



FOSTERING STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

2019 - 2020



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1. Introduction

It is a requirement of the Fostering Services England Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services that each fostering agency produces a Statement of Purpose, including its aims and objectives, a description of the service it provides and the facilities that are provided. This Statement of Purpose gives an outline of those requirements, how the service is managed and its fitness to provide fostering services. It shows the policy and performance framework that underpins our work and shows how children's needs will be promoted and good outcomes achieved for all children looked after by Bedford Borough. It also demonstrates the systems which we have set in place to recruit, train, supervise and support foster carers.

This statement is available to all members of staff, foster carers, children and birth parents and is publicly available on our fostering website. The statement is updated and amended annually.

2. National Legislative and Policy framework

Bedford Borough Fostering Service is run in accordance with the principles outlined in the:

- Children Act 1989
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2013 (Amendments to the Children Act 1989)
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards (2011)
- Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010
- Care Planning and Fostering Regulations (Amendments) 2015
- The Disability and Equality Act 2010
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Children (Leaving care) Act 2000
- Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD) for Foster Carers

3. Policy Statement

Bedford Borough Fostering Service believes that every Looked After child should be able to enjoy the same quality of life and opportunities as all children. The Fostering Service works to the vision set out in the Bedford Borough Looked After Children and Care Leaver's Strategy. The vision states: "We want all of our children and young people in or leaving our care to be safe, happy and healthy and enjoy life. We will give them the support they need to be resilient and well prepared for adulthood and independence. We will provide them with high quality care, support and guidance to ensure that they get the opportunities they deserve."

Bedford Borough Fostering Service recognises that a child's needs are best met by a nurturing family and is committed to placing children who are not able to remain in their own family in an appropriate alternative family placement wherever possible. The first priority will be for children to be placed with family or friends (known as connected person's carers) and supported under regulation 24 of the Care Planning Regulations where this placement is deemed suitable and the child is looked after. Other placements may include a child and parent/s being placed together in a foster home.

Bedford Borough is committed to placing children and young people with our approved foster carers and has developed a dedicated and comprehensive Fostering Service that actively works to meet the quality standards required and the diverse needs of the children who become looked after by Bedford Borough and their families.

We are also committed to placing children and young people with Bedford Borough based foster carers in order for them to maintain contact with families and friends, to continue at the same school and thrive within their community wherever possible.

Each child/young person will have access to service that recognises and addresses their needs in terms of gender, religion, ethnic origin, language, culture, disability and sexuality.

Placement decisions will consider the child/young person's assessed racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic needs and match these as closely as possible with the ethnic origin, religion, culture and language of the foster carer.

Children's safety and welfare are actively promoted in all fostering placement together with protection from abuse and other forms of significant harm.

4. Aims

The main aim of Bedford Borough Fostering Service is to provide safe, high quality foster care placements for children and young people that value, support and encourage them to grow and develop as individuals. As well as promoting their health and general well-being, the service is committed to:

- Ensuring that foster carers are encouraged to help children and young people to reach their maximum educational ability.
- Ensuring foster carers provide good parenting for all children who are looked after and that children will be consulted and encouraged to actively participate in their care and family life.
- Ensuring that the service offered is based on statutory requirements, sound principles and good practice and works within the principles of value for money for the council
- Multi- agency working and developing partnerships and protocols with organisations which can progress the needs of our looked after children
- Working at all levels in partnership with Education and Health to promote the well - being of children in public care in Bedford Borough
- Respecting the rights and responsibilities of Looked After children and their carers and involve them in all aspects of service delivery.

The fostering service also aims to provide a high quality responsive child-centred service in relation to its core functions and to recruit new foster carers from within our diverse community and from the kinship networks of looked after children wherever this best meets their needs. We prepare applicants through training to be able to deal with the range of issues that foster carers face when looking after children.

The service assesses each applicant comprehensively to ensure that they are suitable and able to carry out their role and to supervise and support carers in order they promote and achieve the highest standards of welfare, safeguarding and outcomes for looked after children.

5. Objectives

- To ensure that there is a choice of high quality foster care placements available to meet the complex and diverse needs of individual children and young people.
- Each foster carer will have a qualified social worker (supervising social worker) for supervision and support and to assist with identifying and reviewing carer training and development needs as part of a Personal Development Plan
- To promote a safe, stable and enabling environment ensuring that children and young people are listened to and protected from abuse and neglect
- To promote the child's physical, social, emotional and intellectual development by providing each child with the opportunity of developing their full potential, through health care, education and leisure activities that will enhance their life chances
- To have a positive regard to for the child or young person's racial, religious and cultural needs. All children should have equal access to local family based care
- The individual child's needs/ wishes and feelings are paramount and are taken into consideration in relation to their placements
- Siblings will be accommodated together wherever possible and appropriate
- To promote contact for the child or young person and his/her birth family throughout their placement, and to encourage and facilitate this as appropriate
- To ensure foster carers make children and young people aware of their rights and the complaints, compliments and advocacy process by providing the relevant information
- To ensure that approved foster carers are clear about their role and that they are supported in their tasks, duties and responsibilities by having adequate support mechanisms in place and as outlined in their terms and conditions, tasks, skills and competencies framework and the foster carer agreement
- The Tier Progression model ensures quality by providing a competency and skills framework with clear expectations for foster carers, together with a training and personal development programme
- Ensure that all practice promotes equal opportunities for all and value diversity of both foster children and carers regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, age, religious beliefs, disability or marital status
- To ensure that any decisions are transparent and fair and that any concerns are addressed and information about the complaints procedure is made available to all
- To promote team and personal development and training for both staff and foster carers
- Consult regularly and learn from those that are in receipt of services through comments, compliments or complaints
- Consult regularly with children who are fostered, using a variety of methods to ensure their voice is heard
- A commitment to continuous improvement through the provision of wider placement choices for children by pioneering more innovative approaches to foster care that are needs led, delivering flexible packages of support to children in public care

6. Confidentiality and Conflicts of interest

Foster carers are provided with full information about the children placed with them and are expected to observe high standards of confidentiality. As an agency we maintain records on carers and looked after children who are subject to National Standards and GDPR legislation. Staff and foster carers are expected to declare any potential conflicts of interest.

7. Principles and Standards of Care

Bedford Borough Fostering Service is committed to achieving and maintaining the highest standards and offering quality provision. It has been developed and is managed in accordance with the Fostering Service (England) Regulations 2011 and the principles outlined in the National Minimum Standards 2011. These standards apply equally to our connected person's carers.

- The welfare of the child is paramount
- Children who are looked after are consulted regarding their wishes and feelings in regard to all aspects of their care.
- Every child who is looked after will have a safe care plan, health plan and a personal education plan
- Every child looked after will be encouraged to participate appropriately in religious and cultural beliefs in accordance with their wishes and feelings and developmental understanding
- Every child looked after will be cared for in an environment free from oppression, discrimination and prejudice, encouraging them to develop a positive sense of their own identity
- The fostering service will support the identified aims and objectives of the child or young person's care plan and work alongside other professionals in the implementation of this
- The fostering service will work in partnership with other professionals to promote contact between looked after children and their family and other significant persons
- Foster carers have a handbook (fact file) which guides their practice and clarifies expectations, responsibilities and standards

8. Services Provided

The fostering service approves foster carers to look after children aged 0-18 years. Many of the children placed have experienced difficulties including abuse or neglect before being fostered. Some children and young people present with very challenging behaviour, special needs or complex health conditions. It does this by assessing, registering, supervising, supporting and training a wide range of carers.

Bedford Borough operates a Tier Progression fostering scheme which incorporates all of approved foster carers. All Foster Carers are financially supported via weekly allowance payments (child age related). The Tier Progression scheme has three levels linked to a Task, Skills and Competency (TSC) Framework and weekly fees are paid to carers according to their tier level. The TSC framework sets out a list of competencies that foster carers must be able to demonstrate at each tier level.

It also sets out practice requirements, training and development expectations and support group attendance requirements at each level. Each level adds more to the previous level, so that Level 3

carers have the highest level of skills and competencies and have a more demanding range of tasks that they must undertake. In return they are paid the highest level of fee. Within the levels there are differing areas of specialism depending on carer's skills, abilities and interests. Carers are able to progress up through the tier levels if evidencing required competencies and skills. The differing types of foster carer approval are:

Short Term:

Time limited placements across tier levels. However, tier 3 carers would be expected to provide placements for children with significantly complex needs or challenging behaviours.

Long Term:

Planned, permanent placements across tier levels.

Respite:

Planned, child needs led support for placements and agreed support for carers across tier levels.

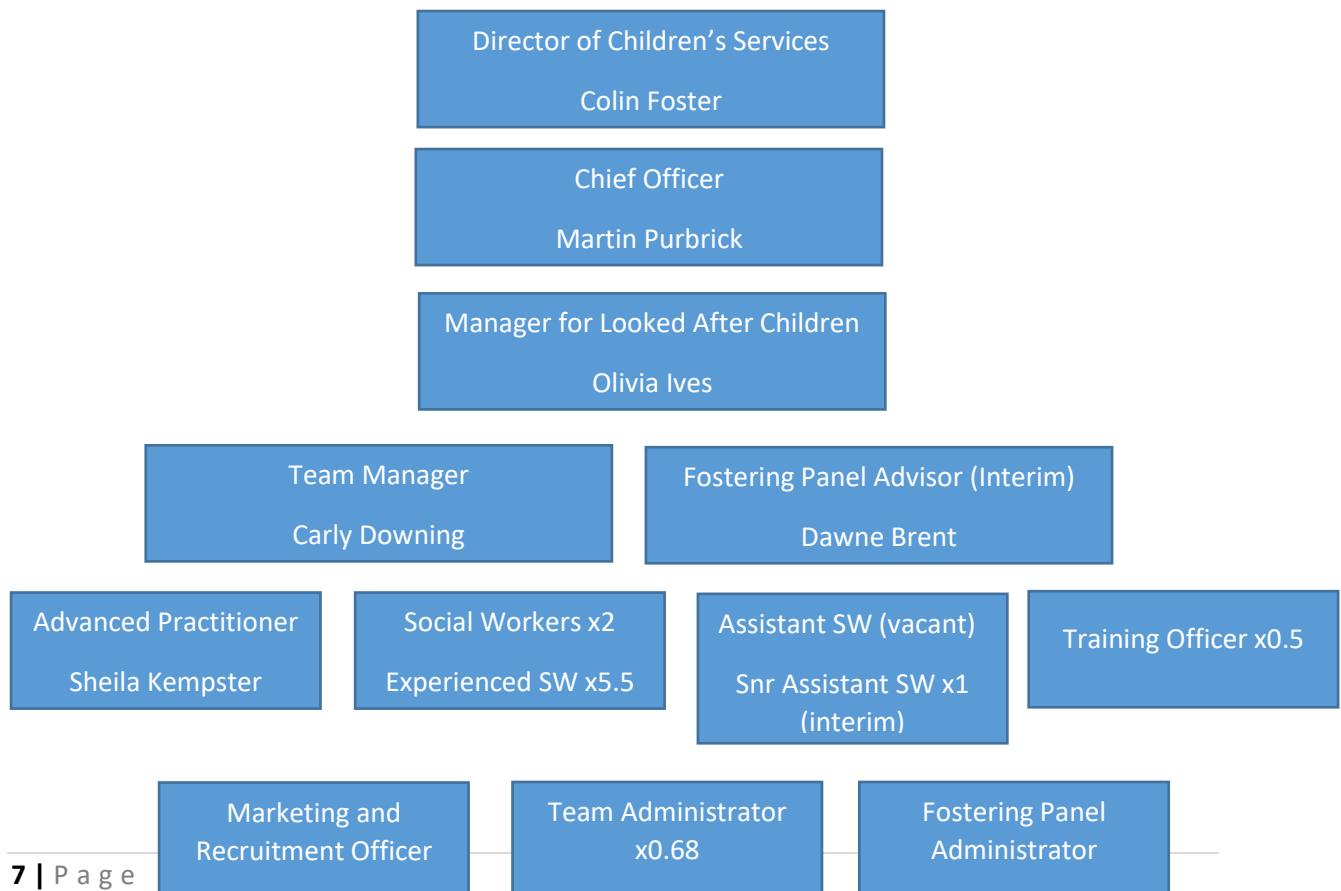
Parent / Child:

Carers provide assessments of parent's ability to care for their child as part of an agreed plan.

Connected Persons:

Providing placements for children and young people known to the carer.

9. Management of the Service: Structure as of April 2019



10. Staffing

The Fostering Team is a single team with supervising social workers who perform dual functions of assessment of prospective foster carers and supervision of foster carers. Their caseloads are balanced according to their skills and preferences for different areas of work with a couple of social workers undertaking more of the assessment work. Each of the social workers holds a specialism which includes leading in one of the following areas:

- Recruitment and Initial Visits
- Support Groups
- Private Fostering
- Bedfordshire Foster Carers Association
- Connected Person's/SGO Assessments
- Training

There is a wide range of experience among staff across the fostering service and all fostering supervising social workers must have had at least one year's experience in field social work before joining the service.

The Senior Social Work Assistant offers a duty services to foster carers and works with supervising social workers to identify foster placements for children coming into care, requiring a change of placement or respite care. The social work assistant post is being resurrected and recruited to and the successful candidate will support supervising social workers and children's social workers to identify long term foster placements for children.

The Fostering Panel Advisor is an interim social worker who has fulfilled this role for a number of years. She is supported by a full-time fostering panel administrator.

The Marketing and Recruitment Officer works across the Fostering and Adoption Service, fulfilling this role for both service areas.

The Chief Officer is the Agency Decision Maker for fostering and can delegate this function to named Managers, namely Manager for Looked After Children and Principal Social Worker.

11. Protecting children from harm

Bedford Borough Fostering Service operates a safe recruitment process for all staff employed by the agency. In addition, there is a rigorous vetting and assessment process undertaken with all potential carers. Enhanced Disclosure and Barring (DBS) checks are repeated every 3 years for all carers and staff.

Bedford Borough fostering service has policy and guidance underpinning our service on which includes: safe caring & safeguarding; health and safety; bullying, management of behaviour; managing allegations; recording and record keeping, confidentiality, 'e-safety' (safe use of internet and social networking) together with linked carer training and development.

Our processes and procedures ensure that any concern is addressed and monitored by the management team and will inform service development and best practice, for example: poor quality of care/breach of foster care agreement; child protection procedures which deal with allegations of abuse against foster carers and through the complaints procedures.

Children are made aware about these procedures through their social worker and fostering supervising social worker. They also have access to a Children's rights issues based advocacy service independent of the fostering service.

12. Provision of Therapeutic Services

Foster carers complete Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires for all relevant children in preparation for the child's annual health assessment. Consultation with CAMHS will be sought for any child receiving a score of 14 or above. The Fostering Service is able to seek consultation with CAMHS via the CAMHS worker available within Children's Services once per fortnight. Training for foster carers provided by CAMHS is provided jointly to Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire foster carers as well as IFA carers caring for children from either of these Local Authorities. Referrals to the CAMHS Looked After Team are made via children's social workers and considered by CAMHS multi-agency team.

13. Provision of Health Promotion Support Services

A Designated Nurse for Looked after Children and Young People based in Looked After Children Team, Cambridge Community Services, oversee Children's Annual Health Assessments and have input into the health promotion of Young People. A dedicated paediatrician advises the fostering panel on medical issues for applications to foster.

The Fostering Service works with other health professionals to ensure looked after children's needs are addressed, for example occupational therapy where children have specific needs arising from their disability.

The Fostering Service is committed to ensuring the health outcomes for young people looked after continually improve. The team works with our foster carers to promote healthy living and eating and assists in the tracking of children's dental health and annual health assessments.

14. Provision of Educational Support Services

There is a virtual head teacher for Looked after Children to look at improving the attainment attendance and exclusion issues and to improve partnerships with schools in Bedford Borough. The Virtual School provide training, support and advice to foster carers and staff regarding placed children's educational needs. A range of training, resources and materials are available to foster carers and social workers. Schools are also offered training by the Virtual School around attachment difficulties and the impact of these.

The Bedford Borough fostering service recognises the need to improve Looked after Children attendance at school. The service works closely with the carers in addressing this issue and this has resulted in a significant improvement in attendance of children in foster care in recent years.

Within Children's Services we have an expectation that holidays will not be taken in term time and that children are not routinely taken out of school. We work together with our colleagues to ensure that this only occurs in exceptional circumstances and not as a rule.

The Fostering Service works alongside and supports educational initiatives for looked after children by promoting children's educational needs to our Foster Carers.

Carers are expected to attend Personal Education Planning Meetings with children and young people and, where appropriate, the supervising social worker will also attend.

A Virtual School Cohort meeting is held on a monthly basis to consider the specific needs of looked after children, particularly in year 6 and key stage 4 young people. This ensures educational progress is tracked and additional support and intervention offered at an early point to promote educational achievement at these key times.

15. Provision of Leisure, Sport, Cultural and Religious Activity

Foster carer training and supervision promotes the importance of leisure provision for looked after children and young people with the expectation that carers will seek out and support new experiences and activities to enhance children's self-worth, social development and independence.

Information on community play schemes, events, clubs and activities during holidays are provided to carers on a regular basis. We aim to support all young people in their religious and cultural beliefs and customs. We ensure that information is available to provide understanding of different cultures and religions. We will provide resources that may be needed to ensure young people are able to practice their beliefs and customs.

We are committed to directly challenging racism and ensure that all young people who access our services are aware of our policies in relation to anti-oppressive practice and anti-racism.

We will ensure that all people are treated equally, regardless of age, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, disability or religion. Fostering supervising social workers assist and advise carers with issues such as appropriate placement matching and with transracial placements.

16. Care leavers provision

The Leaving and After Care Team works closely with the Fostering Service and other professionals to provide an integrated approach to meeting young peoples' needs. Bedford Borough is committed to supporting young people to remain in their foster placement beyond 18 years of age in order to experience normal family life and preparation for independence if this supports them more effectively. The 'Staying Put' policy provides financial and other support for former foster carers making commitments to young people age 18 -21years.

17. Recruitment of Foster Carers

The Fostering Service has a recruitment sufficiency strategy which utilises current data regarding the gaps in resource provision. Currently, more places are needed for teenagers; long-term care for children and young people; children with disabilities; sibling groups and black and minority ethnic children. There is an ongoing recruitment strategy. The Fostering Service uses a variety of media to recruit new carers. The strategy is informed by research and analysis on the most successfully employed advertising methods and this is reflected in our current advertising strategy.

We work closely with the Communications team who help us promote the service to the Bedford Borough public and beyond. Features on local radio and television, in print media and promotion via social media, community meetings and briefings have all been undertaken as part of the strategy.

Elected members have been supportive in facilitating links within different communities and this has been particularly helpful in forging relationships with community leaders within the Asian community to promote fostering and adoption within these sectors.

18. Approval and Assessment Process

Persons over the age of 21 may apply to become a Foster Carer (but between the ages of 21 and 25yrs we will need to have evidence of relevant transferable skills and / or related experience). Initial responses and advice to enquirers is led by one of the experienced social workers. There is immediate exclusion of any applicant who has been convicted of any serious offence against a child or adult. Interest is welcomed from all members of the community, regardless of relationship status, employment situation, class, gender, sexuality, culture, ethnicity or religion.

The Fostering Service web pages on the Council website have been reviewed to ensure information is up to date, accessible and user friendly. When a person contacts the Bedford Borough Fostering Service to express an interest in fostering they will be able to have a discussion with a social worker who will explain the process, take some initial information and offer an initial home visit if appropriate.

At the home visit we will discuss fostering with the enquirers and members of the family, check the home conditions are safe, warm and clean and that there is space for a foster child to sleep, do homework and play and participate as a full family member. If all parties agree that fostering could be suitable for the family, a formal application is made and statutory checks are completed. Once these are completed satisfactorily an invitation to a training and preparation group ('Skills to Foster') is then made.

The preparation training undertaken utilises the Fostering Network 'Skills to Foster' course which includes subject areas on Child Development; Separation and Loss; Working Together; Safe Care; Moving On.

The service runs 3 Skills to Foster courses a year, but this can be increased based on need. The training is run by qualified fostering supervising social workers, experienced foster carers and includes contributions from care experienced young people.

When preparation training is completed, the applicants begin an assessment that includes the requirements laid down in Schedule 3 of the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011, the National Minimum Standards in Foster Care (2011), Assessment and approval of Foster Carers 2013 (amendments to Children Act 1989) and Schedule 4 of the Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (where children are fostered by relatives and friends). All carers are subject to a number of statutory checks and references:

- Disclosure and Barring Checks on all members of the household over the age of 18
- Employer checks
- Other Local Authority checks where relevant
- Children Young People's Social Care ESCR check
- DVLA
- A full medical examination with their GP

- Health service and Youth Offending checks of any child or young person in the household
- Minimum of two personal references
- In addition, interviews are conducted with grown up children and children living in the household
- Any other checks deemed relevant e.g. OFSTED (child minders), voluntary agencies, International Social Services

Applicants are additionally asked:

- To agree to the department making contact with any schools which their children attend to ascertain the school's view on their involvement / suitability
- To agree to the department making contact with ex partners regarding their application to foster
- To provide information related to Social Media accounts

The majority of foster carers are subject to a competency based assessment. All potential carers are invited to be fully involved in the assessment and to provide some level of self-assessment as a tool to look at their competencies. The fostering service uses the Coram BAAF Form F foster carer assessment format for the completion of its assessments.

Connected Person's foster carers are subject to an alternative assessment taking into account the nature of the task and the requirements of Schedule 4 (Care Planning Regulations 2010).

The assessment of a foster carer would take place in the applicant's home over a period of six to eight visits, plus referee interviews and interviewing other relevant parties. The assessing social worker would ensure that timelines, analysis of significant relationships, the family dynamics and characteristics of the foster carers underpin and inform the assessment.

The competency based assessment focuses on the individual or individuals applying to become foster carers and their family. We make a detailed assessment and analysis of their past and present experiences, the skills and competencies which they would bring to their new role and help them to think about their reasons for applying to become foster carers. The assessor will also use the process to assess the applicant's suitability to foster children with differing needs including disabled children and this is made transparent.

The assessments are presented to a fostering panel which applicants are encouraged to attend with the assessing social worker.

All information gathered (except references) is shared with the applicant/s. The social worker's assessment is shared with them prior to the panel. The fostering panel is independently chaired and comprises of people from a variety of backgrounds. They consider and recommend the approval, or not, of all foster carers.

The recommendation then goes before the Agency Decision Maker who makes a final decision. Any appeals can be made within 28 days and may either make further representation to the fostering panel or have their assessment considered by the Independent Review Mechanism who in turn will make a recommendation back to the agency.

All foster carers are subjected to an annual review of their status as foster carers. This is a formal review of the work that they have undertaken during the year and includes an opportunity to reflect on achievements and learning. Annual reviews are undertaken by an Independent Reviewing Officer and draw on contributions from the Foster Carer and family, Supervising Social worker, Child's Social

Worker, Child's Independent Reviewing Officer, Child / Young Person placed and other professionals involved with the placement.

A report is presented to the fostering panel in the case of all first and fourth annual reviews, significant changes to the carer's registration or cases of concern.

19. Support and Supervision of Foster Carers

All foster carers are linked with a qualified social worker (fostering supervising social worker) who provides supervision and support. The supervising social worker undertakes a minimum of six weekly supervision visits to short term foster carers and three monthly supervision visits to long term foster carers with settled, matched children in placement. They also make at least one unannounced visit per year. All visits and contacts with the foster carer are recorded.

The fostering service believes that it is important that foster carers are able to access support and at the time that they need it. During office hours if a foster carer is unable to contact their own supervising social worker they can contact a Duty worker for advice and support.

The supervising social worker will usually be the first point of contact for the foster carer and be able to offer support, advice, guidance and supervision regarding most matters relating to fostering and the care of the child. Additionally, every looked after child has an allocated social worker. This person will usually be the first point of contact for the foster carer for any information and advice on issues that relate to the child. If this worker is not available during office hours, a duty worker is always available to deal with any urgent problems or issues. If additional support is required outside of these times, foster carers can contact the fostering duty support line – a service operated by the Fostering Team until 11pm each week day and at weekends and bank holidays providing advice and support for carers. Where appropriate matters will be referred to the Emergency Duty Service.

Children and young people in a fostering household are also able to access support from their Supervising Social Worker. This can include attending supervision, training, or direct work as needed.

Bedford Borough fostering service provides an Independent Support Service to foster carers (currently commissioned through Fostering Network) where this is required for mediation purposes or to provide advocacy support for the carer during allegations. Carers are provided with free individual annual membership of the Fostering Network, providing a range of benefits, including independent advice and support. The fostering service believes that carers should be fully reimbursed for the costs of looking after a child, and provides weekly allowances at Fostering Network recommended rates. In addition, travel and other additional payments are made available to carers, together with essential equipment for the task.

All foster carers are offered membership to Bedfordshire Foster Carer's Association (BFCA). This is led by an experienced foster carer and provides social activities to foster carers and looked after children, as well as offering support and advice and a closed Facebook group where research is posted and issues pertinent to fostering discussed. It is anticipated that BFCA will become the vehicle for consultation with foster carers, with feedback being used to develop policies and procedures as well as drive practice and service development.

20. Foster Carers Handbook

All Foster Carers have a handbook which gives factual information which they need to know about the service. This includes safe caring issues, the role of social workers, and procedures in a condensed format. The Handbook for foster carers is provided as a hard copy. Annual changes to the financial payments to foster carers are given to all foster carers who are required to sign to acknowledge their receipt of the document.

21. Training

The Fostering Service believes that a comprehensive training programme, for its staff and Carers, is the key to their personal and professional development. Training provides people with the necessary skills and knowledge, necessary in providing a high quality service. It is also key to safeguarding children, Foster Carers and their families, by informing carers of how to care for children safely.

Training is an opportunity for Foster Carers to acquire new skills and an opportunity for group support and discussion. The Fostering Service has a comprehensive rolling programme of training available; this training meets the on-going professional development of foster carers throughout their fostering career.

Foster carers are required to complete a core post approval training programme and thereafter a minimum of 3 training courses a year. Foster carers can access specialist training courses.

A training calendar for carers is provided. Foster carers also have access to e-learning courses. All training courses are evaluated with carers providing feedback. Feedback is collated and used to inform future practice and courses offered. Within the support groups there may be a training component at some sessions. The programme for support groups has covered a variety of topics.

22 Complaints Procedure

Bedford Borough City Council Children's Social Work Service operates a complaints service which is independent of the Fostering Service. Foster Carers are given a complaints and Complements leaflet, detailing the process if they wish to make a complaint when they sign the Foster Carer Agreement.

All looked after children in Bedford Borough Children have access to Mind of My Own through which they are able to make compliments or complaints. A pictorial form of the app is available for children with communication needs. Issues based advocacy is also available through a commissioned service provided by Barnado's. Children can also make their views known through the review system and they are sent a consultation form about the placement prior to the foster carer review.

23. Allegations

All allegations in relation to foster carers are investigated and actioned through the Fostering Service reporting to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) on behalf of the Bedford Borough Safeguarding Children's Board under the procedures for Investigating Allegations against Adults Caring for Children. Foster carers are offered independent support during this process which can be accessed via their supervising social worker.

Contact Details

The Fostering Team is based at:

Borough Hall
Cauldwell Street
Bedford
MK42 9AP

Tel: 01234 718718

Information about the Fostering Service can be accessed via:

Fostering Information Line: 01234 718718

Website: <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/social-care-health-and-community/adoption-and-fostering/>

Email: adoptionandfostering@bedford.gov.uk