

Children's Placement Service Statement of Purpose

As Required under
The Children Act 1989 & 2004;
Care Standards Act 2000 and the
Fostering Service Regulations 2011

September 2017



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Shropshire Council Children’s placement Service’s Statement of Purpose is constructed in accordance with the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000 and the Fostering Service Regulations 2011. The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and Fostering Services Regulations govern the work of fostering services throughout England and are used in inspecting and registering fostering agencies.

Standard 16 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and Regulation 3 (1) of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 require a fostering service to produce a statement which contains a range of detailed information as set out in Standard 16. It is intended as a useful source of information for Foster Carers, Fostering Social Workers, Childcare Social Workers and young people. The aims and objectives of the Statement of Purpose should be child focused and show how the service will meet outcomes for children.

This Statement of Purpose will be reviews annually and is publicly available.

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Shropshire’s Children’s Policy Statement

The fostering service operates within the context of the overall Policy for the provision of all children’s services in Shropshire set out below: Our fostering values are in connection to the National Minimum standards for Fostering.

1. The best interests of the child

All decisions made in relation to children must have, as the first and paramount consideration, the best interests of the child.

2. Assessment, planning and review

Services will be provided to children on the basis of continual assessment, planning, monitoring and review.

3. Avoiding delay

All decisions in relation to the provision of services to children will be made promptly and within agreed time-scales, having regard to the needs of the child; the achievement of these timescales will be monitored and reviewed.

4. Anti-discriminatory

Children will receive services which account for their race, culture, language, disability, and religion.

5. Valuing the family

Children have the right, whenever possible, to be brought up within their own family, either with their parents or relatives.

6. Partnership

In promoting this right, services will be provided in partnership with parents and with other agencies to assist and support parents in meeting their children’s needs within the family.

7. Listening and taking action

We will promote an ‘open door’ culture for all children, which encourage them to express their views, wishes and feelings; and say what they think about anything that affects them. We will then do all we can to ensure their views are taken into account when decisions are made about them.

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8. Quality services for children

Where services are provided for children, they will be provided by skilled people, committed to meeting children’s needs; in a manner which promotes their physical, emotional, social and psychological needs and in an environment where they feel safe, positive and encouraged.

9. Keeping children informed

Children will be provided with a wide range of accessible information about our services and those services that they may require to improve their life chances.

10. Promoting independence

We will help children to be as independent and to take as full and active a part in everyday life as possible.

11. Protecting children

We understand that, on occasions, it will be necessary for limits to be placed on the actions of some children for the sake of their welfare or to protect them or others from injury or harm. Interventions used in these circumstances will be the least restrictive and disruptive and any force will only be used as a last resort.

12. Resolving dissatisfaction

Where children, or others on their behalf, are dissatisfied, we will take steps to resolve their dissatisfaction and provide opportunities for them to complain if they wish.

13. The appropriate looked after placement

Where children are unable to live with their birth family, they will be looked after in family based care or, where appropriate, foster family based placements or appropriate residential care.

14. Respecting privacy

Looked after children will be treated with respect and afforded privacy, where they can express their individuality through their possessions, which they can enjoy and, when they move on, take with them.

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15. Permanence

We will ensure a plan exists for all looked after children to achieve a permanent solution for their future upbringing. Wherever possible, permanence will be secured through a return to their parents’ care or a placement within their wider family but where this cannot be achieved within a time-scale appropriate to the child’s needs, plans will be made for a permanent alternative family placement, which may include adoption, or, for older children, a stable placement which prepares the child for adulthood.

16. Maintaining community links

Where children are looked after away from the family, they will be placed as near to their family home or community as possible unless their needs otherwise dictate.

17. Promoting contact

We recognise the importance of family and friends in the lives of Looked After Children and we will promote meaningful contact between looked after children and their families and community of origin unless particular circumstances indicate that such contact would not be in their best interests. Foster carers will encourage and facilitate contact if appropriate and in line with the agreed care plan.

18. Monitoring

We will ensure that all looked after children receive regular and frequent visits from their social workers for the purposes of monitoring and reviewing the suitability of their placement arrangements.

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Corporate/ Priority Outcomes for Shropshire

Shropshire Council Mission:

To be an excellent organisation working in partnership to protect the vulnerable, create the conditions for economic growth and support communities to be resilient.

Values:

Our values drive our behaviour and demonstrate to our communities, our staff and our partners what we see as being important. These are in alphabetical order, because they are equally important:

Value	Description
Environment	Leading the way in protecting, enhancing and valuing our natural resources.
Equality and inclusion	Treating everyone as equal regardless of their circumstances and backgrounds, and identifying and helping people who may need support.
Excellence	Striving for excellence in every aspect of what we do, and using our resources wisely and responsibly in partnership with others to maximise their impact.
Fairness	Being fair, open and honest, acting with integrity, and expecting the same in others.
Innovation	Striving to improve, to learn from others, to encourage entrepreneurship and to explore new approaches with enthusiasm.
Listening	Demonstrating that we are listening and responding to communities, partners and staff, and treating views with respect.
Partnership	Working collaboratively with communities and partners to benefit the people of Shropshire.
Self-reliance	Encouraging people to be as independent and in control of their lives as possible, for as long as possible.

Children’s Trust Children and Young People and Families Vision

- All children in Shropshire to be happy, healthy and safe.
- To each reach their full potential, supported by their families, friends and wider communities.
- Shropshire is a child-centred County, maximising life chances for children and Young People by strengthening families through early help enabling them to develop healthy lifestyles and become confident resilient citizens with voice and influence.
- Working in partnership, keeping C&YP safe from harm.

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Shropshire Safeguarding Children Board

- Vision: For all children to be happy, safe and reach their full potential supported by their families, friends and wider community.
- Priorities: Ensuring children and Young people are safe and well looked after in a supportive environment.

Children’s Services Strategic Priorities (Business Plan on a Page)

- Strengthening Families through Early Help
- Supporting and Protecting Vulnerable Children
- Looked After Children
- Transition into Adulthood, Care Leavers and Disabled Young People
- Service User Engagement
- Development of a Quality Assurance Framework and Improving Performance
-

The overall aims and objectives to be attained with regard to the children placed in foster homes approved by the fostering service

Aims

Our main aim is to provide a comprehensive range of high quality placements with approved carers to meet the needs of children who are looked after by the local authority and for whom it has been identified, as part of their Care Plan, that a placement is required to meet their needs.

We aim to provide placements that offer a safe environment for the children placed, where the children have the opportunity to express their wishes and feelings, where they are listened to and their views respected and where they are aware of the diversity of the community of which they are a part.

The carers will be appropriately assessed, trained and supervised in order to provide high quality care that values Childrens ability to reach their potential and promotes a happy, safe life and positive behaviour.

The carers will value diversity, equality, promote a positive and healthy development and work in positive communication with the local authority to enhance the Childrens lived experience and life opportunities.

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Objectives

In order to achieve this, we aim to recruit, assess, train, support and supervise carers who have the appropriate skills or experience to provide quality placements. Our staff and foster carers will promote best practice by striving to meet, and in some cases even exceed, national minimum standards. The Service will also contribute to delivering on the five outcomes contained in the ‘Every Child Matters’ report.

The service are actively involved in foster carer, Supported Lodgings Providers and Short break providers recruitment to provide a wide range of availability for placements. This is in line with our sufficiency document 2016-2019.

Our Fostering service will safeguard and promote a Looked After Child’s welfare by ensuring that all applicants are checked under the DBS (The Disclosure and Barring Service). Applications will not be considered from applicants or household members who have committed offences specified under regulation 26(7) (b) of the Fostering Regulations 2011. Applicants for a Fostering role must be able to provide satisfactory medical reports and will not be considered suitable for Fostering children under the age of 5 years of age if the applicant or member of the household smokes. All applications will be considered on their ability to provide care to Looked After children in a resilient, capable and safe manner.

Our pool of foster carers includes placements for a wide range of children and young people, from pre-adoption babies, through to the more challenging teenager, and also respite carers, placements specifically for children with disabilities, and placements for teenagers working towards Independence. The Fostering Service also offer placements within Supported Board and Lodgings and those wanting to support unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Where family or friends are identified as potential foster carers for a child, the full assessment will be carried out following a positive Viability assessment. However the approval will be granted for a specific child, not for the fostering of other children that have no connection to the applicant.

Over recent years we have developed a Payment for Skills scheme which is linked to carers’ competencies, experience and post-approval training. This enables us to be more able to match the identified needs of the child with suitable foster carers, to minimise placement breakdown.

We aim to work in partnership with foster carers, parents and other relevant agencies and professionals, to meet the educational, health, emotional, social and other assessed needs of the children placed as identified in their Care Plans, Health Care Plans, Personal Education Plans and any other relevant Children’s Plans.

The Children’s Placement Service will promote the life chances of children in foster care by ensuring that their educational needs and health needs are assessed, reviewed and met in line with statutory guidance. Our Foster Carers will actively and positively support educational attainment, including school liaison, advocating on behalf of the child and ensuring every child’s regular school/educational attendance. Foster carers will be supported in meeting educational needs by all partners, and the LAC Education team led by the Virtual Head. Support for carers

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to meet the children’s health needs will be supported by the Children’s Placement Service and LAC Health Team with the designated LAC nurse and LAC CAMHS. Our carers will support and encourage the children’s emotional and social development to ensure that all children’s are offered the opportunities to develop their interests, skills and hobbies.

We aim to provide clear information about our services and to keep those involved informed of actions taken and decisions made.

We aim to ensure that the child’s voice is heard and that their wishes and feelings are sought and represented in discussions and decisions. Where the child’s wishes and feelings do not match decisions that are made in the best interests of the child, appropriate support will be given to the child and carer to support their understanding about this.

Conflict of Interest

The Fostering Services Regulations 2002, Part III, states in Section 20 (6) that “A fostering service provider shall not employ to work for the purposes of the fostering service in a position to which paragraph (7) applies, a person who is:

- a) a foster parent approved by the fostering service.
- b) a member of the household of such a foster parent.

(7) this paragraph applies to any management, social worker or other professional position unless in the case of a position which is not a management or social work position, the work is undertaken on an occasional basis, as a volunteer, or for no more than five hours in a week”.

Consequently, this means that employees of Shropshire Social Care and Safeguards or a member of their household who works for the Directorate for more than five hours per week, cannot be registered foster carers for Shropshire, and equally foster carers or members of their household cannot be employed by Shropshire Social Care and Safeguards for more than five hours per week.

This regulation does not apply to arrangements that were in force on 1st April 2002.

The underlying principles and standards of care provided by the fostering service

We believe that every child has the right to a homely, safe environment where care, parenting and choice are provided within a confidential service.

We believe that every child has the right to express his or her wishes and feelings, and to be respected as an individual. We recognise the need for children to be heard and receive relevant responses.

Shropshire Council – Safeguarding children’s placement service

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We believe that every child has the right to be free from oppression and prejudice to enable them to develop their self-esteem, self-control, self-respect and the respect for others.

All children placed by the fostering service will be encouraged to value themselves, their family, culture, community, education, and religious beliefs.

All children placed will receive support to achieve the objectives of their Care Plan, whether this is through a return to their families, remaining in the placement or through a move to a different placement.

Role of Ofsted

The Fostering Service is inspected by Ofsted whose role is, watchdog for children’s services which includes the Social Care sector. Their aim is to make sure Social Care Services meet people’s needs and work as efficiently as possible. Inspections re carried out regularly to ensure that good outcomes are being achieved for all looked after children and that children are safe and will cared for by services which are compliant with the standards and regulations.

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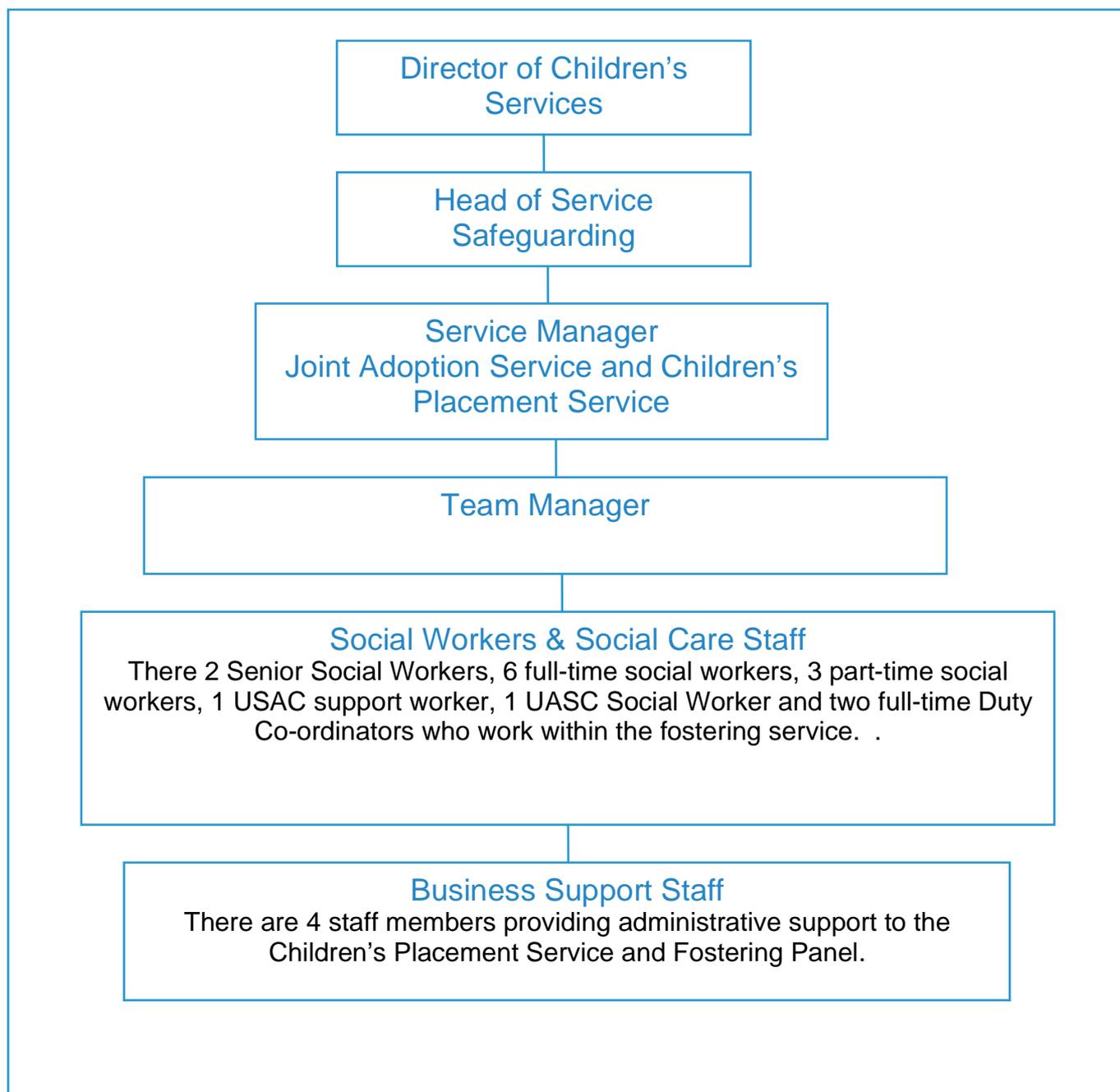
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The manager of the fostering service

The Service manager of the fostering service is Lisa Preston who is the Head of Children’s Placement Service and Joint Adoption Service based at Mount McKinley Building, Shrewsbury Business Park, Shrewsbury SY2 6FG. His telephone number is 01743 250100.

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The management structure of the fostering service



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The number, relevant qualifications and experience of staff working in the fostering service

All members of the social work staff in the Children’s Placement Service, including the Team Manager, have professional social work qualifications. All social work staff are registered with the Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC). All the social workers currently employed have a wide range of experience in the field of Childrens Services. In addition the Children’s Placement service offers placements to social work students in their last year of training and this is an area that is valued by the team and Universities.

The staff who work in the Children’s Placement Service are fully checked and selected as being professionals who are suitable to work with children, young people and carers. All staff receive regular supervision which is recorded.

The Staff Development Officer (Training) also provides a service to the Children’s Placement Service and pre-approval and post approval training for foster carers including support for Training Support and Development Standards required to be completed by all those approved as Foster Carers. This training applies to all of our Foster Carers.

The number of foster carers approved by the fostering service

As at 1st January 2017, there were 141 foster carer households approved by Shropshire Council; 59 of these were connected person foster carers.

Complaints

All local authorities are required to ensure a complaints’ process is provided under the Children Act 1989.

Wherever possible, complaints are dealt with informally. In the first instance, any complaint received will be dealt with in this way and efforts will be made to resolve the issue to everyone’s satisfaction. The Councils have a corporate complaints procedure that operates if no resolution can be achieved at this stage.

Where a complaint against a Foster Carer constitutes a child protection allegation this is dealt with as a child protection enquiry and is investigated under the Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures. Records will be kept

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The procedures and processes for recruiting, approving, and training, supporting and reviewing foster carers

The fostering service will respond positively to applications to become foster carers from people of all backgrounds, cultures, sexuality, marital status and religion in order to provide the maximum opportunity to meet the needs of the children who require foster placements. The on line Procedure Manual (shropshirechildcare.proceduresonline.com) sets out the procedures for Children’s Social Work and Safeguarding service.

All members of the public who make an initial enquiry by telephone, email or letter in relation to becoming a foster carer are treated as a potential resource and we aim to give a timely response. The applicants will be contacted to gather further information and for a general discussion about fostering.

The Initial Referral Form will be completed in relation to all new enquiries. Preliminary basic information should be obtained - numbers in the household, the availability of a separate bedroom for foster children, working hours etc. so that inappropriate enquiries can be filtered out. In addition, a check is carried out in relation to enquirers and all members of their household on Children's Services records. If appropriate, the applicant will be invited to a Steps to Foster evening which will give a presentation on Fostering and an informal preliminary interview with a Children’s Placement Service social worker.

Where the enquirer or a member of the household is known, the enquiry will be passed to the manager for a decision on how to proceed. At this early stage, it may be appropriate to advise these enquirers against pursuing fostering if they clearly do not meet the basic criteria. Where the decision is not to proceed the referral will be closed. Where the decision is to proceed, the enquirer will be sent an Information Pack and the same procedure will be followed as for all other enquirers.

The Foster Carers preparation/Training Course Skills to Foster will cover in detail all aspects of the fostering task, including the need for approved foster carers to notify the manager of any changes in their home circumstances, for example any new relationships they have where they wish their new partners to become a member of the household. Applicants will be booked on the course once their completed application forms are received. All prospective foster carers will be required to attend this training, which is an integral part of the assessment process.

