SAFEGUARDING AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN

OLDHAM FOSTERING SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2018-19

1 MISSION STATEMENT

Oldham Council Fostering Service is committed to providing high quality foster placements for children and young people who are unable to live within their birth families. The fostering service aims to provide foster placements that offer a positive choice as part of a range of services for children and young people.

2 VALUES AND BEHAVIOURS

The values and behaviours of Oldham Council influence the work we do and the expectations we place both on ourselves as a fostering agency and on our approved foster carers as part of the team around the child.

- **Fairness**

  We champion fairness and equality of opportunity, and ensure working together with foster carers, birth families, children and young people and other partner agencies, brings mutual benefits and the greatest possible added value. We will enable everyone to be involved.

- **Openness**

  We will be open and honest in our actions and communications. We will make decisions in a transparent way

- **Responsibility**

  We take responsibility for, and answer to, our actions. We will encourage people to take responsibility for themselves and their actions. Mutual benefits go hand-in-hand with mutual obligations.

- **Working together**

  We will work together and support each other in achieving common goals.

- **Accountability**

  We recognise and act upon the impact of our actions on others, and hold ourselves accountable to our service users and partner agencies.
• **Respect**

We recognise and welcome different views and treat each other with dignity and respect.

• **Democracy**

We believe and act within the principles of democracy, and promote these across our working relationships.

These values and behaviours underpin our work, enabling us to be compliant with the UN Convention on the Rights for the Child and childcare legislation as well as the National Foster Care Standards and the National Minimum Care Standards.

We work towards:

- Providing the highest quality of care in a family setting for all children and young people who are in the care of the local authority.
- The return of children and young people to the carer or their birth families where appropriate, by actively working in partnership with partner agencies, including birth parents.
- Understanding the needs of the child or young person in determining the most appropriate foster placement within available resources.
- The recruitment and retention of a wide range of foster carers in order that all children and young peoples’ foster placement needs can be met.
- Respect for and advancement of the ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language of children and young people, and their families and foster carers in the planning and provision of the service and of each individual placement.
- Consideration of the gender, sexuality and any disability of children and young people in the planning and provision of the service and in each individual placement.
- Continuity in the lives of children and young people, so their identity and education can be maintained and developed, their physical and mental wellbeing promoted and their full potential achieved.
- A team around the child approach embracing parents and children, foster carers and social work staff, all planning and working in the best interest of the child.
- Contribute to the permanency planning for children, whether that is supporting foster carers to move children back home or to adoption, supporting carers to achieve legal permanence through special guardianship or adoption, fostering to adopt and the provision of high quality trained and supported long term foster carers.
- Continuity and consistency in training, support and information for
foster carers and social work staff to enable them to best meet the needs of Looked After Children (LAC)

➢ Respect for foster carers as significant partners alongside all other professionals involved with the child or young person

3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aims
The fostering services’ overarching aims are:

• To provide a safe, stable and secure family environment for all children and young people who require a foster placement

• To meet the assessed needs of the child and family within the foster placement in order that they meet their full development potential

• To provide professional fostering support staff and services that can deliver safe, effective, quality care options that represent ‘best value’ and meet the needs of service users.

• To deliver a service which meets the standards of care, compatible with statutory and regulatory requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, Care Planning, Placement and Case Review, Regulations 2010 and the Fostering Services Regulations 2011.

Objectives
The fostering services objectives are:

• To ensure that children are securely attached to foster carers that are capable of providing safe and effective care for the duration of childhood. This achieved by either through returning children their families, moving them on for adoption, or through providing permanence in a foster placement.

• To reduce the number of looked after children who have three or more placements in one year, therefore giving them greater stability

• To increase the number for foster carer placements to meet the needs of Oldham’s looked after children. Therefore offering greater placement choice.

• To retain foster carers through training, support and foster carer development opportunities, and an equitable payment scheme.

