

THURROCK FOSTERING STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2021-2022

1. INTRODUCTION

Thurrock Fostering Service is registered with Ofsted and complies with the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, Fostering Minimum Standards (2011) and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010

The Fostering Service compiles an annual Statement of Purpose, which sets out the aims and objectives of the service as a whole. This Statement of Purpose relates to the Fostering Service provided by the Fostering Placement Support Team and the Placement Assessment Team in the Fostering, Adoption & Placements Service. The Statement of Purpose is reviewed annually.

The Statement of Purpose is available to anyone working for the Fostering Service, to children who may be placed in foster care, their parents and legal guardians and to those who apply to become foster carers.

The Statement of Purpose is available on the Thurrock website at www.thurrock.gov.uk/fostering.

2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

In Thurrock we take our role as Corporate Parent seriously. We want to make sure that all our looked after children and young people benefit from our efforts to maximize their full potential.

We believe that:

- All children are entitled to grow as part of a stable and loving family.
- Where it is safe for them to do so, children should be brought up by their birth family.
- Children should be matched, wherever possible, with families who reflect their ethnicity, culture, language and religion. These factors have to be balanced against the need to be in a permanent placement, within a reasonable time frame.
- Team work in partnership with colleagues across services is important to ensure that delays in achieving permanence are minimised.

This means in Thurrock:

- Children and young people's best interests come first. The best interests of children are our paramount consideration and we will actively seek out their views, wishes and feelings.
- All children should have an enjoyable childhood and benefit from

excellent parenting and education, enjoying a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and skills supporting them to lead a successful life.

- Services will be built around children's needs, and will be inclusive, accessible and welcoming.
- A sense of identity is important to a child's well-being. We recognise, positively value and promote each child's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion, language, and sexuality.
- The particular needs of children who have a disability or who have complex needs are fully recognised and taken into account.

In addition:

- Decisions on use of resources will increasingly be taken jointly.
- Resources will be pooled wherever it makes sense to do so
- Services will be jointly commissioned and provided, where it is in children's interests to do so.
- We will work with local communities, networks, groups and organisations that have a key role in promoting the well-being of children and providing services and support to them and their families.
- We will integrate service delivery when this demonstrates added value.
- We will work with local communities, networks, groups and or
- Services are evidence based and provided by a skilled workforce.

The Fostering Service seeks to provide a range of placements, including parent and child, to meet the diverse needs of and to improve outcomes for children and young people looked after by Thurrock. We will do this by ensuring that children are suitably matched with fully trained, skilled and well-supported Foster Carers able to provide a high quality of care.

In Thurrock the Fostering Service is provided by the Fostering Recruitment Team which undertakes the assessments of Foster Carers, The Connected Persons Team which assesses and supervises connected persons and the Fostering Support Team, which undertakes support and supervision functions for foster carers once they are approved.

Foster Carers and supervising Social workers are key members of the team around the child and placement.

We are dedicated to the continuous improvement of our services for looked after children. In adhering to the National Minimum Standards, we want them achieve the following outcomes:

- We want our children and young people's wishes and feelings to be heard and recorded with evidence of these being acted on.
- We want our children and young people to feel able to tell us what is working for them and what is not.
- We want our children and young people to be living in a place where they feel safe.
- We want our children to know that we will look for them if they run away and worry about them until they are found, as any reasonable parent would do.
- We want our children and young people to maintain contacts with their birth family where it is safe for them to do so.
- We want our children and young people to be able to form and maintain appropriate friendships.
- We to be ambitious, with our children and young people to achieving their maximum potential in terms of educational achievement and life opportunities.
- We want our children and young people to have access to suitable leisure opportunities and to achieve their full potential in areas where they excel.
- We want our children and young people to be both physically and emotionally healthy.
- We want our children and young people to become well-adjusted adults who will be able to live independently and to contribute to society through the workplace and the community in which they live.

In order to achieve these outcomes we will:

- Make sure that we are looking after the right children at the right time for them and in the best possible placements.
- Recruit and assess Foster Carers who can meet the diverse needs of looked after children and young people including parents with child.
- Run an effective and efficient Fostering Panel with a sound decision making process.
- Ensure that we match children with carers who can meet their assessed needs and support those carers to do this.
- Listen to our children and young people and act upon any of their concerns raised.

- Work closely with colleagues from other services including health and schools to support our children's needs.
- Ensure that there is an updated Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide each year.
- Ensure all staff are suitable to work with children, and that they are qualified and supported in continual professional development.
- Provide learning development and continual professional development for Foster Carers.
- Supervise and support carers to the highest standards
- Handle allegations and suspicions of harm according to the procedures, supporting our children and young people so that they feel safe whilst any investigation is being carried out.
- Ensure our Foster Carers are supported if they become subject to allegations and suspicions of harm.
- Pay foster carers appropriately and on time.

The teams are committed to improving practice and service delivery and to recruiting and retaining quality permanent staff to facilitate this. All staff are provided with a thorough induction and support from experienced and skilled managers to promote these values and to work within the Council's equalities policies. The staff group are also provided with the Whistleblowing policy as part of their induction, which makes clear the responsibility of all staff to report areas of poor practice.

