



Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council

Fostering Service

Statement of Purpose

Mission Statement

Neath Port Talbot Fostering Service aims to provide safe, high quality care for children and young people; with foster carers who are skilled and motivated to enable them to achieve the best possible outcomes in life.

THE FOSTERING SERVICE

VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

We are committed to working in the best interests of children and young people and this underpins the development and provision of all services.

We want to ensure that children and young people achieve in their childhood, and that they can be successful in their futures. That every child is treated as an individual and each child or young person in foster care is protected from all forms of abuse, neglect, deprivation and exploitation.

We want to work successfully with children and young people, their parents and families and partner agencies to help young people achieve the best outcomes.

Children and young people have the right to be listened to and have their views respected, to participate in the plans for their care, and to inform future service needs.

Permanency and continuity is essential for all children in order to provide stable and secure relationships. This will ideally be achieved within their birth family, but where this is not possible the aim will be to provide secure high quality long-term placements.

AIMS

The primary aim of the Fostering Service is to provide quality care to meet the needs of children and young people looked after. To do this we will:

- Provide placements which are safe, caring and a stimulating environment for looked after children. To safeguard and protect the welfare of children and young people and to ensure their physical, emotional and intellectual development.
- Develop Fostering Services to meet individual needs, including linguistic, religious and ethnicity of the child/young person.
- Provide the best possible care and support in placements that meet their needs to help children and young people achieve the best outcomes.
- Provide placements within the boundaries of Neath Port Talbot in order to maintain their relationships with their family, peers and to enable them to continue to maintain their links with education, health and other services that may be involved with them, unless there is a reason why this would not be in their best interest.
- Assist young people when needed to remain in their placements until they are ready to move to independence.

OBJECTIVES

- To deliver a Foster Carer Recruitment strategy which is based on understanding the needs of Looked After Children and understands and recognises the required skills and support needs of foster carers
- To reduce the numbers of looked after children, by supporting plans for children to be rehabilitated to their birth families or to be looked after in permanent families.
- To provide a wide range of support and advisory services to foster carers including out of hours support.

- To ensure all foster carers receive quality training to develop the skills, abilities and competencies required to ensure they are able to provide the best possible standards of care, opportunities and experiences to children and young people.
- To increase the resource available to meet the needs of the children and young people, including assessment placements for parents and babies, children with disabilities and additional needs, teenagers and sibling groups.
- To ensure that the voice of the child informs how the service is delivered and developed and to ensure that foster carers and children are consulted with.
- To promote and develop a clear career pathway through continuous learning for foster carer development to include an opportunity to gain a Diploma qualification in child care.
- To develop positive working relationships with other agencies and professionals.
- To annually review the Statement of Purpose and update as required.

SERVICES AND FACILITIES

Fostering ensures that all children and young people who are looked after are provided with the best possible care and support in placements that meet their needs.

The Service consists of Recruitment & Assessment Team and a Supervising Social Work Team

The service has a recruitment and retention officer and a placement coordinator.

The service supports family and friends who are foster carers and provides financial assessments for Special Guardianship carers where the Local Authority has been involved in the application.

Wherever possible the service aims to support placements within the boundaries of Neath Port Talbot in order for children and young people to remain within their local communities and have stability.

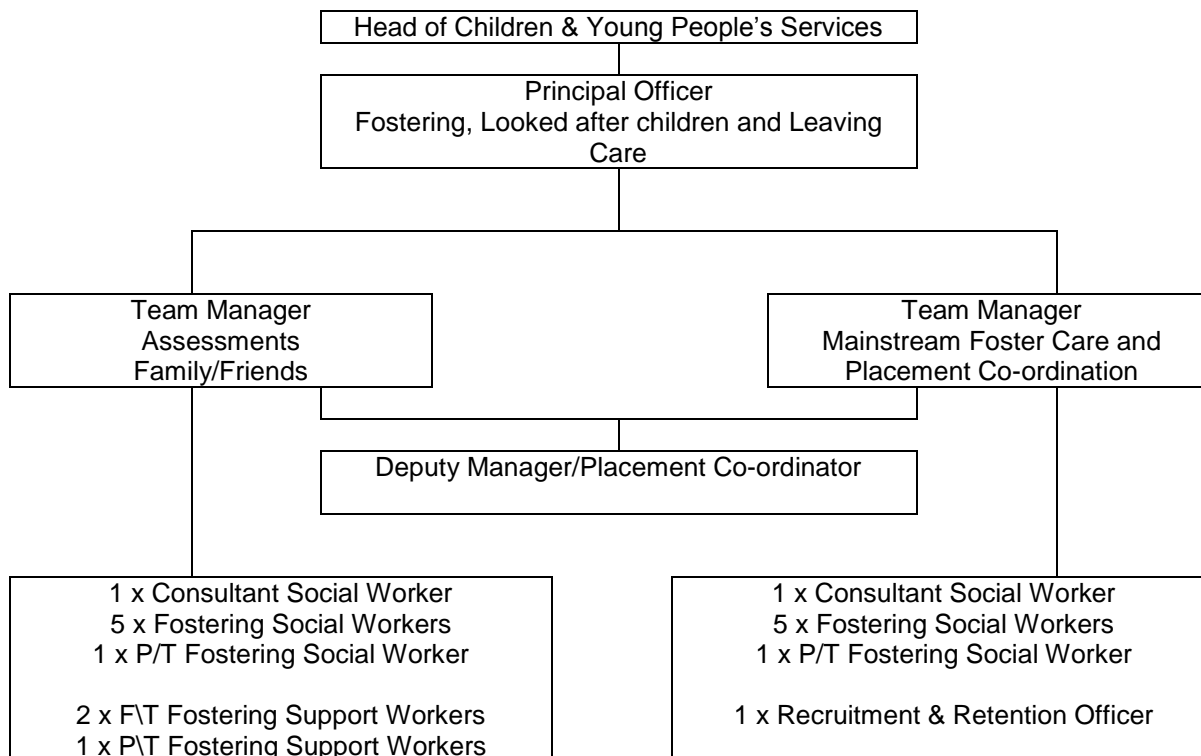
Placements

The range of placements provided include:-

- Foster plus scheme – to provide placements to children and young people with complex needs
- Short term task centred placements for children and young people
- Long term permanent placements for children and young people who are unable to return home or whose permanency has not been achieved through adoption or other Court orders.
- Family and friends foster carers
- Shared care placements where children and young people receive ongoing care between their parents and Foster Carer. Shared care enables children and young people to maintain family and community life and eases the pressures on families who may be experiencing difficulties.
- NPT commissions a short break service for children with disabilities through Action for Children.
- The fostering service provides a support to Foster Carers who become Special Guardianship Carers.

MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE AND STAFFING

The structure below shows the line management arrangements for the Fostering Service and the composition of the Team.



Fostering Service Staff

The Team Manager, Deputy, Consultant and Fostering Social Workers are qualified social workers registered with the Care Council for Wales and have valuable experience of child care services and child protection cases.

The Fostering Support Workers all have vast experience in working with children and young people and have experience of supervision of Family/Friends carers.

Regular team meetings are held with invitations to guest speakers to include the Principal Officer and Head of Service. Weekly placement meetings are held to discuss current placements.

Regular supervision of staff and access to an extensive training programme for staff to ensure workers are knowledgeable on key changes in legislation and practice issues.

RECRUITING AND APPROVING FOSTER CARERS

Recruitment

There are many significant benefits in promoting the growth in local foster carers. Our primary aim is to provide a service with a diversity of placements capable of meeting a wide range of children's needs.

There is a strong competitive local market with NPT Fostering having to compete with large neighbouring local authorities and a high number of independent fostering agencies recruiting within its locality.

NPT must ensure it has a marketing strategy which is visible and offers an attractive package of support. The service must be robust and in a position to deliver effective support to foster carers in order to offer a competitive service.

The aim is to plan for future needs and the strategy is informed by:-

1. Current placement demand
2. Evaluation of recruitment activity
3. Consultation with existing carers
4. Local and national trends and developments

A variety of recruitment activities are used including, social media through our NPT Facebook account, features in the local press, radio adverts and interviews, posters and leaflet campaigns.

Recruitment activities are run throughout the year with particular emphasis on the National Foster Care Fortnight campaign.

The strategy has regard to the need to recruit carers from ethnic minority groups, Welsh speakers and different religious persuasion.

The Fostering Service requires a robust focus on identifying the needs of children and young people and ensuring that it can meet a range of needs including supporting children with complex needs.

The fostering finance policy reflects the need to support placements for children with complex needs, and that this links with the need to develop skills and competencies.

Assessment Process

Enquiries from potential foster carers are dealt directly within the Fostering Team. The Recruitment & Retention Officer completes an initial enquiry form over the telephone with an information pack sent out within two days. This pack provides further details on the different types of fostering available and highlighting the support we can offer for them and their families. The Fostering Service will prioritise assessments in line with the demand on the service.

The Initial Visit

Following the initial telephone call, a Fostering Social Worker arranges an initial visit within two weeks. During this visit the Fostering Social Worker provides detailed

information about fostering and what is involved in the fostering application process. If applicants wish to proceed with their enquiry, DBS, health and Local Authority checks are taken up at this stage.

Preparation Training Course

If following checks applicants are potentially suitable, taking into account the children and young people requiring foster placements, the applicants will be invited to attend our Preparation Training Course.

The Service runs training courses four times a year, shared with the City & County of Swansea Fostering Service and the course consists of 4 sessions run by an experienced trainer. At the training sessions, applicants are encouraged to share their own experiences and knowledge and to participate fully in group activities.

The course explores the following areas:-

- the type of needs, characteristics and backgrounds of the range of children and young people who need foster placements, and their families
- safeguarding and promoting the child's welfare
- the requirements, structures and procedures of the Department
- the legal framework
- roles and responsibilities of foster carers, social workers and the child's own parents
- the strengths and vulnerabilities of the applicants and their family members
- the range of services available to support foster carers.

The course is based on a nationally recognised format for pre-approval training and participants are provided with a training booklet to complete and to refer to during the assessment process.

Assessment

Following successful completion of the training course, applicants who wish to continue are asked to complete a comprehensive assessment. Applicants are required to provide three references one of which must be a family member. Employer references are also taken up when considered relevant to the assessment. Personal referees will be asked to provide a written reference and will also be interviewed by the Fostering Social Worker.

The assessment process is designed to gather evidence of the qualities, skills and competences needed in foster care. Information from the training course will be included.

In addition the named Fostering Social Worker will visit the applicant at home to carry out a number of individual and joint interviews with the applicants and any other household members. The applicants are also invited to make significant written contributions to the assessment. All the information is recorded and will form the basis of the written report which has a standard format and is competency based. The completed report is shared with the applicants for discussion and their signature before submission for Fostering panel.

The applicant's suitability is reviewed at each stage of the process. The withdrawal of any applicants is confirmed in writing and reasons for withdrawal are monitored.

Applicants who are felt to be unsuitable prior to consideration by the Fostering Panel are informed in writing by the Fostering Service and reasons given. In these circumstances applicants are informed that we may need to share this information should we be consulted about the applicant. The Fostering Social Worker records a Statement of Unsuitability on the carers file.

Approval

The completed assessment is presented with evidence of the satisfactory completion of the checks and references and considered by the Fostering Panel which makes independent recommendations about the suitability of the applicant to be approved as Foster Carers and the terms and conditions of their approval.

The Fostering Panel is made up of professional Social Workers, Foster Carers, Medical Advisor, Education Advisor, Legal Advisor (where applicable), Independent Persons with experience of Fostering and Elected Members.

Applicants are invited to attend part of the meeting when their application is being considered by the Fostering Panel. The decision to approve the applicant or not is based on the Panel's recommendation and is made by the agency decision maker who is the Head of Children and Young People Services. Applicants are informed personally by the respective Fostering Social Worker of the decision within 24 hours and receive written communication as soon as is practically possible.

Right to Appeal in line with IRM

Where the agency decision maker does not approve the application, applicants will always receive written notification of the decision including the reasons for the decision and of the Panel's recommendations. The applicant will be invited to make any written representation within 28 days of the notification in writing if they wish to appeal this decision.

The applicants may also have recourse to an Independent Panel Review who provide an independent review of the decision and advice the Agency Decision Maker of their finding. The Agency Decision Maker will review the decision, and if required will return the matter to the fostering panel before the final decision is made.

FOSTER CARER SUPPORT

Once approved Foster Carers are allocated a designated Fostering Social Worker who will be their supervising social worker and who ensures that they receive appropriate support both personal and practical through regular visits and formal supervision sessions.

Emergency Support\On Call Service

Outside of normal working hours, our foster carers have access to our on-call service via telephone, which are manned by our senior members of the Fostering Team. Also, the Authority provides a 24 hour emergency duty line which can be accessed in the case of emergencies and is manned by qualified social workers.

Supervisions

Regular supervisions are held by your dedicated fostering social worker and are an opportunity to discuss the placement, foster carers training and learning development and the child's care plan. Also discussed at the supervision are challenges, difficulties or concerns the foster carer may have regarding the placement, support or the service. Supervision is intended to be an opportunity to reflect on experiences, improve practice and set goals and actions for tasks or learning.

Unannounced Visits

In line with national standards and regulations, the fostering social worker is required to carry out unannounced visits to all foster carers.

Recordings and written records

Foster carers are required to maintain accurate and up to date daily records on the children they care for. Maintaining records are an extremely important and to help the social worker monitor the child's placement and progress during their time with the foster carer. Foster carer recordings can may be required as evidence for Court, and a young person can request access to their records. Training is provided to carers on recording,

Annual Reviews

All our foster carers have an annual review undertaken by a reviewing officer, who will be a social worker not involved in supporting the carers.

Information is gathered from the foster carers, children and young people in placement, the child and young person's social worker and parents. Also included in the review are the views from the son and/or daughter of the foster carers.

The completed review report is signed by all the parties and submitted to the Fostering Panel.

Reviews are completed every 12 months or where there is a significant change in circumstances and/or allegations or complaints made against the foster carer.

In circumstances where foster carers wish to give up fostering, written confirmation is sought from the foster carers and formal notice of termination is sent out to the foster carer via the Team Manager, Fostering Service and the Chair of the Panel.

Policies & Procedures

Once approved, foster carers receive a comprehensive handbook, detailing the policies and procedures for the Fostering Service, along with information on finance, health and safety matters and the Authority's complaints procedure. The content of the handbook is also available on the membership pages on the Neath Port Talbot Fostering web site.

Statutory Checks

Medical Checks and Disclosure & Barring Service checks for current foster carers must be updated every three years. It is also a requirement to complete Disclosure and Barring Checks for household members over the age of 18.

Training Opportunities

Following approval the Foster Carers and Fostering Social Worker agree on what further training and support is needed arising from the assessment process and what further skills and knowledge need to be gained.

The service runs a Foster Carer Training Programme, and carers must attend a minimum of three training courses per year. A commitment to participating in learning is part of the foster carers agreement.

Our foster carers are also able to access the Children's Services training programme. Where appropriate arrangements can be made foster carers are able to attend external training courses.

The training needs of foster carers are continually assessed by the Fostering Social Workers during general and formal supervision and as part of the Annual Review Process. The training programme is reviewed on an annual basis to reflect the training needs of foster carers and the trends and developments within the service.

Foster Carers are also encouraged to undertake the Diploma in Child Care. A dedicated training officer co-ordinates and delivers the Foster Carer training programme and is available to provide advice on continuous learning and development.

Consultation with Foster Carers

The Authority is committed to working in partnership with Foster Carers at consultation events and support groups involving foster carers and social workers are held regularly. These events provide opportunity for foster carers to meet together, to be kept informed and consulted of Service developments and to contribute to these developments. There is a foster carer representative on the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Allowances

Foster Carers are paid an allowance for the children they care for. The allowances are set in line with the Welsh Government Minimum Payments for foster carers. Allowances are based on a Child's age and include payments for clothing, holidays, Birthdays and pocket money. Mainstream Foster Carers are eligible to a professional fee in respect of each child placed. The professional fee will increase for carers who have completed their Diploma in Child Care and an advanced payment is made for Foster Plus Carers.