• To value the unique role of family and friends’ carers in enabling children and young people to remain with people they know and trust and to support them equably as with all other foster carer.

• To work with colleagues and other agencies to ensure that LAC benefit from education, health and social care opportunities and ensure that young people leaving the looked after system are adequately supported and able to maintain contact with foster carers and social workers.

• To maintain an adequate number of appropriately qualified, skilled and trained fostering team workers in order to facilitate the running of the service.

• To provide placements that keep siblings together wherever possible
and where this is identified as in the children’s best interests.

- To offer families who are experiencing difficulties or stress the opportunity of short breaks.
- To offer short stays for children with disabilities through the multi-link scheme

Management Structure

**Interim Executive Director – Health and Wellbeing (DCS)**  
Merlin Joseph

**Director Children’s Social Care and Early Help**  
Jill Beaumont

**Head of Service for Looked After Children (ADM)**  
Patsy Burrows

**Service Manager Adoption, Fostering and Residential**  
Lisa Riding

**Team Manager Fostering Service**  
Maris Elkington  
Registered manager

**Senior Practitioners**  
Carol Mellor  
Anna Pemberton  
Laura Harris

**Social Workers**  
Nadia Hashim  
Lauren Weston  
Michelle Currey  
Alison Stubbs  
Jo Dyer  
Sue Woodworth  
Tracy K Holt  
Lisa Hewitt  
Anna Smith  
Sarah Glynn  
Natasha Hall  
Stacey Weekes  
Madaline Taylor  
Adele Farrell  
Molly Goldie  
Emma Perry

**Recruitment Officer**  
Lisa Lawson
NUMBERS, RELEVANT QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF STAFF

Current staffing levels: - As Point 4. All staff are qualified social workers, recruited in accordance with the minimum standards and registered with the HCPC.

In addition the team manager holds an NVQ4 in management.

Team members have a wide variety of experience in social care and child care related professions. The qualifications range from post graduate to graduate degrees, the Accredited Child Care Award, and post qualifying award.

SERVICES PROVIDED

Foster care placements

Oldham Council’s Fostering Service aims to provide a range of foster care placements to meet all the needs of children and young people in Oldham who cannot live with their birth families and cover ages from birth to 18 years and beyond if a young person is in full time education.

The following details the range of foster placements the service provides:

Short-term placements:

Foster carers undertaking short-term placements do so in a variety of circumstances and with variety of children and young people. It may be for a very short, predictable period of time, for example whilst detailed assessments and court proceedings are undertaken, and until an agreed permanence plan can be implemented for the child.

Long-term placements

Foster carers offering long-term placements commit to caring for a child or young person whose care plan indicates that their needs will best be met in a foster placement that takes them through to and beyond adulthood.

Emergency placements

Foster carers offering emergency placements can be contacted at short notice, at evenings and weekends, to accept unplanned placements of children. A list of emergency foster carers with vacancies is updated weekly and forwarded to the Emergency Duty Team.

One2One Fostering

We have established a One2One fostering scheme aimed at children with significantly complex needs due to traumatic past experiences and are likely to exhibit challenging behaviour. These placements receive a high level of support including therapeutic input for the child and carer.
7 SKILLS BASED PAYMENT SCHEME

The service is seeking to widen placement choice for looked after children through the development of experienced carers.

It aims to do this by the Skills Based Payment Scheme which rewards foster carers for increasing their skills and ability to meet the needs of the children / young people. The current fees are detailed in the payment guidance.

8 Group Criteria

Group 1
Foster carers with less than 6 months experience or who do not meet the criteria for group 2 or do not wish to progress through the group structure. All group 1 carers need to have attended preparation training and be approved by Oldham Council.

Foster Carers who have been previously approved by a registered agency and have fostered children for a period of 2 years or more may be accelerated through the scheme if all the relevant criteria for the group are met.

Foster carers who have previously worked in residential child care with a registered agency for a period of 2 years or more may also accelerate through the skills based scheme if all the relevant criteria for the group are met. This residential or fostering experience will need to have ended no more than 5 years previous to their registration of interest with this service.

Group 2
Foster carer with more than 6 months experience but less than 2 years’ experience who have met the criteria of group 1. The carer also needs to have undertaken the preparation training and any other training or support needs identified through supervision or their annual review.

Group 3
Foster carers who meet all the relevant criteria for group 2 and can evidence further key skills in addition to those required for groups 1 and 2. Group 3 carers will also be expected to evidence an ability and willingness to assist with the recruitment, training and support of other foster carers. Foster carers who assist with these additional tasks will receive payments for undertaking those responsibilities on an additional basis.

Group 4
Foster carers who, in addition to meeting the criteria for group 3 carers, have also successfully completed NVQ Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People (or equivalent). Group 4 carers also need to evidence further key skills in addition to those required for Group 3.
Group 5
Foster carers who meet the relevant criteria for group 4 and who are able to care for a child with complex needs. This group is designed to meet the needs of children and young people who may otherwise be placed in residential care or with a specialist independent fostering agency.

Group 6
Foster carers who hold, or are able and willing to work towards, Diploma level 3 and who care for a young person with very complex needs. The foster carer will be part of the team around the child and will engage with regular therapeutic input to help them support and manage the young person’s placement. These placements are an alternative to residential care and will provide solo long-term care through to adulthood. Carers will provide respite support to other group six placements when appropriate.

One2One foster carers
Foster carers who hold, or are able and willing to work towards, Diploma level 3 and who care for a young person with a high level of complex needs. The foster carer will be part of the team around the child and will engage with regular therapeutic input to help them support and manage the young person’s placement. They will also support the young person to engage with weekly therapy where appropriate; with a view to matching as a long-term placement.

Carers will provide respite support to other specialist carers when appropriate.

9 SOCIAL WORK / SUPPORT SERVICES

- The fostering service facilitates a mentoring policy where experienced foster carers are involved in supporting newly approved foster carers.
- Social workers for children and young people visit children in foster placements on a regular basis and within the statutory requirements.
- In addition to this, each foster carer has a named fostering social worker that visits and supervises the foster carer in accordance with the National Minimum Standards.

The range of support services include:-

- Day to day support and guidance to maintain placements.
- Access to 24 hour advice through the Emergency Duty Team.
- Support group meetings.
- Financial support in the form of allowances, expense payments, equipment and reward payments under the ‘Skills Based Payment Scheme’.
- Review each foster carer annually to identify support or training to develop their skills and refresh their PDP.
- Access to advice and support from a clinical psychologist, regarding managing difficult behaviour / emotional feelings.
- Access to the LAC specialist nurse for advice and support regarding health issues.
- Encouragement to attend local children’s centres.
- Education support services for LAC to gain advice and support.
- The ‘Foster Carer Handbook’, which signposts foster carers to external support services and guidance for looking after children.
- A set of policies and procedures which outline the legal framework of the fostering task, outline the expectations of foster carers, and provide guidance.
- Foster care forum, which is a collaborative activity between the service and the foster carers.
- Regular newsletters.
- Annual foster carer award ceremony.
- FosterTalk membership – each foster carer has access to a range of free helplines, legal protection and discounts.
- Foster carers birth/adopted children – support group where carers birth/adopted children meet and have fun. Oldham Fostering Service also celebrates Sons and Daughters Week acknowledging the important role that sons and daughters play in making fostering a success.
- Access to a range of discounts, including the Max Card and Oldham Council staff benefits card.

10. RECRUITING, APPROVING, TRAINING AND REVIEWSING FOSTER CARERS

The recruitment of foster carers is supported by a recruitment officer. Recruitment activity is undertaken through various local media including the internet, local newspaper, posters and leaflets and through local radio and events, human-interest stories, and working the Marketing and Communications Team. The service also contributes to collaborative activities across the North West.

On receiving an enquiry from a person or persons interested in becoming a foster carer, a worker from the fostering team requests certain basic information from the enquirer. In addition, the worker gives the enquirer information about the training, assessment and approval process, the need for statutory checks, the different types of fostering that can be undertaken, and details about financial payments and rewards that are made to foster carers.

A standard initial enquiry form is used to record this information and an information pack is sent out to the enquirer.

Included in the information pack is a ‘Request a Visit’ form inviting the enquirers to send this back to the team if they would like to proceed to the next stage. If enquirers return the form requesting a visit, the manager
allocates a social worker to visit the enquirer. Enquirers can expect an initial visit within two weeks of the fostering team receiving their request.

The initial visit is an opportunity for the worker to find out more about the enquirer and his/her/their circumstances and more fully inform them about becoming a foster carer.

If, after an initial visit, and consultation with the Manager, all parties agree that it is appropriate to proceed, enquirers will be asked to complete a formal application form and consent to statutory checks being undertaken.

The fostering service makes statutory checks with:

- DBS checks on all household members aged 16 +
- Oldham Council Children’s Services Data Base / Other Local Authorities (if appropriate)
- Probation Service
- Employment
- Education
- Health Visiting Service
- Safeguarding Unit

Prospective carers are also required to undergo a medical examination completed by their GP, and to provide the names of three personal referees, (one of whom should be a family member) who will later be interviewed as part of the process. Our policy is also to seek references from ex-partners, particularly where there has been a joint parenting role.

9 PREPARATION TRAINING

All applicants are required to attend a preparation training course before being approved. The service uses the Fostering Network’s Skills to Foster Preparation Training programme. This programme is made up of the following seven sessions:

1. What do foster carers do?
2. Identity and life chances
3. Working with others
4. Safer caring
5. Understanding children in foster care
6. Transitions
7. Connected People Foster Carers
10 **ASSESSMENT**

A fostering social worker carries out a detailed assessment of the applicant's suitability to become foster carers. The assessment is either based on a competency assessment format or a connected person's assessment for family and friends carers. At the end of the assessment, a report is produced, which demonstrates the applicant's skills and abilities to undertake the fostering task.

The assessment identifies support and training needs of the carers.

The report (excluding references) is shared with the applicant and they are able to add their own comments or record disagreements with the reports content if they so wish.

The report is then presented to the fostering panel for a recommendation about the applicant's suitability to become approved foster carers. The report is presented by the assessing social worker and the applicants are also invited to attend.

Applicants are informed both verbally and in writing of the panel's decision and are given specific details as to their approval status.

If the service decides not to approve an applicant at this stage, the applicant has two choices. They may make independent representation to the Agency Decision Maker within 28 days of receipt of the formal notification that the department does not propose to approve the applicant. The reasons for the proposals are known as qualifying determinations. The other option is to apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

11 **SUPPORT & SUPERVISION**

Immediately following approval, new foster carers are allocated a named fostering social worker. This worker takes on responsibility for both supervising and supporting the foster carers, in accordance with the requirements of Standard 21 of the National Foster Care Standards and the supervision policy.

New foster carers are also given a copy of Oldham's Foster Care Handbook, which includes useful information about the service, all confidential and access the policies and procedures.

12 **TRAINING**

Oldham Council’s Development Academy commissions a rolling programme of training each year for approved foster carers. All foster carers are expected to attend training courses by their supervisory worker through reviews, personal development plans and through the links between training and progression up the Skills Based Payment Scheme. All new carers are expected to complete their Training, Support and Development (TSD) standards within the first year of their approval.
REVIEWS

It is a requirement that each foster carer is reviewed annually or when the carers approval status changes or there has been a significant event. The service has a standard competence based report for completion before review meetings. Different sections of the report are completed by the supervising social worker, social workers for the children who have been placed with the foster carers since the last review, and the foster carers themselves. The children, including birth children of foster carers will be consulted at each review. The completed parts of the report are shared with foster carers prior to their submission to foster panel or the review panel, which is chaired by the independent chair of panel, supported by one other panel members.

The review explores events since the last review and makes recommendations for the coming year for foster carers. These include recommendations about the foster carer's approval status and training needs.

A health and safety checklist is completed also as part of the review. The general home conditions and sleeping arrangements would also be examined and recorded.

The first review is presented to foster panel. Subsequent reviews are presented to the review panel as described above. If there are issues of concern or a major change in foster carer circumstances, the review may be presented to fostering panel.

All review recommendations are presented to the agency decision maker.

The proposed outcome of the reviews and terms of re-approval will be notified in writing to the carer who has the opportunity to appeal if they are in disagreement with the recommendation.

If carers wish to appeal against a recommendation made by the fostering panel they have two choices.

1) They may make independent representation to the agency decision maker within 28 days of receipt of the formal notification from the service that the department does not propose to continue their approval or proposes to change the terms of that approval. The reasons for the proposals are known as qualifying determinations.

2) The other option is to apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (the IRM) for a review. The IRM is a review panel independent of this fostering service.

If the outcome of a review process or appeal is that approval should be terminated or terms of approval changes, written notification will be given.

Notices of terminations will set out the reasons for terminating approval.

Outcomes for children

The service is committed to work in partnership to help children and young people achieve the best possible outcomes.

Our carers aspire to provide high quality, insightful care, so that they are able to:

- meet a child’s physical and health needs
- ensure children are protected from harm and feel safe
- That children and young people are given :-
a) Appropriate emotional warmth and understanding  
b) Appropriate stimulation and educational support  
c) Guidance and boundaries  
d) Security and stability  

The fostering agency supports these aspirations by ensuring:

- Appropriate supervision, support and training and by ensuring that foster carers are partners in the team around the child  
- Outcomes are measured across the child’s journey in foster care through a variety of means, performance indicators around stability, emotional health, educational achievement, health and dental assessments: feedback from statutory child care reviews, foster care reviews, unplanned endings, file audits.  
- The voice of the child and young person is heard through corporate parenting panel, a strong participation ethos, independent children rights service.  
- Children and young people are given a children’s guide in the appropriate format when they become looked after, and children over 5 are given access to the Blace website, which is Oldham council’s web pages for our looked after children.  

15 Complaints, Comments and Compliments  
The Health and Wellbeing Directorate is committed to providing quality services and welcomes customer feedback.  
Foster carers, children and families are made aware of the complaints process through the children’s guide, council website, and foster carers’ handbook and training.  

All complaints, their outcomes and recommendations are recorded by the complaints officer and reported to Ofsted in the annual dataset.  
For further information on how to make a suggestion, pay a compliment or make a complaint please contact 0161 770 1129 email for further information. Complaints made about the service of foster carers are detailed and monitored foster panel. In addition, all complaints are monitored at corporate level.  

16 Allegations of Abuse Made Against Foster Carers  
All allegations made against foster carers that relate to abuse or concerns about the quality of care are taken seriously, and dealt with in accordance with the service’s policy and procedure regarding allegations made against foster carers.  

17 Regulation and Inspection  
All fostering agencies are regulated and inspected by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). Their role is to promote service improvement and
ensure services are efficient, effective and focus on the interests of their users. Complaints and concerns can be made directly to them.

Furthermore, Ofsted offer a whistle blowing hot line on 0300 123 3155 or by Email to whistleblowing@ofsted.gov.uk. Alternatively they can be contacted on the address below.

Inspection reports on individual fostering services are available on the Ofsted website www.ofsted.gov.uk

Oldham council was last inspected in August 2010, and the report is available either form the Ofsted website (unique reference number SCO43218) or from Maris Elkington - 0161 770 6600.

For all local enquiries about Children’s Services contact Ofsted via the details below

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Telephone number 0300 123 1231
www.ofsted.gov.uk, enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk