

Fostering Service



For further information about our services contact:

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2020/21

“Our vision is that services and support in Hertfordshire gives every child the opportunity to thrive, in their families, in their school and in their communities”

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Hertfordshire

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1. Introduction

This statement of purpose outlines the aims, objectives and service arrangements of Hertfordshire County Council's Fostering Service. It has been written in accordance with the requirements of the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, the National Minimum Standards 2011 and amended regulations to explain how the service strives to improve outcomes for children and young people.

Ofsted judgements for Hertfordshire Children's Services Inspection, October 2018, highlighted that:

- The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families is **Outstanding**;
- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection is judged as **Good**;
- The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers is **Good**;
- Overall effectiveness is judged as **Good**;

It was acknowledged that Leaders and Managers had relentless ambition for our Children Looked After.

Ofsted October 2018 made the following observations specifically in respect of the fostering service:

- Foster carers are well prepared, well supported and well supervised.
- Recruitment is still a challenge, as it is nationally, however the fostering service is now back on track to meet its recruitment targets.
- Assessments are thorough. New foster carers, including Family & Friends carers, are properly prepared for their roles. This helps to reduce the likelihood of placement breakdown.
- Existing foster carers have access to a wide range of training and feel very well supported. They welcome the local authority's concerted efforts to strengthen the support available to them, and to the children in their care, through several initiatives. These include the development of an extended family model which provides respite care, peer support, regular joint planning and training, as well as social activities.



Children's Services vision is for Hertfordshire to give every child the opportunity to thrive in their families, in their schools and in their communities. All children and young people should enjoy a happy, healthy childhood that gives them the foundations for adulthood and the opportunity to get the best out of life.

Outcomes Framework

The Fostering Service is working to improve outcomes for Hertfordshire's looked after children, providing them with a safe and secure environment in which they can thrive.

Hertfordshire has developed an Outcomes Framework, the 'Six Outcome Bees' in consultation with a wide range of people across Hertfordshire to help us measure the positive difference we, working alongside our partners, are making to the lives of our service users.

By running an effective Fostering Service, we will enable children, young people, young adults and their families to;

- **Be Happy**
- **Be Independent**
- **Be Ambitious**
- **Be Safe**
- **Be Healthy**
- **Be Resilient**

The outcomes are inter-linked with all the 'bees' being important for the child or young person.

This outcome framework will enable us to set clear and measurable targets across the six domains that are agreed with service users, their families and our partners.



Further information about the Six Bees Outcome Framework is available at:
<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/outcomebees>

2. Our Strategy

This year we are launching our new Strategy: 'One Team Built Around the Child'. Developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, this strategy aims to grow and improve our in-house fostering service, through a focus on recruitment of new carers and retention of existing carers.

Through six monthly reviews of our Strategy Action Plan, we will strengthen our internal processes and support offer to carers to ensure carers are resilient and able to offer stable placements for our children. We will also ensure that everyone involved in fostering in Hertfordshire feels and behaves as One Team and feels valued for the contribution they make to our fostering community, by following our newly developed Fostering Principles. As well as improving the quality of our practice, we will also continue to innovate by growing our Mockingbird Hubs and ARC Fostering model and trialing the Reflective Fostering Model.

A key part of our 'One Team' Strategy is our creative recruitment strategy which ensures that we target recruitment in order to grow the service. This strategy is underpinned by the value modes research, giving insight into what motivates applicants to foster and uses a 'word of mouth' approach to communications with our existing carers and staff playing a key role in sharing positive messages about our fostering community both online and face to face. Key to the strategy is using a number of existing foster carers as 'Recruitment Ambassadors to promote fostering within their local communities.

Our aim is to recruit foster carers who can be trained and supported to provide high quality placements which meet the varied and often complex needs of the children and young people who need looking after.

Our target for 2020/21 is to recruit 60 new fostering households.



Our key recruitment priorities are:

- Carers for older children (10+) and teenagers (13+)
- Carers for sibling groups of all ages
- Carers for children and babies with specific disabilities/complex health needs
- Carers who can offer permanent placements and long-term stability for children who will not return to their birth families
- Respite/Sleepover carers to support carers with complex placements
- Carers able to accommodate young people subject to bail and PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence Act) conditions
- Carers from diverse backgrounds who can provide placements for children from a variety of ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, including carers who are able to provide placements for
- Unaccompanied Asylum- Seeking Children
- Parent and Child foster carers

3. Our Service Objectives



We put the child at the centre of all we do, and we support foster carers to do the same by:

- Promoting and safeguarding the welfare of children throughout their childhood
- Supporting children through trauma informed foster care and understanding that children's behaviour is impacted by their experience of trauma.
- Working in partnership with children and their families
- Ensuring equality of opportunity
- Promoting and abiding by the 'Pledge' for children and young people who are looked after
- Ensuring all children fulfil their potential in education
- Ensuring that young people are supported to move into independence in a planned way; and
- Ensuring all children's health needs are met

The Fostering Service is responsible for a diverse range of foster care placements for children who are unable to live with their own family who are being looked after by Hertfordshire County Council.

Hertfordshire's Foster Carers provide care and support for some of the county's most vulnerable children and young people. Our aim is to provide our looked after children with a safe and secure environment in which they can thrive.

Foster care placements range from babies to teenagers, for children and young with complex needs who need a placement on their own as well as large sibling groups who need to remain together. Providing stable placements is a key priority for the service, which means finding carers who can support children and young people through to adulthood and beyond, where needed.

The Fostering Service actively promotes the option of **Staying Put** with our foster carers, to enable young people in their care to remain with them beyond their 18th birthday, if this is the young person's choice.

4. Fostering Service Aims:

The Fostering Service seeks to promote the principles and practice enshrined in the Children Act 1989, The National Minimum Standards for Foster Care 2011, the Care Standards Act 2001, Care Planning Regulations 2010 and Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

The service's aims are:

- To provide children with a safe, caring experience of living in families which meets their emotional and developmental needs;
- To listen and consider the wishes and feelings of the children and young people we look after and encourage them to participate in decisions about their care;
- To work in partnership with professionals, carers, parents and children to return children to their own family wherever possible;
- To promote a good relationship between parents and their children, to support children to have contact with all family members in line with their care plan;
- To promote equality of opportunity, recognising and providing for each child and young person's ethnic, cultural and religious needs, as well as any needs arising from a disability, ensuring that staff and carers value diversity and difference;
- To work in partnership in an open and accessible way, treating children, young people, their families and carers with fairness and respect;
- To ensure that children and young people and their carers are provided with the services and support to meet their needs;



5. Fostering Service Aims:

The Service's Aims Are:

- to ensure applicants are not discriminated against on the grounds of gender, religion, ethnic origin, cultural and linguistic background, nationality, disability, or sexual orientation. To be open and accessible, ensuring that practice complies in every respect with Hertfordshire County Council's Equality and Diversity Strategy 2016/20
- to provide a service responsive to the needs of children who require a foster placement, recruiting sufficient carers to offer placement choice and create a culture where children and young people feel safe;
- to provide a placement that meets the requirement of the child's care plan and wherever possible that reflects the child's ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic background;
- to place siblings together wherever possible and when it is in the best interest of the child;
- to provide best value local placements, to promote continuity and maintain family networks;
- to recognise the value of our carers by providing them with a high standard of supervision, support and guidance through individual sessions with their supervising social worker, support groups and pre and post approval training, including the Training Support and Development (TSD) training standards for foster carers;
- to ensure that our carers are offered Attachment and Trauma training, alongside support to increase their understanding of the impact that trauma has on a child's behaviour, through the Attachment Regulation and Competency courses (ARC) model training, TCI (Therapeutic Crisis Intervention), Healing Approach to Trauma and Fostering under 12's;
- to offer bespoke support from the ARC fostering team to carers, which includes the development of ARC trauma assessments identifying strategies to support the care of children with complex needs. To offer specific support to build carers confidence and resilience when supporting traumatised children;
- to continue to grow the Mockingbird Family Model hubs in each of the mainstream fostering teams to create a community of support for carers and their children, including practical and emotional support, overnight support (sleepovers) and day care;
- to provide a range of sleepover/ respite care to support a child living with his / her family or carers; (Section 31, Section 20 Section 17)
- to continue to improve and develop our placement support procedures. Ensure robust placement support plans are in place for children and carers at the start of placement, and these plans are regularly reviewed through Placement Support meetings; (PSM)
- to improve relationships through the use of Motivational Interviewing, and Appreciative Enquiry Approaches, which aim to empower children, foster carers and the work force to bring about change;
- to ensure that our carers feel valued by providing regular updates on the service through the secure email system and carers' newsletter; building our carer community through events, Carer Awards, Celebratory meals and Carer Conferences;
- Co-production with foster carers to improve the service for our children through the One Team Strategy, and related task and finish groups, supported by the Fostering Forum and a range of focus groups;

- Continue to increase the foster carer voice in the service improvements and engagement opportunities through the fostering strategy, the Café Conversations; and Fostering Forums.
- Provide opportunities to bring the fostering community together by organising family events such as the Big Event and local social activities;
- To ensure all information/records are treated confidentially and held securely;
- to use customer feedback from a range of sources including foster carers, surveys and the Children in Care Council to develop and improve the fostering service;
- to ensure carers can take appropriate decisions relating to the children in their care by delegating authority for day to day decisions unless there is a valid reason not to do so;
- Continue to work in partnership with the Children in Care Council (CHICC) to ensure children views are considered to improve on their experiences of foster care.



Ten Top Tips for Foster Carers

Children, young people, and carers have worked together to produce 10 key recommendations for foster carers and staff to underpin their practice:

Tip	Quote
1 Be there for us	<i>'Because we always need a helping hand'</i>
2 Involve us in family life	<i>'We can make lifetime memories'</i> <i>'We already feel different being in care, so don't isolate us'</i>
3 Help us to be healthy	<i>'A healthy life makes a happy child'</i> <i>'Help us to get counselling if we need it'</i>
4 Protect and keep us safe	<i>'Our safety should be your priority'</i> <i>'So that no one can hurt me'</i> <i>'It helps me to trust you'</i>
5 Be kind, caring and patient	<i>'Don't get angry with us really quickly we need more time to learn'</i> <i>'There is always more going on behind the scenes than you think'</i>
6 Help us to be happy	<i>'We deserve happiness and we can't do it on our own'</i> <i>'Make us feel good about ourselves'</i>
7 Help us fulfil our dreams	<i>'Let us be creative and don't rain on our parade'</i> <i>'Light the fuse of our firework'</i> <i>'We need your support'</i>
8 Let us develop our interests	<i>'Allow us to be adventurous'</i> <i>'You always need something to look forward to'</i> <i>'Children in care should get to do things like other kids'</i>
9 Give us tasty, healthy food	<i>'Because then you have loads of fun'</i> <i>'Check our likes and dislikes'</i> <i>'Italian, Mexican.....give us a variety'</i>
10 Set a good example	<i>'We want positive re-enforcement'</i> <i>'Be a good role model'</i>

One Team Fostering Principles

Everyone involved in fostering in Hertfordshire will work to these principles.

1. We all work as **one team** around the individual needs of the **child**
2. We build **trusting relationships** with the children we are looking after and each other.
3. We all work with **passion, pride** and **kindness** and take **responsibility** for our individual roles in looking after the children in our care
4. We **communicate** with each other in an **effective** way that is **timely, open** and **honest and** uses jargon as little as possible when talking to young people
5. We treat each other as **equals**, **respecting** one another and making an effort to **understand** our different roles and perspectives
6. We do what we say we will do, or we **explain why** if we cannot do it in the time agreed
7. We **agree decisions as a team** in a **timely** way to best meets the **needs of children**, and we balance the need for **consistent** decisions across the Service whilst being **flexible** to meet individual children's needs
8. We are always **listening** to each other and we have a passion for looking at **new ideas** and **different ways** of doing things to keep on improving the way we support our children
9. We take time to **explain** honestly the reasons why we do things, and we ensure that everyone **understands** the policies, processes and decisions made
10. We are all committed to **developing ourselves** through personal development and all team members completing the same regular training, so that we get the best outcomes for our children
11. We **celebrate** our successes and when mistakes are made, we **learn** from them



6. Management and Staffing

The Head of Adoption and Fostering is the designated departmental lead officer and the Responsible Individual for Fostering. The Fostering Service Manager is the Registered Manager.

The Adoption and Fostering Service has Service Managers for each of the following areas; Adoption, Family & Friends Care and Fostering.

There are four locality mainstream fostering teams, one joint Adoption & Fostering Recruitment Team, and a countywide ARC Fostering Team. These teams undertake the functions of recruitment, assessment, approval, supervision, support, training and development, safeguarding and review. The Supported Lodgings scheme sits within the mainstream Fostering service.

There is also a Shared Care team and two Family and Friends teams who recruit, assess, train, support, and review short-break carers for Children with Disabilities, Special Guardianship, and Family & Friends carers.



Fostering Teams

The four mainstream teams oversee the provision of all fostering resources, emergency, short term, long term, respite "Sleepover", and Parent and Child placements.

Duties include:

- Recruitment of prospective carers.
- Assessment of carers
- Training of carers
- Support & supervision of carers
- Support to carers' birth children
- Family Finding for long term placements
- Identifying well matched placement options for children and young people
- Advice to colleagues on all fostering and placement matters
- Support Groups for carers and children
- Events for foster carers and children
- Involvement in One Team workstreams.

Each locality mainstream fostering team consists of:

1 F/T Team Manager
1 Consultant Social worker
6.5 (Whole time equivalent) Supervising Social Workers/Senior Practitioners
1 Support Officer
1 Children's Practitioner

The ARC Fostering Team

The team consists of:

1 Consultant Social worker
1 F/T ARC SSW Fostering Senior Practitioners
1 F/T ARC SSW Fostering Senior Practitioner Post
1 F/T Mockingbird Model Liaison Social Worker.

ARC foster carers offer care for children with complex and challenging behaviours (trauma history). The carers work to the therapeutic ARC model. ARC Fostering Supervising social workers provide an extensive package of ARC training to support foster carers, practitioners across the whole fostering service and are extending these opportunities to staff across Children's Services and our partner agencies.

The Mockingbird liaison social worker supervises and supports a Mockingbird hub and continues to support the development of further hubs, ensuring fidelity to the Fostering Network model.

The Adoption & Fostering Recruitment Team (AFRT)

The team consists of: 1 F/T Team Manager

1.5 Social workers
1 FTE Marketing & Communications Officer Post
2 Children's Practitioners
3 Recruitment Officers 3 FTE Support Workers.

The AFRT have a crucial role in promoting the need for foster carers and adopters from across Hertfordshire and have a schedule of promotional events that are delivered by staff, foster carers and adopters. The Recruitment team oversees marketing and advertising to recruit specific adopters and foster carers who can meet the needs of children most likely to require placements.

The team is responsible for:

- The recruitment strategy, marketing, communications, advertising and publicity, using
- Values Modes, behavioral models to underpin the strategy & campaigns.
- Arranging regular promotional events, open evenings & information evenings
- Processing initial enquiries
- Undertaking initial visits
- Providing some initial training
- Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) transfers
- Assessment
- Fostering & Adoption pre-stage & stage one processes, including stage one safeguarding checks

The Recruitment Team work closely with the Corporate Communications Team to promote marketing and communications, specifically in relation to Fostering & Adoption.

The AFRT has a recruitment strategy which uses the Values Modes principles to appeal to the motivations of 'Pioneers' and 'Prospectors'. Foster Carers are mobilised through a 'call to action' to

generate word of mouth enquiries to recruit carers to meet the needs of the looked after children and young people requiring placements.

The team oversees the stage one process (statutory checks) for both adoption and fostering.

**Members of the public who are interested in either adopting or fostering can the telephone on 0800917 0925, or online via the web or social media:
<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/childrens-social-care/childrens-social-care.aspx>**

An information pack can then be emailed or posted along with details about forthcoming open evenings.

The team aims to provide a seamless, efficient, & responsive service to both potential adopters and foster carers.

