering along with a chance to meet with your Fostering Colleagues. The forum is supported by a wide range of colleagues within Families First and our partners. The forum aims to share views about the new developments, initiatives and local and national changes to practice.

FOSTER CARER ASSOCIATION

A foster care association is a voluntary organisation i.e. one that is set up and operates because the people involved want to, rather than being set up by law. Associations are independent, fully constituted organisations, run by foster carers for foster carers.

Staffordshire Fostering Service supports the setting up of Foster Carer Associations and seeks to work with those in operating in our local area.

Information about local Foster Carer Associations can be found on the Foster Carers Forum <http://care4child>

or on the Fostering Network website:

<http://www.fostering.net/england/our-work/foster-care-associations>

TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

Training & Development

Training plays a vital role in developing your knowledge base and extending your skills. The details of all the training that is offered for Foster Carers both core training and continuing professional development training events are contained in the most recent training catalogue which is posted out to carers each year, or at the point of approval. The catalogue can also be accessed on the website via the Foster Carers Forum.

Induction

Induction training 'Introduction to Fostering for Staffordshire' is a mandatory course for all new applicants to be completed after a successful Initial Visit or approval at panel for Family and Friends carers. The workshop is run on a four week rolling program including weekends, evenings and daytime training. Prospective applicants will be given the access code to the electronic Handbook.

At the point of approval, you will receive an induction visit from a Fostering Social Worker. At this visit we will ensure that you have been given a copy of this handbook along with giving you an opportunity to ask any questions and seek advice.

Children's Workforce Development Council Standards (CWDC)

The training programmes and activities that have been developed for Foster Carers, support the Children's Workforce Development Council's (CWDC) implementation of The Training Support and Development Standards for Foster Care. These are referred to in the training catalogue as the TSD Standards. The training catalogue sets out in detail all of the standards and their requirements.

All newly approved Foster Carers will be expected to complete the TSD Standards within 12 months of approval and attend induction training. Family and Friends foster carers and Disability Foster Carers have TSD Standards tailored to their specific roles. They are required to complete these within 18 months of approval. Carers will be supported to complete the TSD standards and produce a portfolio of evidence showing that they have met the requirements. On the completion of this induction stage Foster Carers will be awarded a ***Certificate of Successful Completion***.

Those carers who have completed their CWDC / TSD standards via another fostering agency will be asked to compile a portfolio detailing their knowledge and understanding of Staffordshire's policies and procedures within 6 months of their approval. Details of those standards to be included in this portfolio will be provided to you by your Fostering Social Worker.

Personal Development Plans

All Foster Carers will have a Personal Development Plan (PDP), which the Foster Carer and their Social Worker will agree. All Foster Carers should have a Personal Development Plan within six weeks of approval. The PDP will be reviewed at each supervisory visit and updated annually at the Foster Carers Annual Review. Each Foster Carer will have a PDP based on their individual support and development needs.

The PDP will consider each carer's development needs and agree the most appropriate actions to address these needs. Development needs will differ from carer to carer. For newer carers they are likely to centre around the core training and TSD standards. For other carers they may be more focussed on the specific needs of children and young people in placement. Agreed actions will also differ between carers and be dependent on their learning style and preferences. Actions might be attendance at a formal training course but could also include other types of learning such as E-learning, guided individual learning, research, guided reading, accessing Government internet sites or professional discussions. The PDP will consider and agree timescale for completion of any actions identified. Learning from sources outside those provided by the Fostering Service can also be considered such as attendance at talks and briefings at schools or activity clubs or transferrable learning from employment outside fostering.

It is a requirement that all Foster Carers should evidence their training and learning at the level and frequency that is agreed within their Personal Development Plan.

Post Approval Training

All Foster Carers will be required to undertake no less than the equivalent of 3 days (or 21 hours) development activity per year.

Information about post approval training courses offered is found in the training catalogue. This includes information about E-learning which can be accessed through the Training and Recruitment team. In addition to these courses Foster Carers are also able to access training offered by Staffordshire County Council's People directorate and Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board. More information about those courses can be provided by the Training and Recruitment Team or your Fostering Social Worker.

Each Foster Carer is required to complete of the Foundations to Fostering programme or demonstrate that they have completed a suitable alternative. Those subjects covered in this programme are listed in the training catalogue. Many carers will cover this programme through attendance at core training events. Some aspects of the programme can also be covered by E-learning. The Team Manager of your Fostering Social Worker will verify when the programme is completed. For those carers who wish to have learning from sources outside the Fostering Service verified as covering Core Training they should provide details of this to their Fostering Social Worker. These will then be passed to the Team Manager who can verify whether these meet the core training requirement.

In addition to the Core Training Programme it is highly recommended that all male carers attend training on Men in Foster Care, all carers working with teenagers attend training on Caring for teenagers and preparing them for adult life and all carers attend training on Managing Conflict / challenging behaviour.

In addition to these courses, a wide range of subjects is offered in the training catalogue. These are referred to as Continuing Professional Development and specialist courses.

Foster Carer's Online Forum

Staffordshire Foster Carers have access to www.care4child.org forum. To access the forum, carers are allocated a Login and Password. They then follow an easy process to change their password to something more familiar to themselves. On the forum they are able to access information on Fostering & Adoption, carers are able to post information on the forum, respond to information posted by other carers or staff. Access information, policies, procedures, training information, sons and daughters group. If you have difficulty accessing the forum contact the Recruitment & Training Team on 01785 895363.

MENTORING SCHEME

Staffordshire recognises that the role of a Foster Carer is complex and demanding.

The purpose of the mentoring scheme is to provide an enhanced support service to Foster Carers, with the aim of developing the skills and understanding of the fostering task, and thereby sustaining placements and improving outcomes for children.

The Mentor

The Mentor is an experienced Foster Carer who will provide one to one support and advice to carers in assessment, newly approved and existing Foster Carers through identified tasks.

The Mentor will:-

- Maintain regular contact
- Promote awareness of the fostering task
- Encourage and reassure
- Raise self-esteem and confidence
- Encourage the development of skills
- Enhance the quality of care to children
- Increase knowledge base
- Improve the retention of Foster Carers
- Promote team work

The Mentee

All fostering applicants will be matched with a Mentor. Regular meetings between Mentor and Mentee will be agreed. The Mentor will help the Mentee settle into the role by:- Introducing the Mentee to support groups and training, assisting with the completion of CWDC TSD Standards Portfolio and assisting with familiarisation with the Families First Service.

Experienced Foster Carers are able to access the Mentoring Service via their own Social Worker when extra support is required for a specific issue.

Allocating a Mentor

The Mentoring Scheme Co-ordinator will match Foster Carer to Mentors following a referral from the Mentee's Fostering Social Worker.

A range of criteria will be used to ensure a successful match, e.g. fostering experiences of the Mentor, geography, personality and learning styles. Should the match not be successful the co-ordinator will seek an alternative Mentor.

Confidentiality under Mentoring Scheme

The relationship between the Mentor and Mentee requires trust and understanding around the issues of confidentiality. A confidentiality agreement will be signed. Personal details of the discussions will not be disclosed without permission of the other party. This commitment will continue following the conclusion of the mentoring. However, if the information received discloses an illegal act or serious concerns of potential risks to children, adults or the service, the Mentor and Mentee will be under an obligation to break this confidentiality.

It is hoped the Mentoring Scheme will assist in raising the skills and development of Foster Carers in our service which will compliment the role of Social Workers and improve outcomes for children and young people.

EMERGENCY DUTY SERVICE (EDS)

Outside office hours you can access support through EDS who will pick up on issues that cannot wait until the next working day. This is a generic service with a limited number of personnel covering all of Staffordshire. They will offer telephone support and only visit if they consider the situation warrants it.

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE - CAMHS

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are a comprehensive range of services available within local communities, towns or cities, which provide help and treatment to children and young people who are experiencing emotional or behavioural difficulties, or mental health problems, disorders and illnesses.

The teams provide a range of specialist mental health services to children, young people and their families or carers. They can help with emotional and behaviour problems, family relationship problems, effects of traumatic experiences, bullying, eating disorders, sleeping, toileting problems, anxiety and stress.

Some of these services are based in National Health Service (NHS) settings such as Child and Family Consultation Services, in-patient and outpatient departments of hospitals, in GP Surgeries and Health Centres. Others are based in educational settings such as schools, colleges and universities or in youth centres, walk-in centres for young people and counselling services.

For those with concerns about a child or a young person's mental health it might be helpful to speak to any of the following: your GP, a teacher, Head Teacher or Head of Year, School Nurse, Health Visitor, Social Worker or Youth Counselling Service for advice and referral for specialist help within these services.

CAMHS contact details:

STAFFORD:	01785 259449
BURTON:	01283 505820
CANNOCK:	01543 576967
LICHFIELD:	01543 414555
NEWCASTLE:	01782 719615
TAMWORTH:	01827 51183
MOORLANDS:	01782 652660

SUSTAIN+ (CHILD & ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE – CAMHS – FOR CHILDREN IN CARE)

Children who come into care have often experienced trauma and neglect. Moving from one home to another can, in itself, be traumatic for a child. Children who have had these experiences can often appear distressed or display challenging behaviour. They can sometimes be difficult to get close to and their behaviour can appear designed to push you away.

SUSTAIN+ is a health resource service that works directly with Staffordshire foster carers and other professionals and with children and young people who are looked after. The work of the therapist at SUSTAIN+ is strongly influenced by attachment systemic and developmental ideas and theories.

SUSTAIN+ provide therapy and consultation to help, support and maintain placements, by offering time and space to think about and make sense of children's behaviours and feelings. This thinking develops in the context of taking account of the children's very traumatic, neglectful and abusive early experiences, which often have a continuing impact on the children and on their relationships with their carers and families.

SUSTAIN+ has bases in Burton, Stafford and Newcastle which cover the whole of Staffordshire.

SUSTAIN+ offers training and workshops to carers which are included in the Training Catalogue. This includes; Making Sense of Behaviour and Fostering Attachments.

SUSTAIN+ also runs groups for carers details of which can be obtained from your Fostering Social Worker.

SUSTAIN+ will take referrals from you, your Fostering Social Worker, the Child's Social Worker or the child themselves.

What can you expect from SUSTAIN+?

Before seeing a child SUSTAIN+ often finds it useful to have an information gathering meeting with you and other professionals involved with the child. This helps to decide the best way forward.

Sometimes you may find it useful to have several sessions without the child present to discuss your relationship with the child and to talk through strategies that may help.

Often the child is invited to attend therapy sessions. You may be asked to join in these sessions as SUSTAIN+ realise how helpful it is for you to know what is being talked about and to be there to comfort the child if necessary.

SUSTAIN+ carries out the strengths and needs assessment for all children over the age of 18 months who become cared for.

SUSTAIN+ contact details:

161 Eccleshall Road, Stafford ST16 1PD

Tel: 01785 244545

Email: sustain+@sssft.nhs.uk

Weekend Contact Number: 0300 790 7000

NSPCC

Within Staffordshire, the NSPCC run therapeutic services that can be accessed by children in foster care. These are; “**letting the future in**”, a therapeutic service for children who have experienced sexual abuse, “**face to face**” providing independent emotional support, brief solution focused therapy and direct work to children in care. NSPCC also provides a service to undertake therapeutic work with children and young people who display **sexually harmful behaviour**. These services are not generally accessible to children and young people who are accessing other therapeutic intervention. Foster carers, social workers or young people themselves can make a referral to the NSPCC on 0844 892 0273.

FAMILY RIGHTS GROUP

The Family Rights Group provides specialist advice for families who have children in the Children in Care system.

www.frq.org.uk

Family Rights Group, Second Floor, The Print House, 18 Ashwin Street, London E8 3DL

T: 020 7923 2628

F: 020 7923 2683

For advice:

email: advice@frq.org.uk

or

Phone the advice line: 0808 8010366

Opening hours: Monday - Friday

9.30am-3.30pm

GRANDPARENTS ASSOCIATION

The Grandparents Association provide services which include an advice and information line, welfare benefits advice, publications, support groups, and Grandparent and Toddler groups and mediation.

www.grandparents-association.org.uk

The Grandparents' Association, Moot House, The Stow, Harlow, Essex CM20 3AG

Advice and information line: 0845 434 9585

Or email info@grandparents-association.org.uk

FOSTERING NETWORK

All Foster Carers in Staffordshire are members of the Fostering Network.

As a member you will receive the quarterly magazine, Foster Care, which gives useful information about fostering and developments across the country.

There is a local Advice and Mediation Officer who can help to keep you informed or in the event of an allegation offer support and advice. Her name is: Bethan Houston

www.fostering.net

Telephone : 01905 622459

e-mail: bethan.houston@fostering.net

Members also receive comprehensive legal protection insurance to cover legal expenses that may arise as a result of fostering and access to 24 hour helplines providing legal and medical advice, as well as stress counselling

No longer fostering?

As a retired foster carer (someone no longer fostering) it is really important to make sure that you continue to be insured against the risk of allegation. A child that has been fostered by you in the past can make an allegation at any time, regardless of whether or not you are still fostering, and you must be insured at the time the allegation is made in order to qualify for legal support.

For just £18.50, our retired foster carer membership ensures you are covered by the Fostering Network's Legal Benefits Insurance Policy. This insurance provides you with continued legal protection insurance as well as access to a 24-hour legal helpline. Applicants must currently be foster carer members of the Fostering Network who are retiring and retired membership must commence on the day after your foster carer membership ceases.

(Please note– retired membership does not give you access to any other membership benefits.)

How to join

You can download and complete a [form](#) then email it to membership@fostering.net or post to Membership, The Fostering Network, 87 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8HA.

If you have any questions, contact us on 020 7620 6400.

FOSTER CARER ANNUAL REVIEW

It is a requirement that all Foster Carers are reviewed at intervals of no more than 1 year. The review is to ensure that you continue to meet the standards required and to take into consideration any changes in your lives. It takes into account the views of the foster family, the Fostering Social Worker, the child and their Social Worker about how the previous year's fostering has gone. Everyone involved is expected to complete written information for the review meeting.

The review is chaired by a Fostering Social Worker who does not have any direct responsibility for your family.

The review evaluates your fostering experience and can recommend changes in your approval category. The review will identify any training and support needs.

Following the review you will receive copies of all the contributions and a summary of the review meeting, including recommendations.

All reviews are presented to Foster Panel for them to consider your continued approval as Foster Carers. Following Panel you will receive a letter of confirmation of the panel outcome and a new Foster Carer Agreement.

DE-REGISTRATION - CEASING TO FOSTER

When a foster care decides to stop fostering either because they are retiring or because of a change in their personal circumstances they must notify their fostering social worker and team manager in writing. This letter will be presented to the fostering panel with a brief report from their social worker. A letter will be sent to them confirming that their name has been removed from the Register of Foster Carers. A resignation in writing from a foster carer has to be accepted within 28 days of receipt of the letter.

FOSTERING PANEL

The Fostering Regulations 2011 requires each Local Authority to have a Fostering Panel. The function of the Panel is to consider new applications to foster and any changes to the approval of existing foster carers. Recommendations are made to the Agency Decision Maker who will make the final decision. Panel will consider suitability to foster and recommend the approval details including the number, type, age range and gender of children to be placed.

Staffordshire has a central list of Panel Members that include independent members as well as representatives from the Families First Service. The independent members all come from within the Staffordshire community and have a range of relevant experience. All panel members have signed a Confidentiality Agreement and have been checked through the Criminal Records Bureau.

The panel meet on a weekly basis. The Fostering Panel Administrator also attends to take minutes of the meeting and sometimes there may be an observer present. The panel is supported by a Panel Advisor. They are there in an advisory capacity only and do not influence the panels recommendations.

Your Fostering Social Worker will attend with you. If you are a Family & Friends Carer, the Social Worker for the child/ren that you are caring for already or plan to care for will also be invited to attend.

All new applicants and approved carers following their first review are invited and encouraged to attend Fostering Panel. The meeting is a formal one where there is an opportunity for the Panel to ask questions and clarify any issues. You can also ask any questions of the Panel Members present. The Fostering Panel Members feel that it is important that applicants and existing carers attend so that they can contribute to the discussion that will ultimately make recommendations regarding approvals. Carers who have attended the Fostering Panel have valued the experience of being able to represent themselves and Panel Members always welcome the opportunity to meet prospective and existing foster carers.

The Fostering Panel make a recommendation to the Agency Decision Maker. However they will normally inform you at the end of the discussion of their recommendation. You will receive written confirmation of the Agency Decision within 10 working days.

The Agency Decision Maker may not agree with the panel's recommendation. You will be informed of this in the letter. In circumstances where the Agency Decision Maker does not agree to an applicant being approved as a foster carer the reasons for this decision will be set out in the letter. This is known as a Qualifying Determination.

QUALIFYING DETERMINATION

When the letter of Qualifying Determination is sent, in circumstances where the Fostering Service has concerns about a foster carers continued suitability to foster a full report of the circumstances will be given to the carers and presented to the Fostering Panel. In these circumstances foster carers will be able to provide their own report and have someone to

support them at Panel. Foster carers can attend the Fostering Panel. Following the Panels recommendation the Agency Decision Maker will either agree or overturn the Panels recommendation.

The foster carer will receive a letter giving a full account of how the Agency Decision Maker has reached their decision. This is known as a Qualifying Determination.

If you do not agree with the recommendation of the Foster Panel and the decision of the Agency Decision Maker relating to your approval (e.g. deregistration, or not agreeing to a change in approval).

1. You may make representation to the Fostering Service to review the recommendation

or

2. Apply to the **Independent Review Mechanism (IRM)** for a review of the Fostering Service recommendation

You will have 28 days from the date of the Fostering Service letter to make your decision and to notify either the Fostering Service Manager if you are going through option 1, or the Contract Manager at the IRM for option 2.

You will receive a leaflet informing you of both of these options with the letter.

INDEPENDENT REVIEW MECHANISM (IRM)

The IRM is a review process which prospective or existing foster carers can use if they do not agree with the Qualifying Determination (the Agency Decision and the reasons for making the decision).

The IRM is a review panel which is independent of Fostering Service Providers. The IRM can review your suitability as a prospective foster carer to foster a child, review any changes proposed to your terms of approval and can make new recommendations to the agency on your suitability and term of approval.

For more information contact:

www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk

CHANGES TO YOUR HOUSEHOLD/NEW PARTNERS

It is vital that you keep your Fostering Social Worker updated about any significant changes to your household. This will include friends or family moving in and out as well as significant information about the health and circumstances of members of the household.

This is particularly significant where single foster carers are establishing relationships with new partners. In establishing relationships and introducing partners to your fostered children you are reminded that it is important to maintain stability for fostered children. You are also reminded that fostered children can be particularly vulnerable and that it is important to maintain safer caring principles.

When a relationship is first established and the new partner becomes a regular visitor to the home, a CRB check will be initiated. Should the relationship progress and a decision be made that the partner would like to move into the fostering household you should formally notify your Fostering Social Worker in writing. Checks and references will then be taken up and the new partner will be assessed to become a Foster Carer alongside you. Partners cannot live in your home with you without being approved as a Foster Carer.

ACCESS TO YOUR FOSTER CARER FILE

Your file is stored electronically within a secure electronic recording system. Those carers for whom there are records dating from before this system was initiated in 2006 will also have a paper file. These paper files are stored securely in the office in which your Fostering Social Worker is located. Your file contains all records relating to your contact with the Department and complies with the Data Protection Act 1998.

As with anyone involved with the Department, you have a right to see your file. There is a procedure which outlines the access to files process and information. Information about this can be found on the internet:-

<http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/health/childrenandfamilycare/yourdata/Yourdata.aspx>

You can also request this information from your Fostering Social Worker. Where your file contains information about another individual, consent to release the information must be given by that person (known as the third party). If consent is not obtained the information will not be released. Agencies who provide information to the Department about you are also contacted to ascertain their views on the information they have provided being released.

Foster Carers' Files are retained in archives for 25 years after ceasing to foster.

COMPLIMENTS

Foster Carers are frequently complimented by Children's Social Workers, other professionals and parents. All compliments are noted on your file and can be used in your development portfolio.

COMPLAINTS

On receipt of a complaint made in writing or verbally, the matter must be forwarded to the **Customer Feedback and Complaints Team** for consideration.

1. Complaints from Foster Carers:

- 1.1 Foster carers who wish to complain about the service they receive from Families First are entitled to access the Statutory Complaints Procedure.

2. Complaints against Foster Carers:

- 2.1 Complaints about foster carers may be made by the child, parents, teacher, social workers any other professionals, or they can be anonymous.

3. Safeguarding:

If the complaint contains concerns regarding the welfare of a child, the matter will be reported immediately to the First Response Team or to the appropriate County Manager.

4. Allegations, Complaints and Cause for Concern about Foster Carers and Prospective Adopters:

- 4.1 Where a complaint is with regards to an allegation, as defined under Section 47, the procedure set out in Part Five, Section 1 - Allegations about Foster Carers Policy should be followed.

5. Statutory Complaints Procedure:

- 5.1 The Local Authority has a statutory obligation to operate a complaints and representations procedure which is in line with the Children Act (1989) Representation Procedure (England) Regulations (2006) and the accompanying guidance 'Getting the Best from Complaints' (2006).

- 5.2 The procedure has **3 stages**:

- **Stage 1 – Local Resolution** (Timescale 10 - 20 working days).

The complaint is addressed by the Team Manager/County Manager of the service which is the subject of the complaint.

Once the complaint has been accepted into the procedure, the Customer Feedback and Complaints Team will forward the complaint to the relevant Team Manager/County Manager with instructions for investigating and responding to the complaint.

- **Stage 2 – Investigation** (Timescale 25 – 65 working days)

An Independent Investigating Officer is appointed to investigate the concerns. In addition, an 'Independent Person' will work alongside the Officer to ensure the investigation is fair and thorough. A report will be produced by the Investigating Officer together with a report from the Independent Person. Both reports will then be sent to the appropriate Strategic Lead who will consider the findings of the investigation and produce a response to the complainant from the Local Authority.

- **Stage 3 – Complaints Review Panel**

If the complainant remains dissatisfied following the Stage 2 investigation they can request that their complaints are reviewed by a Complaints Review Panel. The panel is comprised of 3 independent people and their role is to review the investigation at Stage 2 to see if the investigation was carried out fairly and thoroughly. The panel does not re-investigate the complaints.

The Customer Feedback and Complaints Team operate a screening process which is applied to all complaints and representations that are received. This process involves establishing the eligibility of the complainant to access the Statutory Complaints Procedure, defining the complaints and desired outcomes.

All complaints are recorded on the Customer Feedback and Complaints Team database, including the outcome of the investigation and organisational learning and service improvements which have resulted from a complaint. Recommendations made following Stage 2 and Stage 3 of the process are closely monitored by the Customer Feedback and Complaints Team via an 'action plan' to ensure that they are completed in a timely manner with evidence to support the completion.

6. The Local Government Ombudsman:

- 6.1 The complainant has the right, at any time during the procedure, to refer their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman for consideration.

6.2 The aim of the Statutory Complaints Procedure is to:

- establish a fair and accessible process
- ensure a swift and satisfactory resolution at local level
- monitor the Local Authority's complaints handling
- learn from complaints, and use this learning to inform service improvements.

7. Complaints against Independent Foster Care Agencies:

7.1 A complaint regarding Independent Foster Carers should be sent to the relevant manager for that agency in order for matters to be addressed and responded to under their own procedure.

8. Complaints made on behalf of a child or young person:

8.1 The Looked after Children '**U Packs**', issued to all children who are looked after, will contain information and contact numbers explaining how a complaint can be made.

8.2 Foster Carers can also make a complaint to the Customer Feedback and Complaints Team on behalf of the child or young person.

8.3 The NSPCC offers an advocacy service for children and young people. An advocate can act on behalf of the child or young person and can provide independent and confidential information, advice and support in making a complaint.

9. Further Information:

9.1 Further information about the complaints procedures can be obtained by phoning the Customer Feedback and Complaints Team – **01785 278601**).

RECORDING, SAFE USE OF COMPUTERS & STORAGE OF INFORMATION

Confidentiality Statement

As part of the Foster Care Agreement, you will have signed the Foster Carer Data Processor Agreement and Confidentiality Disclaimer (Appendix B). In signing these you have agreed to keep all information relating to children in your care and their families confidential. This relates to both the disclosure and storage of information. A guide to the Data Processor Agreement can be found in Appendix C.

Recording

1. Introduction

1.1 Foster carers are increasingly being asked to provide information about fostered children as part of their fostering role. This information will contribute towards maintaining a history of a child's placement and assessments. These records are being made as part of the child's file and should be viewed and written in that way.

1.2 The key role that foster carers play in recording is highlighted in the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards (2011) which state:

'The foster carer understands the important supporting role they play in encouraging the child to reflect on and understand their history. The child, subject to age and

understanding, is encouraged to keep appropriate memorabilia (including photographs) of their time in the placement. The fostering service makes this role clear to their foster carers and ensures they can record, and help children make a record of (subject to age and understanding), significant life events'. (NMS 26.7)

1.3 This policy and guidance aims to:

- Identify the types of information and records that carers hold.
- Recognise who the records belong to.
- Clarify how the records should be stored.
- Describe *what* should be recorded.
- Explain *how* it should be recorded.

NB: Children and young people's records are retained for 75 years. Adults, who have grown up in care, will reflect on their care experiences, especially at key transition life stages, such as when they become parents or grandparents. It could be many years before children wish to, or feel able to access their records. It is therefore, important that foster carers take into account that, however challenging living with a fostered child may be, there are always 'positives' to be celebrated and recorded.

2. Records and Confidentiality

2.1 The Fostering Service will provide foster carers with a lockable, portable filing box in which to store confidential information. Foster carers should keep the box and its contents safe and the Fostering Social Worker will check the contents as part of their supervisory role.

2.2 For the duration of their registration foster carers should keep:

- Information about fostering in general. This information is not confidential but foster carers should have access to it in order to assist them with the task of fostering;
- Information about themselves as foster carers which should be stored confidentially.
- Records about the children currently in placement which should always be stored confidentially

2.3 Foster carers are expected to record electronically and to enable these records to be stored safely the service will provide an encrypted memory stick to all carers (see Section 5).

3. Types of Recording and Information

3.1 Fostering Service information:

- Recruitment information,
- Preparation (for fostering) material,
- Induction information,
- Foster Carer Handbook,
- Fostering Network information,
- Training materials,
- Newsletters/leaflets

3.2 Records about themselves as foster carers:

- Copy of the Form F Assessment;
- Disclosure and Barring Service return,
- Foster Care Agreement,
- Supervision notes,
- Foster Carer Annual Review,
- Agency decisions and Foster Panel minutes
- Training invitations/arrangements,
- Certificates,
- Correspondence,
- Health and Safety check,
- Pet Questionnaire,
- Safer Caring Policy.

3.3 Records about the child:

- Copy of the child's Placement Plan
- Copy of the child's Care Plan,
- Copy of the child's Personal Education Plan (PEP)
- Copy of the child's current Health Plan/Review, Health Record (Red Book),
- Placement Planning Meeting minutes,
- Child Specific Fostering Support and Safe Care Plan,
- Request for Service/Risk & Match document,
- Statutory (Looked After) Review report / minutes,
- Weekly log/records,
- Child's passport,
- Correspondence relating to specific children,
- Incident Notifications,
- Life-story work,
- Risk Assessment for the child,
- Pathway Plan, Transition Plan,
- Photos and memorabilia.

4. Purpose and Content of Foster Carer's Recording

4.1 Foster carers must keep separate records for individual children. It is not acceptable to keep collective records when fostering two or more children.

4.2 These records are required for the following purposes:

- To accurately recall behaviour or incidents related to the child and provide a balanced picture of events;
- To assist in looking at the progress of a placement over time and developing a picture of the child's pattern of behaviour;
- To inform decision-making at reviews, planning meetings and conferences;
- To help the foster carer to review and reflect on their practice;
- To provide information needed for court proceedings;
- To support an application for additional help for the child e.g. therapy;
- To reduce any risk to foster carers and their families while the child is placed, and, in some cases, after the child has moved on.

4.3 Staffordshire Foster carers should use the specific template provided by the Fostering Service, which will be provided by their Fostering Social Worker.

4.4 When updating records, foster carers should consider the following basic guidelines:

- The language used should be simple and jargon-free;
- The record should not be overly long but with sufficient information to be able to recall the event accurately;
- A daily log is required that is submitted on a weekly basis;
- *Facts* should be recorded, rather than *opinions*. If personal opinions are recorded then carers should make it clear that it is opinion and not fact. This is important as records may be read by a young person or their birth family, who may choose to access information at a later date;
- The record should be made as near to the time of the event as possible and signed and dated. If any information is changed or added later this should be clear from the record.

5. What to record/Where to record it?

5.1 For the duration of each placement foster carers will keep information about each child placed in their care. Any information about children and their families must always be kept confidential, and remains the property of the Local Authority.

5.2 Foster Carer's Diary:

5.2.1 The foster carer should keep a diary for appointments and dates of activities.

- Dates of meetings / visits by social workers and other professionals;
- Dates of reviews, or any other meetings concerning the child.
- Dates of any school, or education meetings e.g. PEP reviews
- Dates of any health appointments, any treatments and immunisations for the child.

5.3 Weekly Log:

5.3.1 The following is a guide to what can be relevant to record in the foster carer's weekly log:

- Information about health appointments, with a list of who was there and any key decisions made.
- Details of any contact visits with the child's family, or relatives and any significant interactions including phone calls, texts, letters etc.
- Child's reaction to family contact, remembering to be factual and avoiding opinion. Record any other observations e.g. what the child's mood or presentation was like before and after the contact visit; how the child responded to family members; how the parent interacted with them; how the ending was managed; what the child's response was like.
- Details of when the child is away from home, visiting family or friends, or if they are missing.
- Details of times when alternative care is given, including baby-sitting arrangements.
- Details of any specific incidents, accidents or injuries. Describe what, when, where and how the incident/accident happened and what follow up action was taken. Record when it was reported to which social worker.
- Details of any theft or wilful damage caused by the foster child.

- Details of any behaviour or comments from the child that give rise to concern, with a note of any actions taken. This may help to identify any triggers for such behaviour and what brings it to an end.
- Details of any involvement with the Police, noting the date(s), which Police officer(s) were involved, and the reason(s) for the involvement.
- Details of any request made to the agency for support and any difficulties reported, including the date of the request, the response and when it was received.

5.4 Incident Notifications:

- 5.4.1 Fostering Regulations require that certain incidents in a fostering household are recorded, specifically by the Fostering Service. For these, Foster Carers should complete an **Incident Notification Form**.
- 5.4.2 Carers should continue to let the child's Social Worker and their Fostering Social Worker know of incidents that take place, over the phone.
- 5.4.3 The forms should be submitted to the Fostering Social Worker and the child's Social Worker by email as soon as practicable after the incident (ideally within 24 hours). This is in addition to the completion of weekly recordings.
- 5.4.4 The Incident Notification Form must be completed when the following events have taken place:
- Carers have physically intervened with a child for their protection, or the protection of others
 - A child has gone missing from care
 - A serious illness or accident has occurred
 - A serious infectious disease has developed
 - There has been involvement, or suspected involvement in child sexual exploitation (CSE)
 - There has been a serious incident involving the police
 - There has been an incident of bullying towards a foster child, whether it has taken place in school, the foster home or in the community.
- 5.4.6 On receipt of the form, a discussion will take place with the Foster Carers, the child's Social Worker and Fostering Team Manager about any actions which may need to be taken to reduce any risk to the carers, the child and other members of the family. For example, where a child keeps going missing, a meeting will need to be called to discuss the risks and how they can be reduced.

5.5 Medication Guidance:

- 5.5.1 When a child is placed, foster carers will receive a set of Looked After Children paperwork, including a signed copy of the child's Placement Plan, which gives delegated consent to carers to seek medical treatment for fostered child(ren). This document will also include details of any medication a child is currently prescribed.
- 5.5.2 Foster carers are expected to record all medication administered to fostered children on the Fostering Medication Chart See Appendix 2. This includes both medication prescribed by a health professional and medication which is available over the counter.

5.6 Financial Information:

- 5.6.1 There is no legal requirement for carers to record financial expenditure however, Staffordshire County Council asks carers to keep records of financial expenditure carried out for children placed with them. Carers should review essential expenditure with their Fostering Social Worker and use of the Fostering Allowance will be discussed as part of the carer's regular supervision. Most carers will find it helpful to keep receipts for items directly purchased for the child e.g. clothing. Carers will be encouraged to use their discretion on how this is recorded e.g. keeping a separate account or stapling individual receipts in their fostering diaries.

5.7 Pocket Money:

- 5.7 The personal allowance for children in fostering placements includes a set allowance for pocket money which should be given to the child with support from the foster carer to help the child manage their money and make positive choices. Carers should keep a record of the pocket money given to the child in their weekly log.

6. e-Recording

- 6.1 The expectation is that foster carers will record 'electronically' and email their records **on a weekly basis** to their Fostering Social Worker and to the child's Social Worker.
- 6.2 In exceptional circumstances, where carers hand-write their recordings, this should be given to their Fostering Social Worker at every visit and the Social Worker will issue a receipt. The Social Worker will then arrange for the recording to be scanned onto the carer's file and sent to the child's Social Worker.
- 6.3 All foster carers will need to use an encrypted **memory stick** which has been issued by the Fostering Service to store their recordings. For more information, see the Foster Carer's Handbook.
- 6.4 Where photographs are taken of the child, they should be stored on a secure CD/pen drive and handed to the child's social worker. The foster carer must not store these photographs on their own computers or upload them onto social media sites such as Facebook.

7. Life-Story Records

- 7.1 Records made by foster carers are also used to provide a picture of family life for the child, to help them create a clear sense of their care experience and to recall key events while they are looked after. Foster carers play a crucial role in meeting the needs of children separated from their birth families, by preserving their memories, giving them information, helping to promote their identity, preparing for life changes and building their self-esteem through a positive image of themselves and their birth families.
- 7.2 To support this, carers should develop a 'memory box' to keep tangible items such as certificates, reports, concert programmes, cinema stubs, drawings, holiday leaflets, locks of hair, first shoes etc.
- 7.3 Carers should also keep a photo album to record a photographic journal of a child's 'looked after' experience. This may include pictures of everyday places or things e.g. photos of the home, local shops, nursery, family car etc.

8. Retaining/Returning the information

8.1 On ceasing to be a foster carer the following arrangements apply:

- Any information that falls into the category of 'general fostering' may be kept by the foster carer. However, care should be taken not to share information about other foster carers that may be contained within newsletters (e.g. addresses of carers running local support groups);
- Foster carers may keep any information that they have been given about themselves.
- Any information about a foster child held by the foster carers, whether it has been provided for them, or if they have made the record themselves, must be returned to Families First once the placement has ended, or if the foster carer ceases to foster.

8.2 If a child's placement ends, the Fostering Social Worker is responsible for retrieving any documents relating to the child. This should include checking the lockable box to ensure that all the information is retrieved.

8.3 The Fostering Social Worker should ask the carer to sign the 'Receipt for Foster Carer Records Returned, which should list all the documents returned. See Appendix 4.

8.4 The Fostering Social Worker should pass the information retrieved from the carer to the child's Social Worker who should file the information on the child's file. Any duplicate information should be destroyed.

8.5 Foster carers may have some concerns about returning all the child-based information to the Local Authority, feeling it may leave them vulnerable to potential allegations. However, Staffordshire Fostering Service and all carers must comply with the Data Protection Act (1998) which specifies who can store personal information about another person and the principles that apply to information storage.

8.6 Foster carer files are kept for a minimum of 10 years after they cease to be carers.

8.7 Information kept on the Looked After Child's case record must be kept until the 75th anniversary of their date of birth, or 15 years from the date of death, if a child dies before the age of 18.

8.8 The Fostering Network advises that foster carers are entitled to retain their own 'personal diaries'. This is an acknowledgement that, for safe caring purposes, carers retaining certain key facts about events that *could* lead to allegations, is seen as good practice. Personal diaries are not checked as part of the monitoring of the placement, and are therefore, not removed at the end of the placement. If carers do keep a personal diary they must ensure that only children's initials are used and that they cannot be identified if the diary is mislaid.

8.9 Following approval, recording issues will be discussed on an ongoing basis during supervision and at the Foster Carer Annual Review. Foster carers should be made aware that they can contact their Fostering Social Worker if they have any queries or concerns about recording.

INCIDENT NOTIFICATION FORMS

Incident Notification Forms must be used to let us know of any accidents, incidents of bullying, when a child goes missing or where physical intervention has taken place. Separate contact, medication or notification sheets need to be used for each child in placement to maintain confidentiality and to enable information to go with the child when they move on. Recording should begin from the first day a child is placed with you. At the end of the placement, recording should be given to the child's social worker to add to their file. For children in placement for longer periods the return of recording to children's files should be reviewed annually in discussion with your Fostering Social Worker.

There is useful information about recording in the good practice guide on Foster Carer recording included in this folder.

Internet Safety and Storage of Information Electronically

1

All Foster Carers* need to provide suitable access to I.T for children in their care. All Foster Carers need to complete (B)e SAFE – Embrace Modern Media. All Foster Carers to visit the CEOP site and to look at the SSCB E safety toolkit.

This guidance is compiled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. It concerns all computers within the foster home and the safe storage of confidential information.

Introduction

Over the last few years, advances on the internet have changed completely the way we communicate with each other, share and store information, expand our knowledge, go shopping, book holidays and build and expand friendship networks.

For parents and carers, the internet is still a novelty – for children growing up now, the internet is a fact of life and their lives will be increasingly 'web' based, whether on personal computers, games consoles, mobile telephones, at home or at school. While the benefits it can offer, with regards to education and learning are immeasurable, it can also pose risks and possible harm for young people. Staffordshire County Council believes that families and households should work together to understand safe care and responsible internet use.

Children in Foster Care may be particularly vulnerable. They may be at risk from contact from friends and family members, when it may not be in their best interests to be contacted. There is a chance that revealing their care status may make them particularly exposed to inappropriate behaviour, grooming or online bullying.

Principles

Foster Carers are expected to provide computing equipment to enable children & young people in their care to have access to information technology, which can be of great educational and social value. It is important that children and young people are safeguarded from potential abuse via the internet and carers must take steps to protect them. Any information stored relating to children and young people in their care must be protected in line with the Data Protection Act, this includes accessing and contributing to web site forums etc. If in doubt please liaise with the Foster Care team for guidance.

¹ *The exception is for Foster Carers who only care for babies – this should be discussed and agreed with the Supervising Social Worker.

Safeguarding Children Using Computers

As the internet changes, the basic principles of what young people go on line for and the basic principles of staying safe remain almost unchanged. For the vast majority of children, participating online allows them to chat, message, network and game. We don't expect foster carers to become computer experts, but it is helpful if you speak to young people in your home and find out what they are getting out of the internet.

- Children and young people can be vulnerable when using the internet through meeting people in chat rooms and accessing inappropriate material.
- Some adults use the internet to manipulate children and young people which can lead to emotional, sexual or physical abuse.
- Carers need to take action to prevent children and young people from accessing inappropriate and dangerous websites.
- Personal information should never be given out or displayed online – age, gender, address, telephone numbers, passwords and PIN numbers. If you need to use personal information to purchase goods online, only use a trusted and secure website.
- Language – chat users will abbreviate and shorten words to make it quicker to communicate. For example POS Parent over shoulder. Sites such as www.thinkuknow.com have glossaries of chat speak.

Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP)

CEOP works with child protection partners across the UK and overseas to identify the main threats to children and coordinates activity against these threats to bring offenders to account. They protect children from harm online and offline, directly through NCA led operations and in partnership with local and international agencies. All Foster Carers should regularly access this website. For more up to date information and some useful videos and materials access the CEOP website <http://ceop.police.uk/>

What can you do to protect children in your care using computers?

- Familiarise yourself with the internet, perhaps by getting the child or young person to show you or by taking an IT course at college. You can get help getting started by accessing <http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise>. If you need further advice you can also contact the Recruitment and Training Team. More information can be accessed here: <http://www.staffsscb.org.uk/Professionals/Key-Safeguarding/e-Safety/e-Safety-Toolkit/Internet-Safety-Training/Internet-Safety-Training.aspx>
- All Foster carers should complete the (B)e SAFE – Embrace Modern Media training for Foster Carers. Discuss this with your Fostering Social Worker and contact the Recruitment and Training team.
- All Foster Carers should access the E-Safety Toolkit can be accessed on the Safeguarding Children's Board website. <http://www.staffsscb.org.uk/Professionals/Key-Safeguarding/e-Safety/e-Safety-Toolkit/e-Safety-Toolkit.aspx>
- Develop your own home computer policy to include length of time spent on internet; online games and what sites can be visited etc. Where any website registration is required children and young people must ask your permission and assistance to do so.
- Each child and young person should have their own password to use the computer.
- Do not have a computer with internet access in the child's or young person's bedroom. Always place it in a family room. Exceptions should be agreed as part of the young persons placement plan.

- Monitor everything that children and young people access, ensuring that 'private areas' of chat rooms are not accessible. Always monitor anything to be downloaded.
- Ensure that any unsuitable sites are blocked. Periodically check the computer history for sites accessed by children or young people.
- Encourage children and young people to tell you if they receive frightening or bullying e-mails or anything they consider unacceptable.
- Never allow children and young people in your care to meet up with anyone they have met on the internet
- Children must be supervised at all times when on the internet. Remember you are in control.

Sexting

What is sexting?

Sexting generally refers to the sending of sexually explicit images via text, email, MSN or through social networking sites. For example, this could be a picture of a boy or young man exposing himself or a young woman in a state of undress.

There could be many reasons why young people would want to take these sorts of pictures and send them to someone else. It could be that two young people who are in a relationship want to prove their love or commitment to each other; it could be that someone is looking to start a relationship with someone else or it could be that they simply want to show off.

Background

Most young people today are entirely comfortable with recording their entire lives online – much like other generations used to do in a diary.

These days though, this often includes uploading and sharing photos, status messages on what has been happening in their lives or how they are feeling, and texting back and for. While this 'finger on the pulse, share all' culture has some benefits, it can also create an environment in which teenagers and young people make impulsive decisions without thinking through the possible consequences. Often times, they are only a click away from doing something digitally that they would not normally do in the real world.

Consequences

While sending sexually explicit messages or pictures carries enough problems of its own, it can have real consequences if the content is shared with others – either by people forwarding it on using messages or emails or by uploading it onto a social networking site or website. This could result in immediate consequences, possibly within the school environment, or more serious consequences for later in life such as if a prospective college, university or employer were to see it.

Top Tips:

- Talk to children about sexting and the consequences - don't wait for something to happen. We know it isn't always easy to talk about sex, dating and relationships with teenagers – but it is better to talk about these issues before something happens.
- Remind children that once an image is sent, there is no getting it back. Stress to the children that once they have sent an image, or posted it online, they no longer have control of it and it could end up anywhere. Ask them how they would feel if their teachers, parents, or their whole school saw what they had sent.
- Address peer pressure. Peer pressure can be a formidable force so make sure that children know that you understand that they could be pushed into sending

something. Talk to them about making positive decisions and be sure they understand that no matter how great the pressure becomes, the potential social humiliation could be a hundred times worse. Also let them know that they can talk to you about this pressure and how they can go about dealing with it.

- Make sure they take responsibility. Make sure your child understands that they are responsible for their actions. That includes what they choose to do if they receive a sexually explicit photo. Have them understand that if they do receive one, they need to delete it immediately. Tell them that if they do send it on, they're distributing pornography -- and that they could get into trouble with the police.

Sexting can happen for lots of reasons.

- Feel like 'everyone else is doing it' and want to fit in with friends - especially if they are boasting about sending or having photos on their mobile phone
- Worry about being seen as 'not sexy', 'frigid' or 'shy' and go along with things you're uncomfortable with
- Feel under pressure to sext as a way of 'proving' your sexuality
- Feel harassed, threatened or blackmailed into sending pictures
- Feel it's easier just to 'give in' to somebody who keeps asking for things
- Think you 'owe' your boyfriend or girlfriend or made to feel guilty if you don't do what they ask you for
- Be in love with the person and trust them completely and feel like it's okay
- Have a long distance or online relationship with someone and want to have a sexual relationship with them
- Feel proud of your body and want to share it with other people.

Further information about sexting can be found on:

<https://www.childline.org.uk/explore/online/safety/pages/sexting.aspx>

Did You Know?

- 38% of 13-18 year olds have received a sexually explicit message.
- 39% admit sharing intimate images.
- 40% do not see anything wrong with sending topless images.
- 56% are not aware of instances where images and videos were distributed further than the intended recipient.
- 70% knew the sender; the majority were peers or current girlfriends or boyfriends. A small minority were from known adults.*

**Survey conducted by 'South West Grid for Learning' (SWGfL) & University of Plymouth over 500 13 – 18 year olds.*

Further information about sexting can be found on:

<http://www.parentsprotect.co.uk/sexting.htm>

Gaming

- Time – one of the main issues concerning online gaming, is the amount of time that players spend online. Unless limited too much time spent on gaming could encroach on school work, family time and socialising. You should always set appropriate limits.
- Be aware that your young people may form strong attachments to other gamers without actually knowing who they are.
- Age appropriateness – many games now are aimed at an adult market, with strong language, sexual content, violence or references to substance misuse and criminal activity. Games are given ratings, similar to DVD's and foster carers should ensure that children in their household are not exposed to content unsuitable for their age group and abilities. All consoles now have parental controls, which can be password set to limit time spent playing, the types of game played and the online contact list for the user.
- If you have a game console in your house read the instruction. Parental controls and filters are straightforward to use and Microsoft, Nintendo and Sony have excellent easy to understand websites offering support and guidance.

Computers and Health and Safety

Using a computer for long periods of time can cause pains in your arms, neck and back. Eyes can also be affected by constant focus on the screen. Ensure the following:-

- Adjust seating position for each user and place laptops on a flat firm surface.
- Sit facing the screen. Lower arms should be approximately horizontal to the keyboard.
- Take a break every 20 minutes or so.

Security of Information

Only store information that is directly relevant to the children and young people currently in your care. All the information stored should be in accordance with the requirements of this policy. Firstly ensure that you follow the Council's good practice guidance when it comes to your password.

Good Practice for Use of a Password:

- Do not write your password down and do not share your password with anyone
- Change your password if you suspect that it has been compromised
- Passwords should contain a mix of letters, special characters/punctuation and numbers
- Do not use passwords which are easy to guess, such as your name, pet names, favourite football team, etc.
- Do not use word or number patterns like AAAbbb, Qwerty123 or 12345ABCD
- Do not use birthdays and other personal information such as addresses or phone numbers

Storing Confidential Information

Hard copies of written information e.g. Looked After Children (LAC) or ICS paperwork or individual recording about children and young people must be stored securely in the lockable box provided by the Department. Diaries should be used to record appointments, meetings, reviews etc. not for detailed information about individual children. Evidence produced for foster carers' portfolios must be suitably anonymised and the portfolio stored securely. Confidential information relating to children and young people must not be given to or accessed by anyone else, unless agreed by the appropriate officer; for example Social

Worker, Team Manager or County Manager depending on the nature of the information to be disclosed.

Storing Confidential Information on a Memory Stick

To ensure that suitable security measures are in place, all documents must be stored on the encrypted memory stick provided which must not be accessible to anyone else and must be stored in the lockable box provided by the Department when not in use. **Information must not be stored on your computer.** Advice on how to encrypt a memory stick and how to use a memory stick can be found in Appendices C and D respectively.

Transfer of Information

Do not use the internet based email such as Hotmail or Gmail to transfer any confidential information. Either print a paper copy and hand it to your intended recipient or if you have a requirement to e-mail a document you must use the Secure File Transfer (SFT) solution.

Secure File Transfer

The Recruitment and Training Team will create an account for you and guidance on how to send and receive documents via the SFT can be found in Appendices E and F respectively. There are numerous ways in which a foster carer can communicate with their social worker and other foster carers, including text messaging, emails and online forums. Foster carers are reminded that personal and/or confidential information should not be discussed using these mediums.

Good Practice for Sending Electronic Documents

Ensure that you follow the Council's good practice guidance when it comes to sending electronic documents:

You **should**:

- check the message and think how the person will react to it, or how you would feel if you received it, before you send it;
- make sure you use correct and up-to-date e-mail addresses;
- file mail when you have dealt with it and delete any items that you do not need to keep.

You **should not**:

- print out messages you receive or send unless you need a hard copy;
- send an e-mail that contains indecent, inappropriate, offensive or profane content; use jargon, abbreviations or symbols if the person who receives the e-mail may not understand them.

Digital Photos

Electronic files must be closed after use and written information should be locked away. Digital photos of children or young people who are or have been in your care must be saved to the encrypted memory stick provided and deleted from the memory of the camera / phone used to take them; they can be printed for display around the home, but must not be uploaded to photo-sharing sites on the internet or put on Facebook or any other social network sites.

Deleting Information

Information relating to young people held on electronic media must be securely disposed of when it is no longer required, please consult with the Adoption & Fostering Recruitment & Training Team for guidance (via ICT). When you are due to dispose of your computer you must ensure that no data remains on the device and it must therefore be cleaned.

Unfortunately, it is not enough to just delete the files as this does not irretrievably remove them from the system. Whilst Staffordshire County Council cannot recommend specific products, the following applications are leaders in secure deletion software; Media WIPE, Blanco and Drive Erase Pro. Solutions such as these will permanently erase files and overwrite data so they cannot be recovered.

Access to the Internet on Devices Other than PCs

The following is not an exhaustive list, but includes points to be aware of and sensible precautions to take to avoid unsupervised access to the internet on devices other than PCs

- Modern games consoles can access the internet in the same way as computers and be used for browsing the web. Nintendo 3DS, PS3, PS4, Wii, Xbox 360 and Xbox one consoles can connect to wireless networks, therefore it is sensible to ensure that if you have a wireless enabled router it is protected with a password to prevent unwanted connections.
- Games consoles will still work if they are not connected to the internet, but they will not be able to download updates or play multiplayer games online. If in doubt you should prevent any wireless internet access by setting a password for the network that only you know. This is usually a simple process to achieve, but if in doubt consult the manufacturers guidance issued with your router or modem.
- Try to ensure that you know what is connected to your network; ensuring that the ports on any routers are kept hidden away or checked regularly for any unwanted connections should help to prevent unwanted internet access.
- Try looking at the website for the manufacturer of your Router or Modem, many of them provide FAQ sections and areas with advice on how to best protect young people online.
- Modern mobile phones can often connect to the internet via a 3G, 4G or GPRS network. Often this access is part of a phones standard contract and can be difficult to disable. The newest generation of smartphones often have the ability to connect to wireless networks to facilitate free internet access; this means that there is a high likelihood of fast, unfiltered internet access being available to young people with modern phones.
- Preventing phones from connecting to the internet is often tricky and only possible with the help of the network operator or contract provider for the phone, if in doubt ask them for help.
- Just because some games consoles and mobile phones can connect to the internet does not mean that they have to, they will still work without internet access.
- Regularly check for other wireless networks that may be available, sometime neighbours do not have passwords on their wireless connection. Enabling wireless devices that are close enough to connect to the internet.

Training

All foster carers with a computer in their household should attend our training **(B)e SAFE – Embrace Modern Media** training details can be found in the training catalogue or contact the training and recruitment team for more information.

Additional Support - Buddies 4 FC set up by Staffordshire Foster Carers they are happy to give support and advice around internet safety; <http://www.buddies4fc.org.uk/>

E Safety information is constantly being updated. Foster Carers are kept informed via the Newsletter, the Foster Carers Forum, Training Events and Support Groups. It is very important that you ensure your information on E Safety is current. If you are in doubt please discuss this with your Fostering Social Worker.

***Please see Appendix K for Text Abbreviations A-Z**

KEEPING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SAFE AGAINST RADICALISATION AND EXTREMISM - ADVICE FOR FOSTER CARERS

The carer/child relationship is the foundation to keeping children safe and supporting their social development and educational attainment. Maintaining a positive relationship can sometimes be difficult as children develop and seek an identity that may be different from that of their own family. Children and young people have a natural curiosity.

You will already know that your children can be vulnerable to risks both inside and outside the home, and will have taken steps to protect them so they can grow, learn and develop to their fullest potential. Protecting your children from radicalisation and extremism is similar to protecting them from the other harms you may be more familiar with, such as drugs, gangs and sexual exploitation. This information sets out how to help keep children and young people safe and explains how you should respond if you have a concern.

Is my foster child vulnerable to radicalisation?

Children and young people can be vulnerable to a range of risks. They may be exposed to new influences and potentially risky behaviours, influence from peers, influence from older people or the internet as they may begin to explore ideas and issues around their identity.

Young people may be drawn towards extremist ideologies for a number of reasons, for example:

- They may be searching for answers to questions about identity, faith and belonging
- They may be driven by the desire for 'adventure' and excitement
- They may be driven by a need to raise their self-esteem and promote their 'street cred'
- They may be drawn to a group or individual who can offer identity, social network and support
- They may be influenced by world events and develop a sense of grievance resulting in a need to make a difference

How do people become radicalised?

'Radicalisation' describes the process of an individual engaging with and being drawn into an extremist ideology. There is no single route to radicalisation, as every person is different and the process is unique to each individual.

Online

Children and young people may spend a lot of time on the internet while studying and they use other social media and messaging sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Vine or Whatsapp. These can be useful tools but we need to be aware there are powerful programmes and networks that use these media to reach out to young people and can communicate extremist messages.

Peer interaction

Children and young people at risk may display extrovert behaviour, start getting into trouble at school or on the streets and mixing with other children who behave badly. However, this is not always the case. Sometimes those at risk may be encouraged, by the people they are in contact with, not to draw attention to themselves. As part of some forms of radicalisation, parents may feel their child's behaviour seems to be improving: children may become quieter and more serious about their studies; they may dress more modestly and mix with a group of people who seem to be better behaved than previous friends.

TV and media

The media provide a view on world affairs. However, this is often a very simple version of events which are in reality very complex. Therefore children and young people may not understand the situation fully or appreciate the dangers involved in the views of some groups.

What are the warning signs?

There are a number of signs which may indicate that a young person may be at risk. These include:

- Out of character changes in dress, behaviour and peer relationships
- Secretive behaviour
- Losing interest in friends and activities
- Showing sympathy for extremist causes
- Glorifying violence
- Possessing illegal or extremist literature and / or accessing extremist websites

Remember that there could be all sorts of reasons for the behaviours listed above and radicalisation is just one of these. It is important to recognise and respond to concerns to make sure that the young person gets the appropriate support. If you have concerns, it is important for you to discuss these with your social worker or your child's social worker.

How can I support children and young people to stay safe?

There are many practical things you can do to help your foster child stay safe:

- Know where your child is, who they are with and check this for yourself
- Know your child's friends and their families
- Keep lines of communication open, listen to your child and talk to them about their interests
- Encourage them to take up positive activities with local groups that you can trust
- Talk to your child about what they see on the TV or the internet and explain that what they see or read may not be the whole picture
- Allow and encourage debate and questioning on local and world events and help them see different points of view
- Encourage your child to show an interest in the local community and show respect for people from all faiths and backgrounds
- Help your child to understand the dangers of becoming involved in situations about which they may not have the full information
- Teach them that expressing strong views and trying to change things for the better is fine but they should not take violent action against others or support those that do
- Be aware of your child's online activity and update your own knowledge
- Know what social media and messaging sites your child uses
- Remind your child that people they contact over the internet may be pretending to be someone else or telling them things that are not true
- Explain that anyone who tells them to keep secrets from their family or teachers is likely to be trying to do them harm or put them in danger
- If you are concerned that your child may be at risk of travelling abroad, you might want to consider taking the precaution of locking their passport in a safe place. Some young people think they need to use a passport for confirming their age. They do not – they can apply for an identification card. To obtain an official photo ID for the UK visit: www.validateuk.co.uk. Also consider what access the young person has to money.

What do I do if I am concerned about my foster child in relation to radicalisation and extremism?

If you have any concerns about your foster child in relation to extremism (or any other safeguarding issue) you should discuss this with your social worker and/or the child's social worker who will help you access the appropriate support.

You can also talk to your child's class teacher or another person in the school that you trust. They will be able to help and can access support for you and your child.

If you / the child does not have an allocated social worker, and you have concerns for the safety or wellbeing of a child or young person, you can contact:

First Response Service

Our First Response Service works in partnership with colleagues in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to make prompt decisions regarding referrals made by the public or by professionals to Children's Social Care. Qualified social work staff are available in the MASH to provide advice and guidance to referring agencies, family members or members of the public.

Tel: 0800 1313 126 (In an emergency, outside office hours, please call 0845 6042886)
08:30am - 5:00pm, Monday to Thursday
08:30am - 4:30pm Friday

Fax: 01785 854223
Email: first@staffordshire.gov.uk

Where can I get more information?

<http://educateagainsthate.com> - gives information about how you can help to protect your child/ward from extremism and radicalisation

There is lots of information, advice and resources which can be used to help children stay safe online. Useful websites include:

www.internetmatters.org

www.childline.org.uk

www.cybersmile.org

www.childnet.com

www.ceop.gov.uk - The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) works with child protection partners across the UK and overseas to identify the main threats to children and coordinates activity against these threats to bring offenders to account, protecting children from harm online and offline.

HEALTH & SAFETY ADVICE AND GUIDANCE FOR FOSTER CARERS

Prior to becoming a foster carer, your preparation course covered a wide range of subjects. This document is to provide further Health and Safety help and guidance for supporting children in foster care.

Fire Safety

- Have an agreed evacuation plan with your family
- In the event of a fire dial 999. Keep the door to the room where the fire is located/suspected closed. Get the family out of the house and do not re-enter until a fire officer says it is safe to do so.
- The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) recommends that approved smoke detectors are fitted on each floor of a home. These can be either battery operated (with a long life 10 year battery) or linked to the mains circuit. In some circumstances it may be difficult confirming whether the battery is long life or not. In this and all cases, it is good practice that carers ensure they test their smoke detectors on a weekly basis.
- Local Fire Service may supply these free of charge.
- Do not store aerosols on window sills.
- Do not leave lighted candles unattended.
- Do not leave remote controls for televisions/hifi equipment etc down the side of chairs and furniture as the buttons can remain activated and they can overheat and cause a fire.
- Do not leave electrical appliances on 'standby' over night, as they create a higher risk of fire.
- If a chip pan is still used consider replacing it with an electric deep fat fryer or have an appropriate fire blanket in the kitchen
- Ensure chimneys are swept regularly, to ensure safe operation.

Electricity

- Ensure your electrical installation and equipment is in safe working order.
- If you are in any doubt about the condition of an electrical appliance, take it out of use immediately and either arrange repair of the item by a competent person, or dispose of the item.
- Ensure that the electrical appliance and the electric socket are both switched off prior to plugging in.
- Keep electrical items away from sources of water. Never handle electrical equipment with wet hands.
- Do not fill kettles or irons with water without unplugging them first.
- Visually check electrical appliance prior to use for damage to the item, damaged or scorched mains cable and plug, cracked plug casing and loose or protruding wires from the plug.
- Do not overload sockets. Use a multiple gang extension block if necessary. Adaptor sockets are not recommended. Extension blocks should not be plugged into one another to create a daisy chain.
- Ensure there are no trailing cables which could cause a trip hazard.
- Use a Residual Current Device (RCD) (circuit breaker), when using electrical hand tools or outdoor electrical equipment such as lawn mowers and strimmers.
- If a fuse activates in the fuse board and the fault cannot be identified, ask a qualified electrician to check the electrical installation.
- Switch off and unplug all non-essential electrical devices that are not in constant use.

- Use child safety socket covers to prevent small children sticking fingers in sockets. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) actively discourages the use of decorated socket covers which are attractive to young children. It is always preferable for children to be discouraged and learn not to tamper with plug sockets.
- Carers are advised that when using a child appealing night light plug socket that a risk assessment should be undertaken. This is because for some children the use of such a night light may attract them to tamper with the plug socket.
- Ensure all electrical appliances are used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Check for signs of wear and tear e.g. fraying fabric, scorch marks, worn flex or loose connections and do not use if any of these defects are present. Do not use if in any doubt.

Gas

- If you smell gas and suspect it could be a leak, report it to National Grid on **0800 111 999** immediately.
- Do not operate any electrical switches or appliances, as they can create a spark.
- Do not light a match or use a lighter.
- If you suspect a gas leak, open windows to ventilate the area and lead the family outside for fresh air.
- Install a carbon monoxide detector that is constructed to the standard BSEN 50291.
- Ensure the gas central heating system is serviced annually by a competent Gas Safe registered engineer.
- It is not appropriate for a gas boiler to be located with a bedroom that is used for fostering.

Heating

- Paraffin/Gas heaters should be well maintained and filled with fuel in a well ventilated area to prevent a build up of fumes. Always follow the manufacturers operating instructions.
- Do not store items on top, or in front of heaters. Do not place portable heaters in front of beds, or other furnishings, or use them to dry items of clothing.
- Position portable heaters where they will not be knocked or tipped over.
- Always use a fire guard with portable heaters and open fires. When using with an open fire, ensure it is fixed to the wall. Never place flammable items on the guard.

Smoking

- Due to the known effects of passive smoking, you should not smoke whilst children are about.
- It is suggested that you have a designated area for smoking that is well ventilated
- Never leave smoking paraphernalia unattended and ensure cigarettes are fully extinguished and disposed of in a bin.
- Always keep lighters and matches out of the reach of children.

Kitchen

- Do not fill a chip pan more than half way or leave unattended.
- Where a fire blanket is in place be familiar with the manufacturer's instructions.
- Do not leave items such as hot drinks, glasses or iron near the edge of a table where they can be grabbed by young children.
- Ensure saucepan handles do not over hang the cooker.
- Do not allow young children in the kitchen area unsupervised
- Ensure knives and other sharp utensils are kept out of the reach young children.

- Ensure plastic bags are stored and disposed of safely, and that children do not have access to them.
- Do not leave small items such as bottle tops where children can place them in their mouths.
- Do not place metal items in the microwave.

Food Safety

- Wash hands thoroughly before and after handling food.
- Cover all cuts with a waterproof dressing.
- Clean area's where food is prepared, before and after use.
- Do not leave peanuts and other foods unattended that may cause an allergic reaction, should a child place it in their mouth.
- Ensure leftover perishable food is refrigerated and kept covered.
- Keep raw food and ready-to-eat food separate and store ready-to-eat food above raw food in the fridge.
- Keep your food in the refrigerator below 8° Centigrade and your freezer below -18° Centigrade.
- Keep pets out of food preparation areas.

Household Chemicals

- Store all household chemicals out of reach of children, including containers with a child resistant top.
- Ensure tops on containers are properly secured.
- Wear appropriate protective clothing when handling/using chemicals.
- Any contaminated clothing should be laundered where necessary.
- Always use chemicals either in quantities recommended by the manufacturer or diluted to levels recommended.
- Never mix chemicals (e.g. toilet cleaner and bleach/chlorines urine and bleach, lime scale remover with any other product). They can give off chlorine gas or other fluids which can burn the skin and cause damage to the lungs.
- Never decant chemicals into inappropriate, unmarked containers.
- Seek medical assistance immediately if the child becomes or you suspect they have been contaminated with a hazardous chemical by direct contact (which cannot be dealt with by washing), ingestion, through the eyes, or by inhalation resulting in an adverse health effect. If medical assistance is required, follow the County Councils procedures for reporting incidents.

Warning signs that may be found on container labels.



Dangerous for the environment



Toxic / Very Toxic



**Contains Gas
under pressure**



Corrosive



Explosive



**Very / Highly
Flammable**



**Refers to less serious
health hazards such as
skin
irritancy/sensitisation and
applies to many
circumstances where the
X symbol is applied.**



Oxidising



**Reflects serious longer term
health hazards such as
carcinogenicity and respiratory
sensitisation**

Infection Control

- Disposable powder-free gloves must be worn when giving personal care or when in contact with bodily fluids. These must only be used once and disposed of appropriately.
- Cover any minor cuts with a waterproof dressing.
- Use separate cleaning cloths for kitchens and toilets.
- Wash hands thoroughly before and after tasks, even if you have worn gloves.
- Rubber gloves should be washed in warm soapy water after use.
- Toothbrushes and razors should not be shared.
- Spillages of bodily fluids should be cleared up as quickly as possible, using paper towels or similar and disposed of in a plastic bag prior to placing in the outside bin. Dispose of continence pads in the same way.
- Areas affected by a spillage should be cleaned thoroughly with soap/hot water and disinfectant.
- Do not wear sharp jewellery when providing personal care tasks.

Hand preparation increases the effectiveness of decontamination. You should:

- Keep nails short, clean and polish free
- Avoid wearing jewellery, especially rings with ridges or stones
- Avoid artificial nails
- Any cuts and abrasions should be covered with a waterproof dressing.

Remove your wristwatch and any bracelets and roll up long sleeves before washing your hands.

First Aid

- A well stocked First Aid kit for minor injuries should be readily available.
- A well stocked First Aid Kit should consist of the following items:
- A leaflet giving general guidance on first aid
- Individually wrapped sterile adhesive dressings (assorted plaster sizes)
- Sterile eye pads
- Individually wrapped triangular bandages (which should be sterile)
- Safety pins
- Medium sized (12cm x 12cm) individually wrapped sterile un-medicated wound dressings
- Large (18cm x 18cm) sterile individually wrapped un-medicated wound dressings
- Non latex powder free disposable gloves.
- Your local GP's surgery telephone number should be kept with the First Aid kit or another suitable location for quick easy access.
- If you suspect a broken bone or spinal injury, never try to move a child unless he/she is in danger.
- You should not attempt to give First Aid for which you have not been trained.
(First Aid training is a core training requirement for all foster carers)

Medication Policy

- All Foster Carers should have written information from the County Council indicating when they are allowed to give consent for medical treatment.
- Foster Carers have a right to a full description of the medical needs of the child.
- Foster Carers will have a written health record for the child, which will be sent with the child as they move and a copy of the child's Health Plan.
- Foster Carers are to be given clear guidance about roles and responsibilities for consent to treatment.
- Unless the child is of the appropriate age to consent to a health assessment being undertaken, their parent(s)/ guardians will be asked to sign the **Consent to Health Assessment** form, agreeing to the assessment being completed.
- Children are entitled to seek medical treatment without the consent of their foster carers or social worker, age appropriate.
- The child can choose to attend the Health Assessment alone or with their parent(s)/Carer.
- Failure to obtain consent from the young person/ child's 'birth parents(s)' will not be allowed to override their need for health care.
- Where written information is supplied, this may be made available in an appropriate language or format if required.
- Foster Carers are to receive basic training on health issues, with particular attention given to issues around Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and HIV infections.
- Foster Carers will ensure that medication is stored and appropriately labelled in line with the County Councils policy.

- All medication must be in a suitably labelled container as dispensed by the pharmacist.
- Foster carers will complete the relevant documentation in line with the County Councils policy.
- Details of medication are to be recorded on SW 145 (Prescribed Medication chart and SW146 Over the counter (Homely) medication chart.
- If a mistake occurs, then this must be IMMEDIATELY reported to the child's GP so as to prevent any harm to the young person.
- All Foster Carers and members of their family can access immunisation against Hepatitis B through their GP.

Manual Handling

- Ensure good back care principles followed when lifting.
- Extra care and consideration for posture is required when manual handling in confined spaces, and using unwieldy items.
- When attending to a child's needs, eating and bathing etc, try to maintain a good back posture.
- Moving and handling equipment that is supplied by the County Council or Health Authority is only to be used after suitable instruction has been given. All lifting equipment issued by the County Council will be safety checked and serviced at regular intervals.

Personal Safety

- Check the identity of all unknown callers to your home.
- Fit a safety chain to the front door and locks or restrictors to the windows.
- Always put the safety chain on prior to opening the door to unknown caller.
- Consideration for the installation of outside security lights.
- Be aware of your surroundings when out in the community. Stay away from unfamiliar, unpopulated poorly lit areas. Carry a personal alarm with you and a charged mobile phone where possible in case of emergencies.
- Dial 999, or 112 (European Emergency Number) for Emergency Services.
- If confronted in an aggressive manner, remain calm and try not to do anything that could escalate the situation. If possible attempt to diffuse the situation in a non-aggressive manner.
- Never touch or place your hand on someone who is angry.
- Withdraw from the situation as soon as possible, and report the incident to the Social Worker and/or Police.

Pets

- Pet Questionnaire to be completed as necessary and reviewed on an annual basis.
- Foster carers must inform their allocated social worker when they have a new pet.
- Be aware of any risks that animals and pets pose to children.
- Ensure children wash their hands after handling animals.
- Keep children away from aggressive or dangerous animals.
- Wash hands thoroughly after clearing up animal waste.
- Pet questionnaire to be completed where necessary.

Accident Reporting

- All accidents and incidents need to be reported in line with the County Councils procedures for reporting incidents as soon as possible. All significant illnesses also need to be reported to the Social Worker as soon as possible.

Cycling

- Only use a cycle helmet that has a CE mark, and displays a normal safety standard such e.g. BS683:1989, A.S.2063, ANSI., IZ.90.4 SNELL, B90 or B95.
- Ensure the helmet is comfortable and fitted correctly.
- If a cycle helmet is involved in a serious accident or fall then replace it.
- If cycling whilst it is dark, a white light is to be fitted to the front and a red light to the rear of the bicycle by law.
- Children aged 14+ should access a Bike Ability course
For further advice on cycling, contact Sustrans (0117) 929 0888, visit their website at www.sustrans.org.uk

Transporting Children & Young People

- Staffordshire County Council has guidance and documentation to assist in the management of child car seats. This contains advice and guidance on legal requirements and the suitability of the various types of child car seats for the different stages in the child's development.
- Like all responsible parents, Foster Carers are responsible for driving within the law and they will find this information useful. Carers need to ensure the car seat is installed correctly and it is good practice to visually check the seat for damage, frayed belts etc prior to each use.
- The Foster Carer's Social Worker is expected to ensure that carers understand their role and responsibilities when transporting children and young people. If they have any concerns about which seat to purchase for the child, they should gain advice from a reputable retailer who has expertise in this area, or they should be advised to contact Staffordshire County Council's Strategic Health & Safety Service.
- Further information can also be found by looking at the **Families First 'Transporting Children & Young People Policy'**.
- Ensure that the child can be secured safely in your vehicle. If a child car seat is required inform your fostering social worker who will ensure that you are supported to acquire an appropriate child seat.
- Vehicle drivers are responsible for ensuring children they are transporting are appropriately restrained with a correctly fitted seat belt. Where child car seats are used, drivers are responsible for ensuring the child car seat is fitted correctly, is the correct type for the child's height and weight and also that the child is safely restrained in it via the appropriate harness and/or seat belts. Further information and guidance on the use of child car seats can be found at the following SCC link.
<http://www.intra.staffordshire.gov.uk/healthsafetywellbeing/healthsafety/guidance/child.aspx>
- RoSPA have developed a series of videos explaining the law, how to install and safe use of child car seats. This can be used as useful reference material in addition to any advice carers receive from the child car seat retailer. Please see link below.
<http://www.rospa.com/roadsafety/resources/videos/child-car-seats.aspx>

General Advice

- Slips, Trips and Falls are a common cause of injury in the home. Check that there are no trailing cables, toys on the floor, loose carpets and other items causing a trip hazard.
- Be aware of children climbing on chairs and other objects to gain access to light switches, door handles and windows, climbing into freezers and on the stairs.
- Fit safety glass or cover with a transparent safety film on all low level glazing.
- Soft furnishings and children's equipment and toys must conform to the relevant British Safety Standards and possess a CE mark.

- All cords on window blinds must be cut or stowed out of reach of babies and young children so that they do not present a strangulation hazard. See also Child Death Overview Panel Newsletter regarding Blind Cord Awareness.
- Where young children are being cared for, install a stair and/or kitchen gate as necessary.
- Use appropriate access equipment such as a kick stool or step ladder when reaching for items up high or changing a light bulb.
- Keep stairs and landing free from trip hazards.
- Be aware that hot taps and hot radiators present higher risks to children than adults. Where necessary, consideration for the installation of radiator covers.
- Cover or restrict children's access to garden ponds and pools, and never leave a child unattended near water.
- Ensure gardening equipment, tools and chemicals are safely locked away out of reach of children.
- Ensure the garden is secure and that the child cannot wander.
- Ensure that your vehicle is roadworthy and that appropriate safety checks and servicing are carried out on a regular basis.
- Store keys out of reach of children.
- Be aware of what children are accessing on the internet, and install security filters where necessary to ensure they are not accessing sites which are not suitable for their age.
- Have an Emergency Plan. Know where your gas isolation valve, electric isolation switch and water services stop cock locations are. Have an escape plan in the event of a fire.
- Keep Emergency telephone numbers in a prominent place for easy access.
- Firearms must be stored safely and in accordance with the Firearms Act.

POLICY & GUIDANCE FOR STAFF, FOSTER CARERS AND CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE ON SMOKING IN FOSTER CARE

Introduction

The Government smoking ban, set out in the Health Act 2006, came into effect in England on the 1st July 2007, and made it illegal to smoke in any public place, with exemptions for certain residences, including prisons, care homes and psychiatric units. Under the Act, Children's Units are considered to be public places.

Although Foster Carer's homes are not regarded as a workplace it is essential that the rights of carers to smoke are balanced against the rights of children in care to be healthy.

The health risks from smoking and passive smoking are well known, with smoking being the single greatest cause of preventable illness and premature death in the United Kingdom (Appendix I).

Most children will have experimented with tobacco by the age of 16 and this is a key age at which behaviour can be shaped and influenced. Research does suggest that smoke free environments, promoting non smoking as the cultural norm and providing children with information about the dangers of smoking does help to prevent young people from starting to smoke. Providing positive non smoking role models and support to stop smoking can help them to quit.

The 'Every Child Matters', Change for Children Agenda, has a clear framework of improved outcomes for children, one of which is that children are healthy i.e. physically healthy and living healthy lifestyles.

It is important, therefore, that the authority establishes a smoke-free policy which includes residential staff, Foster Carers and the children they care for.

Foster Carers

It is important that Foster Carers understand and are made aware of the detrimental effect of smoking and passive smoking on their health and that of other people in their household.

During the recruitment, assessment and preparation process discussions will take place with applicants regarding the department's expectations and requirements. Carers will be provided with information as to where they can access help and be supported to reduce or to give up smoking, if they are motivated to do so.

At each stage the department will be clear that any Carer who smokes or lives in a household where people smoke cannot be approved to take a child under the age of five. In addition any child or young person with known middle ear or respiratory tract infections, or who is prone to asthma and bronchitis, will not be placed in a smoking household, although exceptions may be made where it is in the child's best interests.

The issue will be raised regularly with all approved carers who smoke and reinforced through regular supervision, the safe care plan and the provision of guidance and training on Health & Safety issues and Healthy Care. Support is crucial, particularly as smoking can be a response to stress, and consideration needs to be given to ways of minimising the level of stress experienced.

The supervising Fostering Social Worker will agree a **smoke free plan** with the carers to include the following:

- Carers and other members of the household, including visitors, will not smoke in the company of children of any age, in the home or in the car and will promote non-smoking as the norm
- Smoking will take place outside the home or in well ventilated rooms that are not used by children
- Tobacco products, matches or lighters will not be left lying around or accessible to children

This will form part of the Safe Care Plan, which is reviewed and updated regularly and for each new placement.

Families First – Interim Guidance on Smoking (Fostering & Adoption)

Staffordshire County Council (Fostering and Adoption Services) acknowledges the proven skills and abilities of its carers/adopters who smoke, however the overriding priority in fostering and adoption is the welfare of the child who is being placed. Staffordshire County Council always aims to provide a safe, loving and positive environment for the child, helping to improve their chances of being happy and healthy as they grow older. It is therefore in the best interests of all children, to be raised in smoke free homes, ideally by non-smoking carers/adopters.

- The service believes that a smoking environment should be avoided in the best interests of children who are placed away from home.
- Children, under five years old, will **not** be placed with carers/adopters who smoke ¹tobacco-based products.
- All children with a disability, with respiratory problems such as asthma, and those with heart disease or glue ear should not be placed with families who smoke
- Applications to adopt, or to foster children under 5 years old will not proceed unless the applicants have been tobacco-free for 6 months.
- During the recruitment and assessment process discussions about smoking will take place with applicants regarding the agency's expectations and requirements.
- The issue will be raised regularly with all approved foster carers who smoke and reinforced through the annual review, supervision and the Safe Care Plan.

The use of e-cigarettes:

- BAAF are continuing to monitor research on the use of e-cigarettes and following the Public Health England report (2014) have recommended that agencies consider e-cigarettes as different from tobacco.
- Staffordshire County Council recognises the low risk to children and will not see the use of e-cigarettes as a reason to preclude foster carers/adopters, purely on this basis. The applicant's use of e-cigarettes will be assessed in the initial visit, as well as during the full prospective carer/adopter assessment.
- Prospective carers/adopters who use e-cigarettes will need to demonstrate in the Risk Assessment/Health & Safety Plan, what steps they will take to minimise any risk to the child. This should include details about where and how often e-cigarettes are used and how e-cigarettes and their components are stored.
- Approved carers/adopters who use e-cigarettes will be encouraged to restrict their usage to outside of their home, and it will be expected not to use e-cigarettes in front of children.
- In the best interests of the child, the use of e-cigarettes will be discussed as part of the carer's/adopter's personal plan to cease the use of tobacco/nicotine indefinitely.

Children/Young people

It is illegal for retailers to sell any tobacco products to anyone below the age of 18. In the same way foster carers will not be permitted to provide children or young people under 18 with tobacco products.

Some young people may start smoking or be smokers at the point of becoming looked after. It is important to work with young people to actively discourage them from smoking by giving them information about the harmful effects and helping them to access support to reduce or

give up smoking. The role of health professionals, including the Looked After Children Designated Nurse, is crucial in addressing this issue through the child or young person's Initial Health Assessment, Health Plan and reviews. Information about where help can be found is in Appendix I.

The parent or person with parental responsibility for the child or young person will be informed of the department's policy on smoking and involved in discussions about action that will be taken by the Foster Carer. Any arrangements agreed must be recorded in the Placement Plan, and communicated in writing to the parent or person with parental responsibility.

In situations where a child/young person already smokes it is reasonable to expect the Foster Carer to have an agreed place to store any smoking products whilst the child or young person is in the foster home and for the child or young person to hand them over to the carer. This will be explained to the child/young person and their Social Worker and recorded in the child/young person's individual safe care plan. The child/young person will be expected to comply with the smoke free plan for the foster home.

This arrangement will also apply to smoking products given to the child or young person during contact with the parent or person with parental responsibility. The Child's Social Worker will discourage the parent or person with parental responsibility from smoking during contact and return any smoking products given to the child or young person to them.

The Statutory 6 monthly review of the child or young person's care plan will look at any arrangements that are in place in relation to smoking.

This policy and guidance was developed by a small working group made up of young people, foster carers, Looked after Children's Nurse, Children's Commissioner, Children's Voice Project worker and Area and Fostering staff. The policy was widely consulted upon and amended to try to reflect the many views expressed.

It is a working document which will be subject to regular review and revision to ensure that any changes in legislation, regulations or good practice are included.

GUIDANCE ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOL

Principles

- Foster carers have a crucial role in promoting the health of any child or young person in their care.
- Children and young people may have experienced trauma and abuse associated with alcohol consumption or have existing patterns of alcohol abuse themselves. It is therefore vital that carers have full background information about each child.
- Foster carers need to be sensitive to the child or young person's perceptions of adult drinking patterns and behaviour.
- Whilst it is legal for children over 5 years to drink alcohol in their home the Department of Health guidance advises that children should have ***an alcohol free childhood***.

The law in England, Scotland and Wales

Under 5 It is illegal to give an alcoholic drink to a child under 5 except in certain circumstances (e.g. under medical supervision).

Under 14 A young person under 14 cannot go into the bar of a pub unless the pub has a 'children's certificate'. If it does not have one, the child/young person can only go into parts of licensed premises where alcohol is either sold but not drunk (e.g. an off-licence or a sales point away from the pub), or drunk but not sold (e.g. a garden or family room).

14 or 15 14- and 15-year-olds can go anywhere in a pub, but they cannot drink alcohol.

16 or 17 16- and 17-year-olds can buy (or be bought) beer or cider (and wine in Scotland) as an accompaniment to a meal, but not in a bar (i.e. only in an area specifically set aside for meals).

Under 18 Except for 16- or 17-year-olds having a meal, it is against the law for anyone under 18 to buy alcohol in a pub, off-licence, supermarket, or other outlet; or for anyone else to buy alcohol in a pub for someone who is under 18.

By-laws and police action

In the UK some towns and cities have local by-laws banning the drinking of alcohol in public places. The police also have authority to confiscate alcohol from those under 18 who are drinking it in a public place and can arrest anyone who tries to prevent them confiscating what they believe to be alcohol.

Support to foster carers

- The foster carer should be made fully aware of any concerns relating to the health of the young person. This includes having full background information relating to any history of drug/alcohol or substance use by the young person or their family.
- Any risks to the child or young person need to be clearly recorded and a risk assessment put in place.
- The Placement Plan will record agreed strategies for managing behaviour within the placement.
- The Fostering Social worker will identify any specific support required by the foster carer, such as further training for the foster care, and will review this support through supervision or at more frequent intervals if appropriate.

- The foster carer should notify the child's or young person's social worker and the fostering social worker of any concerns about the child or young person's use of alcohol, drugs or substances.
- The foster carer should seek the advice of the child social worker and the fostering social worker as required.
- The fostering social worker should ensure that the foster carer has access to relevant core training and continuing professional development activities as necessary.

Use of alcohol in the foster home

Carers should be aware that many children and young people in care have had negative experiences of alcohol including violence and abuse. Carers therefore need to be sensitive to the young person's perception of adults drinking and how this might vary from their own children's experience.

Foster carers have a responsibility for modelling the sensible use of alcohol. When using alcohol foster carers need to consider and understand that alcohol reduces concentration and impairs responses that may lead to unprofessional conduct.

Carers need to ensure that they are alcohol free if they wish to drive a child anywhere. If in an emergency a child needs to be taken somewhere and a carer has consumed alcohol then an alternative driver needs to be found or a taxi called.

Foster carers should keep themselves informed of official health guidelines for "sensible drinking". Further information can be found at <http://www.nhs.uk>.

Under no circumstances should foster carers buy alcohol for young people or encourage them to use alcohol.

Further related guidance from British Association for Adoption & Fostering

What you can do if your child starts drinking?

- Talk to your child about the dangers of alcohol before they start drinking

If your child is drinking

If your child is drinking alcohol, or intends to, you should talk to them about it.

- Make it clear that you disapprove.
- Don't shout at your child. This will make them defensive and could make the situation worse. Instead, stay calm and firm.
- Make it clear that you're there for them if they need you, and answer any questions they have.
- Talk to your child about how alcohol affects judgment. Drinking too much could lead them to doing something they regret, such as having unprotected sex, getting into fights or drink driving.
- Warn your child about the dangers of drink spiking and how to avoid it.
- Make sure your child has a plan for getting home safely and tells you where they're going. If they're planning to drink, make sure they're with friends who can look after them.

Further information about children, young people and alcohol can be found on:-

<http://www.nhs.uk>

<http://www.dh.gov.uk>

SAFE CARE PLAN

The first priority of any foster home is that it should be a safe place for all its members, particularly any child or young person coming into it. The objectives of safe caring practices are:

- To keep the foster child safe from abuse by adults
- To keep children in the foster home safe from abuse by other children in the household
- Keep members of the foster family safe from false allegations of abuse

Each foster home is asked to develop a Safe Care Plan through discussion with your family members and your Fostering Social Worker. This plan will be reviewed with every new placement and if any previously unknown risks are identified. Alternatively, the plan will be reviewed annually if no changes have taken place within the household during that period.

The Safe Care Plan is designed to cover many different situations including fire plan, computer use, behavioural management etc.

In addition to the Safe Care Plan for the household, each child and young person placed will have an individual safe care plan detailing safer caring issues specific to them. This will be compiled in discussion with you, your Fostering Social Worker, the Child's Social worker and the child (dependent on their age and understanding) at the placement agreement meeting. It will be reviewed if previously unknown risks are identified or if no such issues arise annually.

Every foster home will receive a copy of Fostering Network's book entitled 'Safer Caring', which will inform any discussions in relation to Safe Care issues.

Safe Care on Holiday or Trips Away

While many of the elements of a household's safe caring guidelines will be about behaviour and therefore relevant at all times, some will relate to the environment in which the household is at a particular time.

Safe care must always be at the forefront of foster carer's minds, even at times when boundaries are more relaxed e.g. on holidays, trips away or leisure activities. It is important that carers inform both children's and fostering social workers of their intended holidays or breaks away from home and the proposed sleeping arrangements.

The Fostering Service bedroom sharing policy is clear that each child living in the foster home, whether they are a child of the foster family, or a child in care, should have a bedroom of their own. In some circumstances it may be appropriate for sharing to take place. For carer's own children it is a matter for the family to agree, but for children who are fostered, (whose history we cannot fully know), any sharing must be risk assessed.

The policy is clear that sharing *may* be appropriate in the following circumstances:

- Siblings of the same gender and where sharing has been risk assessed, and in the case of older children, they are in agreement.
- Siblings of different genders up to the age of six may share, as long as the risk assessment indicates this is appropriate.

In a foster carers home unrelated children **should not** share a bedroom, unless there are exceptional circumstances, e.g. children of the same gender and aged three and under; and where the placement has been matched and risk assessed; or there are strong supporting factors that indicate a significant benefit to the children for who the

bedroom share is proposed.

In exceptional circumstances such as holidays where children and young people are sharing a room or sharing a room with an adult and this has not previously been risk assessed a risk assessment needs to be completed prior to the holiday. The risk assessment must be completed with the involvement of the Foster Carer, the child's Social Worker and the Fostering Social Worker, and signed off by the relevant Team Manager.

The Risk Assessment must detail any strategies proposed to minimise risks and indicate the foster carer's views on their abilities to implement the strategies effectively.

SECTION THREE

FOSTER CHILDREN

PLACING CHILDREN WITH YOU

If at all possible introductions will take place prior to placement and will involve the child or young person, current carers and those with parental responsibility. Where this is not possible, the social worker for the child who is moving into placement with you, will receive a copy of your profile. The child's social worker will discuss your profile with the child/ren to help them to be informed about the proposed placement.

It is the Child's Social Worker's responsibility to ensure that you are provided with all the appropriate information and documentation relating to the child which has been appropriately signed and dated.

There are a number of documents relating to children's care planning that you should receive a copy of. The following is a summary:-

Placement Information Record:

To be given at or before the point of placement. Some information may be added following the placement agreement meeting.

Child or Young Person's Care Plan:

Usually agreed at the first statutory review meeting for the child. Outlines different aspects of the plan for the child whilst in placement along with the overall aims of the placement.

Statutory Care Plan Review:

The outcomes of the child and young person care plan is reviewed every 6 months (or earlier if the care plan is changed) and changes to the care plan are agreed.

Assessment and Progress Records:

These give an overview of the child and young person and are completed over the time they are with you.

Pathway Plan:

This is completed as the young person moves towards independence and considers the plan for their transition into adulthood.

Risk & Match:

In addition to these documents which will be provided by the child's social worker you will also receive a copy of the Risk and Match Document from placement referrals. These are sent either by email, post or through the secure transfer portal. The document identifies any immediate risks that the placement service (duty) has been made aware of at the time that the placement was requested. A more comprehensive risk assessment should be discussed at the Placement Planning Meeting. This document also evaluates the impact the placement may have on your household and make recommendations to support you.

Well Being Plan:

For households in which there are children with disabilities and complex needs, in addition to the completion of the risk and matching document a Well Being Plan for the child will be completed to consider the overall impact of the care needs of each of the children in the household.

Individual Safer Care Plan:

An Individual Safer Caring Plan must be completed for each child in placement, taking into account the specific needs of the child and everyone else living in the foster home.

Risk Assessment:

Where there are significant risks in a placement a Risk Assessment will be drawn up between yourselves, your Fostering Social Worker and the child's social worker.

Placement Plan:

A **Placement Planning Meeting**, to agree the day to day arrangements of the placement, must take place either before the placement or within 3 working days. A Placement Plan will be completed at this meeting and will set out the department's expectations of your role and responsibilities. If a child moves placement a new Placement Planning meeting will be held.

Initial Health Assessment:

At this early stage the Initial Health Assessment should be discussed and arrangements made for it to take place, either through your GP or another medical professional - See the 'Being Healthy' section for more information.

It may be appropriate for you to have additional documents, such as court reports; copies of minutes of family conference meetings and previous review documents during the last 12 months or earlier if this is relevant.

All confidential information must be kept in the lockable metal box provided to you by the Fostering Service.

BEDROOM SHARING

Each child living in the foster home, whether they are a child of the foster family or a child in care should have a bedroom of their own. However, in some circumstances it may be appropriate for sharing to take place. For carers own children, it is a matter for the family to agree. For children who are fostered, any sharing must be risk assessed. Sharing *may* be appropriate in the following circumstances:

- Siblings of the same gender and where sharing has been risk assessed, and in the case of older children, they are in agreement.
- Siblings of different genders up to the age of six may share, as long as the risk assessment indicates this is appropriate.

Unrelated children should not share a bedroom unless there are exceptional circumstances; e.g. children of the same gender and aged three and under; and where the placement has been matched and risk assessed; or there are strong supporting factors that indicate a significant benefit to the children for whom the bedroom share is proposed.

Where it is known that a child/young person has abused or significantly harmed another child, or where the risk assessment identifies that a child's behaviour is likely to be harmful to other children, then a bedroom share **will not be agreed**.

Babies aged between 0 – 24 months (maximum) can sleep in a cot in a foster carer's bedroom. The Fostering Service will, therefore, only place babies aged between 0 – 12 months with foster carers, who have no other appropriate bedroom available, unless it is for planned respite. If a baby is 6 months old or more, at the time of placement, and it is known that the placement duration is likely to be for 12 months or more, then the baby will only be placed with a foster carer who will have a suitable bedroom available at the time appropriate for the baby to move into a bedroom.

DELEGATED AUTHORITY

The revised statutory framework for fostering and care planning which came into force in April 2011 and the Foster Carers Charter outline the importance placed by the Government on foster carers being able to take a greater range of decisions about day to day aspects of the lives of the children and young people they care for. Delegated Authority is the term used when the responsibility for making day to day decisions about a child has been passed to the foster carer. This can include decisions about activities, haircuts and overnight stays amongst other things. Children & young people have told us that they feel different when their carers have to seek permission for day to day things such as school trips. It is important that children have the experience as much as possible of being part of family life, Delegated Authority is very important to ensure that children and young people achieve good outcomes.

Foster Carers should be given the maximum appropriate flexibility in making decisions relating to children in their care. The types of decisions that you are able to make will vary with each placement. It will also vary over time, for example you are likely to have more say over decisions for children who have lived with you for a longer time than those who have only recently left home. The delegation of decisions to you must be done in consultation with anyone who holds parental responsibility for the child and must be in line with the law. Decisions about the delegation of authority will be made at the placement agreement meeting and reviewed at each statutory review. The Placement Plan will record the areas where decisions are delegated to you. Training about delegated authority is available in the training catalogue.

U-pack Information Guides

When children are placed with you they will be able to find information from the online 'U-pack Information Guides' which contains important and easy to read information about being in care. These packs are called 'Living Away from Home U-packs' and are split into different age groups (years 7 and under; years 8-13; and years 14 and over) to ensure that all children and young people are receiving appropriate information for their age. Details about the pack can be found on the County Council's website [here](#). You can ask the Child's Social Worker about the U-packs and you should help and support the child or young person to know what information is contained in the U-pack as this will assist them to understand more about being in care.

Children's Guide to Fostering

The 'So what's this Fostering Thing All About' guide can be found on the same web page and you should support children and young people to know what is in this guide too.

The Social Care Institute for Excellence has recently launched a website that helps looked after children and young people understand their rights and entitlements while they are in care. It includes first hand experiences and presents animated information on key topics such as health, education, changing placements, keeping in touch, identity and moving to independence. You can find out more at: www.info4carekids.org.uk

CHILDREN'S REVIEWS

A review is held within 28 days of a child's placement. A further review is held at 4 months from the date of placement. Reviews are then held at 6 month intervals. Where there is a placement change the established reviewing process will continue and only start afresh where there is a change to the child's 'Care Plan'.

In preparation for each child's review, Foster Carers, children and parents will receive a consultation document to complete. This will be part of the discussion at the review.

Children aged over 4 years are encouraged to participate in their reviews and to communicate their wishes and feelings about their care arrangements. Foster carers are expected to support and encourage children and young people to get involved in the meetings. It can also be helpful to support them in completing their consultation booklet. It is important that all children and young people are supported to participate in the decision making processes that affect their lives.

Reviews will take place in your home, unless it is inappropriate to do so.

CONTACT

The Local Authority has a legal duty to promote contact unless it is not reasonably practicable or consistent with the child's welfare.

Children in foster care will, where appropriate, have good, regular and consistent contact with their family and friends. Contact can be crucial to reuniting children with their family.

Contact can be through meetings, phone calls or letter with specific members of the family. Meetings can be unsupervised or supervised by social workers, foster carers, family support workers or other professionals, family members and friends.

Contact arrangements must be agreed from the start of the placement and set out in the Placement Plan. Venues for contact vary. Some children may go home for visits; a neutral venue may be necessary or contact may be arranged in the foster home with your agreement. Meetings can take place at different dates and times regularly or occasionally.

A Risk Assessment will be carried out by the Child's Social Worker and Carers will be advised of any known risk.

Where supervision of contact is necessary, either due to concern about risk to the child or for purposes of assessment, the Social Worker, Family Support Worker or other appropriate person should always be present. If there are court proceedings ongoing, contact may be directed by the court. All contact arrangements must be discussed with you, especially if the request for contact is in your home or you are being asked to help with transport.

Contact arrangements will be considered at the child's review. You cannot change contact arrangements without consultation with the Child's Social Worker. It is important you positively encourage contact and be available after contact to provide support to the child.

Sometimes children may return from time spent with parents or their family confused and upset. You can support the child by helping them to talk about their feelings and realising that the child needs time to readjust.

If you have any concerns about the contact arrangements that are taking place, contact the child's social worker and discuss your concern with your fostering social worker.

INDEPENDENT VISITOR

In some situations an Independent Visitor may become involved with a young person in your care. An Independent Visitor is checked and approved by the Department to offer additional support to a young person who has limited or no contact with their own family. They are appointed with the young person's agreement and are independent of the Local Authority.

CHILD'S SOCIAL WORKER

Visiting Pattern

There are minimum requirements for Social Worker visits to children who are cared for by the Local Authority. These visits should take place as often as the circumstances of the individual child and placement require, but at the very least:

- (a) Within one week of the beginning of placement
- (b) Then at intervals of not more than 6 weeks during the first year
- (c) Thereafter at intervals of, no more than 6 weeks (or three months if it has been agreed that the placement is to last until the child or young person is 18 years old).

A visit must also be made following a reasonable request from the carer or the child.

If a child is placed with a Family & Friends carer (Connected Person) with temporary approval visits must take place at least once a week until the first review and thereafter of intervals no more than 4 weeks. When the carer is fully approved visiting patterns are the same as all other placements.

The above also applies in the event of the child moving placement.

The child will usually be seen alone as well as with the carers. This may be outside the foster home, as this can help a child and their Social Worker to get to know each other, build up a relationship of trust and to ascertain that the child is feeling safe in their placement. The child's social worker will also want to see the child's bedroom.

Unannounced visits

Both Fostering Social Workers and Children's Social Workers have a duty to make unannounced visits to your home, to understand what day to day life is like. Sometimes a child's bedroom will be seen. Occasionally visits will take place when all the members of your household are at home.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN

The aim of all foster placements is to provide a safe and caring family experience for all children to enable them to develop and grow.

The Government initiative Every Child Matters 2004 identified 5 key areas for achieving positive outcomes for children. These are: Being Healthy; Stay Safe; Enjoying & Achieving; Making a Positive Contribution & Achieving Economic Wellbeing.

As a service, our aim is promote positive outcomes for children and young people in foster placements. Foster carers have a central role in this. At every stage of your time as foster carers we will discuss with you what difference your care is making to these outcomes. There will be particular focus on this during supervision and annual reviews.

BEING HEALTHY

An important part of your role as a Foster Carer is to help a child or young person in your care to understand the importance of maintaining good health i.e. physical, psychological, emotional and sexual well being. You will be seen as a role model by children and young people and it is important that you demonstrate and model a healthy lifestyle and make them aware of the dangers of drug and alcohol misuse, smoking, and unsafe sexual behaviours.

We have become increasingly aware of the dangers of smoking and effects of passive smoking and the need for children to be raised in smoke free environments. The policy & guidance for carers and children/young people on smoking in foster care can be found on Pages 92 and in Appendix I.

As a Foster Carer you must ensure that all children:-

- Are registered with a G.P.

- Know who their named Health Visitor, School Nurse or Looked After Children nurse is
- Are registered with a dentist and attend for regular checkups. If you have difficulty finding an NHS Dentist you can contact the Looked after Nurse (number in the directory at the beginning of the handbook) to seek advice or you can discuss this with your Fostering Social Worker. For further information on oral health please see the Oral Health Guidelines for Foster Carers & Social Workers in the back of this folder. This provides information and guidelines for accessing dental services for children in care, how to find an NHS dentist, promoting good oral health, dental treatment and consent to dental treatment.
- Are enabled to attend routine and specialist appointments.
- Have regular eyesight checks at an optician of your choice.
- Have regular routines of eating and going to bed i.e. eating healthy meals, having adequate sleep for their age and regular routines for getting to school on time.
- Have adequate time for play and exercise and are encouraged to be active.
- Are discouraged from smoking and misusing alcohol and drugs and given information about the risks of these behaviours.
- Are encouraged to read or have stories read to them in order to aid the development of speech, reading and listening skills.
- Are allowed time for talking and discussion of everyday topics and personal issues e.g. sitting at a table for meals is an opportunity for family conversations, information sharing and development of social skills.

Every child/young person, on becoming looked after, has an Initial Health Assessment which should be done by a doctor and from which a health plan is developed. A review of the plan and the child/young person's health should be carried out by the named Health Visitor, School Nurse or Looked After Children's Nurse every 6 months if under 5 years or every year over 5 years. This is called a Review Health Assessment. If a child or young person is being seen by a Community Paediatrician for existing health issues it may be more relevant for the review to be carried out by that Doctor.

Following these assessments you should receive a copy of the recommendations made. This will ordinarily be sent to you by the health professional who undertook the assessment. If you have not received a copy of the health assessment or Reviewed Health Assessment and Plan please inform your Fostering Social Worker and the child's social worker who will chase this up for you.

You will have access to the **Looked After Children Nurses Team** who can give advice and assist you in accessing health services or information. Contact details are below:

Springfields Health & Wellbeing Centre

Off Lovett Court

Rugeley

Staffordshire

WS15 2QD

Designated Nurse

Angela Jervis

Named Nurse

Sarah Borton:

01889 571399

07961 247669

sarah.borton@nhs.net

Nurse Advisor

Jacqui Harvey:

01889 571368

07791370353

There are also **Teenage Pregnancy Support Workers** based in each of the Targeted Youth Support teams. These workers support the government target to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies. The service has two strands:

- Prevention service which offers training and resources to those agencies or people who already work with young people.
- Support service for young women who become pregnant. This service makes contact with young women, many of whom are referred by their midwife, teacher or self refer. Once contact has been made the service, will provide an individually tailored package of support in relation to benefits and housing, return to education or training and sometimes more intensive support around parenting, relationships and social opportunities.

If you want to know more please contact the Looked After Children's nurses.

STAYING SAFE

Children who are cared for are often vulnerable and you, as Foster Carers, play a major role in keeping them safe and helping them to develop strategies to protect themselves.

Children may be at risk from:

- maltreatment, neglect, violence and sexual exploitation
- accidental injury and death
- bullying and discrimination
- crime and antisocial behaviour

Developing relationships and open communication can help children understand the risks they may expose themselves to and enable them to talk to you about their concerns.

All Foster Carers are required to establish a Safe Caring Plan in conjunction with your Fostering Social Worker which is reviewed annually and with every new placement. Risk Assessments are completed on all placements and strategies are put into place to minimise any known risks. The Health & Safety checklist which was completed during the assessment process is updated annually or where there are significant changes.

Guidance on dealing with 'Bullying', 'Children who go missing' and 'Safe use of computers' all help to ensure that children are protected and are enabled to protect themselves. The Youth Offending Service offers multi-agency support which is available. Information about these services can be found elsewhere in this Handbook.

There are a number of post approval training courses that will inform and guide you.

ENJOYING & ACHIEVING

This outcome can also look at educational outcomes, (please also refer to a separate section on education page 106)

We are also aware that many foster children may not have had the opportunity to develop interests and hobbies, which can play an important part in building confidence, social skills and positive self esteem. You need to talk to children about what they enjoy doing and encourage them to gain new experiences. You will need to make sure they have access to age appropriate toys that will stimulate and encourage their personal development. Developing your own links with local groups and organisations will help you to identify age appropriate activities for children.

There are a number of sources of information about activities in your local area. Libraries, local newspapers, small ads and leisure centres often provide information. The internet also has a number of useful websites including:-

<http://www.nhs.uk/change4life>

<http://www.youfind.me.uk>

<http://www.dayoutwiththekids.co.uk>

<http://www.under-fives.org>

<http://www.askamum.co.uk/Family/Search-Results/Days-out/Kids-Days-Out-and-Activities-in-Staffordshire/>

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION

Children need to be encouraged to engage in decision making about their own lives. The Children's Review presents them with an opportunity to participate in this process and you can encourage and support them to express their wishes and feelings.

As part of this decision making it is also important that they are able to develop resilience through taking appropriate risks. This is a normal part of growing up and will both help them to develop resilience and prepare them for adult life. As a foster carer, you can encourage them in this along with giving them support and advice to ensure they are kept safe.

Children need to be helped to develop a sense of community responsibility, to be law abiding, to develop positive relationships and to have concern for others and the environment. Through talking to children and introducing them to a variety of experiences you can encourage them to think about others.

As a Foster Carer you play a key role in helping children to develop a sense of self worth and be able to deal with the significant changes and challenges life presents. You can help them build self confidence and resilience, to maximise their opportunities in life.

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING

It is crucial for lifelong economic wellbeing that children are encouraged in further education, employment or training on leaving school. You will work alongside Throughcare Services to achieve this (see Leaving Care information page 113). Staffordshire Young People's Service (SYPS – formerly Connexions) provide support for young people aged between 13 and 19 giving advice and guidance around higher and further education and career options. They are based in schools, colleges, libraries and youth centres. It is important that you develop and maintain links with this service.

Preparation for independence can begin much earlier. Even young children can be encouraged to develop independence skills and make age appropriate choices. For example be involved in choosing clothes, managing their weekly pocket money, become familiar with making choices about money and encouraged to save for things they want and be involved in their Reviews etc. Consideration should also be given to the opening of a bank account.

More information about Every Child Matters can be found on the Department of Education website

www.education.gov.uk

POCKET MONEY

The personal allowance for the child or young person in your care includes a set allowance for pocket money (see Finance Section 6) which you should arrange to give to the child and support them to manage their pocket money and make positive choices. You should keep a record of the pocket money given to the child or young person in your daily recording file.

PROMOTING POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

Fostering Services Regulations 2011 state that:-

The fostering service provider must prepare and implement a written policy on acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of children placed with foster parents. The fostering service provider must take all reasonable steps to ensure that:

- no form of corporal punishment is used on any child placed with a foster parent
- no child placed with a foster parent is subject to any measure of control, restraint or discipline which is excessive or unreasonable, and
- restraint is used on a child only where it is necessary to prevent injury to the child or other persons, or serious damage to property.

National Minimum Standards for Fostering 2011 state that:-

- Foster carers receive support on how to manage their responses and feelings arising from caring for children, particularly where children display very challenging behaviour, and understand how children's previous experiences can manifest in challenging behaviour.
- All foster carers receive training in positive care and control of children, including training in de-escalating problems and disputes. The fostering service has a clear written policy on managing behaviour, which includes supporting positive behaviour, de-escalation of conflicts and discipline.
- Each foster carer is aware of all the necessary information available to the fostering service about a child's circumstances, including any significant recent events, to help the foster carer understand and predict the child's needs and behaviours and support the child within their household. The fostering service follows up with the responsible authority where all such necessary information has not been provided by the authority.
- The fostering service's approach to care minimises the need for police involvement to deal with challenging behaviour and avoids criminalising children unnecessarily.

This guidance is aimed at helping you to achieve these standards by setting clear expectations and offering some practical advice.

Children who are placed in foster care may have experienced abuse, neglect, rejection and loss and others may have experienced inconsistent boundaries which often impacts upon their behaviour. It is an important aspect of fostering that you manage behaviour appropriately and that any measures of control take into account a child or young person's history. However this cannot include corporal punishment which is forbidden and within your Foster Carer Agreement you have signed to abide by the County Council's policy.

Many of you are experienced parents with your own views on discipline. However the bonds and attachments you have developed with your own children since birth will not exist between you and foster children. Tried and tested methods of discipline which have been effective with your own children may not be appropriate or effective with foster children and you may need to develop alternatives.

The use of sanctions by a Foster Carer is a matter of choice but should take into account the age, understanding and maturity of the child. All sanctions must be appropriate, related to the situation, strictly time limited and flexible enough to be reviewed and changed at any

time. The sanction needs to be clear so that a child knows both what is expected of them and when it will end.

WHAT CAN I DO?

- Discuss appropriate behaviour management with the Child's Social Worker so that you can identify what sanctions to take. This can be set out in the Placement Plan and in more detail in a Risk Assessment depending upon the nature of the behaviour and action to be taken.
- Set limits and boundaries; with some children this may need to be reinforced many times!
- Reward positive behaviour through praise or treat.
- Where appropriate used planned ignoring, all the time ensuring a child's safety.
- Distract through humour and activities.
- Show affection through holding a hand or giving a cuddle.
- Use time out for short periods in a designated area (usually not the bedroom), to give the child a chance to reflect on their behaviour (this does not include locking doors etc).
- Increase supervision by insisting that the child doesn't go out without you.
- Use 'grounding' to reinforce house rules but remember to limit the period of grounding for maximum effect as well as your own sanity!
- Restrict visits to and from friends but contact with family cannot be restricted.
- Foster Carers are required to give children pocket money and minimum amounts are set out in the financial section of the Handbook. Pocket money may be delayed or an amount deducted for restitution for damage. There are several ways of doing this:
 - If you provide a higher level of pocket money you can then deduct the difference as a consequence
 - You may hold back pocket money for a period of time (no longer than 4 weeks) which will then be returned to the child either as actual money or in kind
 - Pocket money can be deducted to pay for deliberate damage or loss; this needs to be at a reasonable level taking into account the level of pocket money the child receives and how long it would take to recompense. It is advisable to discuss this with the child's social worker.
- Appropriate removal of possessions such as TV, toy, computer time/game, music system, bicycle for a period of time, particularly if they have been misusing these or acting dangerously with them. This must be done in a planned way and following discussion with the Child's Social Worker.

This list is not exhaustive and you may have other ideas which can be discussed with the Social Workers and other professionals involved with the child and agreed in the Individual Safe Care Plan/Risk Assessment.

All sanctions must be recorded on the contact sheets in your foster carer file. This will enable you to monitor behaviour, what has been tried and whether it was successful, which can then be shared with both the Child's Social Worker and your Fostering Social Worker.

There are training courses to help you develop new skills and strategies in managing behaviour. Your fostering social worker will discuss this with you to inform your Personal Development Plan.

PHYSICAL INTERVENTION

The use of physical intervention is a matter of skill and judgement and there is a thin line between restraining a child and assault or false imprisonment which is legally unacceptable.

Before a situation develops to a level at which physical intervention may become necessary you may find there are indicators or triggers which you become aware of. Techniques such as making eye contact, adopting a calm tone and voice level, gentle touch, diversion or moving away from the area may diffuse the situation which is always preferable. You will be given training on what to do on the 'Managing Conflict / challenging behaviour' course. Remember as you get to know a child you will get to know what may be successful.

If these approaches have not worked and a child is at risk of hurting themselves or others or of causing serious damage to property you may have to physically intervene.

Remember to keep calm and stay in control of your actions. Use the minimum force necessary and try to ensure help is at hand. Under no circumstances must children be asked to assist in physically intervening with another child.

Once the child has calmed down it is important to check that no-one is hurt and to give an opportunity for things to settle before any attempt is made to understand what triggered it.

Where Foster Carers have acted in the best interests of the child to prevent harm they will be fully supported by the local authority.

ACTION FOLLOWING AN INCIDENT OF PHYSICAL INTERVENTION

All episodes must be recorded in your file and the Incident Notification Form should be completed and sent to your Fostering Social Worker within 24 hours.

You must also immediately report the incident to the Child's Social Worker so that a risk assessment meeting can be convened to draw up either a new one or to amend an existing one. The risk assessment may identify the need for further training and where this is felt to be appropriate you will be offered a place on a suitable course.

Strategies can also be set out in the child's Individual Safe Care Plan, completed with your Fostering Social Worker and agreed with the Child's Social Worker.

In some instances an episode of physical intervention may need to be investigated further and a strategy meeting called if it is deemed to have been used inappropriately. This would be convened under the Allegations, Complaints and Cause for Concern about Foster Carers and Prospective Adopters.

WHAT YOUR FOSTERING SOCIAL WORKER WILL DO

The aim is to support you in the task of fostering through regular meetings to listen to your concerns and issues and to help you work out what to do.

Supervision visits will also be used to share your recording, review and monitor both your Safer Caring Plan and the individual safe care plans for children in placement and to reflect upon things that have happened (what worked and what didn't).

It may be necessary to call a risk assessment meeting with the Child's Social Worker and other professionals to set out clearly how specific issues should be handled. In some instances this may be chaired by a Team Manager, depending upon the complexity. You will receive a copy of the written document.

Additional support may be needed through referral to SUSTAIN or CAMHS and you will be helped to access these services by the Child's Social Worker and your Fostering Social Worker. Upon receipt of a Notification form your Fostering Social Worker will notify their Team Manager who will monitor the incident.

PROTOCOL TO REDUCE THE PROSECUTION OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The links between being a looked after child and offending behaviour are well established. It is important to recognise that many of the risk factors associated with pathways into offending behaviour also overlap with the factors identified for children who enter the care system, for example

- Conflict within the family
- Poor parental supervision
- Attachment problems
- Living in relative poverty/deprivation
- Low achievement and low commitment to education
- Negative influence of their peer group

As a corporate parent Staffordshire County Council wants the best possible outcomes for children in care and this includes reducing the likelihood of their becoming involved in offending behaviour. We are committed to a multi-agency approach to achieve good outcomes and divert children and young people away from criminal and anti social behaviour to prevent reoffending and escalation of offending and to prevent them from being inappropriately criminalised.

There is a joint protocol to reduce the prosecution of looked after children,

The full protocol can be made available by your social worker (Families First Policies & Procedures Part 8)

Requirement for police involvement

Staff and foster carers need to consider the nature and seriousness of the incident before deciding whether to involve the police either immediately or at a later stage or whether to involve them at all.

It is crucial that communication between staff, foster carers and the police is clear and evidence based.

The following are some situations where police involvement may be requested.

For full information refer to the protocol as above or ask your fostering social worker for a copy.

Violence by a child or young person on another

In considering attendance at an incident the police service will consider the following:

- Wishes of the victim
- Severity of the injury sustained or threat received by the victim
- Probability of a repeat incident
- Previous relationship between victim and offender
- Potential impact on the child or young person following formal police involvement
- Effectiveness of police action court proceedings
- Future best interest of both parties
- Message sent to other young people
- Availability of alternative courses of action e.g. restorative approaches with the consent of the victim
- Previous behaviour of offending bullying/peer pressure/duress

Violence to staff or foster carers by a child or young person

This can vary from verbal threats to physical acts amounting to assault. Whilst carers have the responsibility of care towards young people, their welfare needs to be balanced with the rights of staff and carers not to be subjected to violence in the course of their duties.

Such incidents are affected by factors similar to these listed above and staff and carers should be encouraged to report any incidents that cannot be dealt with through restorative approaches and behavioural management strategies.

This can include a referral to a Prevention Worker and for Neighbourhood Police Officer which will give consideration to the necessary intervention. If the young person is currently supervised by the Youth Offending Service information should be shared with the Youth Offending Team. This does not remove the individual's right to involve the police. Any decision to involve the police in such circumstances needs to be carefully thought through to ensure it achieves the best outcome for the staff member, carer and the young person.

In all cases foster carers should report the incident to the child's social worker and the fostering social worker and record the incident on the Incident Notification Form.

Following such incidents the fostering social worker should visit the carer. Risk Assessment and Behaviour Management strategies should be updated.

Criminal Damage within the placement

Factors to consider are

- Level/value of damage caused
- Previous incidents of a similar nature by the same child/young person
- Suitability or effectiveness of police involvement
- Impact of police involvement of the child's overall care plan
- Message sent to other young people if applicable
- Availability of alternative courses of action, for example, appropriate consequences addressed by the carer.

Theft within the placement

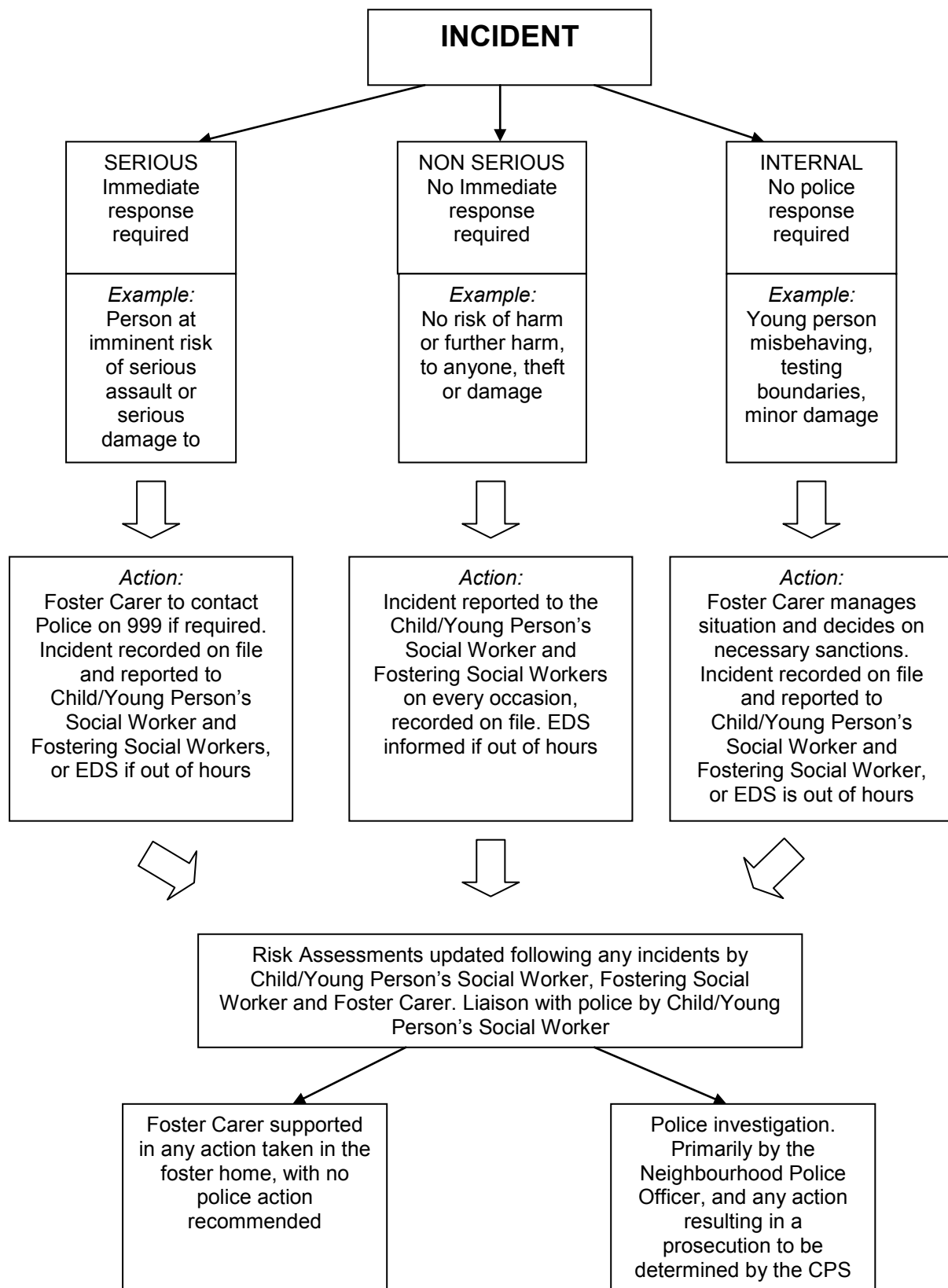
The full factors should be considered in the context of a restorative approach

- Wishes of the victim
- Nature and seriousness of the allegation
- Requirement of formal investigation e.g. insurance claim requires a crime reference number
- Strategies identified to manage the child/young person's behaviour

If a child or young person placed with you steals either from you or another member of your household this can be very distressing for everyone involved. It is often possible to reduce the risk of this through simple practical steps such as not leaving money or valuables in communal areas of the home. Following safer caring guidelines in relation to young people not spending time in one another's rooms will also assist in preventing stealing.

Foster carers categories of response

The following is a guide to support foster carers considering contacting the police.



In all cases you should notify the child/young persons social worker and discuss the incident fully with your fostering social worker.

TRAINING COURSES/WORKSHOPS THAT HELP YOU TO PROMOTE POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

The following post approval training courses/workshops are available to Foster Carers and details can be found in the Foster Carer Training Catalogue:

- Managing conflict / challenging behaviour
- Promoting Positive Behaviour
- Making Sense of Children's Behaviour
- Safer Caring
- Attachment (Part 1 and 2)
- Impact of Domestic Violence on Children
- Keeping Foster Parents Trained and Supported (KEEP and KEEP Safe)
- Managing Complex Emotions
- Understanding and Dealing with Secondary Trauma

Information about these courses and workshops can be found in the Training catalogue.

BULLYING

What is bullying?

Bullying is a complex social behaviour and is difficult to define in a precise way. In Staffordshire we have adopted the Anti-bullying Alliance definition:

Bullying is a subjective experience and can take many forms, making it extremely difficult to define. Children, young people and adults can instigate bullying. The nature of bullying is changing and evolving as technology develops.

Bullying can take many forms including cyber-bullying, racist bullying and homophobic bullying.

Bullying usually fits into one of two categories either emotionally or physically harmful behaviour. This can include name calling, taunting, mocking, making offensive comments, kicking, hitting, pushing, taking belongings, text messaging, emailing, gossiping, excluding people from groups and spreading hurtful and untruthful rumours.

Bullying can take place in many settings e.g. on the way to and from or in school, in youth clubs, leisure facilities, in the street, in the park and at home.

Children in care or children with disabilities can be particularly vulnerable to bullying.

What can carers do?

You need to respond quickly and appropriately to any incident of bullying or where you suspect that a child in your care is being bullied. Children who are bullied may be unable to tell you but changes in behaviour e.g. reluctance to go to school or participate in regular activities may be an indication of this. Some children may become withdrawn or aggressive. There are many reasons for changes in behaviour however it is important that you consider bullying as a possibility.

You must inform the child's Social Worker if you suspect bullying so that action can be taken to address it.

When an incident of bullying has taken place you must inform the child's Social Worker and complete an Incident Notification Form and forward it to your Fostering Social Worker.

As Foster Carers you have a responsibility to challenge bullying and it is important for the safety and well being of all children that you have a clear expectation in your home that bullying will not be tolerated. Bullying will be addressed within both your Safer Caring Plan and the child's individual safe care plan and you will develop strategies for dealing with this.

KIDSCAPE produces very useful information and can be accessed through their website:

www.kidscape.org.uk/

CHILDREN WHO GO MISSING

Children in foster care are significantly more likely to run away than those living at home and when they do they can be particularly vulnerable. Children who run away are at a heightened risk of being victims of crime, sexually exploited, involved in substance misuse or of becoming involved in crime and disorder. Additionally, research shows that the level of risk to the individual child escalates with each episode they go missing and repeat episodes have been identified as a significant indicator of high risk to the child or young person.

When thinking about a child or young person going missing from home it is helpful to consider the factors that can lead to this behaviour. These are often divided into **push factors** and **pull factors**.

Push factors could be:-

- Problems at home - ranging from arguments with parents to long-term abuse or maltreatment.
- Family break-up - young people drawn into their parents' conflicts are less likely to do well at school and more likely to truant or to run away from home.
- Mental health problems - a disproportionate number of young people who run away from home have mental health problems.
- Bullying - children who are being severely bullied are more likely to run away from school and home or care.
- Teenage pregnancy - some young women run away or are forced to leave home because they become pregnant (or fear that they may be pregnant).

Pull Factors could be:-

1. Running to be near friends or family.
2. Grooming for potential sexual exploitation or child trafficking - young people may run away or go missing following grooming by adults who will seek to exploit them.

Every time a child or young person goes missing it should be considered to be serious. Some instances are considered to be **Unauthorised Absence**. This is usually where the child or young person is not considered to be at immediate risk. On other occasions the young person will be considered to be **Missing**. Children and Young people on remand or participating in the intensive fostering scheme may also be considered to be **Absconders**. The decision as to whether a child or young person is missing will be subject to a risk assessment. This will usually be undertaken by a social worker, possibly within the Emergency Duty team in consultation with you.

Factors that will inform the assessment of whether a child or young person is considered missing are:-

- The circumstances of the absence.
- The child or young person's care plan.
- The age of the child or young person
- The maturity of the child or young person.
- Any physical or cognitive disability of the child or young person.
- Any continuing or urgent need for the child or young person to have medication or other medical treatment.
- The legal status of the child or young person.
- Previous behaviour and history of the child or young person.
- Danger posed by the child to themselves or others.
- General vulnerability of the child or young person.
- The child or young person's disposition towards drug/substance abuse.
- Whether the child or young person is perceived as running to, or running from, someone or something.
- Any circumstances within the placement, say with carers or other residents that may be relevant to the absence.
- The risk of offending.
- The influence of peer groups, families or friends.
- Predatory influences on the child or young person. These may relate to others wanting to use the child or young person for crime, sex or drugs.
- Any known risk of abduction.
- Environmental factors including weather, time of year, community events or tensions.

The length of time needed before you should consider reporting a child or young person missing will vary according to all these factors. In some circumstances it will be appropriate to report them missing immediately whereas in others some time may pass before their absence gives cause for concern. Unless there is an immediate risk identified, and parents/carers are in a position to do so, they are expected to undertake the following basic measures before reporting a missing child/young person: NB: if parents/carers are unable to undertake the following e.g. they are the only adult at home/in the care setting etc. they should ensure that the call-taker is alerted to this.

- Search bedroom/house/grounds/outbuildings/vehicles;
- Ascertain if any clothing, cash, mobile phones and/or medication etc. are missing;
- Speak to any other people at the house who may know where they are;
- Contact known friends and relatives where the child may be;
- Visit locations that the child is known to go, if safe to do so;
- Check social media sites.

If a child or young person has been missing before this will not reduce the level of risk they are exposed to. A child or young person will always be considered missing after a **maximum of 6 hours** or if their whereabouts are unknown overnight. Once there is cause for concern you should contact the child's Social Worker, their Manager or Duty Officer, or, if outside office hours, EDS on 08456 042 886 and Police.

The Social Worker must notify the child's parents, unless there are reasons connected to the child's welfare making this inappropriate, or different arrangements are made in the Care Plan. **This is the responsibility of the Social Worker not the Foster Carers.** Once the assessment has been made if the child is considered to be, "missing", you will need to provide the following information if possible.

- A description of the child
- When the child was last seen and with whom
- A recent photograph (if available)
- Family addresses
- The name and address of the child's GP and dentist.
- Circumstances which increase the risk to the child.
- Any other relevant information known acquaintances and addresses frequented
- Any previous history of being missing and circumstances where found
- Mobile phone number of child or young person, email and bank account details (to help with tracking)

You should also contact the police to report the child missing. The contact number is **0300 1234455**. You should keep in contact with the child's social worker and police for the duration of the time the child is away to keep everyone informed.

You must keep a record of all episodes with detailed information recorded on individual contact sheets. You should inform the child's Social Worker and Fostering Social Worker and complete an Incident Notification Form and forward this to your Fostering Social Worker within 24 hours.

A monitoring form will be completed by the child's Social Worker for all episodes categorised as missing, absconded or unauthorised absence. The Social Worker will record details on the child's file, with a copy being placed on your file.

Within 72 hours of their return children will be offered an independent interview called a **Return Interview**. This will often be undertaken by their social worker.

Where a particular young person has been missing on a number of occasions (3 times in 90 days or 4 – 6 times in a year) a strategy meeting will be held to consider what action needs to be taken to keep them safe. These meetings may also be held where there have been fewer episodes of going missing if the risks to the young person are considered sufficiently significant.

Where children and young people are thought to be at risk of going missing, it is important that they are supported to understand the dangers and risks that this can cause. Both you and their social worker can be involved in doing this.

OVERNIGHT STAYS – SLEEPOVERS

Overnight stays with friends play an important part in some children's lives. It is important that children in foster care are able to experience this in the same way as their peers. Children in care should experience the same opportunities to stay overnight with friends, when carers consider the arrangement appropriate, in the same way as for their own children

There is no requirement for friends' parents to be CRB checked for overnight sleepovers.

Government guidance expects foster carers to make the same judgements, in giving or refusing permission on each occasion, as parents would normally make, based on a reasonable assessment of any known risks in staying in a particular household or in staying overnight. Carers are not required to refer this decision to the Department unless there are exceptional circumstances or where there are restrictions on overnight stays from a court order or are included in the child's Care Plan and Placement Plan.

Decisions on overnight stays should in most circumstances be delegated to Foster Carers and arrangements for such decisions written into the Placement Plan.

The guidance expects Foster Carers to make the same judgements in giving or refusing permission on each occasion as parents would normally make, based on reasonable assessment of any known risks in staying in a particular household or staying overnight.

Carers are expected to have contact details of the household, to make contact to confirm arrangements and ensure that the foster child has their contact details.

Whilst carers are not expected to seek permission from parents or Social Workers if children do have overnight stays, it is important to inform parents, if appropriate and the Social Worker that these have taken place.

HOLIDAYS

Taking holidays is part of family life and there is an expectation that if you are going away on holiday you will take foster children with you unless there are extenuating circumstances. It is expected that children will not miss school to go on holiday.

It is essential that you inform your Fostering Social Worker and the child's Social Worker well in advance of any holidays. If the child is 'accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 89,' you will need the consent of the birth parents and anyone else that holds parental responsibility, whether the holiday is in this country or abroad.

If you plan to go abroad and the child needs a passport you need to discuss this with the child's Social Worker well in advance of the date to allow sufficient time for this to be processed. You will need to have a letter signed by a Senior Manager giving permission for the child to leave the country.

It is important that you discuss your holiday plans with foster children, to prepare them for going away and to reassure them that, where appropriate, they will be able to keep contact with their parents.

A set Holiday Allowance is paid annually and is provided to assist you in taking the child on holiday. If you are not going on holiday you must talk to your fostering social worker about how the money will be used to provide activities, outings or events for the child during the summer holidays. In situations where no additional activities are provided the holiday allowance will be recouped.

If you experience problems on holidays please call the child's Social Worker and EDS if out of office hours.

There may be situations when it is not possible to take foster children with you on holiday. You must discuss this with your Fostering Social Worker and the child's Social Worker well in advance so that alternative arrangements can be made.

EDUCATION

Education is vital for all children to improve their life chances and as Foster Carers you play an important role.

As a result of their early life experiences many children in foster care may not have received a consistent and positive educational experience. As a carer you will need to ensure that children attend school regularly and that you become involved in school e.g. attending parent's evenings and other events, offer significant support to the child with school work and at times act as an advocate.

You play a vital role in helping children and young people to achieve their potential in all areas of education, including achieving national standards (SATS) and gaining qualifications.

PERSONAL EDUCATION PLAN

All children living in foster care will have a **Personal Education Plan (PEP)**. The PEP will ensure that the child whom you are responsible for will be receiving the best possible education available to them.

When a child comes to live with you, if the child is of compulsory school age and they are already in care - you should ask for a copy of the current PEP or PEP Review for the child – or ask for an expected date when the PEP is to take place.

For younger children at the Foundation Stage - there is the Early Years Personal Education Plan - for pre-school children attending a registered child care provision, continuing to the end of the Reception Year in school, the process is the same.

If the child or young person has not been in care before they will require a PEP within 10 days (14 school days) of becoming cared for (to inform the 28 day statutory review) and the PEP should be reviewed regularly as outlined below;

- First PEP within 10 days (14 school days) to inform 28 day statutory review.
- PEP review in time to inform 4 month statutory review.
- PEP review – thereafter – 6 monthly minimum to inform statutory reviews.

Where there are significant changes to a child's schooling e.g. change of school, change of placement or change of key stage the full PEP rather than the PEP review should be undertaken. The child or young person's Social Worker should initiate the PEP process and inform the Designated Teacher for Children in Care in the child's school that the child or young person is in care. The Social Worker should arrange the PEP meeting and set a date with the Designated Teacher. As the child's foster carer you should be invited to the PEP. It is important that you attend.

As Foster Carers you have a huge opportunity to make the difference with regard to PEPs. You need to be driving them in the sense that you ask to see PEPs and ask the Social Worker for the date of the next PEP for the child or young person in your care.

VIRTUAL SCHOOL

The virtual school has been set up to support schools and social workers in achieving the best possible educational outcomes for looked after children. It is made up of a headteacher and 4 Education Co-ordinators providing support across the county (contact details at the front of the handbook). They work closely with schools, offer advice and training to foster carers and monitor the educational progress of Staffordshire's looked after children. They also provide some direct educational mentoring in schools through the Education Mentors. Education Co-ordinators can be contacted to give support and advice including around funding available to support the education of looked after children.

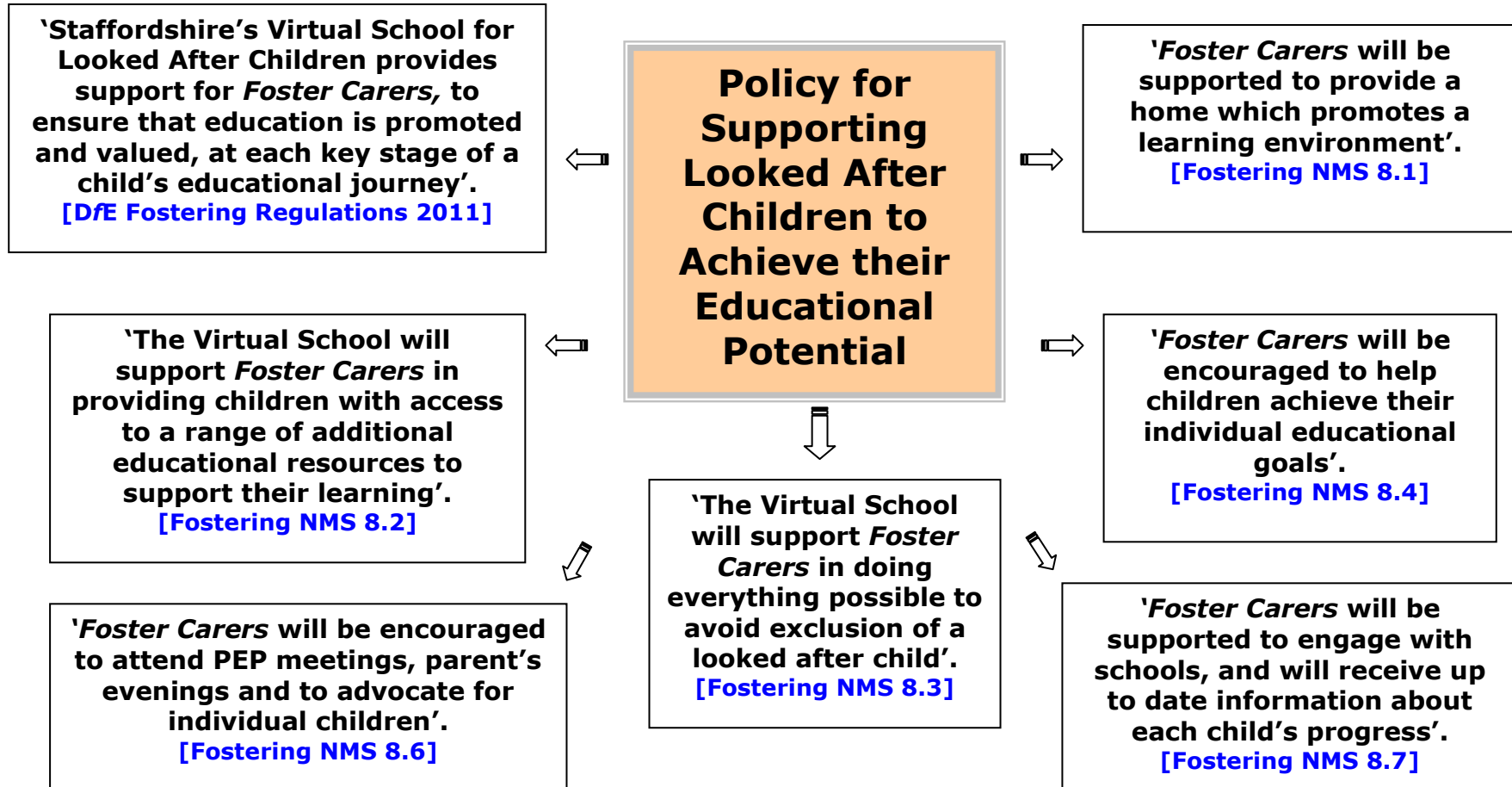
More Information can be found on

www.education.staffordshire.gov.uk

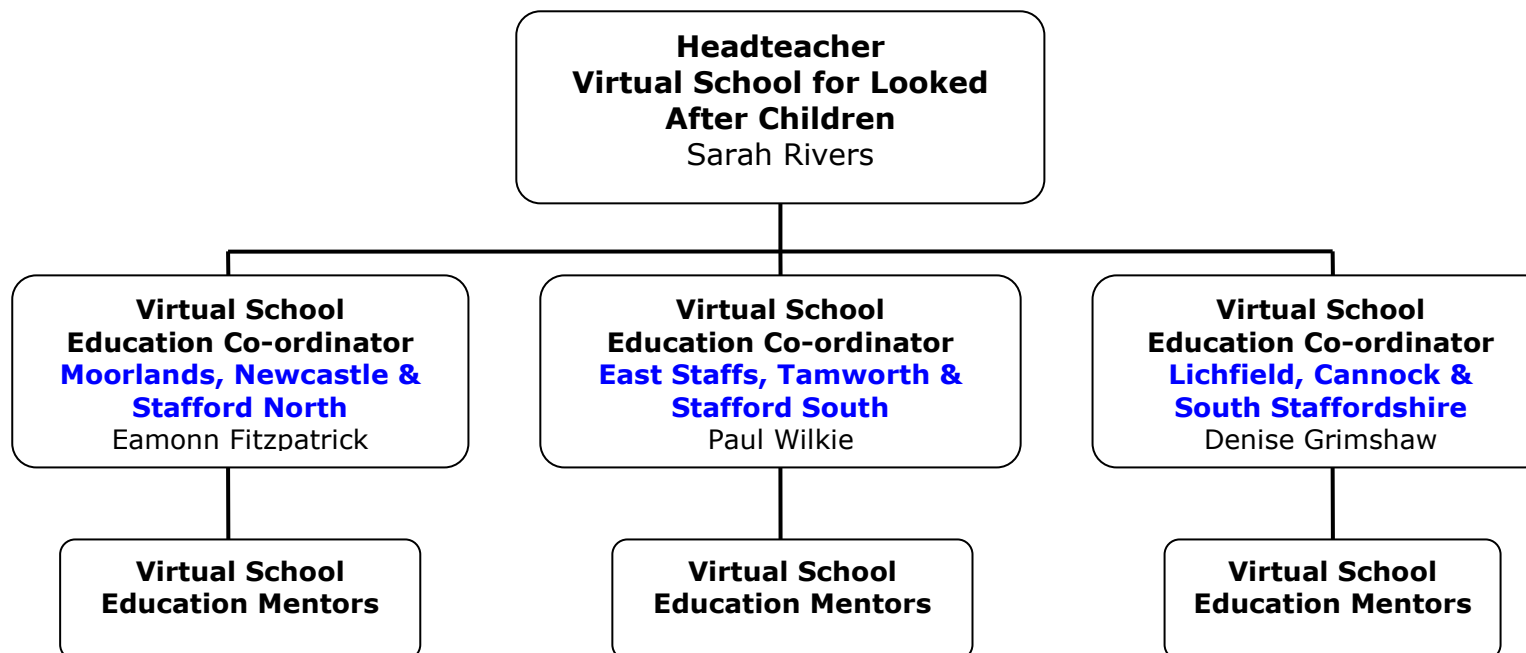
The training catalogue offers a number of courses to help carers achieve positive learning and development outcomes for children and young people.

The Fostering Service is currently working with the Head teacher of the Virtual School to develop a dedicated special interest group for foster carers to help promote children's learning outcomes. This group links to Virtual School arrangements. You can contact the Recruitment & training Team for more information on 01785 895363 or contact the Virtual Head Teacher directly on 01785 845195.

Staffordshire Virtual School for Looked After Children



“Staffordshire is committed to achieving the best possible educational outcomes for its looked after children. Schools are at the heart of providing an education for them that will unlock a brighter future. The Virtual School supports foster carers to achieve the best possible outcomes for Looked After Children - together we can make a difference”.



Headteacher:
christopher.tyler@staffordshire.gov.uk 01785 85 4195

Education Co-ordinators:
eamonn.fitzpatrick@staffordshire.gov.uk 01782 297524
paul.wilkie@staffordshire.gov.uk 01283 239761
denise.grimshaw@staffordshire.gov.uk 01543 512056

Visit our webpage: www.education.staffordshire.gov.uk/lookedafterchildren

PARENT PARTNERSHIP

Staffordshire Parent Partnership Service provides services to children with Special Educational Needs. These include:-

- Helpline support with educational issues
- Support at meetings and home visits where appropriate
- Access to a trained Independent Parental Supporter
- Leaflets and parent packs on a variety of topics
- Books and resources available to borrow
- A termly newsletter full of useful information
- Regular coffee mornings around the county
- Support if a child is excluded from school
- Parent training events through our Skillshare project funded by the Big Lottery Fund.

Their contact details are:

Telephone: 01785 356921

Email:

spps@staffordshire.gov.uk

Website:

www.staffordshire.gov.uk/spps

OTHER EDUCATION

Outside of school you can take children to the library, encourage them to choose their own books, read with and to them as part of your routine. Help them with maths and basic subjects, such as telling the time, and the use of money. Above all make learning fun! Consideration should also be given to the use of computers and the internet- see pages 68-72.

EMPLOYMENT OF CHILDREN

According to national legislation, a child is someone who is of compulsory school age. This means until the last Friday in June of year 11 (at school) if they are 16 years of age or will be before the end of August that year, they can not be employed in the following instances

- Where the child is under 14 years of age
- During school hours on school days
- For more than two hours on school days
- Before 7am or after 7pm any day
- For more than 2 hours on a Sunday
- In a bar or betting shop
- Where the job requires them to lift, carry or move heavy objects that could cause injury, or to use “dangerous machinery”
- In any industrial undertaking, vessel, ship or boat (seek further advice here as the rules are complex)

The law does cover children “assisting in a trade or occupation carried on for profit” even if they are not paid e.g. a child helping out in the family business. Children should not work in petrol stations and there are separate rules governing the employment of children in entertainment.

Children may be employed by their parents in a limited range of farming tasks. Your Local Authority will also operate bye-laws which vary from area to area. These may impose extra restrictions. Check with your local authority (Education Welfare Department) for further advice. An employer who ignores Local Authority by-laws is guilty of a criminal offence.

Young People under School Leaving Age

The law generally states the following:

Age	Work Levels Allowed
Under 14 yrs	Not allowed to work (other than occasional light agricultural work for parents).
Age 14 years	<p>Light work only which is specifically permitted by the Local Authority and of a kind which is not prohibited</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural work • Newspaper delivery • Work in a shop, café, salon, office • Domestic work in hotels • Riding stables work • Car wash by hand in a private residential setting

Prohibited employment usually includes:

- Cinemas, discos, clubs, pubs, betting offices, kitchen, fairgrounds, arcades, slaughterhouses, butchers
- Factories, mines, construction, transport, manufacturing, quarries
- Selling/delivery milk, alcohol, fuel, oils
- Refuse collection
- Work involving exposure to adult material
- Telephone sales
- Work at heights: (The Work at Height Regulations 2005 states that no one should be working where there is a risk of a fall liable to cause personal injury)
- Handling dangerous loads, cleaning machinery, exposure to chemicals
- Door to door selling, canvassing, money collection
- Personal care e.g. residential homes (unless under adult supervision)
- Street trading (may be allowed for those 14 year olds employed by parents)
- Any work at night

Day Type	Eligible Hours
Any day	No work before 7am or after 7pm
School days	No work during school hours/before end one hours work before school (only certain areas – check by-laws) No more than two hours per day
Saturdays	No more than 5hrs total (under 15 years) No more than 8hrs total (15 years or more)
Sundays	No more than 2hrs total
School holidays	No more than 5hrs total per day (under 15 years) No more than 8hrs total per day (15 years or more) No more than 25 hrs total per week (under 15 years) No more than 35 hrs total per week (15 years or more)
Rest entitlement	Breaks No more than 4hrs without a rest break of at least one hour
Holidays entitlement	Two weeks at least which must be work and school free
ALWAYS CHECK LOCAL BY-LAWS FOR ADDITIONAL RESTRICTIONS	

Sixth Formers/Students and Young Workers 16-18 Years

In general, this group of young people are subject to National Employment Legislation with some exceptions:-

- Special Health & Safety requirements
- Minimum 30 minute rest breaks (work over 4.5 hours)
- 2 days off per week, 12 hrs consecutive rest per day
- Health and capabilities assessment before undertaking night work
- Excluded from universal minimum wages
- Redundancy rights only applicable after 2 years continuous employment

For further access to guidance on the employment of children you can view the following website information

www.education.gov.uk/publications

PRESERVING MEMORIES

For many children in foster care their memories are very important and may be all they have to remind them of the past. It is important that information about a child is kept safe and treated with great respect, to prevent it from being lost.

Some children return to their birth families and others move on to permanent families (usually adoptive). You need to help a child to remember the time spent with you and your family.

From the point a child comes to you it is important that you set up a 'memory box' and start to collect items such as photographs (it is a good idea to put dates on photographs), drawings, school reports, significant outings/souvenirs etc.

The Family and Friends Team can offer specialist advice for Family and Friends Carers who may have specific needs around life story work and preserving memories.

Life books can help children understand their past and to move forward. Foster carers will need to collect important information which will be passed on to the Child's Social Worker who will be responsible for preparing the child. In some instances you could be involved in direct work with the child and you will be offered guidance on an individual basis.

Life work needs to go at the child's pace as it can be distressing for some children.

There are Post Approval courses which address preserving memories and helping children to move on.

MOVING ON

A child's placement may end for a variety of reasons:

- (a) return home to family
- (b) move to another placement, including adoptive family, or long term fostering or special guardianship
- (c) move to independence
- (d) placement disruption

The aim of all involved is for children to move on in a planned and positive way with minimum disruption to the child. You may be involved in a variety of meetings such as life appreciation meetings, introduction planning meetings, maintenance and disruption meetings.

If children are moving on to permanent placements i.e. adoption or long term foster care you will play a key role in the process of introducing the child to a new family. This will involve the carers spending time in your home getting to know the child.

A child may have to move, for a variety of reasons, before the care plan has been achieved. Where it is identified that the foster placement is under pressure and may come to an unplanned end, a **Maintenance Meeting** will be held to explore the strengths and difficulties of the placement along with the supports that are in place. This meeting should be held at an early stage in the placement getting into difficulty in order that supports can be identified and put in place promptly. The meeting will also explore what would assist in maintaining the placement. Over the course of a placement there may be a number of these meetings held. It is often possible to work through the difficulties and, with additional supports, continue the placement to a positive conclusion. Wherever possible supports should be identified to enable a child to move on from you in a planned and positive way. The maintenance meeting will usually be held in your home. It will involve yourself, your Fostering Social Worker and the child's social worker. It can be chaired by either a Senior Practitioner or a

Team Manager in the Fostering Service. It is sometimes helpful if the young person participates in the meeting or if others involved such as SUSTAIN are also invited. It is expected that a maintenance meeting will have taken place prior to any unplanned move for a child unless there are exceptional reasons why this has not been possible.

Where it has not been possible to identify supports to maintain a placement a **Disruption Meeting** will be held. In some circumstance, a disruption meeting can occur immediately after a maintenance meeting. The disruption meeting will consider the reasons why a placement has come to an unplanned end along with planning for how the child will be moved to a new placement. Reflections on the ending will inform future planning for both the young person and the carers.

Do share any concerns you may have about the placement with your Fostering Social Worker and the Child's Social Worker at an early stage. This may avoid an unplanned ending.

If you are caring for a young person preparing for independence you will be involved with the Throughcare Teams who are providing leaving care services for young people who leave care.

THROUGHCHARE TEAMS

Services for young people leaving care are integrated into the Throughcare Teams. The purpose of these services is to offer preparation and support to young people who are leaving care, to ensure that they have the skills to live independently in the community.

When a young person in care reaches the age of 16 they will be allocated a Personal Advisor from the Throughcare team to begin to consider their Pathway Plan. As part of this planning they will work with the young person and you to identify the needs of the young person to be addressed to prepare them for independence. The Pathway Plan must be in place by the time the young person is 16 years & 3 months. This plan is reviewed every 6 months and will be in place until they reach the age of 21 years or up to 25 if they are in education at 21.

The Pathway Plan details the young person's current position and long term aims in relation to personal support; accommodation; education & training; employment; family & social relationships; practical & other skills; financial support; health needs and will develop a contingency plan.

The role of the Personal Advisor is to work with key professionals; build a network of support for the young person; monitor progress through close discussion with the young person; link them to Staffordshire Young People's Service; take responsibility for reviewing the Pathway Plan and help them open a bank account if required.

As a Foster Carer you play a vital role in the preparation of a young person for independence. This begins at an early age, encouraging children to acquire age appropriate skills, in preparation for them to take on responsibility for budgeting, cooking, shopping, cleaning etc when they leave care.

In addition to the work undertaken by the local Throughcare teams, support is also offered by the **Central Throughcare Team**. This team is based in Stafford but operates throughout the county (contact details are in the front of this handbook) The team provides a specialist service to assist Social Workers and Personal Advisors to improve outcomes for care leavers. It includes specialists in employment, welfare benefits and youth inclusion as well as providing social work support to unaccompanied asylum seeking children. The team also have extensive knowledge of accommodation options for care leavers.

The central throughcare team are also responsible for distributing a CD rom entitled, **“Get Ready for Adult Life”**. This is a selection of questions and exercises that young people can work through independently or with the support of yourselves and their PA to prepare them for moving towards independence.

The Leaving Care training course provides a wide range of information about provision for young people leaving care. All Foster Carers involved with young people aged 14+ will be expected to attend this course.

Young people cannot legally remain “looked after” beyond their 18th birthday and so cannot remain in foster care past that date. Arrangements can, however, be made for them to remain with their foster carers after they have turned 18. This would be on the basis of a Supported Accommodation Placement. This will be considered if:-

- They were in foster care or a Supported Accommodation Placement at age 16 /17
- They have asked to remain with their carers past 18
- Their pathway plan recommend that it is appropriate for them to do so
- They are continuing education or undertaking vocational training/apprenticeship or plan to go to University

If young people are in employment their circumstances will be assessed individually.

Where plans to remain in placement are made these should be based upon the young person’s assessed needs and vulnerability. The legal status of the placement will change and there will also need to be alterations in the nature of the care provided to them. Carers providing support to young people over 18 will be asked to do so on the basis that they are supporting their transition into adulthood. They will be asked to enable them to develop independence skills and to practice these skills.

If there is a proposal for young people to remain in placement the carers will be assessed by the Supported Accommodation Officer 4 months prior to the young person’s 18th birthday. Who will meet with the carers, their fostering social worker and the young person’s PA. If the foster carer will cease fostering on continuing the placement, support for this will transfer to the Supported Accommodation Officer.

There will be an alteration of funding for a placement post 18. The young person will be offered welfare benefits advice. They will then be asked to pay the carer housing benefit plus an element from any other benefits of £26.67 per week. These payments will be topped up to make the total received £180.60. This will apply to all placements regardless of the carers’ payment for skills level.

Transitions arrangements for some young people with disabilities will be different as they may become eligible for support from adults services. In some circumstances this can result in them being eligible for adult placements. If you feel this may apply to the young person you are caring for please discuss with the child’s social worker as well as your Fostering Social Worker.

NYAS (NATIONAL YOUTH ADVOCACY SERVICES)

As you may be aware we tendered the Children & Young People Advocacy Service and now have a new provider - the National Youth Advocacy Service which will provide a service across Staffordshire & Stoke-on-Trent.

The NYAS runs a national advocacy helpline for the following groups:

- Looked After Children
- Children with emotional wellbeing/mental health issues (*Staffordshire only*)
- Children subject to a Child Protection Plan
- Children & young people with Learning Disabilities
- Children & young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

This may, on occasion, include children and young people living/placed outside the Staffordshire County and Stoke-on-Trent City Council boundaries. The Service will be available to children and young people from the above groups between the ages of 5 – 18 years, and up to the age of 25 for those with SEND or for Care Leavers. The Service will also deliver a small additional element of an **Independent Visitor** programme for children and young people from Stoke-on-Trent.

You can contact NYAS in the following ways:

- **Freephone Helpline (some mobile networks may charge):** 0808 808 1001 (9am-8pm Monday - Friday & 10am-4pm Saturday)
- **Chat Room:** www.nyas.net
- **Email:** help@nyas.net
- **Writing:** Write NYAS Freepost on an envelope

FOSTER CARERS WISHING TO ADOPT CHILDREN IN PLACEMENT

For some children in foster care it can be a positive outcome to be adopted by their foster carers. Staffordshire supports the application of foster carers to become adopters for fostered children. Should you wish to be considered as an adopter for a child in your care you should discuss this with both the child's social worker and your Fostering Social Worker. Once the child's plan has been confirmed you can then formally notify the department of your wish to be considered in writing. You will then be assessed in relation to your suitability to become an adopter for that child.

FOSTER CARERS WISHING TO BECOME SPECIAL GUARDIANS

For some children in foster care it can be a positive outcome for foster carers to take on special guardianship. If you are interested in becoming the special guardian of a child in your care, you should discuss this with your Fostering Social worker and the child's social worker. The social workers can share with you information about the consequences of this change of status and the supports that you might be able to access under Special Guardianship. Should this plan be pursued the Fostering Service will undertake a Special Guardianship assessment and support you through the court process.

STAFFORDSHIRE YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE (SYPS)

SYPS work with young people aged 13-19 and up to 25 years for young people with learning difficulties or disabilities. They offer information, advice or guidance to help a young person

choose options for study and careers. They will also offer support with accessing personal development opportunities e.g. sport, art or voluntary work.

SYPS Advisors will also support you by keeping you up to date with the changing world of education, training and employment.

You can contact SYPS on 01785 356656 or e-mail youth@staffordshire.gov.uk for advice or information

STAFFORDSHIRE YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE

The Youth Offending Service is part of Staffordshire Young People's Service within Families First. It is made up of social workers, Police, Probation & Health. Its roles are:

- Look after the interests of all young people between the ages of 10-17 who are involved with the criminal justice system.
- Undertake restorative justice programmes with young people convicted of offences.
- Undertake programmes to reduce youth offending
- Supervise court orders and write reports for courts
- Provide an appropriate adult for police interviews and courts where necessary

The Youth Offending Service work closely with Intensive Interventions in relation to the provision of Foster Placements both for those children remanded to the care of the Local Authority via the Youth Courts and those children placed in the Intensive Fostering Scheme as part of their sentence. (More information about these schemes can be found in Section 8 of this handbook)

If your foster child is involved with the police you must notify their Social Worker and your Fostering Social Worker. If it happens out of office hours you should let EDS know. **At no time must you act as an appropriate adult** in an interview situation as this role requires training and will be undertaken either by a worker from the Youth Offending Service or the EDS worker.

END OF PLACEMENT REPORTS

When a placement ends you and the child's social worker will be asked to complete questionnaires about how the placement has gone. This can provide important information about how you, your Fostering Social Worker and the child's social worker have worked together to meet the needs of a child and to achieve the care plan.

PROMOTING EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The Fostering Service aims to 'ensure that children feel secure in their placements with carers appropriately trained, supported and capable of providing quality care to meet their needs and maximise their life chances. This will include ensuring that the child has a secure identity, making the most of educational opportunities as well as ensuring the child is healthy, emotionally well and enjoys a network of social relationships within which the child feels valued'.

To be able to do this Foster Carers need to build on the foundation training provided by the Introduction to Fostering Course which introduced you to the importance of a child or young person developing a positive sense of identity and the impact of prejudice, unfair discrimination and racism on children in the care system.

All Foster Carers are required to undertake the Core Training Programme modules ‘Valuing Diversity’ and “Children with Additional Needs”. “Valuing Diversity” enables foster carers to develop their understanding of the different types of prejudice and discrimination which can affect children and young people. It will develop your understanding of why it is important to provide care which respects and preserves each child’s ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background and will help foster carers to demonstrate how they can support and encourage children and young people to develop skills to deal with discrimination, enhance self worth and make a positive contribution. “Children with Additional Needs” provides Foster Carers with an understanding of the needs of children with disabilities, the similarities and differences between these and the needs of children without disabilities and the social model of disability. Foster carers development needs can be met further by attending continuous professional development modules such as “*Identity*”, ‘Sexuality Awareness’, “Introduction to Special Educational Needs”, “Introduction to Autism” and “Introduction to Epilepsy”

It is vitally important that all foster carers are able to recognise and challenge prejudice and discrimination and that foster carers can confidently support children and young people who experience prejudice and discrimination and are able to help them to develop their own skills to deal with discrimination. Foster carers need to be confident about accessing advice and support to ensure that they are able to meet the care needs of a child or young person who has a different racial, cultural or religious background to their own. A child’s needs should be clearly identified within their Care Plan and The Foster Placement Plan and Agreement should identify any support you need. This should be regularly reviewed with your Fostering Social Worker in supervision.

For more information about equality and diversity follow these links

Staffordshire County Council Equality and Diversity
www.staffordshire.gov.uk/community/equalopportunities

Equality and Human Rights Commission
www.equalityhumanrights.com

Office for the Children’s Rights Director for England (CRD)
www.rights4me.org

Also further information can also be found on Staffordshire’s Foster Carers Forum,
www.care4child.org

THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE’S VOICE PROJECT

The Children and Young People’s Voice Project ensure that young people who are looked after by Staffordshire County Council are consulted on various projects and issues relating to them and the wider community. We encourage young people to fully participate in current initiatives which affect both them as young people looked after and individually.

The Team covers many areas of work including:

- Young Peoples Forums
- Children in Care Council
- Young people's interview panels
- Workshops for young people/professionals

- Partnership working with local agencies
- Consult8

Young People's Forums

The Children and Young People's Voice Project runs young people's groups across Staffordshire called the Young People's Forums. All looked after young people aged 10 years and over can attend their local Forum. The groups are held monthly in various venues including youth and community buildings.

Children in Care Council

The Children in Care Council is made up of 10 young people who meet once a month to look at the Care Matters agenda. The group works alongside the Corporate Parenting Panel to involve young people in planning and developing services and their care.

Consult8

Consult8 is Staffordshire's way of consulting with children and young people who are in care and who live in residential units, foster care and independent placements. The Consult8 Facilitator visits young people and goes through a set of questions which are linked with the five 'Every Child Matters' Outcomes. Consult8 brings attention to issues surrounding care, health, education, leisure, and equality and diversity. Any issues or concerns raised are immediately followed up and resolved by a Social Worker, Team Manager or Head of Service. Positive feedback is shared with staff and/or carers.

If you want more information please contact 01785 253878 or email cvp@staffordshire.gov.uk

NSPCC ADVOCACY SERVICE

The NSPCC in Staffordshire run an independent advocacy service for all children in care. This service offers advice, information and representation for all looked after children, in accordance with legislation. They offer support to children ensuring that their wishes and feelings in respect of decisions that effect them are heard and taken into consideration. If a child requests representatives from the NSPCC are able to attend their statutory reviews and meetings. Anyone can make a referral on behalf of a child but the service would not become involved unless the child was in agreement with this. A leaflet about this service can be found in the U Pack provided to the child when they come into care.

NSPCC can be contacted on 0808 800 5000

SECTION FOUR

SAFEGUARDING

Safeguarding children and young people in your care will have many aspects. Several of these are covered elsewhere in this handbook. These include:-

Safer Caring Guidance and Safer Caring plans

Health and Safety

Keeping safe on the internet

Safeguarding children who go missing from care

Risk assessments and risk and matching documentation

Other safeguarding issues are covered in this section.

PROTECTING CHILDREN & ADULTS

Many of the children you will care for have experienced abuse or neglect and all will feel sadness and loss at leaving their families, whatever the circumstances. This can make them very vulnerable to further abuse and as a Foster Carer you have a responsibility to protect a child whilst they are in your care.

If you have reason to be worried or concerned about a foster child, it is your duty to share it with the Child's Social Worker and your Fostering Social Worker.

If the Child's Social Worker is not available, ask to speak to a Duty Social Worker or a Team Manager. If out of office hours contact the Emergency Duty Service.

You must **always** report the following immediately:

If a child:

- Has bruises or scratches with no obvious explanation
- Has an accident whilst in your care
- Is accidentally hurt by you or someone in your household
- Complains that somebody has hurt or threatened them, including bullying
- Goes missing

You will have developed a **Safe Caring Plan** (see page 85) in which you have set out how you and your family will protect everyone in your household to minimise risk and the potential for an allegation. This plan is updated with every new placement in conjunction with the child's **individual safe care plan**).

Remember to record all incidents in detail on the day they have happened so that you can give details to anyone who requires them. There are some rare occasions when your written records may be requested by the police or by a court.

DISCLOSURES

As a foster carer, it is likely that at some time a child in your care may disclose information about what has happened to them either to you or a member of your support network.

If a child does disclose information to you there are some important things to remember:

- Never prompt the child or ask questions. Disclosures are a source of evidence;
- Let them say everything they have to say in a caring environment;
- Comfort the child if they are distressed;
- Do not be judgmental;
- Record the details as soon as possible. Keep recording factual;
- Reassure the child that they have done the right thing;
- As soon as it is possible report the disclosure to the child's social worker and your fostering social worker;
- A foster carer should maintain normal family routine

ALLEGATIONS AGAINST FOSTER CARERS

It is recognised by the department that carers are increasingly required to look after particularly vulnerable children who can present difficulties for their carer. Some of these children may make an allegation against their carer or anyone else in the household.

An allegation is where a carer is accused of neglecting a child; sexual abuse; emotional abuse or physical abuse. Allegations of this nature, as defined under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989, are investigated under child protection procedures and can be made against a carer, or any member of their household, concerning any child within that household. This can include children who are currently or have been previously fostered and indeed the carer's own children. Allegations may originate from a number of sources, including, schools, foster children, parents, neighbours and the Internet.

The allegations that can be made against people who work with children (including foster carers) are listed as:

- Harmed or may have harmed a child
- Has committed a criminal offence against or related to a child
- Behaved towards a child or children in a way that indicates unsuitability to work with/care for children

There is a difference between **allegations** and **general concerns**. If an allegation is made and the decision is that it will be treated as a concern rather than an allegation, issues will be dealt with by the social worker for the child and the Fostering Social Worker rather than an investigation taking place under child protection procedures.

INVESTIGATION PROCESS

When information regarding an allegation is received the following procedure will be followed.

A discussion (known procedurally as a '**strategy discussion**') will take place between the fostering service, the children's team and the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) who is located in the First Response Team. The information is assessed and a decision is then reached (regarding any further action, if any, required) by the professionals involved based on the nature and seriousness of the allegation.

If it is decided at this stage that there is sufficient concern to instigate child protection procedures, information gathering will commence and the outcomes shared at a **strategy meeting** to which carers are not invited. This meeting will include the police and other agencies and should be held within 2 working days. The meeting is chaired by a County Manager or may be delegated to a team manager.

The meeting will decide if further investigation is required and if so whether it will be done jointly with the police or as a 'single agency investigation' by the children's team. A Social Worker independent to the case will be identified to conduct the investigation unless there is good reason why it should be done by the Child's Social Worker.

The strategy meeting will also consider what, if any, are the risks to other children in the household, including your own children. In situations where a carer works with or is involved with groups of children the meeting must also consider whether any risk is posed to them. Only if there is any risk to those children will the employer or organisation be informed about the allegation.

Once this meeting has taken place the investigation can start. **If the Police are not involved** you will immediately be informed of the allegation, the process that will be followed and this will be confirmed to you in writing. You will also be given a copy of the procedure for dealing with allegations by your Fostering Social Worker. **If the Police are involved**, however, we may not be able to tell you about the allegation until they have conducted their interviews.

Further meetings may take place to consider the findings of the investigation and at any point if there is evidence to show that the allegation is false the investigation can be ended and the allegation withdrawn.

When all the investigations have been completed a '**resolution meeting**' will take place. This should take place within two weeks of the conclusion of the investigation unless there are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay.

In general terms there are three potential outcomes to any investigatory process:

- The allegation is **Substantiated** – the range of concluding actions may include criminal prosecution, report for the Foster/Adoption and Permanency Panel, referral to the Independent Safeguarding Authority. Occasionally allegations may be substantiated but the assessed level of risk allows less formal concluding activity.
- The allegation is **Unfounded** - The term 'unfounded' means that there is no evidence or proper basis which supports the allegation being made, or there is evidence to prove that the allegation is untrue. There is the possibility that the allegation may be malicious (see below), but it might also indicate that the person making the allegation had misinterpreted the incident or was mistaken about what he/she saw, or was not aware of all the circumstances.

- The allegation is **Unsubstantiated** - An unsubstantiated allegation means that there is insufficient identifiable evidence to prove or disprove the allegation. The term, therefore, does not imply guilt or innocence. In these situations it will necessary for careful professional judgments to be made on 'the balance of probabilities'

The term 'malicious' implies that an allegation, either wholly or in part, has been made with a deliberate intent to deceive or cause harm to the person subject to the allegation. For an allegation to be classified as malicious, it will be necessary to have evidence to prove the intention to cause harm. Care should be taken in dealing with such allegations as some facts may not be wholly untrue. Where there can be sufficient confidence to conclude that an allegation has been made with malice then it is appropriate for the LADO to refer the matter to the Police for their consideration.

Where the allegation is either substantiated or unsubstantiated the fostering/adoption service shall make an assessment of the situation with regards to the carer's continued suitability to care for a child or children. Where there are concerns regarding suitability a report must be presented to the respective panel to review and make recommendation about future status.

SUITABILITY PROCESS

The Foster Panel must consider a report of the allegation investigation no later than 3 months after the date of the resolution meeting. The Foster Carers will have received this report at least 4 weeks prior to the panel meeting to enable comments to be made and for them to attend panel if they choose.

Panel can recommend the following options:

- Continue as approved
- Change of approval
- Re-assessment of carers
- No longer suitable to foster

If the outcome is 'no longer suitable to foster' and the Agency Decision Maker agrees with that recommendation the carers will be notified and given 28 days to make representation. This can be done in one of two ways:

- Either through application to the Independent Review Mechanism for a review of decision (fostering agency then has to consider this review information when making the final recommendation)
- or
- You may make representation to the foster panel with information provided by yourselves for them to consider.

See page 62-63

SUPPORT FROM FOSTERING SERVICE

The Fostering Service understands that carers naturally feel anxious when an allegation is made. Your Fostering Social Worker is there to offer you support throughout the process. They will not, however, be able to comment on the nature of the allegation, or say that they believe your description of events. What the Fostering Social Worker can do is to listen to your feelings and concerns and keep in regular contact. They will keep you informed of progress of the investigation as far as possible and also try to ensure that your views are represented.

The Fostering Social Worker's first priority is always the welfare of the child and information shared by carers will be recorded and placed on file.

INDEPENDENT SUPPORT

The Department has contracted Fostering Network to offer independent advice and mediation to Staffordshire foster carers. Their Advice & Mediation worker can support you through the allegations process and be available to attend foster panel if requested.

Bethan Houston can be contacted on 01905 622459 or via e-mail at bethan.houston@fostering.net

Fostering Network also operates a Foster Carers' advice line called Fosterline on 0800 040 7675

You may wish to talk through the allegation with a trusted friend or fostering colleague but choose carefully as there may be implications for confidentiality.

The making of an allegation is traumatic for all concerned and you will feel a wide range of emotions. You may wish to seek medical advice which could include counselling.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Following the strategy meeting where a decision has been made to either remove any foster children or where there are no children in placement and the household has been placed on hold, the Foster Carer will be paid the fee element of Payments for Skills only for the suspended placement/s. This will continue to be paid until the resolution meeting has made a decision about the return of the child or continuation of fostering.

In circumstances where future fostering is to be decided by the Foster Panel the fee element will be paid until the Agency Decision Maker has made their decision. If the foster carer makes further representation to either the Fostering Service or the Independent Review Mechanism the fee element will continue to be paid until the conclusion of the process is reached.

CONCLUSION

As a Fostering Service our priority is to protect children in care and those carers who look after them. It is not possible to eliminate all risk but by offering good support, supervision and training to carers, and developing comprehensive Safer Caring Plans, the risks can be reduced. However, when an allegation is made the affects can be devastating for all those concerned, irrespective of how long they may have fostered.

There is further information about the allegations process in the Good Practice Guide included in this handbook.

It is expected that you discuss the allegations procedure with your Fostering Social Worker and also arrange to attend the Safer Caring training course.

SECTION FIVE

MEDICAL MATTERS

As part of the five outcomes, be healthy, we suggest carers adopt a healthy lifestyle with a balanced diet and regular exercise.

As part of the Core Training - Foundations to Fostering you must attend training on basic first aid, this must be reviewed every three years. Information can be found in the training catalogue.

Useful hints tips, recipes and more can be found at the [Change4life website](#)

It is advisable that you are immunised against Hepatitis B, which is available to you through your GP.

The County Council does have an infection control policy relating to blood borne diseases, you can access this policy and other related policies on the Foster Carers Forum website.

It is essential prior to fostering any child that you are fully informed about the child's health, including allergies, and any medical problems. This should be detailed in the Placement Plan and updated in the review health assessments and at the Child's Reviews.

CONSENT TO TREATMENT

Make sure that you have a signed copy of the Placement Plan which gives delegated consent to you to seek medical treatment for your foster child. Please be aware each child placed will need to have an initial health assessment within the first month of placement, (paperwork should be provided by the child's social worker) this is then reviewed every 6 months for under fives and annually for older children. Where older children feel a medical is not appropriate for them, they are able to access the Looked After Children's nurse for an individual consultation in their placement.

Any young person aged 16+ is able to seek medical advice & treatment without the consent of parents, Foster Carers or Social Workers. This also applies to any young person under the age of 16, who is deemed able or have sufficient understanding of what is proposed.

MEDICATION GUIDANCE

Any medication prescribed by the child's doctor must be in the original container and clearly labelled with the child's name and dosage. It must be stored securely. It may be appropriate for the child's individual safe care plan to include details about storage and disposal.

Medication must be administered in accordance with the GP/Pharmacist's instructions and recorded on the Medication Record. There are two parts to the Medication record – one for prescribed medication (SW145) and another for over the counter (or homely) medication such as Calpol, paracetamol etc. (SW 146) If a mistake occurs which could have a major impact on the child's health, medical advice must be sought immediately and the Child's Social Worker informed.

Your Fostering Social Worker will discuss the medication records with you at each supervision session. Medication records need to be completed for each child placed who receive medication.

All health information recorded for the foster child will need to go to new carers or social workers when the child leaves.

Please note Disability Short Breaks Carers will need to discuss medication policy in more detail with their worker and other professionals as well as the child's family.

Information about Administering Medication is included in the Healthy Care Course. Carers who regularly administer medication for children in their care are encouraged to attend the training course, "Administration of Medication"

SELF ADMINISTRATION OF OVER THE COUNTER MEDICINES

If a child has the mental capacity to choose and wishes to buy their own remedies for minor ailments they should be supported in this decision, and encouraged to speak to a pharmacist.

This is included in the Delegated Authority Section of the Care Plan and should be discussed at the Placement Planning Meeting and subsequent reviews when appropriate.

SELF MANAGEMENT OF MEDICATION

If a child or young person in foster care is assessed as being capable of looking after and administering their own medication, foster carers should monitor that they keep the medicines with them or store them in a lockable space.

Medication policies of the child's school, where relevant, should be requested by the child's social worker or foster carer by agreement.

If there is concern about a child or young person's ability to administer their own medicines safely, the foster carer together with the young person should consult with the social worker and the child's parent(s) if possible and agree how much responsibility the young person is able to undertake. Where it is assessed as safe to do so, the young person should be given charge of their own medicines for a trial period. A risk assessment should be put in place.

After this, the foster carer should check whether or not the young person has taken the medicine as prescribed and a decision should be made by the involved professionals (e.g. GP or consultant) and recorded in the child's personal file as to whether or not they can cope with their medicines in the long term. The child or young person's ability to administer their medicines should be reviewed on a regular pre-planned basis. A risk assessment should be put in place.

The age at which children are ready to take care of, and be responsible for, their own medicines, varies. There is no set age when this transition should be made, and there may be circumstances where it is not appropriate for a child of any age to self-manage.

In all situations discuss the management of medication in supervision with your fostering social worker who will be able to support you. Also in all cases you should seek consultation of the Looked After Children Nurse as in some cases it may be appropriate for them to meet and discuss self-medication with the young person.

ACCIDENTS AND EMERGENCIES

In the event of an accident or medical emergency you must take appropriate action to access treatment either through your GP, A & E or the emergency services.

All accidents must be reported to the Child's Social Worker or, if they are not available, their Team Manager, your Fostering Social Worker and, if out of office hours, to the Emergency Duty Service. Record all accidents in your Foster Carer's Folder record. Complete Incident Notification Forms within 24 hours and forward to your Fostering Social Worker

HIV AND HEPATITIS

Blood-borne viruses are infectious agents that some people carry persistently in their blood. They can cause severe disease in some cases, and few or no symptoms in others. The virus can be spread to another person and this may occur whether the carrier of the virus is ill or not.

The main blood-borne viruses of concern are:

- Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) which causes acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS);
- Hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV).

Blood-borne viruses are spread by direct contact with the blood of an infected person. Certain other body fluids may also be infectious e.g. semen, vaginal secretions and breast milk. It should be noted that blood-borne viruses are not spread by normal social contact and daily activities e.g. coughing, sneezing, kissing, hugging, holding hands, or sharing bathrooms, swimming pools, toilets, food, cups, cutlery and crockery.

HIV

HIV attacks the body's immune system making it vulnerable, over time, to infections that a healthy immune system would fight off. However, people with HIV do not necessarily have symptoms or feel unwell.

When a person with HIV infection contracts other opportunistic infections that take advantage of the already damaged immune system they may be diagnosed as having AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome). There is as yet no cure for AIDS but there are antiretroviral drugs that can improve the quality of life/extend the lifespan of people with HIV as well as prophylactic drugs that prevent them from contracting opportunistic infections and keep them in good health.

The vast majority of HIV-infected children in this country have acquired HIV infection through mother to child transmission. Infection may pass from the mother to the unborn child in the womb during pregnancy, during delivery of the baby or after birth through breastfeeding. Children with HIV should be referred to a specialist HIV paediatrician for assessment.

How is HIV spread?

- By sexual intercourse with an infected person without a condom (i.e. unprotected sex);
- By sharing blood-contaminated needles or other equipment for injecting drug use;
- From an infected mother to her baby during pregnancy, while giving birth or through breast feeding.
- By unprotected oral sex with an infected person;
- Through a blood transfusion where blood donations are not screened for HIV (all blood donations in the UK are screened for HIV);

- By invasive medical/dental treatment using non-sterile instruments/needles;
- By tattooing, cosmetic piercing or acupuncture with unsterilised needles or equipment;
- By sharing razors and toothbrushes (which may be contaminated with blood) with an infected person.

Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). The virus is found in the stool (faeces) of HAV infected people. It is uncommon in the UK, but certain groups are at increased risk. This includes travellers to parts of the world with poor levels of sanitation, men who have sex with men, and people who inject drugs. Hepatitis A can be unpleasant, but it's not usually serious and most people make a full recovery within a couple of months.

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a viral infection that may damage the liver and cause serious long-term consequences. People with acute hepatitis B infection do not necessarily have symptoms or feel unwell, but some do get a short "flu-like illness, often with jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes and dark urine), nausea, vomiting and loss of appetite. Infection without symptoms, and illness without jaundice, occurs particularly in children. Children with persistent hepatitis B infection should be referred for assessment by a specialist clinician. Drug treatments may be available.

Hepatitis C

Like hepatitis B, hepatitis C is a viral infection that may damage the liver. Many people with hepatitis C infection have no symptoms and are often unaware that they have been infected. Some people will experience tiredness, nausea, loss of appetite, abdominal pain and flu-like symptoms. They may also develop jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes and dark urine), but this is unusual.

How do hepatitis B and C spread?

Hepatitis B and C are spread by blood-to-blood contact with an infected person's blood or other body fluids if they are contaminated with blood. The main routes by which the infections are spread are the same as HIV but there is no proven association between breastfeeding and hepatitis B & C transmission.

You do not get hepatitis B from sneezing, coughing, kissing or holding hands.

Immunisation against hepatitis B

Hepatitis B infection can be prevented by immunisation.

Immunisation of Foster Carers

The need to offer immunisation to other foster carers should be based on a risk assessment by the local authority making the placement.

STRENGTHS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Recent research has found that children in care are five times more likely to suffer from a mental health problem compared to children living at home, and that many of these problems often go unnoticed and undiagnosed. Therefore, SUSTAIN have been commissioned to assess all children in Staffordshire who become cared for.

Once a child, over the age of 18 months, has come into care and remains cared for when they reach their 4 month review the Strengths and Needs process will be initiated. SUSTAIN ask all Social Workers to complete a SUSTAIN Strengths and Needs referral form for the child and send a copy of the Child's Core Assessment to them. SUSTAIN also request Social Workers to obtain written consent from the child's parent, or whoever holds parental responsibility.

Once SUSTAIN have received all documents they will contact you, the child's teacher and parent to complete some questionnaires. For children over 4 years old SUSTAIN will make an appointment to assess the child directly. This will require the child to complete some questionnaires and quizzes.

The areas the assessment will cover are: Emotions and Behaviour, Trauma, Attachment, Thinking Planning and Performing and Understanding Other People.

Once the assessment has been completed SUSTAIN will provide the Child's Social Worker with a written report of their findings, along with any recommendations, and you will be made aware of this.

The assessment will make future recommendations for the child's care. The child's social worker will discuss this with you.

HEALTH BOOKLET FOR CHILDREN IN CARE

All children and young people will be issued a Health Booklet. This record of health assessment reviews the child's health and immunisation history and is an important document and should be made available at all health appointments. Separate guidance will be issued with the booklet for foster carers to follow. Discuss this with your social worker for further information.

SECTION SIX

FINANCIAL

FOSTERING ALLOWANCES

- 1.1 The table below sets out the allowances paid to all Foster Carers to cover the cost of caring for a looked after child. The minimum amount to be paid has been determined by the Department for Education (DfE) and Staffordshire County Council now pays the same, or more than that rate.

AGE RANGE	WEEKLY ALLOWANCE
0-1	127.05
2-4	130.06
5-10	143.01
11-15	171.08
16+	191.03

Guide to what allowances cover and how it should be allocated

- 1.2 The fostering allowances paid to foster carers covers the cost of caring for a child at home. The percentage guidance chart below gives an indication to the foster carers of the way this allowance is made up, and the amount of money allocated to each element. This is intended as a helpful guide for foster carers and to assist them in the use of the allowance.

AGE	FOOD	CLOTHING	TRANSPORT	PERSONAL/ HOUSEHOLD	TOTAL
0 – 1	34% £43.20	22% £27.95	8% £10.16	36% £45.74	100% £127.05
2 – 4	34% £44.22	22% £28.61	8% £10.40	36% £46.83	100% £130.06
5 – 10	32% £45.76	26% £37.18	7% £10.01	35% £50.06	100% £143.01
11 – 15 years	32% £54.75	26% £44.48	11% £18.82	31% £53.03	100% £171.08
16 + years	30% £57.31	26% £49.66	9% £17.19	35% £66.86	100% £191.03

The following lists the items that the allowance is expected to cover. It is a guide only and not an exhaustive list.

- Food costs
- School dinners/lunch money
- Clothing/footwear (including replacing regular school uniform items)
- Costs of clubs' clothing (e.g. Cubs, Brownies etc)
- Nappies and other baby items
- Personal self-care items
- Pocket money and savings
- Toys/books/games etc
- Education material costs
- Leisure/family day trips/hobbies/activities/entertainment
- School trips/activities
- Life-story work materials and costs
- Transport costs to attend school, support contact and attend meetings
- Household costs, utilities e.g. additional gas, electric, washing
- Household wear and tear e.g. to furniture, carpets and household items
- Luggage costs.

Clothing

There is an expectation that the clothing element of the allowance is fully spent on the child, ensuring that they are well clothed while with the foster carer(s), and when they leave their care.

When the child/young person has sufficient clothing, the allowance should be placed in a saving's account for future needs. This should also be discussed with the child/young person depending on their age and understanding.

The clothing allowance indicated is the minimum that can be used flexibly to purchase items directly by foster carer(s) as necessary for young children and be provided to older children and young people on a weekly/monthly basis, or as agreed.

It is expected that in order to encourage young people to develop budgeting skills that they should be given more responsibility for spending some or all of their clothing allowance. When funds for children and young people's basic clothes have been purchased (or funds allocated) e.g. underwear, shoes, school uniform, the young person should be allowed to purchase their own clothes. It is expected that carers should monitor this by seeing receipts or at least, verifying that clothes have been bought and by recording the purchase in the daily records. It is recommended that foster carers set up a separate bank account for the clothing money. Foster carers should retain receipts of purchases.

Pocket Money and Savings

Pocket money should be given to children for their own use and not to pay for regular entertainment, clothes or personal toiletries.

It is recommended that foster carers record on their daily log when they have given a child pocket money and the amount given. They may also wish to record what this money has been spent on, particularly in the case of younger children.

Primary school aged children would be expected to be paid their pocket money weekly, preferably on a set day. Older children may prefer to receive their pocket money and any other allowances given to them for personal toiletries and entertainment and clothing, monthly and paid into their personal savings account. They may also wish to do this with some of their birthday and Christmas allowances. This will depend on their maturity and should be discussed with them and their social worker.

The amount of pocket money must be clarified at the start of a placement and discussed at the placement planning meeting. Although the minimum amounts for each age group have been defined (see table below), foster carers are free to pay additional pocket money if they wish to. An increase in pocket money should be linked to the child or young person's birthday to mark their increasing age.

Pocket money (weekly payment) and birthday allowances for children at school or unemployed

Age	Pocket Money	Age	Birthdays and Festivals
0 – 4	£2.10	0 – 1	£127.05
		2 – 4	£130.06
5 – 6	£2.35	5 – 10	£143.01
7	£2.60		
8	£2.85		
9	£3.15		
10	£3.40		
11	£3.95	11 – 15	£171.08
12	£5.05		
13	£6.00		
14	£7.20		
15	£8.60		
16	£10.30	16 – 17	£191.03
17 and over	£11.85		

When a child or young person has a short break there is an expectation that the short break carer will pay the child's pocket money (pro rata). If the amount is paid monthly into a savings account, then some discussion will need to occur as to who is responsible for payment or part payment.

Foster carers are expected to put aside weekly amounts of the personal allowance for the child as savings. Foster carers should support children to open a savings/bank account in their own name for this purpose from the age of seven, when they will be able to open an account without an adult sponsor. It is expected that all children would have a bank account by their 14th birthday. Once a young person reaches 18, they are entitled to access their own saving's account and it is expected that carers will offer the young person advice on how to use these savings.

The following weekly saving's amounts are recommended:

- Up to 10 years old - £5.00 per week
- 11 – 15 years old - £10.00 per week
- 16 / 17 years old - £15.00 per week

Initial Placement Expenses

A payment of £25.00 to cover initial placement expenses is made for those children being admitted into foster care. This will enable carers to purchase essential items. The money will be brought at the point of placement by the placing social worker and will not be deducted from the weekly maintenance allowance or any subsequent clothing allowance.

Supplementary Payments

When children are placed and additional needs have been identified within the child's placement plan, supplementary payments may be authorised. **Supplementary payments are discretionary and need to be authorised through the child's social worker/team manager.**

1. Food

Any special dietary requirements should be discussed at the Placement Planning Meeting and included in the child's Placement Plan and agreement reached if a supplementary allowance is required.

2. Clothing

Children may not have suitable clothes when they first come into care and an initial clothing allowance may be available. The child's Social Worker and Team Manager are responsible for the approval of a supplementary clothing allowance. Approval and authorisation of the amount agreed must be in place before any supplementary items are purchased. This should be agreed as part of the placement planning meeting and included in the child's Placement Plan. Foster carers should ensure that unrealistic standards are not set for children returning home, e.g. the purchase of expensive/designer clothes. As a guide, children should have the following items as a minimum requirement. The placement planning process, at the beginning of the child's placement, provides an opportunity to discuss and agree if supplementary items of clothing are required.

Minimum Clothing Standards:

Babies: 6 vests, 5 daytime outfits, 6 sleep suits, 3 cardigans, 6 pairs socks, 1 pair gloves, 1 warm hat, warm outdoor suit. **Supplementary clothing allowance – up to £120**

Toddlers: 6 vests, 6 pants, 6 socks, 5 daytime outfits, 2 jumpers/cardigans, 1 pair shoes, 1 pair trainers or sandals, hat, gloves, coat, 3 pairs of pyjamas/nightdress, 1 dressing gown, 1 pair slippers. **Supplementary clothing allowance – up to £150**

Children aged 5-10 years: coat or waterproof, 6 pants, 6 vests or T-shirts, 6 pairs socks, 5 daytime outfits, 3 pairs pyjamas/nightdress, 1 dressing gown, 1 pair slippers, 1 pair shoes, 1 pair trainers, 1 pair of Wellingtons, gloves, hat, PE kit including swimwear, school uniform, 1 suitcase/holdall. **Supplementary clothing allowance – up to £180**

Young people aged 11-16 years: 7 pairs pants, 3 bras, 6 pairs socks/tights, 6 T-shirts, 5 daytime outfits, 1 coat/jacket, 1 pair shoes, 1 pair trainers, 3 pairs pyjamas/nightdress, 1 dressing gown, 1 pair slippers, gloves, hat, PE kit including swimwear, school uniform, 1 suitcase/holdall **Supplementary clothing allowance – up to £220**

In exceptional circumstances the placement planning meeting may identify that an additional resource is required based on the individual needs of the child being placed. Any additional resource requires the agreement of the child's Team Manager before purchasing.

School Uniform:

School uniform, where needed, should be considered over and above the initial clothing allowance. A supplementary allowance can be agreed by the child's social work Team Manager to cover some additional school uniform expenses.

As a guide, an additional allowance will be paid to cover the expense of providing uniform for children recently placed with foster carers and/or when children need to move to a new school.

It is expected that foster carers will be able to provide standard items of school clothing and footwear for children who have been placed with them for over three months. The supplementary allowance is intended to pay for the more expensive items required by individual schools e.g. items such as blazers, school logo-branded items of clothing and sport's kits, if required.

Transport:

The personal allowance covers all normal family mileage to see friends, attend clubs, routine doctors/dental appointments etc. For school and contact- related journeys that the child needs to attend and that take place outside the foster carer's locality, a supplementary mileage allowance will be paid at **40p a mile**. This should be agreed in advance and be recorded as part of the Placement Plan agreement with the child's Social Worker and Team Manager. Additionally, when the foster carer is required to attend meetings regarding the child that are outside the foster carer's locality/school catchment area, mileage will be paid at **40p a mile**.

Personal Items:

The child's weekly personal allowance covers personal items such as toys and toiletries as well as leisure activities such as swimming, gymnastics and other activity groups. For African or African/Caribbean children and young people, an additional allowance of **£5.00** (12 years and under) and **£7.00** (13 years and over) will be paid per week, to purchase creams/oils for skin care.

Household Equipment:

The personal allowance covers extra electricity, gas or other fuel, normal wear and tear on household items, maintenance and redecoration of the foster child's bedroom. Basic equipment for the use of children and young people is provided to foster carers by the Fostering Service. The equipment that can be provided with the agreement of the Fostering Social Worker and Team Manager is as follows:

For babies and infants:

- Cot and mattress
- Buggy and cover
- Stairgate x2
- Fireguard
- Highchair
- Bedding: 6 cot sheets, 3 cot blankets
- Car seat
- Feeding equipment
- Bath and bath set, changing mat
- Two towels
- Baby monitor

Other children/young people:

- Bed
- Bedding: 2 pillows, duvet, 2 sheets, 2 duvet covers, 4 pillowcases, waterproof cover,
- Two bath and two hand towels
- Chest of drawers,
- Wardrobe,
- Desk and chair.

NB: This is considered a 'start-up package' to assist foster carers and they would then be expected to appropriately maintain equipment. Consideration will be given at each new placement as to whether additional items are required. This would need to be agreed at the Placement Planning meeting; or in exceptional circumstances, with the Fostering Team Manager.

The funding of the 'start-up package' will be based on the most cost-effective purchases available at the time. The Fostering Social Worker will need discuss with their Team Manager about the agreed set cost.

In some circumstances, foster carers may wish to purchase a more expensive item and fund the difference in price themselves. The fostering team manager has the discretion to consider such requests on an individual basis. This would not be agreed for some items which can be re-used in other placements.

Birthday/Festival/Holiday Payments:

Birthday:

A grant, equal to one week's child's allowance payment appropriate to the age of the child will be made automatically for a child's birthday. The birthday allowance is provided to enable foster carers to purchase a gift(s) and to provide a contribution towards the cost of celebrations.

Christmas/Festivals

A grant equal to one week's child allowance payment appropriate to the age of the child will be made at Christmas, and payable for all children in foster placements. The Christmas/Festival Allowance is provided to purchase a gift(s) and to provide a contribution towards to cost of celebrations. If the allowance is required for an alternative religious festival, a request should be made via the child's Social Worker.

Holiday Grant:

An annual holiday grant is paid equivalent to two weeks' personal allowance per child (age related) and is provided to the foster carer as a contribution towards a holiday or for an equivalent number of day trips.

Family holidays are important social events that can build lifelong memories, and foster carers are expected to include the children that they foster when planning their family holidays. The County Council recognises that families have different priorities and family budgets when choosing holidays and this holiday grant is reflective of the available resources and the need to set appropriate budgets within Families First. Foster carers should take this into account when planning their holidays and activities. The holiday allowance is paid in advance to foster carers and should there be circumstances where this allowance is not fully used e.g. due to the child returning home or moving placement, then the foster carer should return the holiday allowance.

Adoption Introductions

A supplementary payment can be agreed up to **£5.00 per day** (maximum of £30 per week), hospitality payment when foster carers facilitate introductions between children and adoptive parents. This payment will be discussed and agreed by the Fostering Team Manager.

In exceptional circumstances, further expenses can be agreed to facilitate unusual arrangements that will promote the introductions and the needs of the child. This will be agreed by the Team Manager to support the requirements of the child's plan.

Educational Trips:

The child's personal weekly allowance covers educational and social events, for example, school day trips, school discos etc.

In exceptional circumstances, the responsible County Manager for the child's social work team may agree to fund certain educational events such as field trips, where for example, this is part of the young person's curriculum and/or course work. Details should be discussed by the foster carers with the child's social worker in advance of the submission dates.

Additionally, the County Manager may also agree to pay for one major school trip in the course of a child's school life. The child's social work Team Manager must seek the County Manager's approval beforehand.

Miscellaneous

With the prior agreement from the child's social work Team Manager, funding can be agreed for:

- Essential documents including a child's passport and birth certificate
- School photographs.

In exceptional circumstances a nursery/after school placement may be funded if this had been agreed by the child's social work Team Manager as part of a child's placement plan.

PAYMENT FOR SKILLS - OUTLINE OF THE SCHEME

INTRODUCTION

The Payment for Skills scheme was introduced in 2001 and is designed to recognise the range of knowledge; competency and experience that foster carers possess, with carers paid an additional fee for each child in placement by reference to their competency.

The acquisition and subsequent maintenance of the necessary skills in relation to higher levels of payment is assessed by the allocated fostering social worker by reference to detailed examination of the evidence of competency level required.

Foster carers are required to demonstrate and maintain evidence of their competency through the collection of practice evidence presented within a personal portfolio. Foster carer's portfolios are regularly and consistently audited by the supervising social worker and their manager.

There are four levels of payment three of which involve payment of a higher rate over and above the basic maintenance allowance:

Level 1 Foundation Level: The carer receives the fostering allowance for the child in placement.

Level 2 Accredited Level: The carer receives the fostering allowance for the child in placement and an additional fee for the carer's skills

Level 3 Advanced Level: The carer receives the fostering allowance for the child in placement and a higher level additional fee for the carer's skills.

Level 4 Advanced+ Level: The carer receives the fostering allowance for the child in placement and a higher level additional fee for the carer's skills. The additional fee is paid to carers who care for children aged 10 year and over.

STANDARDS AND LEVELS OF PAYMENT

Everyone who applies to Staffordshire County Council to foster children undertakes the preparation course, 'Introduction to Fostering', as well as a home assessment. This offers basic preparation for the task of foster caring. Expectations of a new carer cannot be as great as a carer who has many years experience in fostering and who has undertaken relevant post approval training and development activities.

The baseline expectations for all carers, and the starting point for new carers on approval, are set out later in this section. Typically new foster carers will be approved on the basis that there is confidence that they will meet these expectations, even though the evidence that they do meet them may not be complete. Collection of evidence will begin from the start of the preparation to foster.

Level 1

Newly approved Foster Carers will be paid at Level 1 Foundation Skills Level. Exceptionally, newly approved foster carers with previous fostering or demonstrable relevant experience may be approved to start above Level 1.

Level 2

Progression to level 2 will depend on the foster carer meeting the following requirements:

- A minimum of six months fostering experience
- A positive first annual review that identifies that the carers are working towards and are on target for the completion of the Certificate of Successful Completion within a year of their approval
- Their portfolios of evidence contain 2 completed Standards which have been presented to the Standardisation Panel for Feedback and have met the required standard.

If these criteria are met the level 2 payments can be made to the foster carers with the proviso that their Certificate of Successful Completion is achieved within 12 months of their approval. On achieving the Certificate of Successful Completion foster carers will automatically be awarded level 2 accredited skills level and paid accordingly

When Foster Carers have achieved The Certificate of Successful Completion they may work towards achieving Level's 3 and 4 Payment for Skills by working to develop their skill level to an Advanced/Advanced + level by evidencing the required Standards against the PFS criteria.

Level 3/4

To achieve the Advanced/Advanced + levels foster carers will be required to submit portfolios detailing evidence at an advanced level of competency against a number of the

CWDC training, development and support standards for foster care. These standards are referred to by the Staffordshire Fostering Service as Higher Level Learning Indicators and are documented in the Staffordshire Fostering Service CWDC Training Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers Policy.

Carers should submit portfolios of evidence that demonstrate advanced knowledge and skill against these standards to the Standardisation Panel who will confirm that the requirements have been met. In addition to meeting these competencies at the advanced levels foster carers will be required to meet the following performance criteria

Performance requirement for Level 3

Foster carers should demonstrate that they:

- Support and are involved with the Fostering Service recruitment activities; for example, they are contributing to others learning by participating in 'Reggie the recruitment bus events, information evenings, supporting preparation and other training events.
- Have a 70% attendance record at support groups
- Produce verbal and written reports to a high standard about the child and young person in placement
- Have worked and continue to work successfully and positively with parents and professionals
- Have a positive experience of direct work with children with complex needs, for example children with communication difficulties, ADHD, life story work with children with a disability.
- Work closely and successfully with Sustain in direct work/behaviour modification programmes with children
- Have completed core training activities and can demonstrate participating in 6 certified training activities within a 2 year period including developmental activities such as e – learning and guided learning programmes.
- Have worked with children and young people in reducing the incidence of high risk behaviour.
- Have positive annual reviews
- Have demonstrated they have developed, enhanced and consolidated their knowledge, understanding and skills in the higher level learning indicators to a level 3 advanced level standard and this has been verified by the Standardisation Panel.

A written submission will be required by the Fostering Social Worker and will show how these expectations have been met. This report, the carer's portfolio and the current Personal Development Plan/Review will be verified by the relevant Team Manager who will sign and date the social work report and submit it to the Fostering Service Manager for agreement that the skills level has been met. The Fostering Service Manager will confirm in writing to the carer that the skills level has been met. Payment will begin from the date verification was made by the Team Manager. The Fostering Social Worker/Team Manager will then notify the Finance Section of the change in circumstances.

Performance requirement for Level 4

Foster carers should demonstrate that:

- They meet the performance criteria for Level 3

And additionally that:

- That they take a lead role in the development of the Fostering service, for example, being a champion for a particular area of the service such as TSD Standards, recruitment, support groups, health and educational developments.
- They co – facilitate and support training and development activities
- Their personal development review shows evidence of their participation in advanced continuing professional development training activities. Carers should have attended a minimum of 6 certified development activities within a 2 year period.
- They undertake the role of formal mentor to new/less experienced carers and/or undertake the role of learning mentor to support other carers personal development
- They are pro active in their own continuing professional development keeping evidence within their portfolio up to date. Their portfolio should be assessed as current and at an advanced plus level standard.
- They should demonstrate that they have developed, enhanced and consolidated their knowledge, understanding and skills in the higher level indicators to a Level 4 Advanced Plus skill level. This should be verified by the Standardisation Panel
- They should be able to demonstrate that they have worked with young people aged 10 – 18 years with high tariff behaviour and complex needs
- One carer must be available at all times and therefore not in paid employment
- They should be able to demonstrate that they have engaged with therapeutic work. For example, planned risks approach under appropriate supervision and support.
- Have positive annual reviews

A written submission will be required by the Fostering Social Worker and will show how these expectations have been met. This report, the carer's portfolio and the current Personal Development Plan/Review will be verified by the relevant Team Manager who will sign and date the report and submit it to the Fostering Service Manager for agreement that the skills level has been met. The Fostering Service Manager will confirm in writing to the carer that the skills level has been met. Payment will begin from the date verification was made by the Team Manager. The Fostering Social Worker/Team Manager will then notify the Finance Section of the change in circumstances.

Maintenance of the current PFS Level

In all cases, the evidence contained in a Foster Carers portfolio must be current. Foster Carers need to maintain current and reliable evidence within their portfolio and be able to demonstrate the required performance criteria for their PFS level. For example, it is

understandable that some carers may have other commitments that prevent them from working to achieve the criteria required to meet the advanced levels, in these circumstances carers will need to maintain their portfolios at their current level by ensuring that the evidence of the skills and knowledge they have acquired remains current and reliable.

Fostering Social Workers will assess Foster Carers portfolios on a regular basis. Fostering Social Workers will submit the Foster Carers portfolio for review with their Team Manager on an annual basis.

It is expected that the Social Worker and Carer regularly review the requirements for the PFS levels within the supervisory meetings. Carers should be informed within Supervision meetings about the requirements to maintain or progress their PFS level.

Carers may move between PFS levels according to whether they meet the competencies and criteria for a particular level. If a carer is no longer performing at, or meeting the competencies and criteria of their current level they will be moved to a lower level.

Following the annual review of the evidence by the Fostering Social Worker and Team Manager, and where a Carer has been assessed as unable to maintain the current skill level criteria, the Team Manager will notify the Fostering Service Manager of the changed circumstances and recommend the appropriate skill level. Following verification by the Fostering Service Manager the Carer will then be notified in writing of the change in circumstances with details of the proposed Payment for Skill Level. The PFS level will be altered to the new level 28 days following the letter being sent to the Carer. The Fostering Social Worker/Team Manager will notify the finance section to make the appropriate changes.

There may be some circumstances where Carers are unable to maintain the required performance criteria due to unforeseen temporary events, for example, significant personal circumstances or ill health. In such circumstances reasonable allowances should be made and the PFS level may be maintained. The Team Manager will regularly review these cases with the Fostering Social Worker and timescales for the maintenance of the performance criteria should be recorded within the Carers Personal Development Review.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR ASSESSMENT

Responsibility for the assessment needed to progress from one level to another is divided as follows

- A Fostering Social Worker will be assigned to each Foster Carer and will be responsible for home visits, supervision meetings and all necessary interviews as required.
- It is the responsibility of the Foster Carer to demonstrate that they have achieved the required competency (standard or higher level indicator) and performance. The role of the Fostering Agency and the Supervising Social Worker is to empower and enable Foster Carers to do this.

- The Fostering Agency has a responsibility to provide Foster Carers with the tools and an appropriate and reasonable level of support to enable them to demonstrate their underpinning knowledge, skills and learning and meet the required performance expectations.
- It is the responsibility of the Foster Carer to ensure that they are meeting the targets set within their Personal Development Plan/Review and their supervision records and that they are participating fully in developmental activities agreed within their PDP/Review.
- It is the role of the Fostering Social Worker to assess whether the Foster Carer has met the competency requirements (standards or higher level indicators) and performance criteria.
- It is the role of the Team Manager to monitor the work of the Fostering Social Worker and verify and endorse the evidence produced. It is the role of the Team Manager to endorse; where appropriate the recommendations made and subsequently report to the Fostering Service Manager.
- It is the role of the Team Manager to review evidence with the Fostering Social Worker on an annual basis to ensure that Carers are maintaining and developing their skill level. It is the Team Managers role to monitor and review individual cases on a regular basis where the performance criteria and/or portfolio evidence is not being met and to agree the support plan and timescale for resolution.
- The Fostering Service Manager will consider the recommendations made and confirm the outcome.

AREAS OF DISPUTE

Areas of dispute may arise regarding the outcome of decisions by both The Standardisation Panel and the final outcome regarding the Payment for Skill level. In these circumstances the representation process (see 2.5) should be undertaken. Alternatively Carers may choose to make a complaint by using Staffordshire County Council, Vulnerable Children's Service Complaints procedure (see separate policy). In all cases Carers should be advised of the Complaints Procedure.

REPRESENTATION PROCESS

Grounds for making representation

Foster Carers may make representation regarding the decisions made in circumstances where they believe that the assessment process and procedure were not properly carried out. This is the only ground for representation.

How to make representation

Foster Carers should put their request in writing, providing detailed information in support of their case. This letter should be sent to the Fostering Service Manager.

Time scale

The letter of representation from the Foster Carer should be received no later than 21 days following the receipt of the notification of the outcome of the decision.

Acceptance

The Fostering Service Manager will consider whether the issues raised in the letter meet the grounds for representation. The Fostering Service Manager will write to the Foster Carer to indicate whether or not the appeal has been accepted. If accepted the matter will be referred to the Fostering Panel. The Carer will be notified when their representation will be considered by Panel which will take place within 2 months of the receipt of the representation.

Fostering Panel Consideration

The Fostering Panel will consider the representation, specifically,

- Whether or not the assessment procedures and process were carried out
- The reasons for the Standardisation Panel's decision and/or the outcome of the Payment for Skills decision.

The Carer will be given the opportunity to put his or her case to the Fostering Panel in person

The main focus of the representation process is to consider whether the assessment of evidence has been conducted in accordance with the relevant policies and procedures.

Representation Outcomes

The recommendation of the Fostering Panel in matters of representation can be either

- The representation is UPHOLD.
- The representation is NOT UPHOLD

In both cases panel will detail the reasons for their decision. The recommendation will be considered by the Agency Decision Maker who will notify the carer of the outcome in writing no more than 5 working days from the date of Panel.

Financial Consideration

In circumstances where the representation is made regarding a change in the Payment for Skill level to a lower level, the higher level payments will be maintained until the Representation Process has been completed.

FOSTER CARERS WITH RELEVANT PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WHO JOIN THE STAFFORDSHIRE FOSTERING SERVICE

An experienced Independent Foster Carer transferring to the Staffordshire Fostering Service to care for children aged 10+ may come in at Level 4. They will be given 12 months to produce their portfolio of evidence for the Higher Learning Indicators and to demonstrate they meet the performance criteria. Any transfer will be in accordance with the protocol for transfer between agencies. For those wishing to take children under the age of 10 Level 3 payments may be made dependent upon experience.

NEW APPLICANTS WITH RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

An experienced foster carer who fosters for an independent fostering agency and who is transferring to Staffordshire Fostering Service to care for children aged 10+ can be paid Level 4 fee from approval providing they are able to evidence their experience and skills. They will be given 12 months to produce their portfolio of evidence for the payment for skills scheme and to demonstrate they meet the performance criteria. For those wishing to take children under the age of 10, level 3 payments may be made dependent upon their experience. Arrangements for the proposed fee level will be made with the carer prior to

approval. When foster carers transfer to Staffordshire and continue to care for a child in placement there should be no detriment to the allowance and fee that the foster carers previously received for that child prior to the transfer. Any transfer will be in accordance with the protocol for transfer between agencies.

NEW APPLICANTS WITH RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

For new applicants with relevant professional experience, entry at Level 3 can be agreed with the foster carer who will then have 6 months to produce a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate they can meet the requirements of the payment for skills scheme.

FOSTERING RATES 2018/19 PAYMENT FOR SKILLS

Level 1

AGE RANGE	WEEKLY ALLOWANCE	WEEKLY FEE	TOTAL
0-1	127.05	-	127.05
2-4	130.06	-	130.06
5-10	143.01	-	143.01
11-15	171.08	-	171.08
16+	191.03	-	191.03

Level 2

AGE RANGE	WEEKLY ALLOWANCE	WEEKLY FEE	TOTAL
0-1	127.05	43.61	170.66
2-4	130.06	44.45	174.51
5-10	143.01	51.66	194.67
11-15	171.08	70.98	242.06
16+	191.03	81.13	272.16

Level 3

AGE RANGE	WEEKLY ALLOWANCE	WEEKLY FEE	TOTAL
0-1	127.05	106.47	233.52
2-4	130.06	107.45	237.51
5-10	143.01	126.70	269.71
11-15	171.08	164.22	335.30
16+	191.03	182.49	373.52

Level 4

AGE RANGE	WEEKLY ALLOWANCE	WEEKLY FEE	TOTAL
0-9	Level 4 not paid for children under 10		
10-15 years	171.08	283.29	454.37
16+	191.03	321.02	512.05

Intensive Fostering Fee Levels:

Fees paid to carers who are approved to provide placements for specific intensive fostering programmes – resilience care, fostering disability full-time short break fostering and the Thrive placement schemes.

A fostering fee is paid at a higher rate is outside the Payment for Skills scheme. The programme offers solo placements to children and young people who require intensive support. Each programme has individual criteria that the carers are required to meet.

AGE RANGE	WEEKLY ALLOWANCE	RETAINER	TOTAL
10	171.08	477.61	648.69
11-15	171.08	477.61	648.69
16+	198.03	477.61	675.64

PAYMENT FOR SKILLS – ADDITIONAL PAYMENTS:

In addition to the Payment for Skills, the directorate will make additional payments.

For carers on Payment for Skills only, the following payments apply:

- A payment of **£25** to cover initial placement expenses will be made for those children being admitted from their own home into foster care. This will enable carers to purchase essential items. The money will be brought at the point of placement by the child's Social Worker and will not be deducted from the weekly maintenance allowance or any subsequent clothing allowance.
- Where a carer takes a sibling group of three an additional payment of **£30 per child per week** will be made. For four children or more the fee will be **£150 for the whole sibling group**.
- For carers who have fostered for **more than two years**, and have cared for a child/children for **more than 250 days in the year**, a **loyalty bonus of £300** will be paid. The year will run from 1st April to 31st March and the payment will be made the following April/May.

JOINT FINANCE UNIT (VCPT) – PAYMENT DETAILS

TIMING OF PAYMENTS

The payment period runs from Sunday to Saturday, so a payment advice or cheque received on a Friday/Saturday will be in respect of the fortnight ending that Saturday.

Allowances will continue to be paid when a child has an unplanned absence from placement for three days or less. There will be a deduction of this allowance when the absence is pre – agreed.

Child benefit is not payable to foster carers who are in receipt of a weekly fostering allowance.

Payment of all fostering allowances ceases the day before the young person reaches the age of 18 years. Fostering allowances are paid fortnightly, in arrears, by either BACS (a credit direct into your bank account) or by cheque posted on Thursdays, which should arrive on a Friday or Saturday.

BACS payments are available for withdrawals to be made from Friday. Cheques will take up to three days to clear through a bank account, or longer through a Building Society account.

Carers presently paid by cheque can opt to be paid directly into their bank/building society account by phoning 01785 277180.

CHECKING ALLOWANCES/ENTITLEMENT

Carers should look carefully at the payment they receive to ensure that they are getting all the allowances they are entitled to. Please contact Staffordshire County Council, Joint Finance Unit (VCPT), with any payment queries, or Tel: Stafford (01785) 277182 or 277180.

Alternatively, you can email: rena.lowbridge@staffordshire.gov.uk or deborah.brough-davies@staffordshire.gov.uk

Where young people are moved at short notice, then the balance of any part weekly payments will not be expected to be returned. This practice does not automatically apply to **Special Initiative Payments**.

Please be advised that it is a legal requirement that all remittance advices be retained for a period of six years. This complies with the Statute of Limitations and meets both VAT and Tax compliance rules.

CHANGE IN CIRCUMSTANCES

The child's Social Worker must inform Adult's and Children's Financial Services (ACFS) immediately of any change in circumstances. The carer should also contact ACFS immediately should a placement end to try and avoid any overpayments. Any overpayments will be re-claimed by deducting 25% of the total allowance each pay run until the overpayment is cleared.

OVER PAYMENTS

Every effort will be made to ensure that the overpayments of fees or allowances do not occur. However, foster carers have an individual responsibility to check all payment information received and to contact the payment's team immediately if an overpayment does occur. In the event of an overpayment, the payments team **will recover the full amount**.

Prompt arrangements for repayment should be formally agreed as soon as possible. The County Managers (Fostering and Adoption) will be notified by the payments team and authorise a repayment's schedule if required according to County Council Financial policy and procedures.

INCOME TAX AND NATIONAL INSURANCE

Foster carers are treated as self-employed for tax purposes. There is a specific tax scheme foster carers can use called qualifying care relief. The scheme calculates a tax threshold unique to the fostering household which determines if a foster carer has to pay any tax from their fostering.

Anyone who is self-employed must register to pay Class 2 National Insurance Contributions. If a foster carer's taxable profit from self-employment is nil or below £5,965 (2015-16) they automatically qualify for the Small Profit Threshold (SPT) and will be exempt from paying the contributions. The individual circumstances of the foster carer will determine if this is the best option for them or whether they have to make other arrangements to maintain their national insurance record.

Further information about tax and national insurance is available on HM Revenue and Customs website

BENEFITS

Foster carers are approved rather than employed by their fostering service, and this status has a particular effect on means tested benefits. In the main, fostering payments when a child is placed with a foster carer are disregarded when calculating welfare benefits. Alternatively, foster carers may be able to claim Working Tax Credit because fostering is regarded as 'work' by HMRC when they have a child in placement. However it is also important to also remember that the benefit system can often change at short notice.

Additional information in regard to Tax and Benefits can be found on the Fostering Network website in the finance section at

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk> or by phoning 020 7620 6400

If foster carers are still unsure about any of the above, they should speak to their fostering social worker.

DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE

There are a number of benefits that foster carers can apply for on behalf of the children and young people they care for, including Disability Living Allowance (DLA). It is advisable that carers seek guidance from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the child's Social Worker before applying for any benefits for the child.

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is a non-means tested benefit paid by the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) to individuals who are disabled in order to provide financial support to meet the additional needs that they have as a result of their disability.

Disability Living Allowance for disabled or terminally ill children may help with the extra costs of looking after a child who:

- Is aged under 16
- Has difficulties walking, or needs more looking after than a child of the same age who doesn't have a disability.

The current DLA rate depends on the level of help the child needs which may be informed by the undertaking of an assessment.

Eligibility:

Entitlement to DLA is subject to meeting all the eligibility criteria stipulated by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Claims for a child under 16 are only paid when the child's disability means that they have substantial / additional needs above those of an average child of the same age.

To qualify for DLA, a child must need additional help, above those of an average child of the same age, during the day and/or with everyday living tasks such as:

- Getting in and out of bed
- Going to the toilet
- Washing and bathing
- Extra help at school
- Dressing or undressing
- Playing and learning
- Eating and drinking
- Taking medicines
- Climbing stairs
- Turning over in bed
- Communicating with other people and learning social skills.

For example, the child may need someone with them to:

- Stop the child from hurting themselves, or other people, because of behavioural difficulties
- Protect the child from dangers of which the child is unaware
- Prevent accidents. For example, children with learning disabilities or with autism and with poorer road sense could be at risk outdoors
- Guide a hearing impaired or partially sighted child to walk outdoors safely;
- Support a child with mental health problems to avoid becoming anxious and panicked in group/crowd situations.

DLA is paid in two parts – the mobility component and the care component and is paid at different rates according to the child's needs. A child may receive one or both components.

The care component is paid at a low, medium and high rate and may be payable to a disabled child from the age of three months, once the child's needs have been assessed.

The mobility component is paid at a low or high rate (i.e. higher? rate from age three and higher rate from age five).

Any adult caring for a disabled or terminally ill child, providing the child is not in hospital or residential care for more than 28 days, can apply for this benefit. Although

the foster carer does not need the permission of the parent to apply for DLA, it would be good practice for the child's Social Worker to inform the parent of the foster carer's intentions.

If a child is in receipt of DLA prior to becoming looked after, the child's Social Worker should be involved in discussions with the parent concerning the transfer of the DLA to the foster carer. The parent must notify the DWP that the child is no longer in their care and the foster carer must be advised by their Fostering Social Worker to make an application to the DWP to receive it. In the same way, if a child moves placement from one foster carer to another, the foster carer must notify the DWP.

www.dwp.gov.uk

Carers should seek advice from the DWP and must tell their Fostering Social Worker that they have applied for DLA, if they haven't already spoken with their FSW.

DLA is paid every four weeks to the child, not the carer. Normally, if the child is under 16 the carer acts as an appointee, otherwise, the young person, providing they are capable, can have the benefits paid to them directly into their own bank accounts.

Foster carers should set up a separate bank account in the foster carer's name into which the DLA will be paid. For young people aged over 16, the foster carers should set up a bank account in the child's name.

DLA expenditure

The child's social worker and foster carer should agree the manner in which the DLA is to be spent, and this agreement should be recorded on the child's record, placement plan and reviewed during statutory visits to the placement. The Fostering Social Worker should review the agreement in supervision with the carer.

DLA should be spent by the foster carer in securing services and to support the child's additional needs. DLA is intended to support everyday living, and can be spent on a range of activities and equipment to meet the child's additional needs, e.g.:

- Activities that are costly e.g. horse riding, sensory sessions (Please note that all escorts or helpers must have a current CRB check to ensure their suitability)
 - Provision of an escort to enable social events to be attended
 - A special holiday for the child, which could (in exceptional circumstances and prior to agreement) include covering the family's expenses
 - Extra support including child sitting, using DBS-checked sitters
 - Individual equipment such as a computer or communication aids
 - Specialist and/or replacement clothing, where there is excessive wear and tear on clothing,

DLA should not be saved for the child to use in later years as this could result in them being penalised. For example, for a child reaching 16, a sum of between £6000

and £16000 in their own bank account will affect their claim for income support and housing benefits.

The child's bank statement details should be kept by the foster carer, along with records and details of expenditure. These records should be entered onto the child's record as a financial document, on a three-monthly basis by the child's Social Worker.

Although foster carers are not expected to produce receipts, it would be good practice to do so to show how money is being used for the benefit of the child. Foster carers are expected to record how the DLA is used to promote the child's outcomes within the placement. A record sheet (Appendix 1) is available to enable carers to evidence how DLA has been used.

Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

Disabled children aged over 16 can make an application for a Personal Independence Payment (PIP) which has replaced DLA for anyone aged 16-64 years. In order to confirm eligibility for a PIP, applicants will be required to undergo an assessment.

If a child is in receipt of DLA and is approaching 16 years, they will automatically receive an application pack for PIP, approximately 28 days before their 16th birthday. Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

Further information:

For further information on the appropriate use of DLA, contact the DLA Helpline on 0345 712 3456, Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm who will offer clarify.

Claiming benefits - advice for members

<https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/advice-information/finances/claiming-benefits/claiming-benefits-advice-members>

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for children:

<https://www.gov.uk/disability-living-allowance-children/overview>

NATIONAL INSURANCE

All foster carers who receive a reward from fostering are required to pay National Insurance contributions as self-employed people, which will provide benefits e.g. pension. This does not apply to Level 1 and Level 2 carers.

Those carers whose reward payment is below the threshold level for National Insurance payments need a 'Certificate of Small Earnings Exception' from their local DSS office. This does not, however, give entitlement to benefits nor give credit towards a pension.

Carers at Levels 3 and 4 will need to register as self-employed and pay National Insurance contributions. They have three months, from the time they become liable to pay tax, in which to apply.

PENSIONS: HOME RESPONSIBILITY PROTECTION

Home Responsibility Protection (HRP) was made available to foster carers from 2004. HRP protects the basic retirement pension position of people whose opportunity to work is limited because they are caring for children, or a sick or disabled person. It also helps with bereavement benefits. It is designed to have the simplest of qualifying criteria - namely as a 'passport' entitlement based on the receipt of appropriate benefits. For carers of children, Child Benefit is the trigger.

Foster carers are not employees of the local authority and the allowance they receive for caring for a child is not normally subject to National Insurance or tax. 'Reward payments' are made in certain circumstances, which are classed as earnings from self-employment and are liable for NI payments, but few foster carers receive these and some of them are granted exception from NI liability on the ground of low earnings.

As the children cared for by foster carers are technically in the care of the local authority, foster carers are not entitled to Child Benefit for them. Consequently, they are not covered by the HRP provisions for periods of foster caring unless they have children under 16 of their own.

HRP has been extended to foster carers for each full tax year for which they are registered as an approved foster carer. This means that they will be covered for periods when they are awaiting a placement and will benefit emergency foster carers who are ready to take in a child at any time.

How HRP works

The amount of basic (Category A) retirement pension a person is entitled to will depend on the number of qualifying years (i.e. years covered by national insurance contributions or credits) they have built up during their working life. The working life runs from age 16 until state pension age. In order to receive a full basic pension, 9/10ths of the working life normally needs to be covered by qualifying years. The working life is currently 49 years for men and 44 years for women. Therefore, for a full basic pension, a man needs 44 qualifying years and a woman 39.

HRP reduces the number of qualifying years needed for a full basic pension. However, it cannot reduce that number below 20. The provisions apply equally to men and women.

The current maximum number of HRP years is 24 for men and 19 for women. When state pension age is equalized at 65 in 2020, both men and women will need 44 qualifying years for a full pension and HRP will cover a maximum of 22 years.

The broad intention of HRP is to protect a person's pension over substantial periods of home responsibilities, not short periods of a few weeks or months; the legislation therefore applies to complete tax years during which a person satisfies the conditions.

What has to be done?

Foster carers need to complete claim form CF411, which they can get from social security or Inland Revenue offices and send it to the Inland Revenue. They will need to enclose a letter of confirmation that they have been approved as a foster carer throughout the previous tax year. This letter will need to be provided by the Local Authority which has approved them. Provided everything is in order, they will have their entitlement to HRP for that tax year noted on their National Insurance account.

INSURANCE

Foster Carers must inform both home and car insurance companies that they foster. They must have appropriate home insurance and fully comprehensive car insurance with business use for fostering. If the companies impose an extra charge, i.e. for business use, this should be discussed with their Fostering Social Worker. Where a foster child has caused damage to a foster carer's property, the carer should initially contact their insurance company. Families First have an insurance policy, which covers foster carers in circumstances where an insurance claim cannot be met.

FOSTER CARER INSURANCE – GUIDANCE NOTE

The following insurance is provided in respect of Foster Carers, including those involved in the Disability Short-Break scheme; those of children under remand from the Court, and lodgings providers registered with Staffordshire County Council and involved in the Supported Lodging Scheme.

Property Insurance

Insurers: Travelers Insurance

Policy Number: UCPOP 398807

Indemnity Limit: £300,000 Buildings / £15,000 Contents any one household

This policy provides cover to all property belonging to persons appointed as foster parents/supported lodgings provider in respect of damage (wilful or otherwise) caused to Foster Carer/Supported Lodgings Provider's property by the foster child residing with an Insured Foster Parent/Supported Lodging Provider.

It is a contingent policy that would only pay if no other policy is in force or if the policy in existence fails to pay out for some reason. Carer's property is defined as follows: 'Buildings and Contents belonging to an Insured Foster Parent/ Supported Lodging Provider'.

The following is not covered under this policy:

1. Theft of money
2. Damage to Motor Vehicles (whether being driven or not)

Where such damage or theft has occurred, the foster carer should discuss recompense with the fostering social worker. The policy is on a reinstatement basis and provides cover on a new for old basis.

The policy would cover Foster Carer/Support Carers/Supported Lodgings Provider's own children's property provided this property is within the Carer's home and forms part of the household's contents. The policy is subject to an excess of £100, which will be met by the Fostering Service. Standard policy terms and conditions will apply to this cover, and it should be noted that all claims should be reported to the Insurance Company within 30 days of the loss.

Liability Insurance:

Insurers: QBE Insurance (Europe) Ltd

Policy Number: Y097981QBE0116A

Indemnity Limit: £5,000,000

Excess: nil

This policy indemnifies individual Foster Parents/Support Carers /Supported Lodging Provider approved by Staffordshire County against any claim made by a third party against the Foster Parents/Supported Lodging Provider arising out of the fostering by them of children in care of Staffordshire County Council.

The policy provides retrospective cover for Foster Parents arising out of claims made during the currency of the policy in respect of injury, illness, loss or damage, which occurred, between 1st April 1964 and 16th June 1989 when Policy TP-2A004-0183 was effected. During this period of cover, the Indemnity Limit was £1,000,000 and not as stated above. Cover for period 16th June 1989 to 30th April 1998 provided under policy TP-02A004-0183 with Indemnity Limit of £1,000,000. Standard policy terms and conditions will apply to this cover.

EQUIPMENT

Equipment is provided through the Fostering Social Worker via the issue of an official order giving details of the items to be purchased and maximum amount to be spent. The type of equipment that family placement provide is detailed in 1. In exceptional circumstances permission will be given for carers to make the purchase and for money to be reimbursed on submission of the receipt.

DISABILITY SHORT BREAK PAYMENTS

When a link has been set up the child's Social Worker will complete a SW734 and forward it to JFU. Payments for each session or series of sessions are initiated by the Fostering Social Worker who will complete the Form SW807 for each date the child is in placement.

Payment is as follows:

Intros/Meetings	£15.85	Up to 84 hours	£185.50
Up to 6 hours	£31.60	Up to 96 hours	£205.25
Up to 12 hours	£47.40	Up to 108 hours	£224.95
Up to 24 hours	£63.20	Up to 120 hours	£244.70
Up to 36 hours	£94.70	Up to 132 hours	£264.50
Up to 48 hours	£126.30	Up to 144 hours	£284.20
Up to 60 hours	£146.00	Up to 156 hours	£303.95
Up to 72 hours	£165.80	Up to 168 hours	£323.65

Where agreement has been given by the area social work team to cover transport costs, the mileage will be paid at the rate of 40p per mile.

Any equipment required will be provided through the Family Placement Social Worker, in conjunction with the specialist OT services. See previous sections for details of equipment, insurance, tax etc.

REMAND PAYMENTS

Payments to remand foster carers are initiated by the child's social worker through submission of a SW734 to JFU (VCPT).

Remand carers receive a payment of £450.00 per week or £65 per day for periods of less than one week.

EMERGENCY DUTY SERVICE FOSTERING

Foster carers will be available on a rota to accept placements made by the County Emergency Duty Service Social Workers (EDS) outside normal office hours. This will increase placement choice, reduce the need to use residential emergency beds and enable siblings to be placed together.

EDS Incentive Fee: Carers will receive £50 for one child, £75 for two children and £100 for three or more, in addition to payment of the appropriate for skills level (paid pro rata). Placement should be until the next working day only.

LOANS TO FOSTER CARERS

Staffordshire County Council may authorise the provision of a loan to Foster Carers under duties set out in Section 23 Children Act 1989, to provide accommodation and maintenance for children they are looking after.

Applications for loans for conversion or extension to the carer's property, or for the purchase of a larger vehicle, will be considered by the Directorate, for carers approved by the Authority. This is to enable carers to be supported in the fostering task through providing additional accommodation for fostering or a larger vehicle where it is necessary due to the number of people in the family or an adapted vehicle when caring for a severely disabled child.

All loans exceeding £4,999 will be secured through a legal charge against the carer's property and will be repayable by instalments over an agreed period of time. Should the carers cease to foster for the Authority, the outstanding balance of the loan will be repayable in full.

Loans of £4,999 or less will remain unsecured but will be subject to a clause in the contract requiring repayment of the loan in full should the carer cease to foster for the authority.

Loans will be re-paid through instalments by standing order / direct debit payable to Staffordshire County Council.

The provision of a loan will be subject to the standard terms set out below, unless exceptional circumstances apply, and agreed by the Service Manager (Fostering services) or Head of Provider Services (Looked after Children), dependent upon the amount and whether secured.

STANDARD TERMS

Parties: Staffordshire County Council and Foster Carers approved by Staffordshire. Special Guardians and Adoptive parents where children have been placed by Staffordshire.

Security: All loans of £10,000 and above to be secured by way of a legal charge against the carer's property, in favour of Staffordshire County Council. The outstanding balance will become repayable in full should the carers cease to foster for Staffordshire. Where the loan required is for less than £10,000, there will be a clause in the contract requiring repayment in full should the carer cease to foster for Staffordshire.

Should the borrower miss any two payments in any six month period they will be required to repay in full the outstanding balance, and the contract will come to an end.

Amount to be advanced: Loans of less than £30,000 to be determined by the County Manager following application to, and positive recommendation from Resource Panel. Loans above £30,000 require a positive recommendation from resource Panel and the agreement of Strategic Lead Looked After Children Services.

Period of loan: the maximum period will be the date of the 18th birthday of the youngest foster child at the point of the agreement for long term placements or for an agreed number of years. Relocations/extended loan periods may be considered in exceptional circumstances

Repayment of loan the borrowers will make monthly payments by standing order / direct debit to Staffordshire County Council.

Early termination of the agreement: will occur when the loan is repaid in full or where the borrower ceases to foster for Staffordshire. There will be no penalty for early repayment.

Interest: loan to be interest free.

PROCEDURE

- 1.1 Families First is committed to providing the right support to our families and carers. Sometimes this requires agreeing financial support to assist with home adaptations in order to provide suitable accommodation for children being placed, or growing older in their placements; or in order for a household to purchase a larger vehicle to meet their needs as carers.
- 1.2 This type of financial support is agreed under duties set out in Section 23 (Children Act 1989), to provide accommodation and maintenance for children they are looking After ([Special Guardianship Orders Regs 2016](#))
- 1.3 All loans over £10,000 will be secured through a legal charge against the carer's property and will be repayable by instalments over an agreed period of time. If the carers cease to foster for the Local Authority, the outstanding balance of the loan will be repayable in full.
- 1.4 Loans of £10,000 or less will remain unsecured but will be subject to a clause in the contract requiring repayment of the loan in full should the carer cease to foster for the Local Authority.
- 1.5 Loans will be repaid through instalments by standing order / direct debit payable to Staffordshire County Council.
- 1.6 Recipients of loans must understand that they are legally bound by the conditions of the contract issued by Staffordshire County Council to repay any loan amount in full.
- 1.7 Where the recipient of a loan is experiencing difficulty maintaining their repayments, they should contact Staffordshire County Council Order Payments team at the earliest opportunity.
- 1.8 Decisions in relation to changes in the terms of repayment schedules will be passed to the Resource Panel for consideration and agreement.
- 1.9 Where the recipient of a loan has defaulted and the Resource Panel is not satisfied that an effective repayment plan is in place, the outstanding debt will be passed to Staffordshire County Council's Debt Recovery Team. Legal action will be instigated to recover outstanding debt where required.

- 1.10 The provision of a loan will be subject to the standard terms set out below, unless exceptional circumstances apply, and agreed by either the County Manager (Adoption/Fostering Services) or the Strategic Lead, Looked After Children Services.

2. Procedure for Home adaptations

- 2.1 All practitioners are reminded that, in their discussions with carers and potential carers, they must remain realistic about the provision and availability of this type of financial support. It is not fair to unrealistically raise carers/prospective carer's expectations before the outcome of a fair and transparent assessment and decision-making process.
- 2.2 **All practitioners share a responsibility to manage carers/prospective carer's expectations.**
- 2.3 When considering issues around the need for home adaptations the following must be considered:
- Is this absolutely essential in order to meet the needs of the child being placed/in placement?
 - Have all possible solutions to meet the identified needs been explored?
 - Is this an immediate or future need (if it's a future need can we consider other options like support with rehousing)?
 - What is the most cost-effective way to achieve a *good enough* outcome in order to meet the child/ren's needs?
- 2.4 All requests for financial support must be raised with the Team Manager.
- 2.5 The Team Manager can decide to reject the request or support the request from their own team budget (e.g. S.17) for up to £1,000.
- 2.6 For higher cost arrangements, the Team Manager can consider supporting a request to the Families First Resource Panel.
- 2.7 Before supporting a referral to the Resource Panel, the Team Manager **must** meet with the carers/prospective carers and undertake a visual inspection of the home, taking into account the principles set out above.
- 2.8 The Team Manager should make a key decision supporting the need for financial support to be considered by the Resource Panel and include this when booking onto Panel.
- 2.9 The carers/prospective carers must be informed that there is still a process to go through and their expectations must be managed. They will be required to provide detailed information about their household finances and costings in relation to any work proposed. They need to remain open to critical challenge/creative thinking about ways to achieve the outcomes needed in the most cost-effective way.
- 2.10 Resource Panel will only consider applications for loans where they are in receipt of all information.
- 2.11 Where required, Resource Panel will make time available to discuss potential applications with team managers and practitioners in order to arrive at '*in principle*' decisions to help support early decision-making/care planning.
- 2.12 No indication of a decision should be given to carers/prospective carers before this is formally agreed at Resource Panel.

- 2.13 Applications to the Resource Panel for home adaptations from Care Planning & Court and/or Safeguarding Team Manager's will be considered. NB: Panel will not consider any other applications for funding outside of Regulated Services.

3. Procedures for accessing car loans

- 3.1 Car loans to carers should only be provided where there has been an assessed need that the household require a larger/different vehicle in order to meet the needs of the children who have been placed.
- 3.2 Requests should not exceed £12,000 unless exceptional circumstances have been identified.
- 3.3 Social Workers supporting requests for car loans must take into account the carer's current and future commitment to their role and the carer's ability to repay the loan without it impacting adversely on the children in placement.

4. Resource Panel Process

- 4.1 With the agreement of their Fostering Social Worker, carer's must complete the application form for *Home Adaption/Extension or Purchase a Larger/Adapted Vehicle*, attaching the necessary estimates/quotes.
- 4.2 Panel will consider 'in principle' decisions, where this is required.
- 4.3 The Team Manager will review the application and make a decision re progression to Resource Panel. Team Managers are required to complete the applications re home adaptations over £1000.
- 4.4 The completed ID1 Application form and estimates will be forwarded to the Resource Panel Administrator.
- 4.5 The Resource Panel will consider all applications for loans between £1,000 and £30,000 and make a decision, setting out clearly the basis upon which the loan has been agreed.
- 4.6 Any unsecured loans and/or secured loans exceeding £30,000 will be considered by Resource Panel and a recommendation made. These will then be escalated to the Strategic Lead, Looked After Children Services, who will consider the application and the Panel recommendation and make a decision, setting out the basis upon which the loan has been made.
- 4.7 The signed application form will be forwarded to Legal Services who will arrange through Property Services, in cases where the loan is to be secured against the carer's property, for the property to be surveyed to establish whether there is sufficient equity to absorb a legal charge. Where there is insufficient equity, the County manager (Adoption/Fostering Service) will consider whether the request is exceptional so as to justify an unsecured loan in excess of £10,000 being made.
- 4.8 Legal Services will liaise directly with the carer to explain the process, the proposed agreement.
- 4.9 Legal Services will draw up and execute the contract, ensuring that any

legal charge is set against the property.

- 4.10 The application form will be forwarded to the Joint Finance Unit (JFU) by Legal Services in order for the finances to be released on the agreed date
- 4.11 The carer will provide proof of purchase to the JFU to confirm the loan has been used to purchase the vehicle for which it was agreed.
- 4.12 For extensions to properties, the carer will send a copy of the Building Regulation's Certificate to the Resource Panel as proof that the building works have been completed and to a satisfactory standard.
- 4.13 Recipients of loans are contractually obliged to inform the Local Authority where these circumstances change. Where required, fostering social workers will inform the Families First Finance Manager where circumstances arise that may impact upon the full repayment of the loan.

5. Financial Matters:

- 5.1 Once a signed legal contract is received from Legal Services, the following action will be taken by Families First Joint Finance Unit:
 - a) Issue loan payment to the carers in accordance with the above legal document ensuring that loan repayments are calculated exactly to ensure that the total amount to be repaid equates to the contract sum and the standing order / direct debit mandate.
 - b) A Sales Order will be raised against the carers, where applicable, with all paperwork being forwarded to the FF Debt Recovery Officer.
 - c) The FF Debt Recovery Officer will send a letter to the carers informing them of their repayment obligations as outlined in the approved contract.
 - d) On receipt of the returned signed standing order / direct debit bank mandate form, the FF Debt Recovery Officer will forward this completed document to the carer's bank.
 - e) A copy of the Building Regulation's Certificate will be sent to JFU by the carer as proof that the building work has been completed and to a satisfactory standard. In the case of purchase of a vehicle proof of purchase will be sent to JFU.
 - f) In the event of any **two** payments not being made in any six month period, the FF Debt Recovery Officer will liaise with the child's social worker and Legal Services with a view to terminating the contract and seeking immediate recovery of the outstanding balance of the loan. Should this amount not be paid by the borrower on request, the FF Debt Recovery Officer will instigate normal debt recovery procedures.
 - g) The FF Debt Recovery Officer will notify Legal Services when loans have been fully repaid that have been secured against the carer's property.
 - h) The register of loans maintained by the JFU will be reviewed on a 6 monthly basis by the FF Finance Manager and forwarded to the relevant County

Manager, (Adoption and/or Fostering) for identification and notification to the JFU of any breaches in the carer's contractual obligations.

JDU will notify Legal Services and the Fostering Social Worker when the loan has been fully re-paid.

SECTION SEVEN

DISABILITY FOSTERING TEAM

Disability Fostering is a Short-Break Service, which links families of disabled children with individuals and families who can provide their children with short-term care on a regular basis.

ACCESS AND CRITERIA (for children and young people who access the service)

The aim of the service is to promote the upbringing of the children and young people within their own families. The careful matching process when placing a child/young person adheres to working in partnership with the young person and their parent/carer along with other agencies to provide the best possible individual service to all.

When foster care is provided as a short term break for a child, arrangements should recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child. The parents remain central to the promotion of the child's health and education at all times.

The series of short term placements to which this regulation applies may be treated as a single placement.

All Disability Fostering referrals are processed through the two Disability Resource Panels, East & West.

- Disability Fostering is a planned service.
- The referral for Disability Fostering is an agreed referral made in conjunction with the family and child/young person.
- The child is aged between 3 and 16 years at the time of referral. Children outside this age range will need to seek guidance from the relevant Disability Resource Panel.
- The referral to the service is in line with Staffordshire's Children with Disabilities Services Eligibility Criteria for which the Matrix of Need is used. The Disability Fostering Team will be accessed at level 2 or level 3 of the Matrix of Need.
- The quantity of service provided will be up to a maximum of 29 overnight stays per year. Additional stays must be agreed by the Head of Service or through the Disability Resource Panel.
- To meet the needs of the child efficiently, it is essential for a social worker to be allocated to a child to access and maintain the service.

PLACEMENT PROCESS

- Monthly Service meetings are held to discuss resources and potential links for children awaiting a placement.
- Once a possible match has been identified, the child's social worker and Disability Fostering Social Worker will discuss the proposed placement in greater detail. Meetings will take place between the Parent/Carer, Disability Short Breaks Carer, Child, Child's Social Worker and Disability Fostering Social Worker.
- A Risk assessment will be completed prior to placement.
- Once the link has been agreed by everyone, in addition to the mandatory placement paperwork, the Child's Social Worker, family and child will complete the child's passport containing details of the child's needs and wishes.

LEVEL 5 FOSTER CARE FOR DISABLED CHILDREN (Contract Care)

In line with guidance through "Aiming High for Disabled Children" which states that "the 570,000 disabled children in England around 100,000 of whom have complex care need, need support from a wide range of services."

Our remit under 'Aiming High' is to recruit five households to meet the needs of the following groups of children:

1. Children and young people with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (likely to have other impairments)
2. Children and young people with complex health needs
3. Children and young people with moving and handling needs
4. Children and young people where challenging behaviour is associated with other impairments

Level five carers are paid a weekly fee plus allowances in recognition of the complexity of the Children's needs

EXPECTATIONS OF LEVEL 5 CARERS

- This will provide 230 placement nights with the child in placement plus 10 days allowed covering training, reviews etc.
- Carers would be expected to work a minimum of 30 weekends per year and be available for placement for the majority of the school holidays.
- Sick leave - carers would be expected to submit a letter from the GP after 2 weeks if they were unable to care because of sickness. The fee would continue to be paid for one calendar month, should the sickness continue the fee would reduce to half for 2 months. Should this exceed 3 months and prevent them from caring, their fitness would have to be assessed with the help of their GP or consultant.
- Resignation - a three month notice period would be expected from carers to enable an alternative provision to be arranged.

CRITICAL ILLNESS/CHILD DEATH IN PLACEMENT

Guidance for Foster carers of children who have no Advanced Care Plan

(An Advanced Care Plan is drawn up by family/carers and health professionals involved when it is clear that a child has a life threatening or life limiting condition, it is led by Health)

When a child is critically ill in placement

Why procedure is required

Local Safeguarding Children Boards have responsibilities set out in statutory regulations when a child dies (Working Together, Chapter 7, 2010).
<http://www.staffsscb.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/B423F1E7-9E1E-4C51-BF56-364932A39B59/152049/10AOverviewDocument.pdf>

Purpose of Document

This document provides details of the procedure which is to be followed in the event of a critical illness or child death in placement, and includes guidance and information for foster carers.

The procedure to follow if a child is in placement with foster carers and is taken critically ill or appears lifeless, then the foster carer will take the following action:

1. The foster carer is to stay with the child. If alone, take the phone to the child and phone 999. Give details of the child and illness to the operator, plus any details of open access to a hospital ward.
2. The foster carer is to follow the Health care plan guidance in carrying out CPR as appropriate to the child.
3. The Emergency Operator will stay on the phone and guide you until the ambulance personnel or paramedic arrives to take over. The foster carer will collect the child's emergency file, medication and most recent medication chart for the hospital. They will require details of the last medication given.
4. On the arrival of the paramedics/ambulance personnel, the foster carers will be guided by them as to when it is appropriate to contact the child's parents and inform them of the situation. The paramedics will guide the foster carer as to whether the child is taken to hospital and if so, which one.
5. The foster carer will inform the child's social worker as soon as practicably possible. After this the foster carer will contact their supervising social worker or the relevant team.
6. If out of hours, contact the duty social worker Tel No. 01785 354030, or 0845 6042 886
7. Medical personnel will be available to take charge at the hospital. They will require the following details:- medication sheet, full name, date of birth, address, names of parents, contact details, diagnoses, any recent illness, allergies, names of consultants if known, or which hospital they are seen at. They may also need the child's current medication.
8. At the first opportunity, the foster carer is to record the child's health and behaviours prior to the incident. This is information which may clarify the onset of the illness

9. The child's social worker and Medical staff are responsible for following statutory procedures which may lead to an investigation.
10. The child's sudden death may lead to an investigation. If so, information collated by the Foster carer will be removed at the earliest opportunity. Foster carers may also be required to be interviewed by the Police

Procedures for Children in Placement with Advanced Care Plan

1. Foster carers are to be informed where a child is in placement with an advanced care plan, or where such a plan is made during a child's placement.
2. The advanced care plan will be discussed with foster carers either during the placement meeting or at the time of drawing up the advanced care plan.
3. The foster carers will have a copy of the advanced care plan to give to medical personnel as necessary.
4. In case of critical illness or death, Advanced Care Plan recommendations are to be followed.

Carer support

1. The Supervising Social Worker or colleague will contact the carer on the same day if require or on the next working day at the latest, and will visit within two working days in order to clarify support needed.
2. Appropriate times will be arranged to collect the child's belongings, files equipment etc
3. Support will be offered from the fostering social worker to attend the funeral and an ongoing support plan will be agreed.
4. Ongoing contact with the child's family and other implications to be discussed in the Foster carers' supervision.
5. Additional contact numbers

Fostering Network - Bethan Houston – 01905 622459

Email - bethan.houston@fostering.net

SECTION EIGHT

INTENSIVE INTERVENTIONS

Working together with specialist staff from social care, mental health and the youth offending service, our Intensive Interventions foster carers provide different types of specialist placement for exceptionally hard-to-reach young people who often require a solo placement.

RESILIENCE FOSTERING (LEVEL 5)

Resilience Fostering (Level 5) is a family finding project delivered jointly by the Staffordshire Fostering service and the North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust and is located within the Intensive Interventions arm of the fostering service. The approach in this model is centred upon ***resilience theory***.

Young people entering these solo foster placements are usually aged 10-13 and do so from the residential sector where, following a period of preparation, consultation with their birth family and with the consent of the young person they are provided a solo foster placement within a long term family unit.

Applicants for Resilience Fostering are usually professionals with a knowledge of the social care system (residential workers, police officers, foster carers, nurses, teachers and so forth) who commit to the usual Form F assessment but also an additional psychological screening (the Attachment Style Interview) to ensure their suitability for this challenging work. Carers are paid a high professional fee in addition to the fostering allowance and receive 36 days paid respite annually.

Close support to these placements is guaranteed via a network which includes a clinical psychologist, social workers, learning mentors, respite foster carers and education tutors. This team meets with the foster carer weekly to ensure the plan for the young person is on track and working well for everyone. The Resilience Fostering social workers also offer out of hours support 24/7.

The rationale

Evidence from research tells us that children are best able to overcome adversities if they have a strong support network, positive school experiences, a belief that their own efforts can make a difference, opportunities that promote competence/emotional maturity and exposure to challenges that develop problem solving and emotional coping skills.

The single most important factor in promoting resilience in children is a secure and supportive family. Securing and supporting the resilience of their foster carers is just as important to the success of a placement.

REMAND FOSTERING

New legislation introduced in May 2012 (the Legal Aid, Immigration and Sentencing of Offenders Act) will mean some young people age 10-17 involved in court proceedings who were formerly remanded to secure custody may now instead be offered the support of a foster family whilst they await their court appearance. In only some cases might these be solo placements; many other young people may benefit from joining a larger family, including where other foster children may be present. The placement match is risk assessed and undertaken in full consultation with the providing family and their supervising fostering social worker. Remand foster carers (irrespective of their payment for skills level) receive a fixed high professional fee in addition to the usual fostering allowance for the duration of the placement.

This is a welcome development as sending young people to custody to await court has proved highly detrimental for many young people, the majority of whom research shows will abandon their offending behaviour post-adolescence.

Time spent in a foster family and away from negative peers can be used constructively to counsel them, educate them, model pro-social behaviours and introduce new positive choices for young people.

A typical period of remand is 12 weeks, during which time the foster carer ensures the young person attends any legal meetings or court appearances, the remand social workers undertake a timetable of direct sessions with the young person and the education worker ensures the young person's education or training obligations are fulfilled.

A suite of materials are available to inform the public and enquiring professionals about Resilience Fostering (Level 5), Intensive Fostering and Remand Fostering. Information can be sought via www.care4child.org/fostering-in-staffordshire/fosteringlevel5.php

Or for further information and a discussion on any of the above contact:

Brian Johnson,
Programme Manager,
Intensive Interventions
Tel: 01785 277368
Mob: 07969 242584
brian.johnson@staffordshire.gov.uk

SECTION NINE

FAMILY & FRIENDS

Family & Friends Team

When parents have difficulties at home and their child is suffering as a result, s/he may need to be looked after by someone else, for example a relative, friend or other person who is connected with the child. These arrangements can be made directly between parents and their relatives or friends or a social worker may be involved because they are concerned that the child is suffering significant harm and do not believe it is safe for the child to remain in the parents' home.

When a social worker is involved the child becomes a 'looked after child.' Staffordshire County Council is committed to placing children with a relative, friend or connected person to the child, before considering placing them with unrelated foster carers, unless that is not in the child's best interests. This can be a short term arrangement or may be on a permanent basis; it can also be done in an emergency.

If you are a family member, friend or other connected person and the child is placed with you, when they are 'looked after', you will be assessed by the Family and Friends Team.

Family & Friends Foster Care:

Children who reside in Family and Friends foster care are under 18 and are either subject of a care order, or who are accommodated voluntarily. These placements are made following an assessment by the Local Authority who having made the decision that the child should be 'looked after' have a legal responsibility to provide accommodation in an approved placement, which may be a placement with a Family & Friends Foster Carer.

The assessment involves a social worker from the Family and Friends Team talking with and gaining information from the prospective carer and child/ren, to establish if the placement is in the child's best interests. The Family and Friends social worker will also undertake relevant checks, including CRB checks, health checks and undertake visits to referees.

Following this, all the information is gathered and a report is presented to the Fostering Panel, who make a recommendation on whether to approve the carers as foster carers (see information on Fostering Panel on page 61).

To be approved as a Family and Friends foster carer, there are a number of regulations and standards that have to be met, to ensure the child/ren will receive all the support they need to be happy and safe.

Support to Family and Friends Foster Carers:

Following approval as foster carers, Family and Friends Team will continue to provide support, information, advice and guidance to carers and children to ensure that they are able to make informed decisions about the options available to them.

Support Groups:

There are also a number of Family and Friends foster carer support groups which are held County wide on a monthly basis. The support groups provide carers with an opportunity to meet people in similar situations, share good practice, support one another over a cup of tea and listen to guest speakers.

Additional Support:

All Family & Friends foster carers are provided with the same level of support as other foster carers approved by Staffordshire Families First, Looked after Children - Fostering Services, which includes membership to the Fostering Network access to the full range of training opportunities afforded to other approved foster carers.

Family & Friends foster carers are required to complete the CWDC 'Training, Support and Development' - Standards for Foster Care within 18 months of the approval.

Family & Friends foster carers have an allocated social worker from the Fostering Service who will visit on a regular basis, making scheduled and unannounced visits. They will also review the approval of the foster carers, at least on an annual basis.

Financial Implications:

Accountability for the placement of Looked after Children resides with the Local Authority. All Family & Friends foster carers are paid a level of allowance in line with Families First Fostering Service's Finance Policy.

Duties/Services undertaken by the Family and Friends Team:

The Team has a broad remit which can be summarised within the following areas:

- Undertaking Viability Assessments (these are the initial assessments to establish whether the placement appears to be in the child's best interests)
- Undertaking Full Assessments (including those following placements made under Regulation 24 CPPR 2010)
- Regulating and supporting approved family and friends foster carers
- Undertaking Special Guardianship Reports
- Supporting Special Guardians
- Undertaking Private Fostering Assessments and statutory undertakings
- Regulating and supporting Private Fostering Arrangements
- Providing a county wide daily duty service to colleagues
- Promoting good care planning and advice in respect of regulatory requirements.
- Providing social workers in court with urgent access to advice/ information re process and timescales

Guiding Principles and Values of the Family and Friends Team:

- The welfare of the child is of paramount importance, and wherever possible children and young people should be brought up by their wider families and friends, if they cannot remain with their parents.

- In order to promote a child's welfare, support will be based on the needs of child, rather than their legal status.
- Family and friends carers will be provided with support to ensure that children do not become, or remain in care longer than is needed.
- Where children live in family and friends care, the Family and Friends Team will provide support, information, advice and guidance to carers and children to ensure that they are able to make informed decisions about the options available to them.
- Parents will be supported to retain their responsibilities and to remain closely involved with their child(ren), even if their child(ren) cannot live at home with them.
- The Family and Friends Team will consult with children about their care, involve them in all decisions made about them, and take their wishes and feelings into account in a way which is appropriate to their age and understanding.
- Staffordshire Families First Specialist Services will ensure it meets its legal duties in relation to family and friends placements.

For further information please contact:

Tracey Hussain

Team Manager

Family and Friends Team

Staffordshire Place 1

Stafford

ST16 2LP

Tel: 01785 895363

SECTION TEN

LEGAL TERMINOLOGY

BEING LOOKED AFTER; CHILDREN IN THE CARE OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

Children who are 'looked after' (children in care) by a local authority may be 'accommodated', subject of a court order or remanded/detained

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ACCOMMODATED

This means that a child under 16 may only be accommodated with the consent of the parent(s) or those with parental responsibility. It is entirely voluntary. There is no court order. It means that social services provide somewhere for a child to live if:

- there is no one who has parental responsibility for the child, or
- the child has been lost or abandoned or has been thrown out of home, or
- the person caring for the child cannot provide accommodation or care either temporarily or permanently, or
- the child might suffer ill-treatment from another person, or
- the police or the court has asked Social Services to provide accommodation for the child.

EMERGENCY PROTECTION ORDER (EPO) (Section 44 Children Act 1989)

This is an order from the court that allows Social Services to remove a child from home and grant Social Service parental responsibility. The court will only make this order if it believes the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm if not removed into local authority accommodation or does not stay in the place they are currently being cared for example a foster placement. The order cannot be stopped or challenged within the first 72 hours. After that it may be challenged in court providing the parent or carer was not present at the initial hearing. It can last up to eight days and then be extended for a further seven days.

INTERIM CARE ORDER (Section 38 Children Act 1989)

This order will often follow an EPO and gives the court time to collect more information. An interim care order is made initially for not more than eight weeks. Further interim care orders are renewable at regular intervals until the directions/final hearing. An Interim care order awards parental responsibility to the local authority. Parents and legal guardians retain their parental responsibility.

Following the application to Court there is usually a series of Interim Care Orders while further investigations and assessments of the situation are carried out before any final orders are made by the court.

CARE ORDER (Section 31 Children Act 1989)

This order gives Social Services parental responsibility jointly with the parents or guardian.

A care order gives the local authority the power to determine the extent to which a parent or guardian of the child may meet his parental responsibility. For example the local authority can make decisions for the child about where they live and with whom they live and who they have contact with (however they have a responsibility to make any decisions after appropriately consulting with the child, their parent or any significant person to the child).

A Care Order is made if the court thinks the child might be suffering significant harm or is likely to suffer significant harm and

A) The harm is attributable to the care given to the child and is not what it would be reasonable to expect a parent to give or

B) The child is beyond the parent(s) control

It lasts until one of the following happens:

- the young person reaches the age of 18
- the child is adopted
- a supervision order, a residence order or a special guardianship order is made
- the court stops the order
- the child, their parent(s), Social Services or the person with parental responsibility asks the court to stop the order and the court agrees

There are some things that the local authority cannot agree to such as, agreeing for the child to be adopted, causing the child to be brought up in any religious persuasion other than that which they would have been brought up in if they had remained with their parents/guardian and allowing the child to live outside the UK for more than 28 days without the consent of everyone with parental responsibility for the child or a court order.

CONTACT

The local authority has a duty to promote a reasonable level of contact between a child who is cared for and their parent, guardian and family. What is reasonable can sometime be an area of dispute and the court can be asked to make specific directions about how and when contact should occur.

If the local authority wants to suspend or stop contact for a period longer than 7 days they need to obtain a court order to do so.

SUPERVISION ORDER (Section 31 Children Act 1989)

These orders are made on the same basis as a care order i.e. a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm. These orders do not give parental responsibility to the local authority but where an order is in force the local authority has a duty to advise, assist and befriend the child and take steps that are reasonably necessary to give effect to the order. Directions may be specified by the court such as directing where a child should live, directing the child to meet with a social worker or to participate with certain activities. An order lasts one year but can be extended by the court for a maximum of three years.

SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP ORDER (Adoption and Children Act 2002)

This is an order made by the court that places a child or young person to live with someone permanently and gives legal status to non parents who wish to care for that child or young person in a long term secure relationship. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 introduced this order with the intention of creating a permanent home for a child who does not live with his or her parents. If adoption is not suitable or not in the child's best interest then a special guardianship order should be made

It is a court order similar to a residence order and gives a child a permanent, legally-secure family. It means that:

- the child must live with whoever is specified in the order and that person will be given parental responsibility that can be exercised to the exclusion of everyone else, which a residence order does not
- it does not remove parental responsibility from the child's parents but does prevent them from using it whilst the special guardianship is in place
- Foster Carers are able to apply if they have cared for the child for 12 consecutive months or have the consent of the local authority

RESIDENCE ORDER

This is a court order stating with whom the child must live and it means that:

- the child must live with whoever is specified in the order and that person will be given parental responsibility if they haven't got it already
- the child cannot leave the country for more than a month (nor can the child change his or her surname) without the written permission from whoever has parental responsibility or the court
- any interested party can apply to have it stopped at any time

It lasts usually until the child is sixteen but occasionally until the young person is eighteen

The following people can apply for a Residence Order: A parent, a guardian, a step parent, any other person who has the consent of all those with parental responsibility, any person who, if the child is in care, has the consent of the local authority, people with the permission of those who already have a residence order for the child, anyone who has lived with the child for at least 3 years, a local authority foster carer if the child has lived with them for at least 1 year immediately preceding the application, people who have leave of the court to apply.

PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

The following people have or can acquire parental responsibility:

A married couple who have children together both automatically have parental responsibility. Parental responsibility continues after divorce.

Mothers automatically have parental responsibility.

Where parents are not married, the unmarried father has parental responsibility if:

- His name is registered on the birth certificate – this is the case for births registered after 1 December 2003. Fathers can re-register if their names have not been placed on the birth certificate before this date.
- He later marries the mother.
- Both parents have signed an authorised parental responsibility agreement.
- He obtains a parental responsibility order from the court.
- He obtains a residence order from the court.
- He becomes the child's guardian.

The Local Authority acquires PR if the court makes a care order. The parent(s) still retain PR so the parents and local authority both have it jointly. If there is a dispute then the local authority's PR overrides the parent(s)' PR. Foster Carers do not have PR but may have some day to day responsibility delegated to them by the parent(s) and/or local authority.

CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN

The Children's Guardian is appointed by the court and does not work for the Local Authority. A Guardian is a person who looks after a child's interests if someone has applied for a court order. Guardians do the following:

- Listen to what a child wants now and in the future
- Talks to the child, parents, grandparents and anyone else who is important to the child
- Talks to Teachers, Social Workers, Health Visitors and anyone else who can give advice or help
- Reads reports about the child and family
- Works out what's best for the child

The Guardian will choose a suitable solicitor who will be able to explain what is best for the child to the court

POLICE PROTECTION POWERS (Children Act 1989)

In some circumstances where children are considered to be in need of protection the police have emergency powers to remove them to a safe place. This lasts for up to 72 hours and these powers are only used in exceptional circumstances where there is not enough time to seek an emergency protection order or for reasons relating to the immediate safety of the child.

APPENDIX A

FOSTER CARER AGREEMENT

SW620 (Version.2018)

SW & Office: NAME & OFFICE

Foster Care Agreement

Issued in accordance with Regulation 27(5)(b) of The Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011

Name:

Name:

Address:

1. Approval

You were first approved as Foster Carers/a Foster Carer by Staffordshire County Council with effect from:

2. Date first approved: DATE

The approval specified below is with effect from:

3. Date of signing: DATE ADM SIGNS (Date of Panel:)

The terms of your current approval are:

APPROVAL DETAILS

Both the terms of Approval and this Agreement will be subject to Review within a maximum of 12 months. This will usually take the form of a Review meeting held at the foster home. The recommendations of the Review, and any changes to the terms of approval that result, will be considered by the Fostering Panel.

Foster carers are required to achieve the TSD Standards Certificate of Successful Completion within 12 months of approval. With the exception of Family and Friends carers who have 18 months to achieve their Certificate of Successful Completion

The primary aim of Staffordshire's Families First Service is to ensure that the needs of children, young people and families across Staffordshire are identified early, the right help is put in place. Families First believes that children are best cared for by their own family. Where this is not possible or not in the best interests of the child, we believe that children should be able to experience family life in a suitable family, on a temporary or permanent basis, wherever possible.

4. The Fostering Service

Staffordshire County Councils Fostering agency will provide supervision, support and development opportunities to all foster carers.

We will do this through providing:

An allocated fostering social worker whose role is to undertake the supervision and support of foster carers, enabling them to provide safe care of a high quality for children who are looked after, taking into account the needs of every member of the household.

An allocated children's social worker who has primary responsibility for each child in placement. The child's social worker will wish to see the child alone.

An independent advice and mediation worker employed by the Fostering Network to support carers as required.

Financial support paid promptly and reviewed regularly.

Essential items of equipment.

An initial clothing allowance to meet the needs of the child upon first becoming looked after. Ongoing maintenance of clothing is provided through the weekly allowance for the child paid to foster carers.

Essential items of equipment to meet the needs arising from any disability the child may have.

Insurance

The Department carries insurance cover for exceptional use by foster carers.

It is expected that all foster carers purchase household insurance that will provide appropriate cover for them for their fostering tasks and fully comprehensive car insurance with business use for fostering.

Details of the Department's insurance policy and procedures will be provided during the foster carer's induction and is included in the **Foster Carer Handbook in the Finance Section**.

5. Requirements of Foster Carers when caring for children

Foster carers are required to:

Support all children by:

Being responsible for the care of children placed by the authority

Working with the agency and all those involved in helping children fulfil their potential.

Taking part in implementing the child's care plan, and supporting the child to achieve good outcomes specifically linked to Health, emotional health, behaviour and development, identity, self-care skills, social presentation, education, family and social relationships, hobbies and activities.

Promoting contact with birth family members and other people important to the child.

Ensuring that children are looked after as if they were a member of the family and their sense of belonging is promoted.

Ensuring children have a positive understanding of their heritage and meet the needs of the child placed arising from his/her culture, race, religion and language. In the case where the child's background differs from that of the foster carer, to promote specified actions necessary to meet a child's needs.

Being aspirational for the children in their care.

Ensuring that children are kept safe from harm and abuse.

Taking children to family events and on family holidays unless there are exceptional circumstances

Not taking children out of school during term time.

Wherever possible carers should transport children to school

Carers should transport children who attend school in the local community

Comply with policy and procedures by:

Not administering any form of physical sanction or corporal punishment, including smacking, pushing or shaking.

Complying with the terms of the care plan, placement agreement, delegated authority and safe care plan in respect of each child placed.

Notifying the County Council immediately of any serious illness or other serious occurrence concerning the child, including incidents where a child is subject to physical intervention for their own safety or that of others, is being bullied or goes missing.

Complying with Families First policies including the protection of children from abuse or neglect, acceptable measures of behaviour management, discipline and control and unauthorised absences / missing of a child from a foster carer's home

Allowing the child to be removed from the foster carers' home in a manner consistent with the welfare of the child and the carers by the responsible placing local authority or Staffordshire County Council.

Allowing the supervising fostering social worker and child's social worker access to their home at any reasonable time.

Comply and co-operate with inspections undertaken by Ofsted who are an independent inspectorate for standards in education and children's services.

Comply with the Fostering Services policies and guidance in respect of social media, e-safety and data protection.

Participate in training and development by:

Attending identified training courses and completing learning and development activities relevant to placements and their own personal development.

Following the terms of the Payment for Skills policy.

Participate in Supervision:

It is expected that all approved foster carers participate in supervision sessions with the fostering social worker on a three monthly basis supervision meetings are distinct from general support meetings.

The supervision meetings are recorded and copies held by the department and carers.

Supervision will involve all members of the household, including children and young people as appropriate. All improved carers within the household should participate in supervision.

Supervision will form part of the information gathered for the annual review

For further information please refer to the **foster carer handbook and supervision template**

Recording:

Foster carers are required to:

Complete daily recordings that should be submitted electronically on a weekly basis to their fostering social worker and the child's social worker for safe storage.

All records that carers make in relation to a child placed with them remains the property of Staffordshire County Council.

All records held in relation to a child must be returned promptly when not required and/or at the end of each placement.

Foster carers must comply with the Data Recording policy, procedures and guidance.

6. Unplanned endings

Foster carers are expected to work with children's social workers and fostering social workers to ensure that children are supported to remain in their placement

Foster carers are expected to notify their social worker immediately of any challenges to the placement and fully participate in stability meetings and any follow up meetings.

In the unlikely event of an unplanned ending the foster carer will be expected to participate in a meeting to consider all aspects of why the placement ended and to comply with any actions identified at the meeting.

7. Foster Carers Training and Development

All foster carers will have a Personal Development Plan (PDP) which will be reviewed as part of the foster carers review process.

All foster carers are expected to achieve the targets within the timescales set out within their PDP.

All foster carers will be expected to undertake all foundation training as agreed within their PDP within 18 months of approval.

All foster carers are expected to undertake a minimum number of hours in training and development activities which will be specified in the PDP and should be no less than 21 hours annually. Such activities include attending support groups, foster carer forums, briefings, events, training, E learning, guided learning, reading and professional discussion.

All approved foster carers are expected to achieve the Training Development and Support Standards for Foster Care, Certificate of Successful Completion within 12 months of approval (18 months for Family and Friends carers) and will be expected to produce a portfolio of evidence that meets the areas of competency required.

Subsequent to achieving the Certificate of Successful Completion all foster carers will be expected to keep their working portfolio of evidence up to date. This will be reviewed on an annual basis.(see TSD policy)

8. Notification

Carers are to give immediate written notification to the authority, with full particulars of:

- All referrals made to children's services regarding their own family members.
- Any Safeguarding concerns within the household or extended family network
- Any intended change of address
- Any change to the composition of the household, arrivals and departures.
- Any further request by carers to foster or adopt
- Any pending court cases, convictions, arrests, police interviews or cautions of any nature relating to any member of the household or anyone who is a visitor to the household.
- Any intended childminding
- Any other changes in personal circumstances and any other event affecting the foster carer's capacity to care for any children placed, or the suitability of the carer's household.eg significant illness, bereavement or separation .
- Any disciplinary action by an employer.
- Any new relationship that has regular contact with the household
- Any new relationship with a potential partner
- Any issue that would have an adverse impact on the fostering household e.g. bankruptcy, family conflict, priority need of family members.

9. Confidentiality

Normally Families First will not divulge information about foster carers outside of the authority without their consent. An exception may be made if this affects the safety of children and others.

Foster carers are to ensure that any information passed to them relating to any children placed, or their families, is not disclosed to any person without the consent of the responsible authority.

Foster carers are to treat as confidential the content of all meetings they may attend in relation to the children they care for.

Foster carers are to be familiar with the department's policies in relation to secure records as detailed in the Foster Carers Handbook.

Foster carers need to follow the policy in relation to the safe and secure storage of records which includes electronic data.

10. Conflict of Interest

The Children Act 1989 Guidance & Regulations Volume 4 (5.35) allows for foster carers or a member of their household to work for the fostering service but care must be taken to avoid any actual or perceived conflict of interest

Any interest from employees of Staffordshire County Council will be considered on an individual basis to determine whether there is a conflict of interest.

In general terms anyone working within the fostering service will not be considered a foster carer. Neither will staff working in a managerial, social work or other professional role within the Families' First Service.

When foster carers are employed by Families First the conflict of interest will be considered by the agency decision maker as they may be need to resign.

11. Foster Carer Review

Foster carer review meetings will be held at least annually as a minimum and whenever there is a significant change of circumstances. It is expected that the review is attended by all approved carers in the household.

The review will consider that all necessary regulatory checks are in date e.g. DBS, medicals, local authority and media checks. These will be updated every 3 years.

Each review meeting will consider placements made since the last review, the outcomes for children that have been achieved, identified learning and development needs of carers and the extent to which these have been met.

Foster carers are required to complete their annual review questionnaire. If this is not received this may affect their continued suitability to foster.

Any changes to the household will also be considered as well as any changes required to the foster carers terms of approval.

The review will make a recommendation regarding carers continued suitability to foster as well as the terms of their approval.

All reviews are presented to the Fostering Panel and the Agency Decision Maker who will decide on the ongoing suitability of the carers to foster as well as the terms of their fostering approval.

Following the panel recommendations being agreed by the Agency Decision Maker a new foster care agreement is provided which you are required to sign and return.

You will be allowed 28 calendar days from receipt of the letter to either make further representation to the Fostering Panel or the Independent Review Mechanism.

The names and addresses of all foster carers approved by Staffordshire County Councils fostering agency or for whom Staffordshire is the responsible authority, will be entered on the Staffordshire foster carer register.

12. Delegated authority and Placement agreement

Delegated authority for all placements will be clearly detailed in the placement agreement for each child in placement and reviewed at their looked after child review.

Foster carers should abide by the delegated authority policy guidance.

13. Placement of children

When children are placed, foster carers will receive:

- A placement plan
- Risk and match documentation
- Child specific fostering support and safer caring plan.

The placement plan will be completed at the point of placement and will detail those decisions that will be delegated to the foster carer and detail any extra support available to meet the child's needs.

When the placement plan highlights any significant risk to the child a risk assessment will be completed.

The fostering social worker will complete the child's fostering support and safer care plan at the point of placement.

At the time of placement the vulnerability and associated risks of a child going missing or absconding must be considered. Children who are known to behave in this way must have a risk assessment completed.

This risk assessment will consider the need to involve the police or any other person in the search when children go missing.

If a child does go missing, Foster carers will be required to provide full details about the child including;

- Full description of the child including clothing

- When the child was last seen
- Family and friends addresses
- Previous history of going missing
- Legal status
- Any circumstances which increase the risk to the child.

If the appropriate documents and information have not been given by the time of placement the foster carer should notify the fostering social worker immediately.

14. Allegations, Concerns and Complaints

Information regarding allegations and concerns can be found in the foster carers handbook and the [allegations, complaints and cause for concern about foster carers and prospective adopters](#) policy

Any allegations that a foster carer has caused significant harm to a child in their care will be dealt with according to Families First procedures. In the event that foster carers are not permitted to accept further placements pending investigation, the carers will receive written notification from the relevant Team Manager.

The Fostering Service will ensure that foster carers are provided with information and support in respect of any such allegations, including the assistance of the independent Fostering Network Mediation and Advice Service.

15. Complaints comments and concerns

Foster carers with general queries, concerns or suggestions concerning the operation of the fostering service are advised to speak to their supervising Fostering Social Worker or Team Manager, in the first instance.

Carers with comments or concerns in relation to the Care Plan for any child placed should contact the child's social worker or Team Manager in the first instance.

Foster carers who wish to make specific representations or complaints about Families First its staff or services will be directed to the Departmental Complaints Procedure as detailed in the **Foster Carers Handbook**

16. Resignation

A foster carer may, at any point, give written notice that they wish to resign from the role.

The foster carer's approval is automatically **terminated 28 days after receipt of the notice** by the Fostering Service Reg 28(13).

I / We acknowledge our willingness to be bound by the terms of this Foster Care Agreement.

Signed
(Foster Carer)

Date:

**Signed
(Foster Carer)**

Date:

Signed on behalf of the Fostering Service

County Manager, Fostering Services
Date:

APPENDIX B

DATA PROCESSOR AGREEMENT

This data processor agreement ("agreement") is between
Staffordshire County Council ("the data controller")
and
Foster Carers ("the data processor")

Whereas:

(A) This agreement is provided in addition to any other separate agreement entered into between the parties and introduces further contractual requirements to ensure the protection and security of data passed from Staffordshire County Council ("the data controller") to the foster carer ("the data processor") for processing.

(B) Where personal data is to be processed by a data processor on behalf of a data controller paragraph 12 of Schedule 1 part II of the Data Protection Act 1998 requires that processing is carried out under a contract and requires data processors to comply with obligations equivalent to those imposed on a data controller by the seventh principle. For the purposes of Schedule 1 part II, this agreement constitutes a contract.

(C) The conditions laid out in this agreement apply to short term² access to data controlled by Staffordshire County Council by foster carers

Definitions:

1. "Data" covered by this agreement may be manual or electronic, stored on media of any kind and processed in any way. Data includes but is not limited to "personal data"³ as defined in the Data Protection Act 1998 ("DPA").
2. "Systems" covered by this agreement may be any system which holds, processes, displays, transfers or otherwise makes data available.
3. "Processing" covered by this agreement may be any operation which is performed on personal data, (whether manual or electronic) including collection, recording, storage, use, disclosure, erasure or destruction.
4. The conditions in this agreement will apply at all times to both raw data and any data produced by further processing by the Council, the foster carer, the "data subject"⁴ (as defined in the DPA) or any other party.

Application:

1. This agreement shall apply to all data processed as part of the foster care agreement for the period of time that the placement requires.
2. The foster carer will be required to undertake appropriate training which will be made available through the Adoption and Fostering Recruitment and Training Team.

² Short term refers to the length of time the foster child is in the care of the foster carer

³ Personal data is any information which relates to an identifiable living individual

⁴ Individual to which the personal data relates

3. The foster carer will be required to sign the confidentiality agreement which can be found in Schedule A of this agreement.

Purpose of processing:

1. Data controlled by the Council may only be accessed by, and released to, “authorised persons”⁵ and may only be processed for the business purposes of the Council as outlined in the Foster Care Agreement or where permitted by law and authorised by the Council.

Security and confidentiality of data

1. Foster carers must comply with any procedures, standards or confidentiality requirements specific to the work area. If the foster carer believes that these requirements may conflict with something else that they have been advised to do, they should refer the matter to the Fostering County Manager who will discuss the issue with the Head of Information Governance.

2. All use of Council data must be compliant with relevant legislation including, but not limited to, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) the Data Protection Act 1998, the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. There may be occasions when the Council requires assistance from foster carers in order to ensure compliance with this legislation.

3. The foster carer shall treat all information belonging to the Council as confidential and shall safeguard it accordingly. Confidential information should be afforded the highest sensitivity and security.

4. All confidential written communication between the parties should be sent securely by secure file transfer (that will be provided by the Council), delivered by hand or sent via special delivery.

5. Any credentials that are provided to a foster carer or authorised person to facilitate access, i.e. usernames, passwords or physical means of authentication, must be kept secure and must not be disclosed or provided to unauthorised persons. Passwords should not be shared with any other person. If physical means of authentication have been provided, these must be returned once they are no longer required.

6. Where the foster carer or authorised person may select their own password they should refer to the Council's guidance on password management which can be found in the IT security section of the Foster Care Handbook.

7. No copy of the data may be made except for any copies required to carry out the foster care role. No data may be retained by the foster carer once the placement has ended or used in any way which is not required for the foster care role without the written consent of the Council.

8. The foster carer must not, under any circumstances, attempt to bypass security systems or controls.

9. Any advice provided by the Council must be followed to ensure that electronic data processed on behalf of the Council does not become compromised, i.e. infected with malicious code or viruses.

⁵ An authorised person is any person deemed by the Council to be authorised

10. The Council reserve the right to inspect any equipment used to carry out this work.
11. The foster carer should return all data relating to the foster child (whether manual or electronic) to the Council upon completion of the foster care placement. Foster carers should check that information has not accidentally been saved to the PC, and if any information is found, it should be wiped. Advice on how to do this securely can be found in the IT security section of the Foster Care Handbook. Continuing to hold this information after the placement is complete may be a breach of data protection legislation.
12. The foster carer must comply with licensing restrictions on software and data to which they are given access.
13. The foster carer shall safeguard the data from unauthorised or unlawful processing or accidental loss, destruction or damage. All personal data will be kept with adequate security; electronic data should be stored on an encrypted memory stick issued by the Council which should be stored in a locked receptacle when not in use. Manual data will be stored in a locked receptacle when not being actively processed.
14. Where data must be transferred, moved or copied to another location this must be by suitably secure means and only to authorised locations and persons.
15. As data may only be made available to foster carers and authorised persons, care must be taken not to allow any unauthorised person to see it on a screen, as a hard copy or hear its content discussed in a conversation.
16. The requirements of this agreement apply to any security backup copies of Council data.
17. Any potential or actual security incidents that occur must be reported to the Adoption and Fostering Recruitment and Training Team as soon as it has been realised.
18. The foster carer must provide the necessary assistance to the Council when dealing with requests for information, complaints and investigations in to alleged security incidents to ensure compliance with corporate and statutory timeframes.

Liability

1. All rights are reserved by the Council and no rights or obligations other than those expressly stated in this agreement are granted or to be implied from it.
2. The Council provides no warranty in respect of the data or systems that the foster carer is allowed access to.
3. If a foster carer is in breach of any of the terms contained in this agreement, they may be in breach of the Data Protection Act 1998, and in some cases, committing an offence.

Termination:

1. Any changes to this agreement must be approved in writing by the Fostering County Manager and the Head of Information Governance.
2. Either party may terminate this agreement through retirement, resignation or de-registration upon giving the appropriate notice as outlined in the Foster Care Handbook.

Jurisdiction:

1. This agreement shall be governed by and interpreted in accordance with English law and the parties submit to the jurisdiction of the courts of England.

Schedule A**CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT**

Information relating to Children in Care which is controlled by Staffordshire County Council will contain sensitive personal data and may be restricted and/or confidential.

No unauthorised person is permitted to access the information and anyone deliberately or recklessly accessing or attempting to access the information may be committing a criminal offence. No information is to be used in a manner that is incompatible with this agreement or not approved explicitly by Staffordshire County Council.

Declaration:

I have read, understood and agree to the above.

Signed (foster carer): _____

Print name (foster carer): _____

Date: _____

Declaration (to be completed by the Allocated Fostering Social Worker)

Full name of foster carer	First name		Middle Initial		Surname	
Address						
Telephone number						
Email address						
<p>I understand that I am acting on behalf of Staffordshire County Council in ensuring that the foster carer named above understands this agreement and that the foster carer's compliance with it will be monitored. I will ensure that the foster carer has access to any policy, procedure or standard that is relevant and that any Council assets, i.e. memory stick, information, equipment, etc that are provided to the foster carer are recorded. I will review implementation during supervising visits and will report any security incident that arises as a result of this agreement to the Information Governance Unit.</p>						
Full name of Allocated Fostering Social Worker				Allocated Fostering Social Worker signature		
Location						
Date						
Telephone number						

Declaration (to be completed by the foster carer)

I have read the information in this agreement and agree to comply with this and all policies and standards that Staffordshire County Council makes me aware of. I realise that the Council may record, for management use, information about my use of information and information systems and keep a record of any network activity including the transmission or receipt of any kind of file or message. I know that violation of this agreement could amount to a breach of the Data Protection Act 1998, and in some cases, an offence.

Foster carer signature:

Signed: Date:

If you require any further information about this agreement or do not fully understand the terms, please contact the Adoption and Fostering Recruitment and Training Team who will advise accordingly.

APPENDIX C

FOSTER CARERS GUIDE TO THE DATA PROCESSOR AGREEMENT

Background of the agreement

All organisations that handle personal data are required to comply with data protection legislation. When an individual or organisation is carrying out a function for that organisation, i.e. providing care for a foster child, that organisation may need to pass some of that personal data to the individual or organisation to allow them to carry out the role.

When this happens the Data Protection Act requires that the organisation that is providing the information puts in to place an agreement between themselves and the other party (whether that is an individual or organisation).

The agreement acts like a contract but relates specifically to information and how it will be handled in a secure manner.

As the agreement is produced in line with legislation it is difficult to avoid using technical legal language which can sometimes be difficult to understand and interpret. Therefore foster carers should be assured that there is nothing contained within the agreement that is designed to trip them up and the Adoption and Fostering Recruitment and Training Team are putting mechanisms in to place to aid foster carers compliance with the agreement.

This document is a designed to act as a guide to the data processor agreement for foster carers in terms of what they should and shouldn't be doing with information relating to Children in Care.

DO:

1. Attend the training relating to data protection, information security, confidentiality and privacy.
2. Ensure that you understand and sign the data processor agreement and confidentiality agreement (which is documented in Schedule A) of the agreement.
3. Comply with any procedures and/or standards that the Adoption and Fostering Recruitment and Training Team have made you aware of.
4. Send confidential documents securely either by hand delivering them, sending them via special delivery or by using the Secure File Transfer facility.
5. Select a strong password. Advice on how to do this can be found in the IT security section of the Foster Care Handbook.

6. Return all data relating to the foster child to the Council once a foster care placement has come to an end.
7. Check that no information has accidentally been saved to your PC. If any information is found, this should be securely wiped. Advice on how to do this can be found in the IT security section of the Foster Care Handbook.
8. Comply with any licensing restrictions that are in place.
9. Keep information secure by storing electronic information on an encrypted memory stick and manual information in a locked receptacle.
10. Report any potential or actual security incidents to the Adoption and Fostering Recruitment and Training Team as soon as possible after they have been identified.
11. Provide the Adoption and Fostering Recruitment and Training Team with assistance if they require information from you.
12. Contact the Adoption and Fostering Recruitment and Training Team if you are unclear about anything.

DON'T:

1. Give access to information to any unauthorised person. If you are unsure as to who is allowed access, contact the Adoption and Fostering Recruitment and Training Team.
2. Use the information for purposes other than those required to carry out the foster care role.
3. Disclose usernames and/or passwords to anyone. If you think that your password has been compromised, you should change it. Advice on choosing a strong password can be found in the IT security section of the Foster Care Handbook.
4. Make copies of data unless it is necessary to carry out the foster care role.
5. Attempt to bypass any security systems that have been put in to place.
6. Talk about personal and/or confidential information with unauthorised persons.
7. Allow unauthorised persons to view personal and/or confidential information on a screen or as a hard copy.
8. Infer anything from the agreement which has not been specifically stated.

Penalties:

It is important that foster carers understand the importance of looking after information relating to Children in Care and the potential implications of failing to do so. The Council can be fined up to £500,000 for breaches of data protection legislation: however there are also individual offences which can be committed by individual members of staff and foster carers. An offence can be committed by an individual when they either deliberately or recklessly, without the consent of the Council, obtain, disclose or sell personal data.

APPENDIX E

ePEP ACCESS AGREEMENT

Introduction

Information Governance allows an organisation to manage its information in an efficient, effective and secure way whilst maintaining the balance between confidentiality and openness.

Information Governance processes allow this by ensuring:

- records are only kept for the appropriate period of time and that they are confidentially destroyed when no longer required.
- access to records is suitably managed and maintained so that requests for information can be dealt with in a timely manner.
- the appropriate privacy and security is applied to information and/or systems whilst in transit and storage.

Any organisation handling data, especially personal data, has a responsibility to ensure that it complies with Information Governance requirements.

This document intends to set out the responsibilities of all parties to ensure that everyone understands what is expected of them when handling data.

Section 1: Data Controller

Staffordshire County Council will be the sole data controller and data owner for all information uploaded to the e-PEP system.

All data processed will be used solely for the purpose of delivering Personal Education Planning and Pupil Premium Plus to Staffordshire County Council Looked After Children.

Staffordshire County Council will be responsible for the technical and organisational security of the e-PEP system, including:

- Management, provision and removal of access rights
- Ensuring the individual does not have the ability to access any other systems and information other than that required.

SCC will then be solely responsible for any subsequent decisions in relation to processing the transferred data, including retention and secure destruction.

All decisions relating to requests for access to information, including Freedom of Information, Data Subject Access Rights and third party personal data requests, will be dealt with by the SCC e-PEP administration team.

Section 2: Foster Carers

As these may require access to data owned by the County Council they will be required to sign an agreement (Appendix A) to confirm that:

- They have received appropriate training regarding handling data and their responsibilities relating to Data Protection, Confidentiality and Information Security.

- They have read, understood and signed the County Council's Acceptable Use Policy.
-
- They have been made aware of, and work in line with this e-PEP access agreement.
- They understand that the County Council reserves the right to restrict or remove access to data and/or systems where non-compliance is evident or where a threat, or potential threat, is identified. Where illegal or criminal behaviour is suspected or identified SCC will refer the matter to the Police.

Users will be responsible for ensuring that all data uploaded is accurate and up to date, as far as reasonably possible.

Users will not be provided SCC accounts nor provided with access to any other SCC systems as part of this process, therefore Third Party Access Agreements are not required.

Users will need to ensure that SCC data is only accessed when required and that it is accessed only by those who are authorised to access it. Users must not share the data with any other party unless agreed by the e-PEP administration team.

Any user that believes that a security incident has occurred relating to data belonging to SCC, within 2 working days of the security incident being discovered. The e-PEP administration team must pass this on to the Information Governance Unit using the SCC information security incident reporting process.

Users must inform the e-PEP team immediately they are no longer responsible for the care of a child.

Staffordshire County Council – ePEP Access Agreement

Confidentiality Statement

By being provided access to the e-PEP system as a Service Provider/Foster Carer, I agree to the following statements:

1. I have received appropriate training regarding handling of information and am aware of my obligations and responsibilities relating to, but not limited to, Data Protection, Confidentiality and Information Security
2. I have been made aware of, and understand that I must work in line with, the e-PEP Information Governance Reference Document.
3. I understand that I must inform the e-PEP administration team immediately I cease to provide care for a child and my access to that child's record will be removed from the system.
4. I understand that Staffordshire County Council reserve the right to restrict or remove access to data and/or systems where failure to comply with the above is established or where any threat or potential threat is identified.

Name:	
Organisation (if applicable)	
Signature	
Date	
Email Address	
Name of Looked After Children (if applicable)	

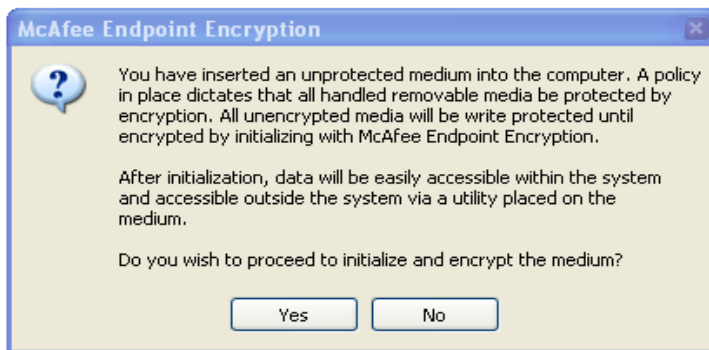
Once completed please return to guy.jones@staffordshire.gov.uk The Virtual School

APPENDIX E

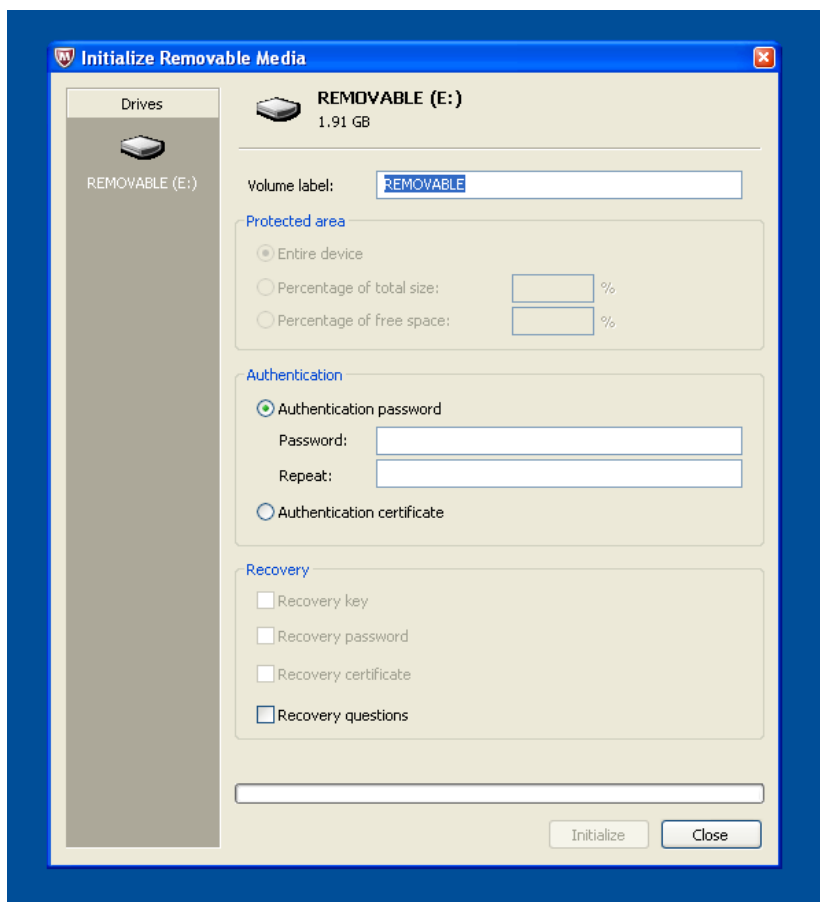
ENCRYPTING MEMORY STICKS

Your Social Worker or Support Worker will bring your USB memory stick with them which will need to be set up with a password of your choice. They will run through a series of screens with you as follows:

When the memory stick is inserted in the laptop the following screen will appear:



To encrypt the device select "Yes" and the following screen will appear:



There are a number of fields to be completed.

The “Volume label” enables you to give the device a name when it is displayed in My Computer, it is not necessary to do this.

The “Authentication” password fields do need completing, this is where you need to enter and confirm a password to access your memory stick when it is encrypted.

Do not click on the “Authentication certificate” button.

Passwords need to conform to the following structure:

- **At least seven characters long**
- **Contain at least three of the following; uppercase letter, lowercase letter, numerals, special character e.g. *\$!£&*%***

Once you have completed this it is strongly recommended that you check the box marked “Recovery questions” otherwise if you forget your password you will not be able to retrieve your data.

Once selected the screen below will appear:

The screenshot shows the 'Initialize Removable Media' window for a 1.91 GB REMOVABLE (E:) drive. The window is divided into several sections:

- Drives:** A list on the left showing 'REMOVABLE (E:)'.
- Volume label:** A text box containing 'REMOVABLE'.
- Protected area:** Three radio buttons: 'Entire device' (selected), 'Percentage of total size: [] %', and 'Percentage of free space: [] %'.
- Authentication:** Two radio buttons: 'Authentication password' (selected) and 'Authentication certificate'. Below the selected option are 'Password:' and 'Repeat:' text boxes.
- Recovery:** Four checkboxes: 'Recovery key', 'Recovery password', 'Recovery certificate', and 'Recovery questions' (checked). Below the checked option are five pairs of text boxes for questions (Q1-Q5) and answers (A1-A5).

At the bottom of the window are 'Initialize' and 'Close' buttons.

It is important that you choose questions you know the answers to without having to write them down and which would be difficult for other people to know or guess the answer to.

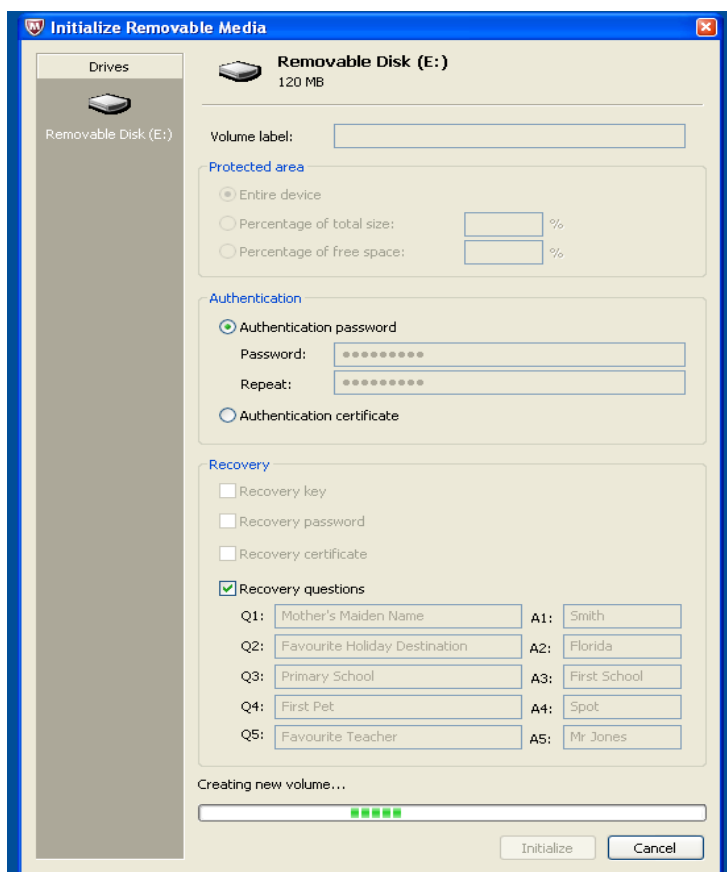
You should also note that the answers are case sensitive. Therefore if you use capital letters at this stage you must use them when you recover the contents in the event of you forgetting your password.

If you do not choose this option you will be prompted with the message below asking you to choose the recovery option.

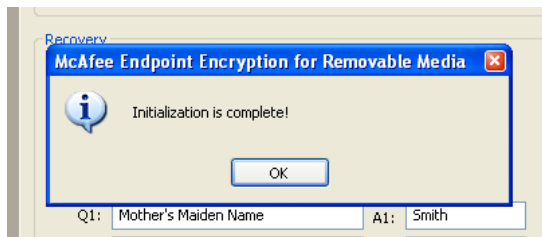


Once you have completed all the fields select "Initialize" and the screen below will appear.

You will not be able to select initialize until you have entered a password. In addition if you have chosen to have recovery questions you will not be able to select initialize unless all five questions and answers are completed.



Once this is complete the following message will appear and your device will now be encrypted:

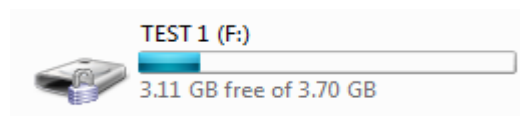


APPENDIX F

USING AN ENCRYPTED MEMORY STICK

This guidance was produced using Microsoft Office 2010 and Windows 7, if the software or operating system that you use is different to this; please follow the manufacturer's guidance for using your device.

Once you have plugged the memory stick into your PC and followed the encryption login process, you will have an icon that looks similar to this:



For the purposes of this guidance the memory stick that is being used here is called 'TEST 1' and it has been assigned the drive letter F: by the computers operating system. Your memory stick may be allocated a different letter, but it will not affect the way that it works.

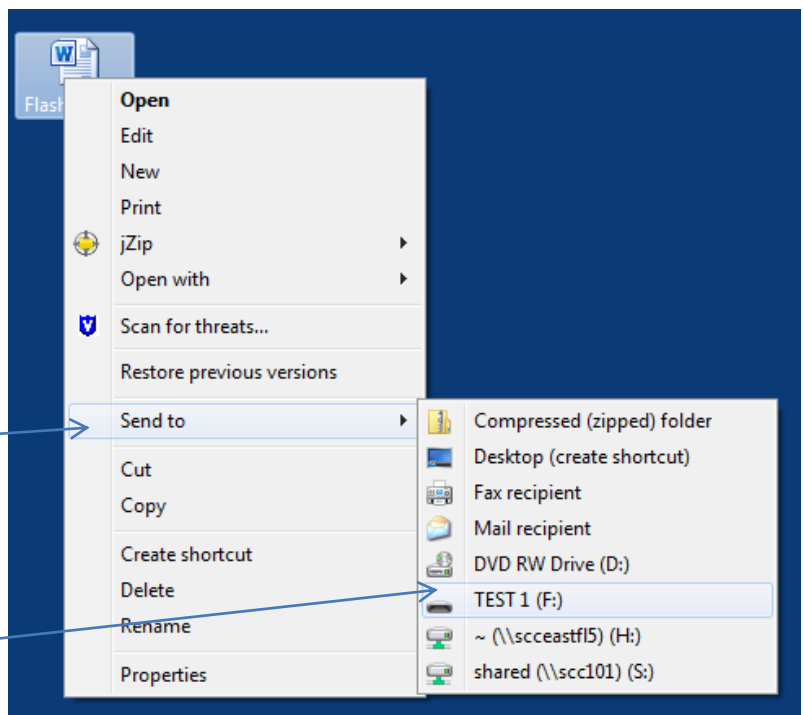
1. Moving existing files to your memory stick

If you have existing files saved on your computer that you want to move onto the memory stick, there are various ways to do this. The simplest way is to use the "Send to" function.

Go to the place on your PC where the files are stored and right click on the file you want to move. This will open the 'Context Tab' where you are presented with a number of options.

Click on 'Send to' and it will open a list of destinations where you can move the file to.

Select your memory stick from the list. A copy of the file will be moved to the memory stick.



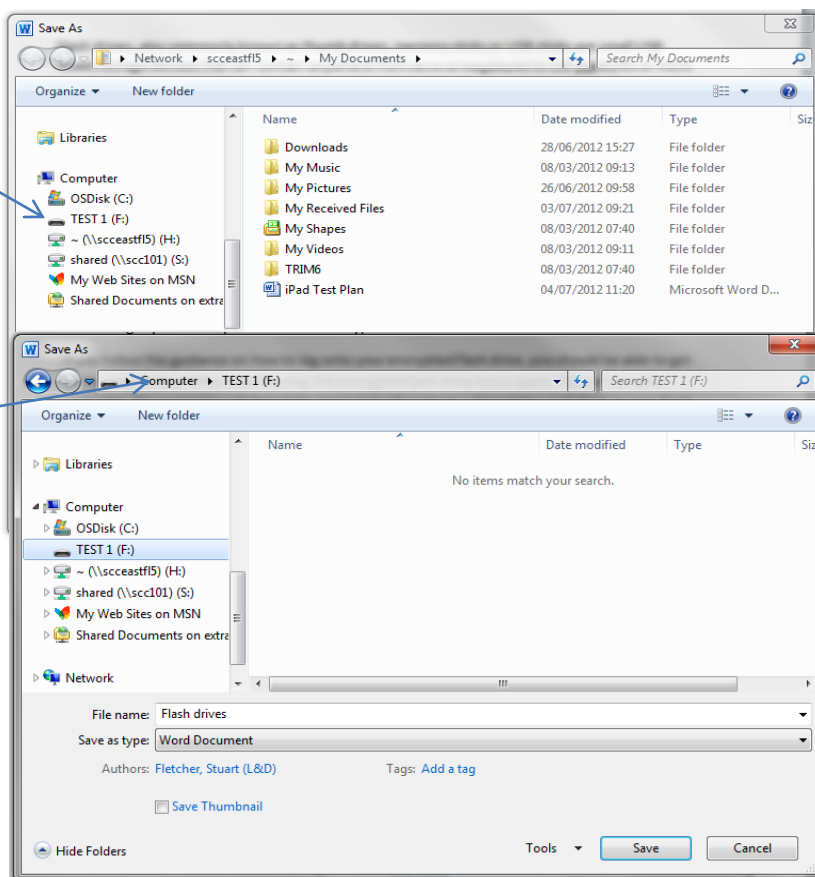
2. Saving files directly to your memory stick

You can also save files directly to your memory stick. Open the file or document that you want to save, go to the “File” menu and select ‘Save As’ and you will be presented with a screen similar to the one below:

Your memory stick will appear in the list of available drives to be saved to.

Select the drive that you want to save to by double clicking on it.

You will be able to tell that the drive is selected as it will show in the file path.



3. Retrieving a document from the memory stick

If you want to open a file/document on your memory stick to update it, you can do this in the same way that you would for a file that is saved on your computer. You can open files on the memory stick directly, or by browsing to the file using the software that created it, i.e. by clicking on “File” in Microsoft Word. When you click save, it will update the file on the stick with the changes that you have made.

4. Deleting a document from the memory stick

In order to delete a document from your memory stick, right click on the document and select “delete” from the list of options that appears.

Do not remove the memory stick without properly disconnecting it, otherwise remove it when the PC is switched off.

APPENDIX G

SENDING DOCUMENTS VIA THE SECURE FILE TRANSFER FACILITY

There has been a request for you to have a Secure File Transfer account by an employee of Staffordshire County Council. This is so that you can receive or send confidential information or a large attachment.


The SFT application is used to store the information to be sent. It uses HTTPS protocols to ensure files are being transmitted encrypted between sender and receiver.

It can also be used to send large files (up to 1 GB) that cannot be emailed due to the size restriction of 20MB.

When your account has been setup you will receive an email asking you to change your password.

This is a brief guide to illustrate how to use the SFT facility to send data securely to recipients.

Click on the following link to access the appliance: <https://filetransfer.staffordshire.gov.uk/> and you will be presented with the screen below:



The screenshot shows the login interface for the Staffordshire County Council Secure File Transfer facility. At the top, there is a small logo of the council. Below it, the main header area contains the council's name and logo. The login form consists of two input fields: one for the email address and another for the password. To the right of the password field is a blue 'Login' button. Below the email field is a checkbox labeled 'Remember me'. At the bottom of the form is a 'Password Reset' link.

Enter the email address that you provided to the Council (i.e. hotmail, yahoo, Gmail) and the password that was sent to you.

Do not tick the box which states “Remember me”

Once you have logged in you will see the screen below. Fill in the fields as you would a normal email message.

Ensure the message is protectively marked if it contains sensitive information

This security level must be included in the subject field and can be one of the following

SCC USE

RESTRICTED

CONFIDENTIAL

Staffordshire County Council Secure Messages FileLinks Request File Help

Hislop, Sharon (F&C) <sharon.hislop@staffordshire.gov.uk>

Message

To: user@example.com

add cc add bcc

Subject: Subject

Message

Drop Files Here

+ Add Files

Send

Message Expires
09/07/2018

Message Expires After
Downloads per Recipient

☒ Send a copy to myself

☐ Private Message

Limitations
Max size: 1000 MB (Limit per message)
[Blocked Extensions](#)

Be sure to double check that the correct email address has been entered before the message is sent.

Click on the “Add Files” button to locate and attach the document that you would like to send. **Only information which is attached to the email is considered secure and no confidential information should be included in the body of the email.**

Private Message Option

Ticking the “private message” box will ensure that any message you send, alongside any attachment, will only be viewable by the recipient by clicking on a link.

Leaving this box un-checked will leave the text you type visible, but encrypt the attachment only.

☐ Private Message

By default the document will remain on the appliance for two weeks and the date that the message will expire is shown on the right hand side of the screen.

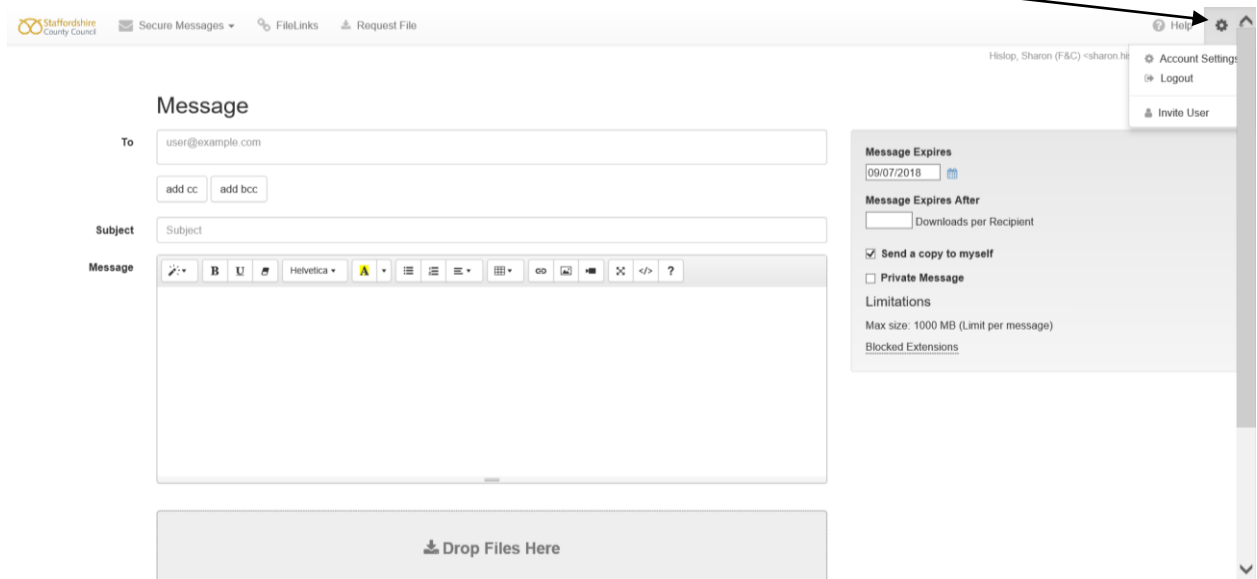
If you want to alter this date, you can do so by clicking in the box containing the date and you can alter the date here.

On this date the data will no longer be available to download.

When all of the fields have been completed, click on the “Send” button.

A message will appear that states the message has been successfully sent which gives a unique message ID, subject, expiry date, and specified access restrictions.

You can then click on the “cog” button which is situated in the top right hand corner and select “Logout” to exit the appliance.



When the recipient downloads the document that you have sent, you (as the sender) will receive an email to inform you of this.

APPENDIX H

RECEIVING DOCUMENTS VIA THE SECURE FILE TRANSFER FACILITY

There has been a request for you to have a Secure File Transfer account by an employee of Staffordshire County Council. This is so that you can receive or send confidential information or a large attachment.

The SFT application is used to store the information to be sent. It uses HTTPS protocols to ensure files are being transmitted encrypted between sender and receiver.

It can also be used to send large files (up to 1 GB) that cannot be emailed due to the size restriction of 20MB.

When your account has been setup you will receive an email asking you to change your password.

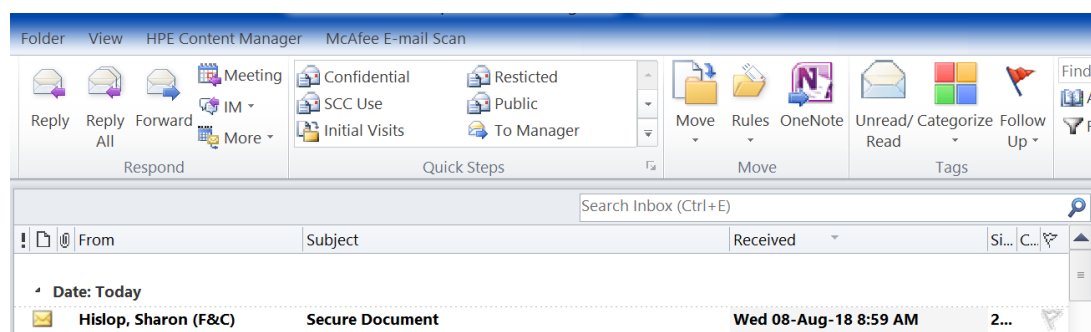
Once you have changed your password, logged onto the application and downloaded your attachments, the sender will receive an email to say the data has been downloaded.

For You, The Recipient

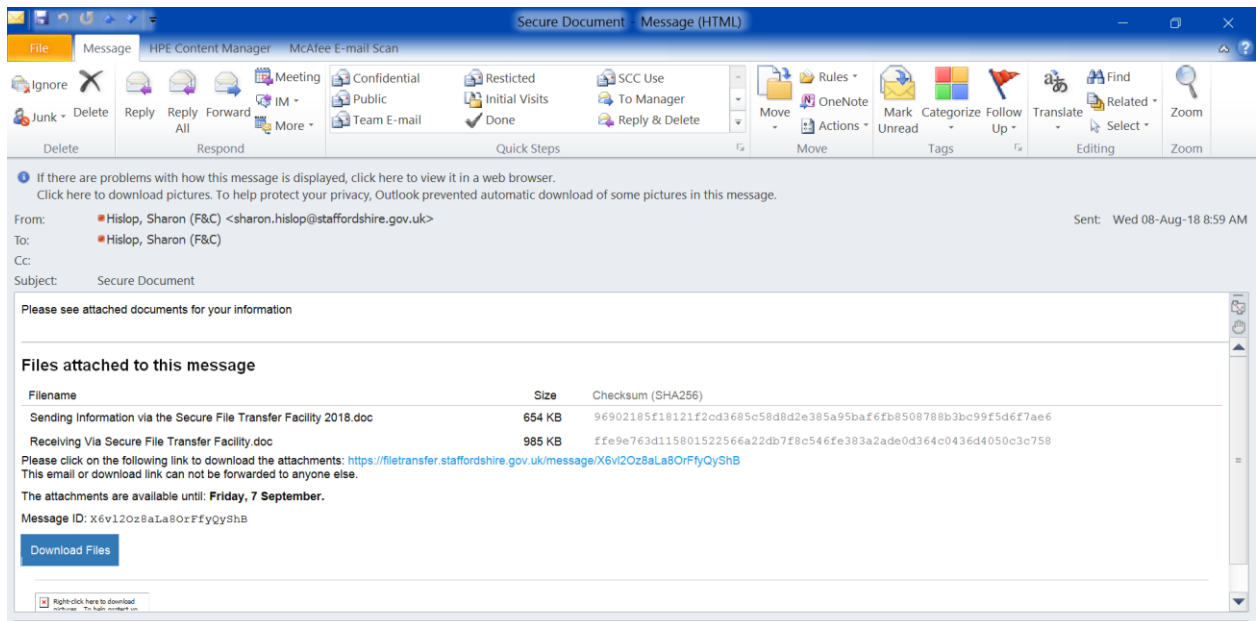
You will receive an email informing you that there is a secure file transfer waiting for you. This will contain the following information

- ☐ *File name and size*
- ☐ *The link to access the file(s)*
- ☐ *Any text added by the sender*
- ☐ *The expiry date*

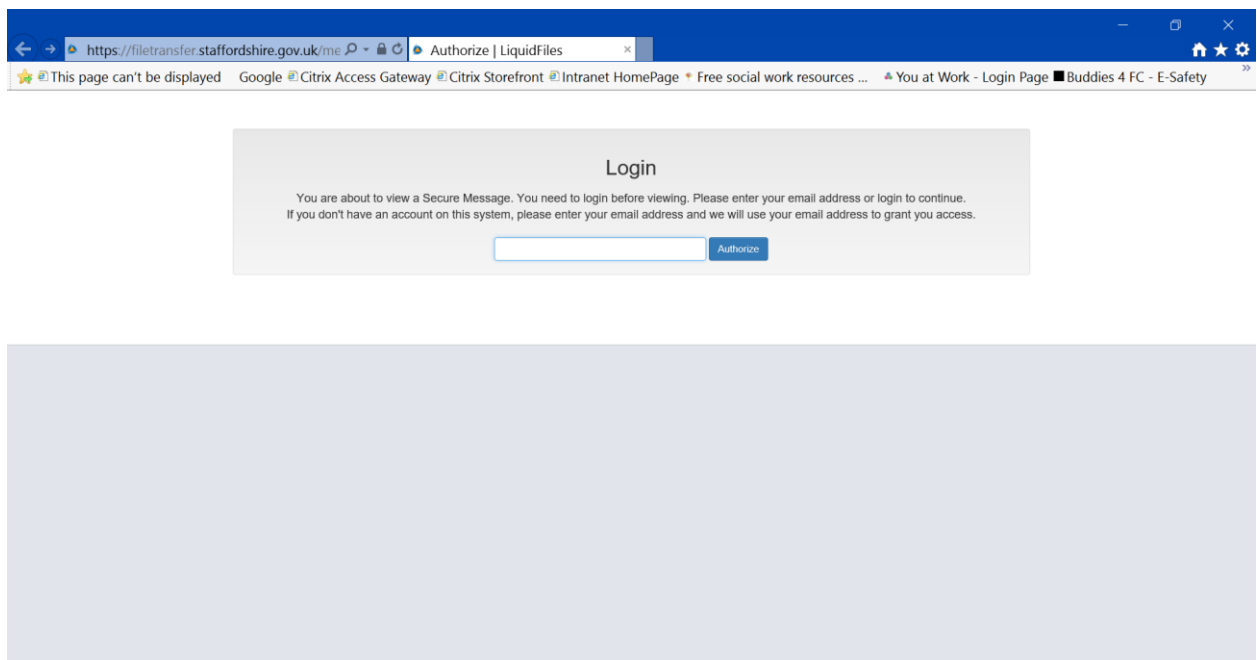
When someone first sends you a file via SFT you will receive an email in to the inbox of your personal mailbox.



When you open the email you will see the following screen and contained within it will be a link which will take you to the SFT site.



When you click on that link you will see the following screen:



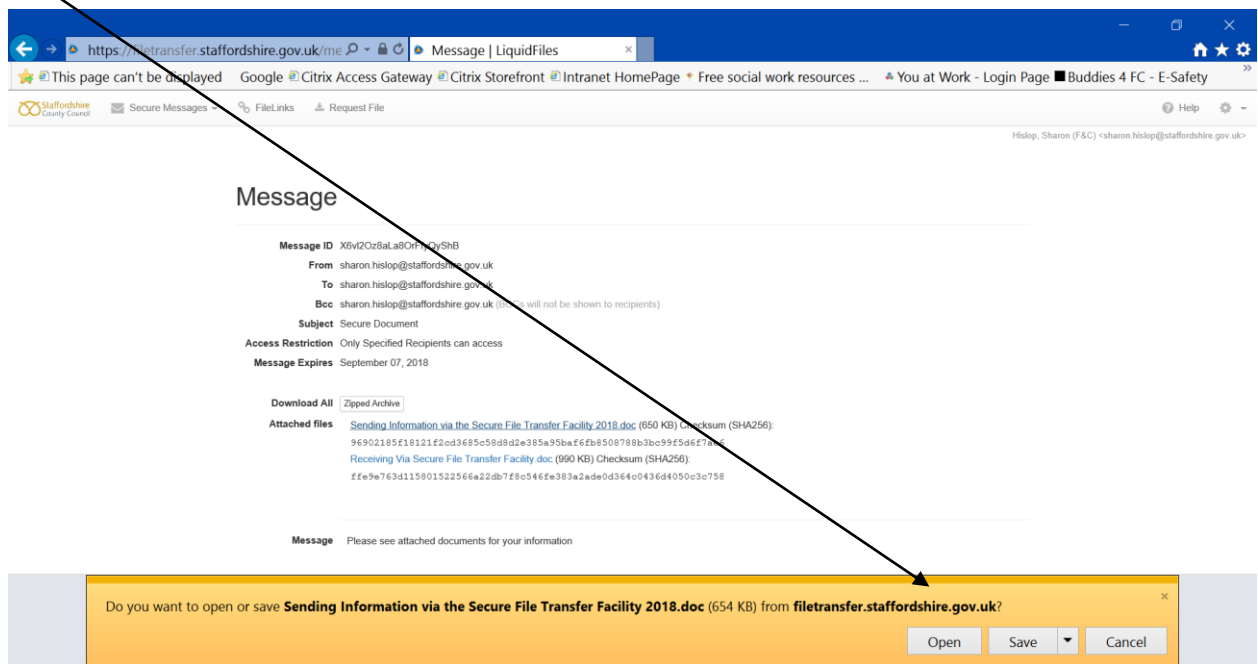
Enter your email address in the box marked “Email” and click “Authorize” you will automatically see the following screen:

Enter the password that you have been provided with in the box marked “password”.

Do not tick the box which states “Remember me”

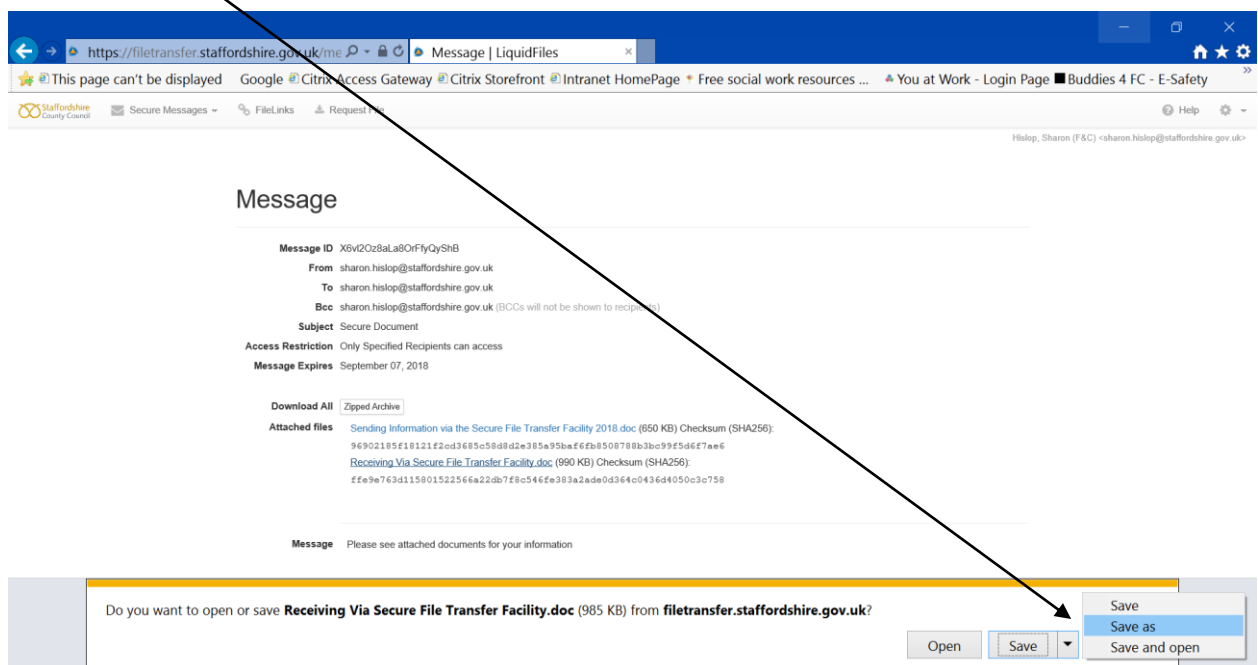
Once you have entered your password, you will see the email message that has been sent to you. It will look similar to the following:

To open the attachment you will need to link on the link next to the “Attached files” field, where you will be presented with the following screen:



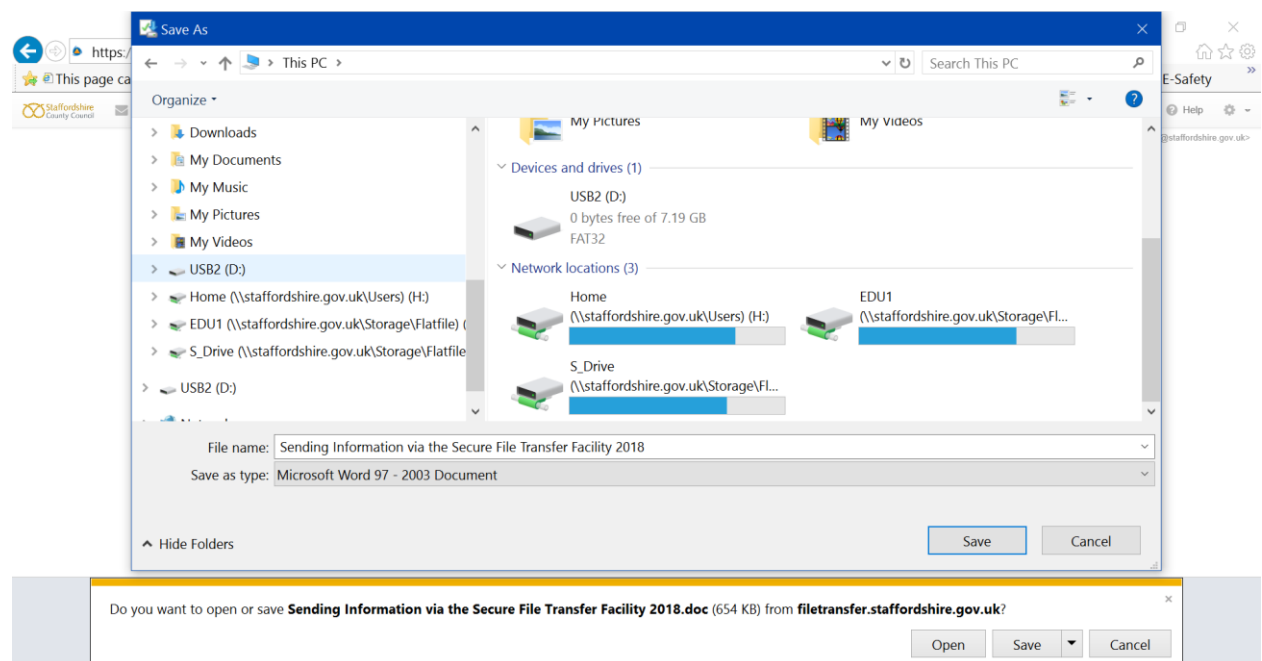
Here, you are asked whether you want to open or save the document.

Click on the arrow next to save and choose ‘Save As’



Make sure that you save the document to your encrypted memory stick as shown below. You will need to connect your memory stick before you download the document. **Do not save the document to your home PC.**

Once your memory stick is inserted and you have selected the “Save” option, you will be presented with the following screen:



Click on the memory stick and select “Save”.

Do not remove the memory stick without properly disconnecting it, otherwise remove it when the PC is switched off.

APPENDIX I

Foster Carers' Smoking Policy

1. Introduction:

- 1.1 The Local Authority has reviewed its existing policy in relation to smoking in light of legislation and national guidance published by BAAF and in response to a joint brief 'Foster Care, Adoption and Smoking' – published in July 2014 by the Fostering Network and ASH (Action on Smoking and Health).
- 1.2 The smoking ban, set out in the Health Act (2006), came into effect in July 2007 and made it illegal to smoke in any public place, with exemptions for certain residences, including prisons, care homes and psychiatric units.
- 1.3 Although foster carer's homes are not regarded as a workplace, it is essential that the rights of carers to smoke are balanced against the rights of looked after children to be healthy.
- 1.4 The health risks from smoking and passive smoking are well known, with smoking being the single, greatest cause of preventable illness and premature death in the UK. (See Appendix A).
- 1.5 Most children will have experimented with tobacco by the age of 16 and this is a key age at which behaviour can be shaped and influenced. Research suggests that smoke-free environments, promoting non-smoking as the cultural norm and providing children with information about the dangers of smoking, does help to prevent young people from starting to smoke. In addition, providing positive, non-smoking role models and support to stop smoking can help young people to quit.
- 1.6 In light of the above, it is important that smoking is actively discouraged in all foster placements, including family & friend's placements.

2. Applicants and Approved carers:

- 2.1 New applicants should be advised from an early stage that their smoking habits will be considered prior to and during the assessment and these habits will impact on their approval and matching. Placing social workers may be more likely to choose non-smokers for preference.
- 2.2 Additionally, young people should be able to have the choice of being placed in a non-smoking environment, if consistent with their age and understanding. Birth parents, who request that their child be placed in a non-smoking household should, where possible, also have their wishes adhered to. However, in some situations the wellbeing and health needs of the child may override the wishes of the children/parents.
- 2.3 It is important that foster carers understand and are made aware of the detrimental effect of smoking and passive smoking on their health and that of other people in their household.
- 2.4 During the recruitment, assessment and preparation process discussions will take place with applicants regarding the agency's expectations and requirements. Carers will be provided with information as to where they can access help to give up smoking, if they are motivated to do so.

- 2.5 Where people inform us they have given up smoking and wish to foster children under the age of 5 years, we would ideally need to ensure that they have given up for at least a year (where possible by being tested at their GP surgery and providing evidence of this). If carers have a child under 5 years placed with them and are subsequently found to be smoking, a risk assessment needs to be carried out outlining the steps the carer will be taking to minimise risk to the child in placement. Once that child has moved on, the carer will need to show they have ceased smoking for a year before children under 5 years can be placed.
- 2.6 At each stage the agency will be clear that any carer who smokes or lives in a household where people smoke cannot be approved to take a child under the age of 5 except in exceptional circumstances, for example where relatives or friends become carers at short notice. In these circumstances a plan to cease smoking needs to be agreed between the carer and assessing social worker and presented to the Fostering Panel alongside the assessment. The Fostering Panel may recommend it is in the best interests of a child to remain there. In addition, any child or young person with known middle ear or respiratory tract infections, or who is prone to asthma and/or bronchitis, or has heart disease will not be placed in a smoking household, although exceptions may be made where it is in the child's best interests. Additional consideration needs to be given to long term placements as the risks of exposure to passive smoking increase with time.
- 2.7 The issue will be raised regularly with all approved carers who smoke and reinforced through the annual review, regular supervision, the Safe Care Plan and the provision of guidance and training on health & safety issues and healthy care. Support is crucial, particularly as smoking can be a response to stress, and consideration needs to be given to ways of minimising the level of stress experienced.
- 2.8 The supervising Social Worker will agree a smoke free plan with the carers to include the following:
- Carers and other members of the household, including visitors, will not smoke in the company of children of any age, in the home or in the car and will promote non-smoking as the norm. Carers should also not expose children to smoking when visiting friends and relatives.
 - Smoking will take place outside the home. If carers are smoking this should be in an area where children cannot see them.
 - Tobacco products, matches or lighters will not be left lying around or accessible to children.
 - This will form part of the Safe Care Plan, which is reviewed and updated regularly, and for each new placement.

3. Children and Young People:

- 3.1 It is illegal for retailers to sell any tobacco products to anyone below the age of 18. In addition, foster carers are not permitted to provide children or young people under 18 with tobacco products.
- 3.2 Some young people may start smoking or be smokers at the point of becoming looked after. It is important to work with young people to actively discourage them from smoking by giving them information about the harmful effects and helping them to

access support to give up smoking. The role of health professionals, including the Looked after Children Designated Nurse, is crucial in addressing this issue through the child or young person's Initial Health Assessment, Health Plan and Health Plan Review. Information about where help can be found is in Appendix C.

- 3.3 The child/young person's parent or person with parental responsibility will be informed of the local policy on smoking and will be involved in discussions about action that will be taken by the foster carer. Any agreed arrangements must be recorded in the Placement Information Record (Placement Plan), and communicated in writing to the parent or person with parental responsibility.
- 3.4 In situations where a young person already smokes it is reasonable to expect the foster carer to have an agreed place to store any smoking products while the young person is in the foster home and for the young person to hand them over to the carer. This will be explained to the young person and their social worker and recorded in the Safe Care Plan. The young person will be expected to comply with the smoke free plan for the foster home.
- 3.5 This arrangement will also apply to smoking products given to the young person during contact with the parent or person with parental responsibility. The child's social worker will discourage the parent or person with parental responsibility from smoking during contact and return any smoking products given to the young person to them.
- 3.6 The child's Statutory Review will look at any arrangements that are in place in relation to smoking.

4. Electronic (e-cigarettes)

A new joint brief has been produced by ASH and the Fostering Network (July 2014) – 'Foster Care, adoption and electronic cigarettes' and is endorsed by the Fostering Network. The BAAF advice in regards to e-cigarettes is as follows:

- E-cigarettes are not regulated as a tobacco product or as a medicine in the UK. While research evidence suggests that the use of e-cigarettes is effective in helping people to stop using traditional tobacco cigarettes, there is little evidence to suggest that it is encouraging smoking.
- The Fostering Network considers the current research evidence provides no compelling reasons for restricting the use of e-cigarettes. Therefore, foster carers should not be prevented from fostering or applying to foster because of their use of e-cigarettes.
- However, the Fostering Network also advise that it is good practice not to use e-cigarettes in front of children and young people until more evidence is gained about the role modelling effect of this on the smoking behaviour of children more generally.
- Health professionals should not recommend the use of e-cigarettes as a smoking cessation aid or a lower risk option than continuing to smoke due to a lack of evidence of their safety and efficacy

5. Further Information

5.1 For more information about this policy, please contact the Business Improvement and Development Team - 01785 277024/278426.

Links to both documents can be found here:

[Ash.org.uk - Foster Care, Adoption and Smoking/e-cigarettes](https://www.ash.org.uk/foster-care-adoption-and-smoking-e-cigarettes)

Appendix A: Additional Information

In the UK, 42% of children live in a home where someone smokes. Despite nearly 60% of smokers admitting they disapprove of smoking cigarettes with a child present in a room or car, 28% continue to do so.

What's wrong with second-hand smoke?

Tobacco smoke contains poisonous gases, tar and thousands of toxic chemicals. These poisons get into the bodies of children who live in smoky atmospheres. As children are more sensitive to smoke than adults, due to their bodies still developing, it is not safe for children to be in a room where someone is smoking, even if the room is odourless and not visibly smoky.

How does second-hand smoke harm children?

Babies and children who are exposed to a smoky atmosphere are:

- Twice as likely to have asthma attacks and chest infections
- More likely to need hospital care in their first year of life
- Off sick from school more often
- More likely to get coughs, colds and wheezes.

Medical research also shows they have:

- Much higher risk of cot death than the children of non-smokers
- Increased risk of meningitis
- More chance of getting 'glue ear', which can lead to partial deafness.

What can you do to protect babies and children?

You can help protect them by keeping their playing, sleeping and eating areas completely smoke-free.

What can I do if my family and friends are smokers?

- Let them know before they visit that you are keeping your home smoke free for your children's health
- Ask if they would not smoke while visiting you
- Explain that children can get ill through second-hand smoke.

Useful tips:

- Always smoke outside, well away from children.
- When out and about with the family, try to find non-smoking or smoke-free areas.

The benefits of giving up smoking:

- **After 20 Minutes** - Blood pressure and pulse return to normal. Circulation improves, especially to hands and feet.
- **After 8 Hours** - the oxygen level in your blood increases to a normal level. Chances of a heart attack start to fall.
- **After 24 Hours** - Carbon monoxide leaves the body. The lungs start to clear out mucus and debris.
- **After 48 Hours** - Nicotine is no longer found in the body. Senses of taste and smell improve.
- **After 72 Hours** - breathing becomes easier. Energy levels increase.
- **After 2 to 12 Weeks** - Circulation improves throughout the body. Walking and exercise become easier.
- **After 3 to 9 Months** - Breathing problems, coughing, shortness of breath and wheezing improve. Lung efficiency increases by 5-10%
- **After 4 Years** – The risk of having a heart attack falls to about half that of a smoker.
- **After 10 Years** – The risk of lung cancer falls to around half that of a Smoker; the risk of a heart attack also falls to about the same as someone who has never smoked.

Smoking Cessation Services:

Talk to your GP or Pharmacist:

Many people don't realise that their GP can help them quit smoking. Your doctor can do a lot, such as enrolling you in a 'stop smoking' clinic and prescribing nicotine replacement therapy such as patches and gum, or prescribe a stop smoking medication such as [Champix](#).

Get a free 'Quit Kit'

This kit is packed with practical tools and advice to help you stop smoking, including a 'tangle' to keep hands busy, a wall chart to keep track of your progress, stress-busting apps, information on medicines that can help you stop smoking and exercises to improve your willpower.

Join an NHS Stop-Smoking Service:

The NHS has stop-smoking services staffed by trained stop smoking advisers all over the country in a range of venues at times to suit you. You can join a group where local smokers meet once a week or have one-to-one support if you prefer. You usually go for a few weeks and work towards a quit date. Find your nearest NHS Stop Smoking Service from the [NHS Smoke free website](#), or call 0800 022 4332.

APPENDIX J

OUT OF HOURS PLACEMENT SCHEME

The Emergency Duty Service (EDS) provides placements for vulnerable children outside office hours with experienced foster carers who have been approved through the foster panel process.

Carers on the EDS rota can be extended or exempted to take EDS placements if the placement falls outside the terms of their approval or placement availability.

Any extension or exemption will only be for the period of the emergency placement which will be up to 5pm on the next working day (Longer for weekends and Bank Holiday periods). As from 8.30am on the next working day the child's social worker together with Placement Referrals will be responsible for identifying a further placement.

In exceptional circumstances carers may be asked to offer a placement for a longer period, where they have a vacancy or with the agreement of the Fostering Service Manager, on an extension or exemption.

When a placement is required EDS will contact available carers to check out suitability to place, taking into account other children already living there. If a carer is named as available on the rota they will be expected to offer a placement when requested to do so, unless they consider their household to be "at risk".

EDS will inform Placement Referrals of all placements made, including where a carer has found it necessary to refuse a placement.

Carers will be given all available information including appropriate Looked after Children documents at the time of placement. Outside office hours the information may be very limited, however EDS must ensure that carers have basic details and are clear about who to contact on the next working day.

Availability will be for a 7 day period Monday to Monday (or Tuesday if a Bank Holiday Period). Carers can stay on the rota for successive weeks if carer is in agreement.

Children can only be placed on the scheme via EDS. In exceptional circumstances, placements may be made during office hours but only by Placement Referrals, with the agreement of the Fostering Service Manager.

Placements cannot be made by the Children's social workers or managers and carers must not accept placements without an approach from EDS or Placement Referrals.

It is a requirement of the scheme that one carer is at home and available to care for the child in placement until 5pm the next working day, unless previously agreed.

PAYMENT

In addition to a pro rata rate of the fostering allowances, foster carers will receive £50 as a one off payment. If a carer takes a sibling group they will receive the following payment: £75 for two siblings and £100 for 3 siblings or more.

Placement Referrals is responsible for liaising with carers and their Fostering social worker and drawing up a rota to send to EDS. The rota will be updated weekly.

Placement Service Telephone Number: 01785 277724

Email Address: placementreferrals@staffordshire.gov.uk

APPENDIX K

INTERNET SAFETY; TEXT ABBREVIATIONS A-Z

Below are some common abbreviations:

Abbreviations A to Z	
2moro	Tomorrow
2nte	Tonight
AEAP	As Early as Possible
ALAP	As Late as Possible
ASAP	As Soon as Possible
ASL	Age / Sex / Location?
B3	Blah, Blah, Blah
B4YKI	Before You Know it
BFF	Best Friends, Forever
BM&Y	Between Me and You
BRB	Be right Back
BRT	Be right There
BTAM	Be that as it May
C-P	Sleepy
CTN	Cannot talk now
CUS	See You Soon
CWOT	Complete Waste of Time
CYT	See You Tomorrow
E123	Easy as 1, 2, 3
EM?	Excuse Me?
EOD	End of Day
F2F	Face to Face
FC	Fingers Crossed
FOAF	Friend of a Friend
GR8	Great
HAK	Hugs and Kisses
IDC	I Don't Care
IDK	I Don't Know
ILU / ILY	I Love You
IMU	I Miss You
IRL	In Real Life
J/K	Just Kidding
JC	Just Checking
JTLYK	Just to Let You Know

KFY	Kiss for You
KMN	Kill Me Now
KPC	Keeping Parents Clueless
L8R	Later
MoF	Male or Female
MTFBWY	May the Force be with You
MYOB	Mind Your Own Business
N-A-Y-L	In a While
NAZ	Name, Address, ZIP
NC	No Comment
NIMBY	Not in my Backyard
NM	Never Mind / Nothing Much
NP	No Problem
NSFW	Not Safe for Work
NTIM	Not that it Matters
NVM	Never Mind
OATUS	On a totally Unrelated Subject
OIC	Oh, I See
OMW	On My Way
OTL	Out to Lunch
OTP	On the Phone
P911	Parent Alert
PAL	Parents are Listening
PAW	Parents are Watching
PIR	Parent in Room
POS	Parent over Shoulder
PROP(S)	Proper Respect / Proper Recognition
QT	Cutie
RN	Right Now
RU	Are You
SEP	Someone else's Problem
SITD	Still in the Dark
SLAP	Sounds like a Plan
SMIM	Send Me an Instant Message
SO	Significant Other
TMI	Too Much Information
UR	Your / You are

W8	Wait
WB	Welcome Back
WYCM	Will You Call Me?
WYWH	Wish You Were Here
XOXOXOX	Hugs, Kisses, ...

APPENDIX L

TREASURE BASKETS AND HEURISTIC PLAY

ABBEEY MONK AND ANDREA CHEESEMAN
EARLY YEARS QUALITY SUPPORT CONSULTANTS

Brain Growth



Key Points:

- The below diagram emphasises the short period of time where maximum brain development takes place
- Children want to communicate as well as to explore the world physically and research shows that the prime areas of learning relate to the developing brain from the earliest age, this is why the EYFS has a sharp focus on these areas.
- Skills in these areas are time sensitive and if not securely placed by the age of 5 they will be more difficult to acquire and their absence may hold back learning in all areas....

So there is a very small window of opportunity to build that brain with all the necessary tools and a huge responsibility for us as early years practitioners, particularly if you have that child for long periods of most days.

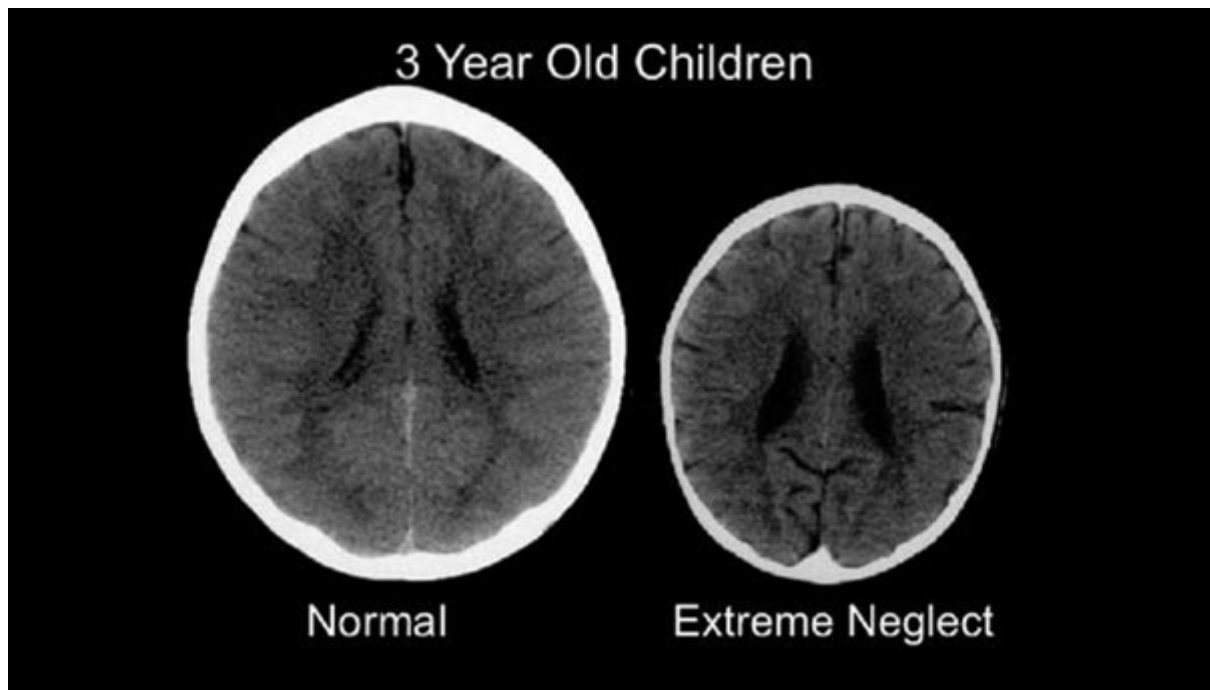
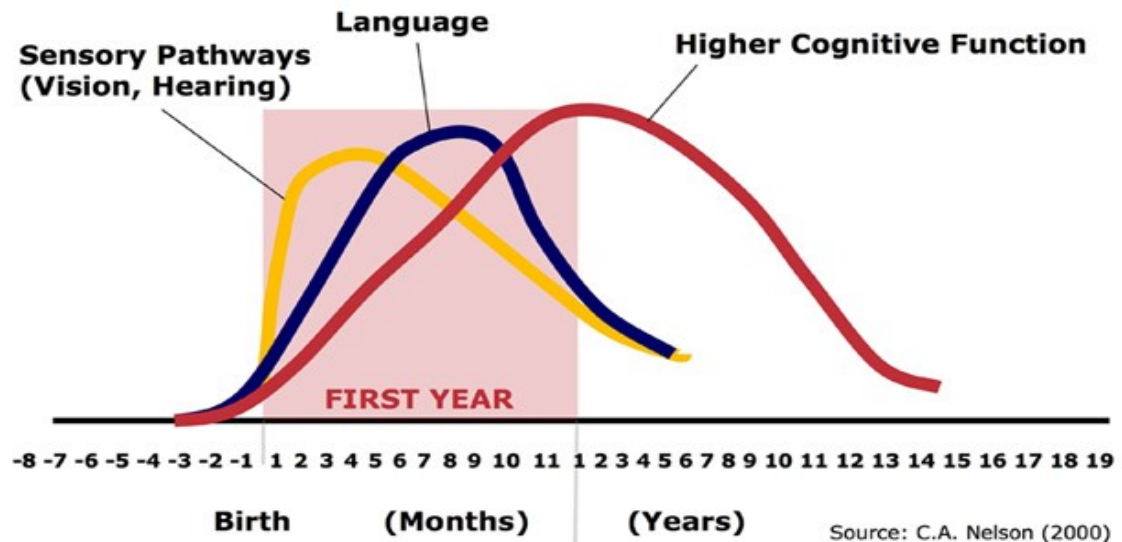
Key words:

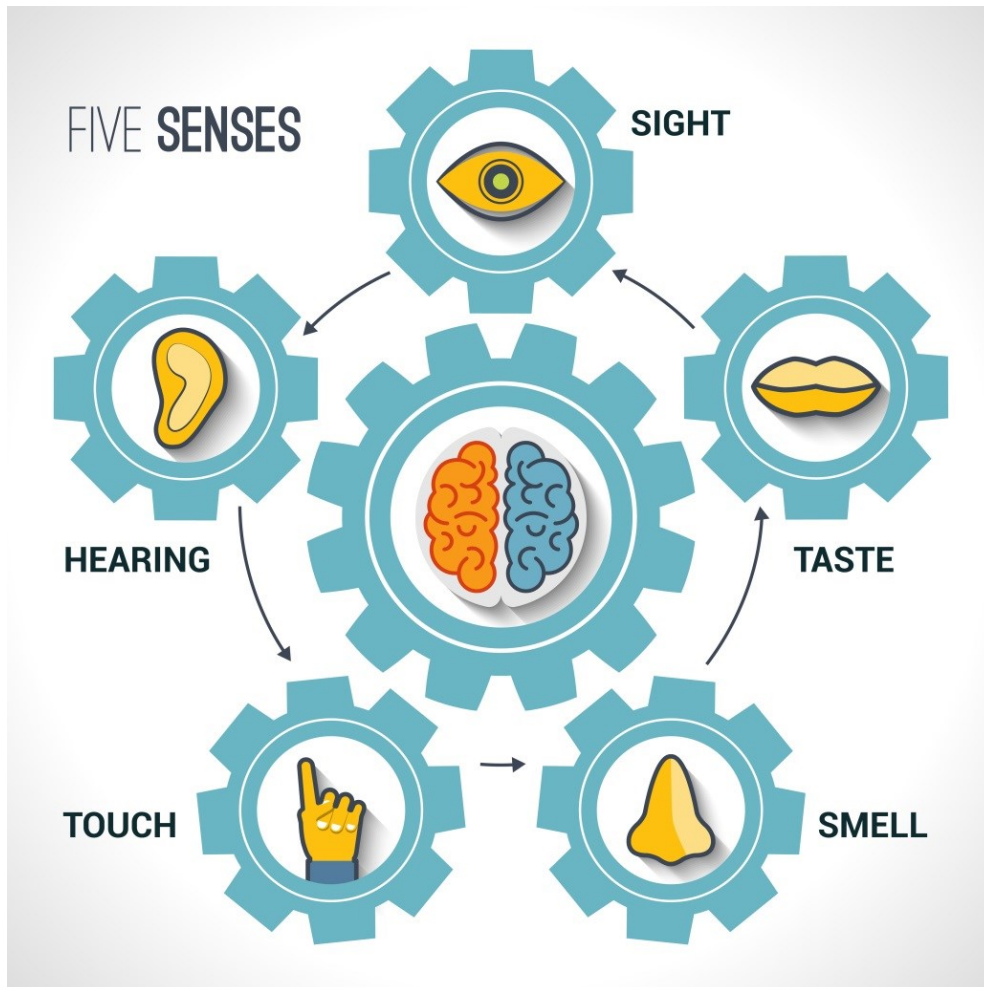
- Brain
- EYFS



Human Brain Development

Neural Connections for Different Functions Develop Sequentially





Treasure Baskets

The use of a treasure basket is one way that we can ensure a richness in the babies experience when the brain is ready to receive, to make connections and so to make use of this information

(Goldschmeid and Jackson, 2004)



Door wedge
 Bowls
 Dolly pegs
 Kitchen utensils; spoons, spatulas,
 whisks etc.
 Curtains rings
 Mug tree
 Kitchen roll holder
 Egg cups
 Wooden eggs
 Lengths of dowel
 Wooden bricks



Sieves and strainers
 Bowls
 Measuring spoons
 Lemon squeezer
 Pans
 Tins and containers
 Jar lids
 Whisk
 CD's
 Sparkly glitter ball
 Mirrored ornament
 Teaspoon
 Serving spoon
 Bells
 Metals bracelets
 Keys
 Watering can
 Lengths of chain
 Colanders



Bark
Pumice stone
Coconut shell
Orange/lemon
Large pebbles/stone
Fir cones
Sea shells
Corks
Natural sponge
Rope
Loofah
Large seeds and pods



Scrubbing brushes
Pastry brush
Hair brush
Nail brush
Various sized paint brushes
Shaving brush
Toothbrush
Make up brushes



Leather key ring
Knitted toy
Crochet squares
Bean bags
Flannel
Velvet
Ribbon
Pom poms
Lace
Fur fabric
Sponge
Velcro
Elastic
Sequin waste
Knitted gloves
Fabric puppet
Netting
Shiny fabric

Heuristic play is rooted in young children's natural curiosity. As babies grow, they move beyond being content to simply feel and ponder objects, to wanting to find out what can be *done* with them. Toddlers have an urge to handle things: to gather, fill, dump, stack, knock down, select and manipulate in other ways.