2.1 Our Commitment to Equality and Diversity

The Fostering Service is committed to furthering equality, promoting diversity and eliminating discrimination in all its forms. We are committed to placing the needs of children first; to recognise children, young people and carers as individuals, and to treat our service users, carers and partner agencies with dignity and respect. We are committed to raising the profile of equality and diversity issues across the Council. Recruitment materials are developed to attract foster carers from all communities to encourage applications irrespective of gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation and disability. We encourage foster carers from many different backgrounds to suit the diverse needs of children requiring alternative homes.

The Fostering Service actively and consciously values diversity and difference, and seeks to provide a high quality service and fair and equal treatment for all our carers, children and young people. Our approach to promoting equality and diversity is to provide bespoke services, with due consideration and sensitivity to the complex needs of children and young people and families. We are thoughtful about the matching needs and ensure there is appropriate information and support to meet the needs of cross cultural family placements.

3. THE SERVICE

Thurrock Fostering Service is based in Thurrock Civic Offices alongside all other Children's Social Care Social Work Teams. The fostering service forms part of the Fostering, Adoption, Children with Disability and Placements Service and is included in the remit of Strategic Lead for the Children Looked after Service and Aftercare.

3.1 The Structure of the Fostering Service

The Fostering Service consists of four teams:

- **Recruitment and Assessment Team** (the recruitment of foster carers who are not connected persons)
- **The Connected Persons Team** (including private fostering arrangements, connected persons assessment and special guardianship assessment)
- **Fostering Support Team** (searching for in-house placements, the supervision and support of approved carers)
- **The Placements Team** (searching for internal and external placements)

These four teams undertaking the following responsibilities;

- Recruitment and assessment of all foster carers including Connected Person's Foster Carers (friends and family carers) and Special Guardianship assessments.
- Provision of training, supervision and support to all foster carers
- Matching children to Thurrock Foster Carers
- Providing external placement resource to children and young people who cannot be accommodated by in-house foster carers.
- Ensuring the Fostering Standards are upheld and there are high standards of care for children
- Working to stabilise placement with the offer of clinical supervision
- Ensuring allegations and standards of care issue are addressed
- Direct work with children and ensuring the Voice of the Child is central to work undertaken with carers and families
- Support for family time arrangements (contact).

There are two additional posts that have been introduced to quality assure and assist in service development:

- **Senior Practitioner – Fostering Reviews.** This role is responsible for undertaking the annual household reviews, investigation of standards of care/suitability to foster following allegation and assisting the Team Managers in service development. This role is managed within the Quality Assurance Service to provide scrutiny of the work of the service and Foster Carers
- **Fostering Panel Advisor,** this role acts as the professional advisor to the Fostering Panel

3.2 Leadership and Management of the Fostering Service

All managers and social workers hold recognised social work qualifications,

are registered with Social Work England, undertake post-qualifying training and have experience of working with children and families. The Service is committed to continuous professional development of all staff and therefore encouraged to attend internal and external training to develop and refresh their skills.

The staff group has a wide range of knowledge, skills and experience and is continually seeking to develop these to promote service improvement. The staff group is culturally and racially diverse and is reflective of the population that we serve

Thurrock Council's Fostering Service offers advice, undertakes assessments and provides support for all areas of permanency including adoption and special guardianship.

3.3 Senior Leaders and Agency Decision Maker

Sheila Murphy - Corporate Director for Children's Services .

Janet Simon - Interim Assistant Director – Children's Social Care, has overall responsibility for the Fostering Service.

The Strategic Lead for Children Looked After is Naintara Khosla. Naintara is also the Agency Decision Maker for the Fostering Service

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Email: nkhosla@thurrock.gov.uk

Naintara qualified as a social worker who qualified in 1993 and is registered with Social Work England. Naintara has been a senior manager in Cafcass and Social Care since 2003, prior to this she held various positions as a Team Manager and Social worker. Naintara has extensive experience as a senior leader across Fostering, Adoption and Placement Services for a range of local authorities

The Service Manager responsible for the Fostering Service is Dan Jones

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Dan is a qualified and registered Social worker, he has an LLB Law gained in 2003 from Cardiff University, a BSc Social Work gained in 2010 from the University of Lincoln and a post graduate certificate in Applied Social Work Practice: Children and Families from the University of Bedfordshire. Dan has experience in all aspects of Fostering and Adoption services as well as experience in therapeutic and harmful sexual behaviour services. He joined Thurrock as Service Manager in March 2019.

3.4 Team Manager, Recruitment Team

Carole Parker is the manager of the Recruitment Team. Carole is a qualified social worker and registered with Social Work England since 2000. Carole's previous experience includes working in both Local Authority and Private Sector, Carole's experience encompassed working as a Residential Social worker, undertaking family assessments, working with adolescent and post

16, and as a Registered Manager of children's homes (CH EBD), ensuring the homes were appropriately safe and sensitive to the needs of the young people being looked after. Carole has managed placement teams since 2003 and in September 2012 joined Thurrock as Manager of the Placement Team.