Acknowledgement and Recognition

In recognition of the continued commitment by our foster carers and for the value the authority places on its foster carers, foster carers will be awarded for their service.

Foster Carers are recognised for their length of service caring for children and young people on behalf of the Authority. The event seeks to demonstrate the value we have for our Foster Carers and is an opportunity to congratulate and show our appreciation for their dedication and hard work.

Foster Carer Support Groups

The Fostering Service Facilitates a number of support groups for carers. Support groups are a way for carers to get together and share ideas and focus on specific aspects of the role of fostering.

There is an Adoption support group which allows foster carers to discuss how they can assist a child moving on to an adoptive family and the challenges they and their own family experience. The Men who Care group allows our male carers the opportunity to discuss issues which may affect them.

The Fostering Service also provides additional support to foster own sons and daughters. The support includes direct work with children and young people, consultation events and social events.

Foster carers Association

The foster carers association is a group of Neath Port Talbot foster carers who meet independently of the fostering service to provide mutual support for foster carers and represent foster carers as a group. The managers of the fostering service meet regularly with the Foster Carers Association to ensure that carers views are incorporated into service development and planning.

SUPPORT FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

Neath Port Talbot commissions a number of services which support looked after children through its Family Support Services Strategy.

Action for Children provide intensive work to prevent placement breakdown and support when the plan is for children to be rehabilitated home.

Some children access therapeutic services through CAMHS for looked after children. Other therapeutic services are provided based on the individual need of the child. Where required children are able to access specialist support through SERAF and TAITH services.

Advocacy

All children who are Looked after are offered support from an independent advocate who will represent their views.

The voice of the child

Neath Port Talbot has a dedicated participation and engagement officer who ensures that children, young people and carers are consulted with and that their views are used to inform service delivery and development.

Supporting education

The Letterbox Club is a literacy and numeracy initiative for looked after children aged 7-13. Working in partnership with local Authorities to deliver personalised parcels of books, number games and stationery to help encourage and stimulate reading and learning at home.

The scheme is funded by the Welsh Government in conjunction with Book Trust Cymru. The scheme focuses on improving the education outlook of looked after children for a period of 6 months running from May to October.

The Fostering Team have been managing the distribution of the parcels since 2009 and have received extremely positive feedback from both the children/young people and also from the foster carers.

Foster carers have reported increased engagement in reading from the children/young people who have been part of the scheme.

Continuing with our partnership working, the Recruitment & Retention Officer worked with our Education LAC Co-ordinator in developing and including fostering in the Improving LAC Reading Attainment Policy.

The purpose of the policy is to improve the literacy of children who are looked after by improving their reading ability. The Letterbox scheme was linked into the action plan that accompanied the policy.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Neath Port Talbot has a Quality Assurance Framework which provides a mechanism for having an oversight of the standards of practice and service delivery. Quality of work is scrutinised through data monitoring and audits of practice, as well as consultation and feedback.

Assessment of applicants is undertaken by social workers who have had the necessary safeguard checks and are experienced in childcare and fostering. They work under the supervision of the Fostering Team Manager who advises and scrutinises applications prior to submission to the Fostering Panel and ensures that high professional standards are maintained.

The Fostering Panel will draw attention to any practice issues which arise out of their scrutiny of the work of the service to the Fostering Team manager.

Elected Members have a role in the overall monitoring and review of Children's Services including Fostering Services within Neath Port Talbot

Feedback from foster carers and foster carers children is obtained from the annual carer review, foster carer forum meetings, annual reviews and an annual questionnaire. Looked after children may present their views through consultation events and questionnaires facilitated by the case manager and/or a support worker.

Complaints

Neath Port Talbot Fostering Service aims to provide the best possible service. We take complaints about our service seriously and aim to resolve matters as soon as possible.

Wherever possible complaints should initially be responded to by the Fostering Social Worker or Team Manager. Most complaints can be settled this way. If a complaint that cannot be resolved at this stage a formal complaint can be made by contacting the complaints officer on 01639 763394 or e-mail: complaints@npt.gov.uk

Welsh Government

Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales

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Children's Commissioner

Children's Commissioner for Wales

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