Supported Lodgings Team

The team consists of:

2 Supervising Social Workers
Support Officer

The team is based and managed within the Fostering West team and provides:

- Placements for 16 and 17 years olds who are children looked after.
- Placements for care leavers aged 18+

The Shared Care Team

The Shared Care team is centrally managed from within the 0-25 Together Service of Hertfordshire County Council and provides:

- Respite placements for disabled children
- Day care placements for disabled children
- A Sitting Service for disabled children in their own home
- Shared care plus carers who provide care for several disabled children

Family and Friends Teams

The teams consist of:

2 F/T Team Managers
14 (FT equivalent) Supervising Social Workers
1 Private Fostering Officer (countywide)
1 Special Guardianship Officer (countywide)
1 Children's Practitioner
2 Support Officers

Hertfordshire County Council has two Fostering Family and Friends teams who provide:

- Assessment of Family and Friends and Connected Persons Assessments and Special Guardianship Orders (SGO).
- Support & supervision of approved carers
- Training for carers
- Support to birth children
- Support to carers to apply for a permanent order for children in placement, i.e. Adoption, Special Guardianship Order (SGO) or Child Arrangement Order (CAO)
- Provide reports for court proceedings as requested
- Undertake and promote awareness of Private Fostering Assessments

All social work staff are required to have the Diploma in Social Work or equivalent on appointment and have current Health and Care Professions Council registration.

All Team Managers are qualified social workers and are required to hold or are working towards a management qualification.

The Fostering Services works closely with the Brokerage Accommodation team to identify fostering placements, working as one service to provide the best possible matched placements for children and young people.

The Fostering Service works closely with two Independent Reviewing Officers who co-produce foster carer's first reviews and any further review where there have been significant practice concerns/allegations.

Family and Friends Care

The Local Authority seeks to place children with their family or a connected person when they are unable to live with their birth parents, where it is safe to do so.

Family and Friends care enables children to remain within their family networks, or with a connected person under fostering regulations and national minimum standards

Children's needs, wishes and feelings are always taken into account when seeking alternative care. Children are supported to achieve their potential in school, ensure good health, families are given support to enable contact with family members. Family & Friends care can provide a commitment to family heritage and family values.

Hertfordshire have two dedicated Family and Friends teams who are supporting 40 Family and Friends carers. Carers are provided with training opportunities to assist them in developing their new role and are encouraged to attend support groups which provide information and advice and peer support. All Family and Friends foster carers have a Supervising social worker who provides support, supervision and review.

Fostering in Hertfordshire

At 31st March 2019, 360 mainstream and ARC Foster Carers were registered with Hertfordshire. The Service aims to grow this number to meet the needs of our looked after children.

Hertfordshire is unique in its approach to co-working with foster carers to develop the fostering service. Foster Carers are an integral part of our recruitment, training, innovation and support processes. We actively listen and act upon the Foster Carer's voice.

Foster Carers are increasingly taking a lead in the development of the Fostering Service, for example by leading the Fostering Forum and through participation in the One Team Board and workstreams. Foster Carers are key partners in generating new ideas to improve the fostering service.

Hertfordshire Fostering Service needs a diverse team of foster carers who are committed to providing safe, secure and supportive placements for Hertfordshire's looked after children.

Our aim is to recruit foster carers with the right skills to meet the needs of the children requiring fostering placements.

Our existing foster carers are important and valued ambassadors for Hertfordshire Fostering. Foster carers inform us about the personal satisfaction they receive from fostering, taking great pride in knowing that they are making a difference to a child's life.

Our foster carers and recruitment champions regularly hold promotional recruitment events, virtual and face to face across Hertfordshire, to help us recruit more foster carers. We have a team of Foster carer recruitment ambassadors who support the recruitment of foster carers.

Word of mouth is a positive recruitment method, and the service offers incentives to carers to recommend friends and family members to foster. Regular open evenings are held on a monthly basis. A comprehensive information pack is available for anyone interested in fostering and this is followed up with an initial home visit.

Assessing Carers

All prospective carers are subject to statutory checks, such as Disclosure and Barring (DBS), medicals, local authority, personal and employment references.

Our 'Skills to Foster' course is jointly run with our foster carers which enables potential carers to find out what fostering is really like and prepares them for the journey ahead. All applicants are assessed by social workers using the Fostering Network competency-based assessment and the completed assessment is presented to the Fostering Panel.

7. The Fostering Panel

The Fostering Panel considers the approval of all new carers and existing carers' reviews.



The panel will make recommendations on foster carer's terms of approval including:

- Type of fostering; Age of child(ren);
- Gender of child(ren); and
- Number of children to a maximum of 3.
- Long-term matches for a specific child.

The Fostering Panel's recommendations are considered by the Agency Decision Maker who makes the final decision

The 1989 Children Act sets the 'usual fostering limit' to three children, unless the children are siblings to each other. In certain circumstances, the Fostering Service may consider placing children outside the usual fostering limit on exemption. With the carers' agreement, whenever this applies, the exemption will be formally recorded and presented to panel. Consideration will also be given to what additional support the carer may require.

Any other variations of approval are risk assessed to ensure the needs of all the children in the household are met. A return to panel will be actioned to ensure there is independent scrutiny and oversight.

If the plan is for the child to remain with carers on a long-term basis, a matching meeting is held where the needs of the child/ children are identified, a report is completed identifying how the proposed carers can meet these needs. This report, together with the carers' long term review and Child's Permanency Report are presented to panel for approval for matches for a specific child.

Fostering Panel minutes are recorded, and minutes and decisions are confirmed in writing to the carer.

The panel hears all cases where there have been significant concerns in terms of safeguarding, quality of care or allegations made. An Independent Reviewing Officer review will be completed and presented to Panel.

A foster carer's review following a change of circumstances, or a request to increase their approval status will also be referred to the Fostering Panel. They will also recommend as appropriate, the termination of an approval. Panel will also consider Appeals to recommendations.

Training

Training is a statutory duty. The Fostering Service provides Foster Carers with a wide range of training opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills to help our looked after children thrive. A comprehensive learning & development offer is in place (see page 14).

The service has a comprehensive pre-approval and post-approval training programme which is reviewed annually and updated. All carers are expected to complete core training during their first year. Carers receive details of the training programme and are encouraged to attend courses to meet their development needs as carers.

The Fostering Service expects all mainstream Foster Carers & ARC Foster Carers to complete the Training Support and Development Standards (TSD) within 12 months of their first placement. All foster carers have a Personal Development Plan which is reviewed annually. This plan should include all of the mandatory training. Each foster carer can access the opportunity to complete any specific training that relates to the children they are caring for.

The Fostering Service specifically promotes the Attachment, Self-Regulation and Competency Therapeutic model (ARC). This is supported by the delivery of Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) Training, Fostering Under 12's, and Healing Approach to Trauma courses, with the aim of enabling carers to increase their understanding of how trauma impacts on children's behavior. The foster carer training has been further developed in the last year to include monthly ARC workshops for foster carers and practitioners' training/seminars to support continued learning and development of the ARC model.

The Fostering Service training programme is supported by Children's Services Learning and Development(L&D)Team. We continue to find new ways to provide learning & development for foster carers including the use of online training programmes. We continue to develop carers' skills in the areas of safe caring, attachment, trauma, resilience and self-regulation through supervision and working with partner agencies.



Mandatory 'Prevent' training was introduced during 2017/18 for completion by the end of the first year of fostering. 'Prevent' training supports foster carers to recognise early signs of exploitation and prevent vulnerable young people from being drawn into terrorism.

The Fostering training programme is co-delivered by staff and foster carers. The importance of foster carers in co-delivering courses is recognised by remuneration. Our carers are also members of the Training Strategy Group which plans and evaluates training needs for the fostering service.

Our Foster Carer Learning & Development Offer

A Personal Development Plan

(PDP) will be agreed between you and your supervising social worker annually, capturing any identified development needs.

This may include bespoke training depending on assessed need.



Pre-approval • Skills to Foster Preparation Training



- Training, Support and Development Standards (TSD)
- Statutory Core Training - First Aid, Safeguarding, Record Keeping, Safer Caring, Healing Approach to Trauma, Prevent, Delegated Authority
- Attachment, Self- Regulation & Competence (ARC) Training Course with follow up Workshops advisable



- Attachment, Self- Regulation & Competence (ARC) Training Course with follow up Workshops
- Behaviour Management- Fostering under 12's and/or Therapeutic Crisis Intervention(TCI)
- Men in Fostering (Male carers only)



- Specialist training
- Qualifications
- Bespoke training depending on assessed need.
- For example; Moving and Handling, Makaton, Steps and Specific Disability training

Other Development Opportunities and Resources

- Fostering Network Membership - access to their support service
- In-house Service Days
- Bi-Annual Carers Conference
- Comprehensive Virtual Schools Training Programme
- Research in Practice
- Subscription
- Making Research Count Events
- Comprehensive e-learning catalogue
- Training Delivery - train the trainer courses available
- Access to Learning and Development training Programme
- Support groups, with guest speakers

Our Foster Carer Support Offer

Supervising Social workers

All carers will be allocated their own supervising social worker who will undertake monthly supervision and be available to offer support at other times.

Buddy Service

All carers are allocated an experienced foster carer to act as a 'buddy' as part of the assessment process. This will be ongoing post approval for as long as required.

Induction pack

All carers are provided with a comprehensive and informative induction pack covering all aspects of fostering immediately post approval.

Duty

There is a duty system in place to support carers in the social workers absence.

A range of placement support interventions available

Placement support meetings, brief therapy, counselling, mediation and practical support; respite; carer to carer mentoring; direct work with carers and children

Range of Support Groups

- Structured support groups with guest speakers for all carers.
- Baby and toddler groups for carers of the under-fives.
- Specific groups for men who foster.
- Specific groups and for carers who look after Asylum seeking children and unaccompanied minors.

Fostering Out of Hours Support Line

Telephone support line for foster carers between the hours of 5.30-11pm, 7 days a week.

Service is run solely by Fostering staff, specific for fostering issues

Peer Intervention & Support

Provision of a specialist carer to offer support to mainstream carers either when there is a 'crisis' in the placement and/or in order to prevent a crisis.

Membership to Fostering Network –

all carers have access to their support services

Learning and Development Offer

HCC provides carers with an extensive L & D offer to support them from the beginning of their careers and as they progress as carers.

9. Supporting and Supervising

Each foster carer has an allocated supervising social worker (SSW) responsible for ensuring that the foster carer is well supported to meet the needs of children in placement.

Regular formal supervision takes place in accordance with the National Minimum Standards.

To increase safeguarding requirements, we work to an improved standard of two annual unannounced visits to improve safe practice and ensure our children's welfare is safeguarded. Supervising social workers will draw up a Personal Development Plan (PDP) with applicants as part of their assessment and will support carers in the completion of their first year portfolio in order to meet the TSD Standards for foster care. This PDP will be reviewed each year as part of the carer's annual review.

On approval, all foster carers will be allocated an experienced carer as a buddy. Each team runs a variety of support groups and all foster carers are expected to attend a minimum of six groups a year.

In recognition of the foster carers' professional role, Hertfordshire provides foster carers' with staff ID badges.

The supervising social worker is available for help and advice. At other times, and when the SSW is not available, each Fostering Team operates a duty system for calls. Children's Service Out of Hours continues to be available for emergency calls. The Hertfordshire Fostering Support line, delivered by fostering staff, also gives foster carers access to advice seven evenings per week 5.30pm – 11pm.

The Fostering team also operates an emergency weekend rota of foster carers, which enables the placement of teenagers in an emergency at the weekend, where Foster carers are retained on a rota basis. Feedback from the Children's Out of Hours service on this model is very positive.

The Fostering Service is responsible for ensuring that foster carers receive prompt payment. Payment rates are reviewed annually, and the comprehensive payments document is available to all foster carers via the website:

<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/childrens-social-care/fostering/fostering.aspx>

The Fostering Service works closely with the Virtual School to help children reach their full potential in education and help carers to support their children. The Virtual School provide excellent additional training opportunities for foster carers to support the achievement of positive educational outcomes for looked after children.

The designated nurse for looked after children provides advice to foster carers on a full range of health issues, supporting access to specialist medical advice where appropriate and developing policies and procedures to meet the needs of children and foster carers.



The Fostering Service recognises that providing high quality support is critical in ensuring placement stability for children & young people in care. The service has developed a Foster Carer Support Officer, which outlines the range of support options available (see page 14).

All foster carers have direct access to consultation with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, (CAMHS) which has dedicated staff to prioritise the needs of looked after children.

Respite care (sleepovers) is an important source of support to foster placements. When considering

respite arrangements, consideration is always given to the needs of both the child and the carers.

Hertfordshire County Council funds individual membership of the Fostering Network for all approved foster carers. This provides a holistic package of support for foster carers, helpline and includes legal insurance.

If a foster carer is subject of a child protection allegation against them, foster carers have access to independent support from Foster Talk Independent Support Service (FISS) and Independent Counselling Services.



10. Safeguarding checks

Every carer must have an annual review. Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and medical checks must be completed as part of the foster carer's assessment and at intervals of three years.

The family safe caring policy is updated at every review or on the arrival of a new placement. Health and safety checks are reviewed annually.

The first annual review is presented to Fostering Panel for consideration. Further annual reviews receive quality assurance through the Fostering Team Manager's endorsement.

Reviews may be presented to the fostering panel chair or panel at regular intervals, or when there are specific changes to the household or approval.

In the event of a child protection investigation as a result of an allegation of abuse against a foster carer, the foster care review will take place immediately after the conclusion of the investigation. These reviews will be conducted jointly between an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) and the Supervising Social Worker. They are presented to Fostering Panel for consideration.

A review where there have been serious concerns raised about the quality of care will also be completed by an IRO. Every carer review will include feedback from the looked after child, their parents and social workers as well as the carers' own children.

11. Equalities

The Fostering Service is opposed to both direct and indirect discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnic origin, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation or religion. We aim to provide culturally sensitive services and ensure that all people are treated with equal respect and receive equal access to services.

The service operates within Hertfordshire Children's Services Equality and Diversity Policy 2016/20 and the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2020.

All training carried out by the Fostering Service workers will reflect anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practice and any expressed discrimination will be challenged.



Anti-discriminatory practice features in preparation, assessment, training and ongoing support of carers and staff. Carers will be expected to develop the skills to identify and challenge discriminatory practice where it exists.

The views of children and young people receiving a service are sought through a variety of methods, including feedback from the Advocacy Service, outcomes of complaints, lessons from disruptions, children's views expressed in statutory reviews and foster carer reviews and surveys.

The Bright Spots survey is completed annually and provides comparative data. The views of children, young people and foster carers are used to inform service planning.

Our care-experienced young people support the development of our foster carers by co-delivering

our Skills to Foster training and presenting at a variety of fostering events. Written feedback is requested from the child's social worker as part of the foster carer's review and at the end of each placement.

The Fostering Service aims to seek views from a range of service users, including representatives from other agencies, carers and from young people.

Hertfordshire has a vibrant Children in Care Council who organise a full calendar of social events for children & young people, who are encouraged to participate in events and activities.

13. Recording and Access to Records

The Fostering Service has a responsibility to maintain accurate records on all foster carers and to ensure that information is shared with the carer wherever possible.

There is a statutory requirement to retain files or 10 years following closure. However, in accordance with Hertfordshire County Council policy, the practice is to retain for 35 years. Carers have a right to have access to their records and are able to approach the HCC Information Governance Unit for advice and guidance.

14. Matching

The Fostering Service is committed to approving carers who can meet the identified needs of the child.

If there are gaps in the carer's ability to meet those needs these must be recorded with reference to how those needs can be met from elsewhere, and appropriate support provided.

The Fostering Service works closely with the Brokerage accommodation team to ensure placement choice and matching.

In order to promote a good match Brokerage has an up to date profile of carers who have a vacancy.

Brokerage is responsible for reviewing requests for placements from the area teams and setting up placements with carers in collaboration with the appropriate fostering team.

Long term matches will be presented to the Fostering Panel for approval, following the process outlined in the long-term fostering procedures <https://tinyurl.com/y8aqong8>

15. Comments, Dissatisfactions, and Complaints

Comments, complaints and compliments are received in the spirit of open communication.

It is hoped that any problems can be dealt with quickly and at a local level. Formal complaints are dealt with in accordance with Children's Services Complaints Procedure. Carers are made aware of the procedure in relation to children in their care and how to complain. The complaints procedure has three stages.

Complainants are advised at each stage of their right to request that their complaint be referred to the next stage if they are not satisfied that it has been resolved.

The Children's Services procedures can be accessed via Hertfordshire County Council's website at <https://tinyurl.com/yb22xwdn>



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