3.5 Team Manager, Connected Persons Team

Alexandra Cucu is the manager of the Connected Persons Team. Alexandra is a qualified social worker since 2010 and is currently registered with Social Work England. Alexandra's previous experience includes working in the public sector within various social care teams. Alexandra's experience encompassed working as a Social worker to children from 0-18 years in foster or residential care. Alexandra has worked as a family finding social worker within an Adoption Team to both children and adopters and has worked as the lead professional to develop a Special Guardianship (SGO) Support Service within her previous role. Alexandra undertook and quality assured SGO assessments and support plans as well as assessments of need post SGO. Alexandra joined Thurrock as Manager of the Connected Persons Team in December 2019.

3.6 Team Manager Fostering Support Team

Sandra Clark qualified as a Social worker in 2010 and is registered with Social Work England. Prior to being Social worker Sandra has experience of being a Special Constable for Essex Police. After qualifying, Sandra worked in Family Support and Fostering Services. Sandra managed part of the contact service for Essex County Council. She joined Thurrock as the Fostering Support Team Manager in August 2019

3.7 Team Manager, Placements Team

Carole Parker is also the team manager of the Placements Team. Her details are as above.

3.8 Staffing of the Fostering Service

Currently there are currently 31 staff working in the Fostering Service. They include;

- 1 Service Manager
- 3 Team Managers
- 17 Senior Social Practitioners
- 1 Qualified Fostering Social worker
- 3 Business Development Officers
- 6 Business Support / Administrators

3.9 Student Placements

We are committed to the development of trainee social workers offer placement opportunities to students from all backgrounds. However, due to the specialist nature of Fostering Service, we currently only offer student placement opportunities to students in their final year placement.

3.10 Monitoring of the Fostering Service

We are committed to providing the highest standard of care for children. Performance is managed by meeting the Fostering Regulations and the provision of care is monitored through:

- Feedback forms for children (Including Mind of My Own)
- Feedback forms from social workers
- Feedback from foster carers
- Foster Carer supervision
- Foster Carer Annual Reviews
- Fostering Panels
- Allegations and complaints/compliments
- Case File Audits
- Management Oversight and Case Supervision
- Performance Data
- Ofsted

4. FOSTERING SUPPORT SERVICES PROVIDED

The Fostering Service provides a range of Foster Carers and variety of fostering arrangements for children and young people in Thurrock.

4.1 Temporarily Approved Foster Carers

The Family Placement Service values the role of Connected Person's Foster Care wherever possible as it keeps the child or young person within the family network. This arrangements start on the basis of Temporary Approval of Carers under Regulations 24 of Care Planning and Placement Review Regulations 2010.

4.2 Foster Carers Approved for Short and Long Term Placements

These are carers who make commitment to provide accommodation, care and support to children and young people, either S20 accommodation, Interim Care Order, Care Order until they reach adulthood. It includes those connected persons who have been fully assessed and approved by the Agency Decision maker. The terms 'Care Skills', 'Care Skills plus' and 'High needs' reflect the payment band applicable to the carer but all of these carers are approved for both short and long term placements. The details of the payments can be found the 'Payments to Thurrock Carers Policy'.

4.3 Respite, Short Term & Bridging Foster Carers

These are carers who take children on 'a single period' fostering usually up to three months or slightly longer. It includes children where the care plan is for a

return home or move to an alternative permanent placement. These carers are usually task centred and are expected to work with a range of professionals to achieve the expected outcome. There are exceptional circumstances where a child may remain with such carers in medium to long terms; this would be agreed in consultation with the Foster Carer.

4.5 Parent and Child Placements:

These Foster Carers are specifically trained to care for children who are placed with their parents (mother and baby or father and baby) in the foster carer's household. There are rare occasions where the arrangement includes both parents. Parents and child carers are trained to support parents on how to appropriately parent their children.

The approach to supporting parents who are care leavers would be, wherever possible for Foster Carers to support them in transition towards moving into the community with their children. This would be based on a model that assists, guides and directs them to care for their own children with minimal intervention except where their child is/or likely to be at risk. The general expectation would be for such parents to receive allowances including all the entitlements of the child and to provide for, and meet the child's needs as they would have done in their own accommodation. Depending on the circumstances of the parent and child it may be that only one, either the parent, or the baby have the status of a 'looked after child'. The legal status of arrangements would be clarified before the placement commences.

Parent and Child arrangements in court proceedings where the local authority is taking steps to safeguard the child shall be supported and monitored with carers taking an approach which assist the local authority to provide evidence to court in relation to carer's observation, records and judgement of mother / father's parenting capacity. Foster Carers will therefore be given training around observation skills, record keeping as well as court attendance and evidence giving.

4.6 Fully Approved Connected Persons Foster Carers (Family and Friends carers):

These carers are approved to look after a specific named child(ren). These carers are usually family members or friends who knew the child(ren) before they were accommodated by the local authority.

A full assessment and approval of Connected Person's Foster Carers is completed in accordance with Standard 30 of the National Fostering Minimum Standards, 2011. All approved Connected Person's Foster Carers are supported and managed under the same regulations, statutory guidance and legislation as other registered Foster Carers.

5. RECRUITMENT OF FOSTER CARERS

Thurrock Fostering Service undertakes recruitment activity throughout the year to ensure we recruit sufficient Foster Carers to meet the needs of the children who form the looked after population and the Council's sufficiency duty. Thurrock Foster Carers are actively involved in recruiting new Foster

Carers to ensure applications are considered and processed in a timely manner. Information days for potential Foster Carer's were held regularly (prior to Covid 19), at the Civic Offices, local shopping Centres and in other venues across the Local Authority to help interested applicants to learn more about the fostering task and the assessment and approval process. It is hoped that with the lifting of restrictions these recruitment activities can be recommenced.

The strategy for the recruitment of Foster Carers is based on the identified needs of our looked after CYP. This is based on the annual Sufficiency Strategy which assists the recruitment team in focusing on particular communities to ensure we meet the diverse needs of our looked after population.

The Recruitment Team can be contacted on **0800 652 1256** for further information about recruitment activity or information sessions or they can be contacted via the Thurrock Council Fostering Service website.

5.1 Initial Enquiry and Acceptance of Application

When an enquiry is received from a potential Foster Carer, an information pack is sent out within forty eight hours of that enquiry with details about the different types of fostering and the assessment process. A follow up call is made by the duty Social worker usually within three working days and an arrangement is made for a home visit to discuss the application or to answer any additional questions a potential applicant may have.

Each applicant household over the age of 18 must give consent for Thurrock Fostering Service to undertake the following references and statutory checks:

- Disclosure and Baring Service checks – DBS (police references are obtained on all members of the household aged 18 years and over)
- Medical and health checks (the applicant's doctor will be asked to complete a health assessment report that will be forwarded to the Fostering Panel's medical advisor for review and comment)
- Local Authority checks (information held on children services database)
- Schools and employers checks
- Details of former partners where relevant
- References from all employers where the prospective carer(s) have work with children or other vulnerable groups
- A file review and references if carer(s) were previously approved by another fostering agency
- Social Media Checks
- Housing checks and reports
- Financial review

A decision to progress any application to stage two will be made upon receipt of all checks and references. However, there may be occasions where the

stage one and two shall progress simultaneously. In such situation, the applicant would be clearly informed and process shall comply with the Independent Review Mechanism principle should a decision be made to terminate the assessment at a later stage in the stage two processes.

5.2 The Assessment of Prospective Foster Carers:

Successful applicants from the stage one process are required to attend Skills to Foster training as part of the assessment process. Thurrock Fostering Service has a procedure in place for the assessment of foster carers that details the process to be followed when assessing potential carers. It includes the requirement to complete and provide all the information as outlined in the Fostering Regulations 2011 & 2013

The assessment is carried out by a qualified social worker from the Placement Assessment Team. Whenever an assessment is completed, there is a mandatory requirement for the report to be shared with the applicant(s) to confirm factual accuracy of the information sourced or gathered. Applicants are required to comment and sign the report to verify that they have read and agreed with the contents before they can be invited to attend the Independent Fostering Panel.

The assessment team aim to complete Stage one and two processes within 4-6 months upon receipt of a completed application. Every effort is made to ensure there are no delays and applicants are given an update on the progress of their application every month until the assessment is completed. Applicant Foster Carers will see an initial draft of their assessment to correct any factual errors. All reports are signed by the applicant and the report author.

5.3 Approval of Foster Carers

All completed applicant foster carer's assessments are presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel for consideration and recommendation. Applicant Foster Carers attend the panel with their assessing Social worker to answer questions by Panel members. The draft recommendations are communicated verbally to the applicants by the chair of the Independent Fostering & Adoption Panel on the day of the panel meeting. The Panel recommendations then go to the Agency Decision Maker for the final decision of an applicant's suitability.

The Agency Decision Maker makes this determination within 7 working days of receipt of recommendation and minutes from the Panel.

5.4 Pre-Panel Information to Applicants and Post Panel Feedback

An information pack which outlines the roles, functions and membership of the fostering panel shall be made available to prospective applicants as soon as they are notified that their application is being presented to the independent Fostering and Adoption Panel by the Panel Administrator. Applicants who attend the Panel are required to complete a survey about their experiences of attending the Panel. This is for quality and assurance purposes to ensure the panel process is fit for purpose.

5.5 Fostering Agreement & Induction

Each approved Foster Carer is required to sign a Foster Carer's Agreement and undertake mandatory induction training before commencement of their fostering career. The fostering agreement outlines the contractual relationship and agreement between carer and the Authority. The inductions set out expectations of the Foster Carers' role.

- The assessing Social worker will remain the allocated Social worker until a supervising Social worker is allocated.
- The supervising Social worker should be allocated prior to attendance at the Fostering Panel and should attend the panel

5.6 The Fostering Handbook and Policies

Thurrock Council provides its Foster Carers with an up to date online handbook which can be accessed as follows:

- <https://www.fosteringhandbook.com/thurrock/>

Thurrock Council provides an online resource of its policies relating to Children's Services as follows:

- <https://thurrockcs.proceduresonline.com/chapters/contents.html>
- Specific Fostering Policy can be found here:
https://thurrockcs.proceduresonline.com/chapters/contents.html#fostering_adopt

6. MATCHING OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FOSTER CARERS

When a placement is required the Placement Team receives a placement request report which identifies the needs of the CYP and has additional information which assists in looking for the best possible match with a fostering household. This is crucial for successful match between a child and foster carer(s).

There is an established procedure in place to be followed in the matching process. The Family Placement Service seeks to ensure that each child or young person placed in foster care is carefully matched with a carer capable of meeting her/his assessed needs.

Other information such as the child's care plan and recent written assessments of the child and their family are used to help make the right matches. Matches are achieved by means of information sharing and consideration involving all relevant professionals, the child and her/his family and potential carers, their families and other children in placement.

Matching criteria considers the child's assessed needs including but not limited to racial, ethnic, religious, cultural, disability and linguistic needs and

matched as closely as possible with the ethnic origin, race, religion, culture and language of the foster family. There are occasions where cross cultural and religious matching takes place. Supervising Social workers are able to assist carers so that information and assistance are provided where it is necessary to ensure the diversity needs of children are met.

Where possible a planned introduction between the child and a new Foster Carer takes place within 7 days before the placement start date. However, this is not always possible when emergency placements are made therefore efforts shall be made to reduce emergency placements to its barest minimum.

6.1 Safer Caring Agreements

- There should be a safer caring agreement for each child placed and this should be completed within one month of placement.
- The safer caring agreement should include the child where possible and be placed on the child's file
- The safer caring agreement should detail any actions the carer is expected to take as a result of the child's 'Criminal Exploitation', 'Prevent' or 'Missing' Risk assessment as applicable to each child placed
- A copy of the safer caring agreement should be placed on the child's and Foster Carers file

7. TRAINING OF FOSTER CARERS

The Fostering Service is committed to providing continuous professional development and training opportunities for foster carers, The service believes that quality training is an integral part of a fostering career and begins during the assessment process with a 'Skills to Foster' course. Once approved, all new foster carers are expected to complete a minimum mandatory Core Training Programmes each year, which aims to provide the basic skills and information that new carers need to perform their fostering task effectively.

Carers training needs shall be identified jointly with the carer's supervising Social worker as part of the annual review process. Any training attended shall be added into the foster carer's training profile and considered as part of each carer's annual review process. The trainings may also count towards a professional qualification award and the mandatory Training Support and Development Standards (TSDS) for newly approved foster carers.

Thurrock recognises carers skills set and value their experiences. We therefore encourage and involve foster carers in helping deliver training events. We aim to offer 'Training for Trainers' course for those who wish to undertake this task. We believe that this is an important way for carers to learn from each other, promoting partnership working between themselves, social care staff and other professionals. In light of the Black Lives Matter movement, there has been a review of the training offer to ensure that diversity needs and understanding racism is sufficiently included in the training programme.

8. SUPPORT PROVIDED TO FOSTER CARERS

Foster carers receive regular in person supervision visits from an allocated supervising Social worker as follows:

- Foster Carers with a temporary approval should be seen monthly as minimum
- Foster Carers with a full approval should be seen monthly until their first annual review of approval as a minimum
- Foster carers who have been approved more than twelve months and have short term placements should be seen every six weeks as a minimum
- Foster carers with long term placements only, should receive supervision every six weeks but the supervisor may alternate between a telephone call and in person supervision

Foster carers should receive notes of their supervision from their supervising social worker within two weeks of their supervision. Records are maintained from each supervisory visit using an agreed format and copies are shared with carers for factual accuracy and information for sharing purposes

- Unannounced visits should be conducted at least one a year and should not be completed by the allocated supervising social worker
- The unannounced visit should include a check of all relevant areas of the property

The allocated worker is expected to be aware of the demands of each placement and would be available to offer additional support and visits. Each carer's supervising Social worker has a duty to assess the needs of the carer and identify whether or not additional support and training may be required.

- Each Approved Foster Carer should have a training and development plan agreed with their Supervising Social worker
- Progress against this plan should be part of the annual review of approval

Foster Carers can also contact the Fostering Duty Social worker if their allocated worker is unavailable. The Foster Carer's have access to supervising social worker support via the Out Of Hours rota, Monday to Friday until 10.30 pm and weekends between 9 am – 4.30pm. Thurrock Council also operates an Emergency Duty System (EDT) which is also available to all foster carers.

All Foster Carers have access to a Therapist as part of the Therapeutic Support sessions provided by the Council. This is available when they have new children or young people in placement. Foster Carers may also access Therapeutic Support sessions at any point if there are any concerns and

difficulties in placement either via a self-referral mechanism or being referred by a supervising social worker.

The Foster Carers attend regular formal and informal support group meetings. All Foster Carers have automatic membership subscription with Fostering Network and are encouraged to join the Thurrock Foster Carers Association – The One Team. The One Team provide support to foster carers and are able to use this forum to liaise and feedback to managers in Childrens Services regarding issues arising from the fostering community.

9. ANNUAL REVIEW AND SPECIAL REVIEWS

All Foster Carers shall be reviewed in accordance with the Fostering Service Regulations 2011. The Family Placement Service is committed to a transparent Annual Foster Carer Review (AFCR) process which shall include self-assessment foster carers, consultations and feedback from all members of foster carers household, children Social workers and the Reviewing Officer. The first annual review shall be presented to the fostering panel for approval. Thereafter, every third review shall be presented to the Panel unless there is an allegation, cause for concern or change of circumstance of the foster carer which will automatically triggers a special review process. All special reviews shall be presented to the Fostering and Adoption Panel

All panel recommendations in relation to Annual Review process shall be presented to the Agency Decision Maker for a decision on re-approval. All successful applicants shall receive a written confirmation within 10 working days from the Panel date. The Service Manager shall approve all Reviews which are not presented to Independent Fostering Panel.

All approved Foster Carers shall be issued a Fostering Agreement which will set out the terms of their fostering arrangement with the council. The validity of each agreement shall not exceed 12 months from the date of issue. The statuses of all foster carers (General, Advanced and Therapeutic) shall be subject to annual reviews.

10. ALLOWANCE AND PAYMENTS SCHEME

The Allowance and Payment Scheme comprises is made up of two elements: The **Boarding Out Allowance element** is designated for the care of the child. The allowance is payable to all foster carers who are subject to Fostering regulations and are caring for Thurrock Council' Looked after Children. It is structured to meet a child's needs over the medium to long term (see allowance s documentation). The same allowance is payable to Connected Person's Foster Carers who have been approved to care for a 'named child' still frequently- being a family member or family friend, sometimes referred to as a 'Family and Friend foster carer.'

The **Fee payment** is a reward payment to foster carers

10.1 The Boarding Out Allowance

The allowance is intended to contribute towards the general costs associated

with the care of the child or young person and their day to day needs. The allowance is aimed at maintaining an expected standard of care for the looked after child or young person.

The allowance includes items that are purchased directly to meet the child's needs such as food, clothing and social activities. It also covers indirect costs such as family transport, family outings and any additional general household maintenance costs such as utilities including broad band and cleaning materials.

It is understood that the needs of children and young people of the same age group can vary widely and foster carers are responsible for using their discretion to ensure that the child or young person's overall needs are met. For example, some expenditure on items may not change from month to month e.g. food. However expenditure on items such as clothing and utilities may vary. The carer is expected to budget for these variations in expenditure. If the carer's expenditure on the child or young person differs significantly from the proportions set out in the table above, the supervising social worker should arrange to discuss the carer's expenditure at a supervisory visit. This will assist the foster carer to budget accordingly or assist the Social worker to determine if any additional financial support is required.

- **Food** - Children and young people should receive dinner money or a packed lunch as is appropriate to their needs and preferences. They should be provided with breakfast before school and a meal in the evening. Healthy drinks and snacks should be made available within reason.
- **Health and hygiene** - Young people who have reached puberty will need an allowance to buy toiletries such as tampons, deodorant and shaving equipment etc.
- **Clothing** - It is important that children and young people are provided with sufficient shoes and clothes appropriate to their age. Carers should provide opportunities for children and young people to be involved in choosing and buying clothes as they get older. It is expected that foster carers would provide young person aged thirteen and over with money to buy some clothes for themselves from the basic allowance with guidance.
- **Pocket money and savings** - It is important that children have some understanding of the responsibilities of looking after their own money from the age of seven years. Prior to this, children's pocket money should be spent under the supervision of the foster carer or kept as savings. The child's social worker will be responsible in partnership with the foster carer for determining the exact amount of pocket money and savings as this will sometimes need to be considered in light of what is reasonable within the fostering family and the child's level of maturity. Carers are expected to help children to learn about savings as part of preparation for adulthood. It is therefore important for the carer to assist the child in opening up a savings account, such as a post office account, into which the child can

save an element of their pocket money. These issues should be discussed as part of the Placement Arrangements meeting.

This savings account is maintained and held by the carer until such time when the child leaves the placement. If the child moves placement, the savings book is then given to the supervising social worker who will ensure that it follows the child to their next home. Where a foster carer is concerned about providing a child or young person with pocket money they should be referred to the supervising social worker, who will discuss ways to address the concerns.

Savings for children who are looked after is saved corporately to ensure that savings are applied consistently and that there is no disruption of savings if a child moves placement.

10.2 Fostering Allowance and Fee Payment

As noted above, the fostering allowance and payment rates are made up of the fostering boarding allowance and the fee payment for carers who have met the competency requirements as detailed in the Payments to Thurrock Foster Carers Policy

11. PROMOTING EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

The Fostering Support Team prepares and encourages Foster Carers to promote and support each child's education achievement whilst in placement. Foster Carers are supported through training and ongoing support to provide home environments that stimulate, encourage and value the experience of learning and educational achievements. It is our expectation that the child's social worker consults and include Foster Carers in the educational plans for the children in their placement. This includes attending PEP's, Education Review Meetings, Parents Evenings and School Activity /Open Days. Thurrock wants to be ambitious for its young people and encourage them into further study and training so they can continue learning beyond their statutory schooling and attend University. There are more Universities recognising and supporting Looked After Children to attend University.

The Family Placement Service, where required, will liaise with the Virtual School to provide access and support to learning mentors/additional tuition to support looked after children with education.

12. CONTACT

The Family Contact Team (Oaktree) is the hub for all family placement contact activities. Oaktree staff and the CYP Social worker are responsible for coordinating and supporting family contact arrangements. Foster Carers are also expected and may be requested to supervise contact in their homes or community subject to a risk assessment. It is also important that Foster Carers are aware of the names and details of the child's network of friends and, if appropriate, supported and its consistency encouraged and maintained.

Foster Carers will actively support, promote and facilitate safe contact

between children, young people and their family and friends so that children can experience, as close as possible, normal family life. Foster Carers are also encouraged and supported to promote contact and friendships as set out in the children placement plans.

13. CHILDREN'S HEALTH

The service promotes the health and development needs of children and young people living in foster care. We ensure that health care information for each child is provided to Foster Carers prior to the child being placed and no later than 7 working days, if the information is not readily available at the point of placement. We ensure that foster carers are aware of health, illness or medication issues relating to child/children placed.

The service also ensures that the carer is given a copy of the child's Initial Health Assessment Action Plan. It is an expectation that all children and young people placed are registered with a GP and dentist close to the foster's home, if they are not already registered. Foster Carers are aware of their obligation and responsibility to support children to attend medical, dental and other health care appointments. Medical issues are discussed any appointments are agreed with social workers.

14. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The service recognises the rights of children and young people and discusses with foster carers the rights of a child. All young people in foster care have access to a named person responsible for seeking and promoting their rights. Children shall be consulted and their views incorporated in the delivery of service to ensure effectiveness in the day to day running of the Family Placement Service. The person shall provide ongoing support and advocacy for looked after young people as well as ensuring that they are provided with a copy of the children's guide and complaint procedure. All foster carers are provided with information about the Children in Care Council and children should be supported to access this forum and participation events.

15. SAFEGUARDING

The service complies with the Southend, Essex and Thurrock (SET) Child protection procedures and its own associated procedures in all areas of child protection. The SET Procedures reflect all relevant law, regulation, statutory and non-statutory Government guidance and best practice; including the key government document 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018'.

Thurrock Child Sexual Exploitation Strategy (2020/21) has been updated to ensure there is a Contextual Safeguarding approach. Foster care training includes child exploitation and contextual safeguarding. Foster carers along with other professionals, have a role in raising profiles and gathering intelligence in conjunction with the police and other partner agencies with the aim to protect children and young people from sexual exploitation.

The service monitors children and young people missing from care; all

children reported missing will have a return debriefing interview and will be monitored by the Risk Assessment Group meeting (RAG).

All relevant training, child protections procedures, safe caring, children missing from care are reviewed for each individual household during the monthly supervision and as part of the annual review process.

16. FOSTER CARERS RECORD KEEPING

Foster carers of all approval types are expected to keep a log for each child in placement. The frequency of recording is as follows (with the exception of incidents or significant events which may require more detail) :

- For children aged 0-1 years, brief records should be kept for each day and submitted weekly
- For children aged 1-5 years brief records should be kept for each day and submitted monthly
- For children aged 5-18 a weekly summary is sufficient which can be submitted monthly
- All recording should be completed electronically and be uploaded to the child's and carers file.

Incidents and Significant Events

There will be occasions where a more detailed recording may be appropriate. All urgent concerns should be reported to the appropriate agency without delay via telephone; recording can be completed after the event. The following is a non-exhaustive list of examples where approved Foster Carers would make a more detailed recording.

- Missing episodes
- Unplanned attendance for medical care
- Accident or injury to the child
- Accident or injury to the carer as a direct result of the child's action or behaviour
- New Police involvement
- Arguments or disputes within the home
- Unplanned changes in sleeping arrangements
- Unplanned or sudden changes in the household
- Allegations or complaints by children against the Foster Carer or anyone else
- Upon the decision to give notice on a placement

The incident form should be used and completed in sufficient detail that if a person unknown to the situation could understand what happened and why.

Foster Carers are offered training on keeping records, their importance and implications. These issues are also explored in managing allegations training.

17. REVIEW OF STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In accordance with the Fostering Service Regulation, 2011, this Statement of Purpose shall be reviewed annually.

18. STAKE HOLDER CONSULTATION

The Thurrock Family Placement Service is a listening service and opened to further learning and development. We shall therefore peer review our practices with best performing fostering agencies. We shall also make concerted effort to solicit suggestions, feedbacks, comments and views from all relevant persons, professionals and key partners.

Although not limited to them, the following are considered as stakeholders and extension of the service and as such the views shall be solicited formally through consultation meetings, surveys, surgeries, and commentary from:

- i. Foster Carers
- ii. Care Leavers
- iii. Fostered children and young people
- iv. Children' Social workers
- v. Parents and carers Supervision Social workers
- vi. Independent Reviewing Officers
- vii. Health Professional
- viii. Education Professionals
- ix. Inspire Youth Hub
- x. Councillors
- xi. Panel Members
- xii. Family and Friends carers
- xiii. Birth Children of Foster Carers
- xiv. Children in Care Council
- xv. Thurrock Foster Care Association
- xvi. Thurrock Safeguarding Partnership

19. PREPARATION FOR ADULT LIFE

The Fostering Service provides training to foster carers to help develop their skills on how best to help young people prepare for adulthood and independent living. Carers are expected to provide young people with positive life experiences, information, skills and advice that will support them in this objective. Young people preparing to leave care are referred by their social workers to the Leaving Care Team where practical advice and support is offered.

Preparation for transition into adulthood (post 18 years), begins early so that young people are aware of what their financial entitlements, housing, education and employment options.

The Service principle is to improve choices for young people through Staying Put, Supported Lodging and other bespoke provisions that will meet the individual's needs. Each young person is therefore consulted by the supervising social worker about their considered options when the preparation for Pathway Planning is started. It is the service's expectation that Foster carers are consulted and involved in the process of moving children and young people on to begin their adult life.

20. ALLEGATIONS, COMPLAINTS CONCERNS AND COMPLIMENTS

The Fostering Team has a policy that deals with allegations, complaints and concerns against Foster Carers Procedure. All complaints are recorded and reviewed in line with procedural guidelines. Foster carers also have access to the council's complaints procedure. Staff and carers are provided with safeguarding training as part of the ongoing professional training and development programme. The Family Placement Service aims to respond to any allegation on complaint within 14 days but not exceeding 28 days.

We however recognise that there are some allegations and complaints that may require complex investigation which could take longer than 28 days. In such cases, the registered fostering manager shall write to the person(s) involved in the process, explaining the nature and complexity with anticipated timelines. This shall be followed up with periodical updates, keeping all parties informed with progress until the matter is concluded. Depending on the nature of allegation or complaint, for example, child protection enquiry, the regulator (Ofsted) and the Local Safeguarding Board of the Area Authority shall be notified accordingly.

The Service welcomes compliments and well as constructive feedback on what we do well as well as areas, we should improve. All compliments and feedback should be sent to the registered Manager of the Fostering Service.

21. COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS PROCEDURE

21.1 In seeking to constantly improve the quality of the fostering services, Thurrock Council welcomes and encourages feedback from service user's providers and partner agencies as an opportunity to learn lessons and put matters right. We also welcome comments or compliments as a way of learning about our practice and use them as an integrated part of our Quality Assurance processes.

21.2 Thurrock Council recognise that children, their birth parents, foster carers, applicants and special guardians are best placed to identify the strengths and deficiencies of the fostering service and, therefore to inform the changes and developments needed to ensure continuing improvement.

21.3 The majority of such complaints will be dealt with under a complaints procedure established in line with **The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006** and the statutory guidance "**Getting the Best from Complaints**".

21.4 There is a framework in place for responding to and ensuring that the views of the parties in the fostering process are heard. All parties are advised of Thurrock Council's complaints procedure

21.5 In most situations, areas of potential tension or conflict can be minimised through careful planning, open communication and early discussion/negotiation involving the child's social worker and/or the social worker, as appropriate.

21.6 Any of the parties in the fostering process can use the complaints procedure if they have a dissatisfaction or concern with the service provided. This includes a complaint by:

- Any child who has been placed with our approved foster carers.
- A birth parent of a child who has been placed with our approved carers including connected persons
- Foster Carers
- Applicants during the preparation and assessment process and after approval whilst awaiting a placement.
- One person on behalf of another e.g. a parent/advocate on behalf of a child.
- Anyone granted a Special Guardianship Order or is seeking one.

21.7 Applicants to become Foster Carers who are turned down for approval on the recommendation of the Fostering panel and/or the decision of the agency decision maker are able to ask for their case to be referred to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). Details of this process with timescales will be made available to applicants during preparation and assessment.

The IRM has the following timescales:

- Applicants have 40 working days from the date of the letter confirming the panel's decision, to decide to contact the IRM.
- The Fostering agency will be contacted to produce relevant documentation within
- 10 working days.
- The IRM will set up a panel within 3 months of the application.

Contact details for the IRM are as follows:

The Independent Review Mechanism Contract Manager
Unit 4, Pavillion Business Park,
Royds Hall Road
Leeds, LS12 6AJ
Tel: 0845 450 3956
Email: irm@irm.org.uk
www.independentreviewmechanism.org.uk

21.8 Information about the complaints procedure can be obtained from:

Complaints,
Thurrock Council,
Civic Offices,
New Road,
Grays,
RM17 6SL
Tel: 0800 021 3016
Email: complaints@thurrock.gov.uk

Information is also available on <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/how-to-complain/children-and-young-peoples-social-care-complaints>

Thurrock Council has applied a clear policy defining complaints and how they are dealt with.

22. THE REGISTRATION AUTHORITY

22.1 OFSTED is responsible for monitoring, regulating and inspecting fostering services under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000. Thurrock unique registration number is SC056087

22.2 Thurrock Council's Fostering Service is regulated and inspected by:

OFSTED

Piccadilly Gate

Store Street

Manchester M1 2WD

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Web: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

This statement of purpose is subject to annual review