Those facilitating the course will provide written feedback on issues relating to the applicants for the assessing social worker which must be used in his or her assessment. Any issues of concern should be referred to the manager.

Where issues emerge during the training as a result of which the manager decides that it is not appropriate to proceed with the application, the applicants should be visited by a social worker and notified in writing of the decision, with reasons. Advice should be given of any steps they may take in order to meet the criteria or of how they might pursue their interest elsewhere, if appropriate.

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Stage 1 of the assessment process is intended to provide the decision maker with basic information about the applicant to enable clearly unsuitable applicants to be sifted out without unnecessary bureaucracy or expenditure of time and resource by the fostering service or the applicant. Where a person applies to become a foster carer a full assessment is needed to assess their suitability to become a foster carer, with the following information being obtained as soon as reasonably practicable relating to the applicant and other members of their household and family:

- Full name, address and date of birth;
- Details of health (supported by a medical report);
- Particulars of any other adult members of the household;
- Particulars of the children in the family, whether or not members of the household, and any other children in the household;
- Particulars of their accommodation;
- The outcome of any request or application made by them or any other member of their household to foster or adopt children, or for registration as an early years provider or later years provider under Part 3 of the Childcare Act 2006), including particulars of any previous approval or refusal of approval relating to them or to any other member of the household;
- If the applicant has, in the preceding twelve months, been a foster parent approved by another fostering service provider, the name and address of that fostering service provider;
- Names and addresses of two persons who will provide personal references;
- In relation to the applicant and any other member of the applicant 's household who is aged 18 or over, an enhanced criminal record certificate;
- Details of current, and any previous, marriage, civil partnership or similar relationship;
- The views of, the local authority in whose area the applicant lives, if different;
- Where the applicant has previously been, or is currently, approved as a foster carer by another fostering service provider, or as a prospective adopter by an adoption agency, and consents, access may be requested to the relevant records compiled by that other fostering service provider/ adoption agency in relation to the applicant. That service/agency must provide access within 15 working days of a request being received.

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Records compiled by another fostering service, or an adoption agency, can be used to inform the new assessment of the applicant's suitability to foster. For instance, if previous partners have been interviewed in the past to verify facts, and the current assessing social worker is satisfied with the records in respect of these interviews, it should not be necessary to repeat the interviews if no further information is required. The assessing social worker should, however, satisfy themselves as to the quality and continuing relevance of the information before using it to inform the current assessment.

Where, having regard to any information obtained, it is decided (by the Agency Decision Maker) that the applicant is not suitable to become a foster carer, the applicant must be notified in writing with reasons. This notification may be given whether or not all of this information has been obtained. Such a notification may not be given more than 10 working days after all the information has been obtained. The applicant has no right to make representations about the decision or to have their case reviewed under the Independent Review Mechanism. However, the applicant must be informed that they can complain via the fostering service's complaints process if they are unhappy with the way in which their case has been handled.

Where all the specified information has been obtained and notification has not been given within 10 working days that the applicant is not suitable, then the application must proceed to stage two.

Stages 1 and 2 of the assessment process can be carried out concurrently, but the Stage 1 information must be sought as soon as possible, and the decision about whether an applicant has successfully completed Stage 1 must be made within 10 working days of all the information required in that Stage being received.

The Fostering Panel must make its recommendation on the application within eight months of the applicant first applying to be assessed.

Sharing information about a person that is held in their existing foster carer or adopter records is permitted for the purposes of informing a new assessment of a person's suitability to foster or adopt. The assessing social worker should, however, satisfy themselves as to the quality and continuing relevance of the information before using it to inform the current assessment.

Information should only be shared with the informed, explicit consent of all parties referred to in the information, including young people where they have sufficient understanding to consent to the sharing of their information.

If consent is refused, the current fostering service or adoption agency should consider whether there is any information in the records that is a cause for concern. Any information about an applicant's conduct or suitability to foster/adopt that has caused concern should be shared even if the individual has refused consent. If there are no such concerns, and the individual has refused consent, information should not be shared. This may require documents to be redacted to remove information relating to individuals who have refused consent.

Requests for access to information should be accompanied by the written consent of the applicant to the sharing of their information.

The administrative staff will arrange for the following checks to be made on all members of the household aged 18 and over: Disclosure and Barring Service, Probation, Health Trust,

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Education, Children's Services (including the List of Children with a Child Protection Plan) and the NSPCC, and whether the applicants have a right to work in the UK. Where the applicants live or have lived outside the local authority area, the checks must be made with the local authority and health trust where the applicants live/have lived. These checks should be recorded including the date when the checks were made.

Where the applicant or any member of the household has been known to Children's Services, information should be obtained from the relevant social worker.

In addition, where the applicant has school age children, the relevant school(s) may be contacted, with the permission of the applicant, for information regarding the applicant's ability to promote the child's education.

On receipt of the statutory checks, the administrative staff will update the electronic records.

Where the applicant has been a foster carer within the preceding 12 months and was approved as such by another fostering service provider, a reference must be requested from that other fostering service provider.

There is no requirement to also interview personal referees. However, additional verbal and/or written references may be sought from personal referees. If the previous fostering service, for whatever reason, does not provide a reference, interviews with two personal referees must be conducted.

Otherwise, each applicant will be asked to provide the names of two personal referees, who are adults, have known the applicant for at least five years and are not related to the applicant, and two other referees who may be family members or personal friends. All referees should be people who know the applicants well in a personal capacity.

Where there is a joint application, referees should know both applicants, or additional referees will be required.

A written reference must be obtained from each applicant's current employer regardless of the applicant's occupation. This may be one of the four references provided. In addition, where the applicant has frequently changed jobs, written references should also be obtained from past employers.

Where the prospective applicant has made a previous application to foster or adopt, the relevant agency must be asked to confirm in writing the outcome of the application and provide a written reference.

The applicants will be provided with the relevant medical form to fill in with their details and send to their GP with a covering letter requesting that the GP complete the Form and send it to the manager. On receipt the manager will pass the information to the Medical Adviser for comment.

Where the medical information suggests that the applicant may not be suitable for health reasons, this should be discussed in detail with the applicant(s) and withdrawal may be advisable at this stage. Additional advice may be sought from the Medical Adviser or the Medical Adviser may raise questions with the GP where this is appropriate. It may be necessary for reports from other health professionals also to be obtained and presented to the Medical Adviser and the Fostering Panel.

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Where the Assessment - Stage One information has been obtained, and no notification has been given within 10 working days that the applicant is not suitable to be a foster carer, the full report/assessment must be undertaken to consider whether the applicant is suitable to be a foster parent and whether the applicant’s household is suitable for any child.

Where, having regard to the information obtained during Stage 2, it is decided that the applicant is unlikely to be considered suitable to become a foster parent, notwithstanding that not all the Stage 2 information has yet been obtained, a Brief Report may be prepared and submitted to the fostering panel in the same way as for a full assessment report. (There is no prescribed length or format for a brief report.)

The assessing social worker will record in the full report all appropriate factual information and address issues including the applicants' understanding of the following areas:

- Child rearing;
- Caring for children born to someone else;
- Contact between children and their families;
- Helping children to make sense of their past;
- Sexual boundaries and attitudes;
- Awareness of sexual and other forms of abuse;
- Health and health promotion;
- Promotion of education;
- Approaches to discipline;
- Awareness of how to promote secure attachments between children and appropriate adults;
- Religion;
- Standards of living and lifestyles;
- Racial, cultural and linguistic issues;
- Experiences of disability and attitudes to disability;
- Awareness of equal opportunities;
- Understanding and dealing with young people's behavior including encouraging children to take responsibility for their behavior and helping them to learn how to resolve conflict.

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The list is not exhaustive - other issues relevant to the individual applicant and his or her family may need to be addressed. The skills and personal qualities that need to be evidenced will be different according to the type of fostering the applicants want to do, e.g. babies and toddlers, short term or permanent.

The assessing social worker may contact the previous partners of the applicants (taking care not to disclose confidential personal information about the applicant). Where there were any children of the relationship or where children were cared for jointly, the social worker will arrange to interview them face-to-face wherever practicable. All adult children of the applicant(s) living away from home may also be contacted.

Applicants will be encouraged to be actively involved in contributing towards the assessment. The foster home will also be thoroughly checked to ensure it provides appropriate and safe accommodation for the child, as well as safe transport. Each child over 3 has their own bedroom or, where this is not possible, the sharing of the bedroom has been agreed by the placing authority. A risk assessment must be conducted in regard to pets.

The applicant must be notified that the case is to be referred to the fostering panel, be given a copy of the report and be invited to send any observations in writing within 10 working days beginning with the date on which the notification is sent.

At the end of the 10 working days, (or when the applicant's observations are received, whichever is sooner), the report, the applicant's observations on that report, if any, and any other relevant information obtained, must be sent to the fostering panel.

The assessing social worker will attend the Panel meeting, together with the applicants. The decision to attend rests with the applicants and a wish not to attend will not prejudice consideration of their application. However the expectation is that all applicants will attend the Panel meeting at which their assessment is presented.

Applicants who decide they wish to attend should be fully prepared as to the procedure prior to their attendance.

The Fostering Panel comprises representatives of Shropshire’s Children’s Social Work and Safeguarding service, as well as independent members and the agency’s medical adviser. All panel members are appropriately vetted, trained and assessed as being suitable members of the panel.

The Panel will consider the reports together with all the supporting documentation, and make a recommendation to the **Agency Decision Maker (Fostering)** regarding the suitability of the applicant for fostering.

The recommendation, with reasons, will be recorded in writing and, where approval is recommended, the category of fostering, any limitations of the approval to named children (for example in the case of a Family and Friends Foster Carer) or conditions as to the age range or number of children to be placed in the foster home will also be specified.

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Where the applicant does not attend the Panel meeting, the social worker undertaking the assessment will advise the applicant of the Panel recommendation within 24 hours of the Panel meeting. This will be verbally, by telephone or, where appropriate, a home visit.

The **Agency Decision Maker (Fostering)** will make a decision as to the suitability of the applicant, based on the reports presented to the Fostering Panel and the minutes detailing the Panel's recommendation. Where the decision is to approve the applicants as foster carers, the Agency Decision Maker will specify the terms of the approval i.e. the number and age range of children to be fostered, the type of placement and any specific inclusions/exclusions. Applicants can be approved for more than one placement category.

Where a Brief Report has been submitted to the fostering panel, the Agency Decision Maker will, taking into account the fostering panel's recommendation, make a determination about whether to terminate the assessment or whether the full assessment should be completed.

The manager will arrange for the applicants to be given verbal notification of the decision within 24 hours and written notice of the decision, with reasons, signed by the Agency Decision Maker, within 5 working days of the decision.

If, at Stage 2 of the assessment process, the Agency Decision Maker gives a Qualifying Determination that he/she proposed not to approve the applicants as foster carers, the applicant will be advised that if he or she wishes to challenge the decision, applicants should be advised they have a right to submit representations within 28 days of the date of the written notice of the decision to the Agency Decision Maker. In addition, as an alternative, they may exercise the right to apply to the Secretary of State to request a review of the decision by an Independent Review Panel under the Independent Review Mechanism. Any such application must be made in writing within 28 days of the decision and supported by reasons.

The foster carer will not have the right to request a review by an Independent Review Panel if he or she is regarded as disqualified as a result of a conviction or caution for a specified offence see **Persons Disqualified from Fostering Procedure**.

Where it is decided at Stage 1 of the assessment process that the applicant is not suitable to become a foster carer, there is no right to have the case reviewed under the Independent Review Mechanism.

If no written representations or notification of a request for a review are received within this period, the Agency Decision Maker will decide whether or not to approve the applicant as a foster carer (following a full assessment) or continue the assessment (following a Brief Report).

If written representations are received within the period, the Panel Adviser will arrange for the reports and other documentation to be reconsidered by the Fostering Panel, taking into account the written representations, and make a new recommendation to the **Agency Decision Maker (Fostering)**.

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After considering the representations, the Panel will make a recommendation, which the Agency Decision Maker (Fostering) will consider before a final decision is made.

If the decision remains not to approve the application, the manager will arrange for the applicants to be informed verbally within 2 working days. Written notice of the final decision, together with reasons, must be sent to the applicant by the Panel Adviser within 7 working days of the Panel meeting. Information about the Complaints Procedure must also be sent. A copy of the report to the Panel, the Panel's recommendation and the decision, with reasons, must be retained on the applicant's case file.

If the applicant decides to refer the matter to an Independent Review, the relevant Panel reports, any new information obtained since the Panel meeting, a record of the decision made and reasons, a copy of the written notification of the decision and a copy of the Panel minute, if different, will be sent to the Independent Review within 10 working days of their written request. The procedure for the Independent Review is carried out by BAAF; the applicant and two representatives of the fostering agency will be invited to attend the Independent Review. After considering the representations, the Independent Review may make a recommendation, which the Agency Decision Maker will consider before a final decision is made. Written notice of the final decision, together with reasons, must be sent to the applicant within 7 working days of the receipt of the Independent Review recommendation. Where the decision is to approve the application, the procedure will be followed.

If an application is approved statutory checks of approved foster carers are repeated at regular 3 yearly intervals, including DBS and medical. Where it is revealed that an approved foster carer or a member of the household has become disqualified in working with or caring for children, consideration of his or her future status and the position of the children currently placed will be considered as a matter of urgency

Approved foster carers have a written Foster Care Agreement and will be sent an electronic copy of the Foster Carers Handbook.

The Children’s Placement Service provides support to and supervision of the foster carers, once they are approved. Each approved foster carer has an allocated social worker from the Children’s Placement Service who is responsible for supporting and supervising the foster carer. The allocated social worker will have regular contact with the foster carer(s) and members of their household, and will also meet with the foster carer(s) for supervision on a regular basis.

The approval of all foster carers will be reviewed annually in accordance with the procedures. Foster carers will participate fully in the review process. Reviews will be more frequent where circumstances require, for example where there has been a significant change in the foster carer’s circumstances, or where there has been a complaint or allegation against the foster carer which has required investigation.

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Allegations of abuse, neglect or harm made against foster carers will be investigated according to procedures developed with the Local Safeguarding Children Board and in consultation with the Local Authority Designated Officer. Records will be kept and shared in line with the expectations set out in the Fostering National Minimum standards 2011 and statutory guidance.

The foster carer’s first annual review will be presented to the Fostering Panel. Subsequent reviews will only be presented to the Panel if a change in the status of the foster carers is recommended or concerns raised. The Panel will then make a recommendation to the Head of Children’s Placement Service for a final decision to be made.

The services and facilities provided for children placed with foster carers approved by the fostering service

The Procedures Manual for Children’s Social Work and Safeguarding service includes the procedures to be followed before and when placing looked after children with approved foster carers. This can be found at shropshirechildcare.proceduresonline.com

Each carer has a named qualified social worker from the Children’s Placement Service who is responsible for their supervision, support and development. Contact is maintained through home visits and also through telephone calls and emails. Out of hours emergency support is accessed through the Emergency Duty Team. At least one unannounced visit will be made each year to all carers and a full record of the visit will be completed.

Annual reviews on the suitability and terms of approval of all carers will be conducted by the service. The first review following approval will be conducted after the first 6 months. There may also be early reviews called where issues of concern or significant changes have arisen and a further review is felt to be necessary. Reviews following allegations or complaints will always be presented to panel for a recommendation.

Placements with approved foster carers can only be made via the Children’s Placement Service. The team operates a duty co-ordinator system and requests for placements are made to the Duty Officer by social workers for children in respect of whom the need for a foster placement has been identified. The Duty Officer will identify and contact the foster carer who appears to be in a position to offer a suitable placement to the child in order to discuss whether the placement can and should go ahead.

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During this discussion the foster carer will be made aware of available information in relation to the child or children concerned in order to consider the suitability of the placement and the arrangements required if the placement goes ahead. In an emergency situation, the information may be extremely limited but the foster carer will be given as much information as is available in order to ensure that the immediate care needs of the child are known, until a fuller picture can be obtained. Once the child is placed, the child’s social worker will visit the child in the foster placement at regular intervals.

It is seen as extremely important that the exchange of information as to the child’s progress takes place between the social worker and the foster carers on a regular basis. Good record keeping is considered essential to facilitate this and the recording of the child’s progress and any significant events and incidents is an important part of the foster carers’ role in safeguarding the interests of the child. Confidentiality is very important and taken into account throughout the children’s involvement with the service by agencies and carers alike.

Each child placed will have a Placement Plan, which sets out the day-to-day arrangements for the child’s care. The Placement Plan will be drawn up by the child’s social worker in consultation with the foster carer and the supervising social worker from the Children’s Placement Service. The Placement Plan will set out the part to be played by the foster carers in relation to the arrangements made for the child’s health, education, and contact with his or her family and, where appropriate, the child’s behaviour management.

Foster carers are generally encouraged to manage children’s behaviour through good professional, caring relationships with the child and an established framework of general routines and individual boundaries. Shropshire uses the Solihull Understanding your child approach which has its principles based in attachment theory. The use of corporal punishment of children is unacceptable under any circumstances.

The Fostering Service has access to a multi-agency ‘Looked after Children’s Team’, made up of professionals including Education (Teachers and assistants) and Health (Psychologists, a Mental Health practitioner and a LAC Nurse). This team is responsible for providing a range of dedicated services to Shropshire’s looked after population in addition to the mainstream education, health and employment services provided elsewhere. The primary aim of the LAC team is to respond to assessed need expediently and effectively in order, not only to improve performance in relation to placement stability, but also to compensate for the disadvantage children can sometimes experience when placed in the looked after system. They do this through a combination of providing services directly, assisting with foster carer training and, via individual consultation on issues such as behaviour management.

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Each newly approved foster carer will have access to an induction process which includes access to Shropshire Foster Carer forums, and training. All new Foster Carers are made automatic members of both the Shropshire Foster Carer Association and given membership access to Fostering Network and in turn become eligible for all the benefits of this membership. This also includes the Fostering Network Helpline which gives all approved Foster households telephone advice and support. Executive members of the Shropshire Foster Carer Association meet regularly with the service management to raise any issues, celebrations or developments.

A comprehensive package of carer training is available to all carers in a rolling programme. This is reviewed annually and updated in line with developments in Foster Care. There is a core set of training for all carers which are completed following approval.

In summary, the Childrens Placement Service is committed to providing placements for looked after children, which meet the objectives of individual Care Plans and achieve an outcome for each child placed which is consistent with his or her need for stability and security.

Lisa Preston

Head of Children’s Placement Service and Joint Adoption Service

Colleen Male

Head of Children’s Social Care and Safeguarding

1st September 2017

END OF STATEMENT OF PURPOSE FOR THE FOSTERING SERVICE

SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL