

## Fostering Statement of Purpose 2014-15

### Aims and Objectives

Hampshire County Council's Children's Services Department manages the legal duties in relation to placing children who need to be looked after. This service is provided through the Fostering Team.

The service aims to meet the needs of all Hampshire's children who have been assessed as requiring a foster placement by providing a range of good quality, family-based care, for children who are unable to live with their own families.

#### The aims of the service are to:

- Support the development and welfare of looked after children who are placed within the service.
- Provide looked after children with a safe, stable, nurturing family experience which will promote their health, educational achievement and wellbeing, and which will assist them in coming to terms with their life experience and reaching their full potential.
- Provide different types of foster placements to meet the needs of the children being looked after, including temporary, permanent, respite and short breaks.
- To retain a skilled group of foster carers who are able to meet the needs of children who are looked after.
- To recruit and assess foster carers in a consistent and transparent manner and to work closely with the Fostering and Adoption Recruitment Team to engage the right quality and number of carers to meet the needs and demands for placements.
- To offer training and support to all foster carers which will provide the necessary skills to enable them to care for looked after children and develop and enhance their potential.
- To meet the key aims of Hampshire County Council and the objectives of the Children and Young People's Plan.

## Service Delivery

### **Children first**

All work within the Fostering Service is guided by determining and acting on what is in the best interests of each child.

### **Placement matching**

Placement matching means placing children with a family that can meet their needs. This includes considering the wishes and views of the child, the child's birth parents and significant relatives, and factors such as heritage, faith and language.

Placement matching is undertaken by the Placement Commissioning Team in consultation with the area Family Placement Teams and the Fostering Assessment Team.

When placing children, proximity to schools, family and friends is taken into consideration. If the most appropriate match is not available at the time of placement, a child is placed with the most appropriate carers until a better match is found.

### **Types of fostering**

Fostering is a positive option for children whose care cannot be met within their birth family. The need for care may be short term, temporary or long term. Hampshire County Council aims to provide a range of placement options to meet the needs of children who need care, including emergency placements, short term, long term, remand and intensive support placements, as well as managing placements with family or friends, a range of short breaks placements and parent and child placements.

### **Working together**

The Fostering Service works with a range of other teams and departments to ensure good quality care for the children looked after by foster carers and support for foster carers. We work as partners with agencies and services in specialist fields such as children in care and children in need social workers, health and education professionals as well as with children, children's parents and wider family members.

As part of the wider directorate of Children's Services, the Fostering Service also works closely with the Strategy and Commissioning Officers to develop robust policies, procedures and protocols to benefit looked after children, foster carers and others that we work with.

## Recruiting and Approving Foster Carers

Hampshire County Council uses a variety of approaches to recruit a diverse range of foster carers who can meet the needs of children in Hampshire.

### Assessment of Prospective Foster Carers

In assessing prospective foster carers, Hampshire County Council follows the Fostering Services Regulations, (2011), National Minimum Care Standards Act, (2000), The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services as well as adhering to the good practice guidance provided by the British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) and the Fostering Network.

Following an initial enquiry, all prospective applicants are sent an information pack and have an opportunity to have a discussion with the duty worker. The Recruitment Team are available for evening and weekend call backs if applicants would prefer. Prospective applicants are offered a visit at home so they can further discuss their interest in fostering with Hampshire County Council.

All suitable applicants will progress to Stage 1 of the process which includes the Skills to Foster Preparation Training and statutory and best practice checks and references are undertaken; these include a number of formal checks with agencies such as police, health and education. On successful completion of this stage, applicants will progress to Stage 2. An assessing social worker is allocated to undertake a competency-based assessment with the prospective carer (based on the BAAF process) and further checks are undertaken which include personal references and home, health and safety assessments.

Stage 1 and Stage 2 will sometimes run alongside each other to help expedite the process and avoid delay.

Request Information and DVD
Speak to the Recruitment Team
Home Visit
Stage 1
Skills to Foster Preparation Training
Checks and References
Stage 2
Assessment
Pre-approval training (starting September 2014)
Discussion and visits with social worker
Preparation and review of written application with social worker
Meet with Independent Fostering Panel
Decision made by Agency Decision Maker
Formal Handover to Family Placement Social Worker
<b>WELCOME TO FOSTERING</b>

## Approval of Foster Carers

The assessment process ends with a written report which is then read and signed by the prospective carers and presented to an independent fostering panel for review. Hampshire's fostering panels are made up of members who have relevant personal and/ or professional experience or expertise in looking after children. They review the written report and ask relevant questions to enable them to make a recommendation. The recommendation of the panel is sent to the Agency Decision Maker for Hampshire County Council. The Agency Decision Maker has the final decision on approval of foster carers.

On approval, a supervising social worker from the area Family Placement Team is allocated to support the foster carer with their role.

## Training Foster Carers

All foster carers are expected to participate in locally delivered training which is essential in undertaking the fostering task. They are also required to complete the Training, Support and Development standards (TSD Standards) for foster carers.

A comprehensive programme of additional training is available for foster carers, providing training in issues specific to the children and young people who they are looking after. The programme also offers excellent personal development opportunities. Training is delivered by staff, foster carers and specially commissioned trainers and the programme is managed by Hampshire Workforce Development Team.

During the assessment, prospective carers attend a three day 'Skills to Foster' preparation training course. This training is an essential element in the preparation of foster carers for the task of looking after children and young people. Further pre-approval training will be introduced from September 2014 and will focus on topics that carers need to be aware of before taking a child or young person into placement.

Skills To Foster Training
Online E-Learning
Attachment and Loss
Keeping Safe
Pre-approval training
Essential Training
Fostering Changes Programme
Continuous professional development

## Supporting Foster Carers

### Financial support

All foster carers receive an allowance for each child they foster, according to the age of the child. The allowance is paid per day or per week, depending on how long a child is in the care of the foster family. For foster carers who are able to demonstrate their skills and experience in supporting children and young people with complex needs, a skills award is also possible. A formal panel-based appraisal process reviews foster carers against a set of specific criteria to assess carers competencies. Any skills fees awarded are paid per child, for those children placed after the foster carer has been successfully assessed to a skills level.

### Practical support

All foster carers work with an allocated family placement social worker who has responsibility for managing and supporting them. Six-weekly supervision visits are complemented by a series of support groups, automatic membership of Hampshire's Fostering Network and access to 'out of hour's' duty services. Foster carers can also directly access a range of support services for themselves and the children in their care. These services are listed in the Foster Carers Handbook and in a separate Support Directory and are known to the family placement social workers. In addition to formal support, foster carers are encouraged to participate in informal support and social activities organised by other foster carers.

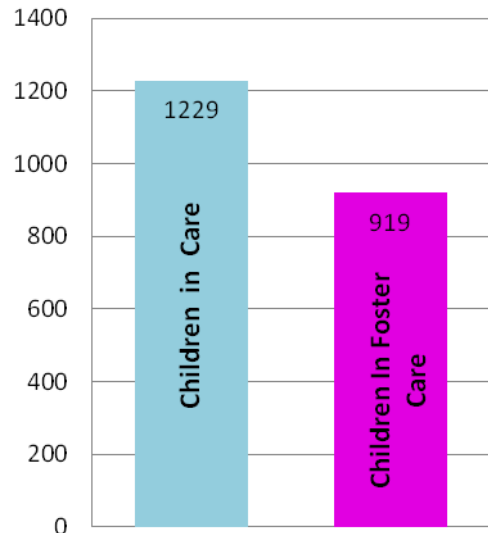
## Reviewing Foster Carers

Formal supervision with foster carers also includes reviews of foster carers record keeping and the outcomes they are delivering for the children in their care. A supervising social worker will undertake unannounced visits to the foster home and there is a formal annual review of each fostering household. The first annual review is presented to the Independent Fostering Panel. Alongside this, Hampshire's procedures indicate situations in which further reviews should be undertaken, for example in the case of a serious complaint or if a change in approval is recommended.

## Service Statistics

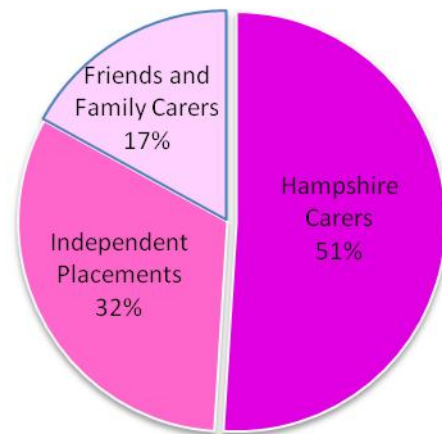
### Children living in care

At the end of January 2014, there were 1,229 children in the care of Hampshire County Council. The number of children placed in foster care was 919. Around 51% of these live with Hampshire County Council carers, 32% in placements commissioned through independent agencies and 17% were placed with Friends and Family carers.



### Placement Commissioning Team

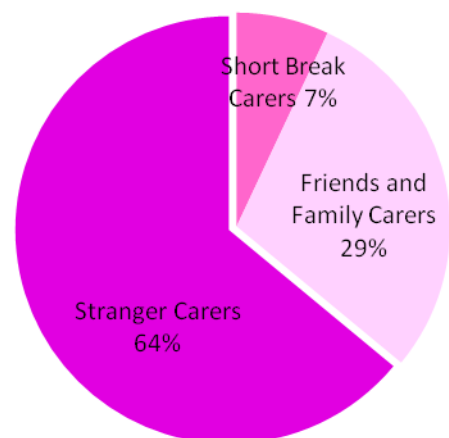
From 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 there were a total of 1098 requests for placements through the Placement Commissioning Team. This includes multiple placement requests, for example for family groups, children who may be moving to long term placement etc.



### Foster carers

At the end of March 2014, Hampshire County Council retained a pool of 522 foster carers to support young people who require foster placements.

Of these, 64% are general or stranger carers - this means that the foster carer will not be known to the child placed with them; 29% are Friends and Family foster carers who are approved to foster named children. 7% of foster carers support Short Breaks by offering respite care or supporting disabled children through the Family Link scheme.



## Service Feedback for 2013

### Complaints about the Family Placement Service

Feedback is vital to our growth and development. We take great pride in the services we provide and want to ensure we deliver a quality service to all. We welcome all feedback and deal with all comments promptly and professionally.

As part of our commitment to safeguarding, we ensure that children and young people in care and foster carers are aware of our 'Comments, Complaints and Complements Procedure' and know how to raise concerns.

In 2013-14 the Family Placement Service received three formal complaints about the service.

These were generally about operational aspects of the service such as policy, procedure or service delivery.

One complaint was received from parents or grandparents of children living with foster carers. Two complaints were received from foster carers.

Two of the complaints regarding the Family Placement Service were resolved in Stage 1 of the statutory process and one of them was resolved at Stage 2 of the corporate process.

More information about the comments, complaints and compliments process can be found by visiting: [www.hants.gov.uk/childrens-services/contact-cs/cs-complaints.htm](http://www.hants.gov.uk/childrens-services/contact-cs/cs-complaints.htm)

### Complaints against foster carers

All complaints against foster carers are investigated using the 'Complaints and Allegations Procedure' which is outlined in the Foster Carers Handbook. Emphasis is placed on resolving complaints of this nature swiftly and locally where possible. In 2013, 3 Level 3 allegations were made against foster carers. All were resolved during Stage 1 of the complaints procedure.

In supporting foster carers, the Family Placement service employs The Fostering Network Independent Fostering Support Service to aid foster carers who are subject to investigation following a Level 2 or Level 3 complaint/ allegation.

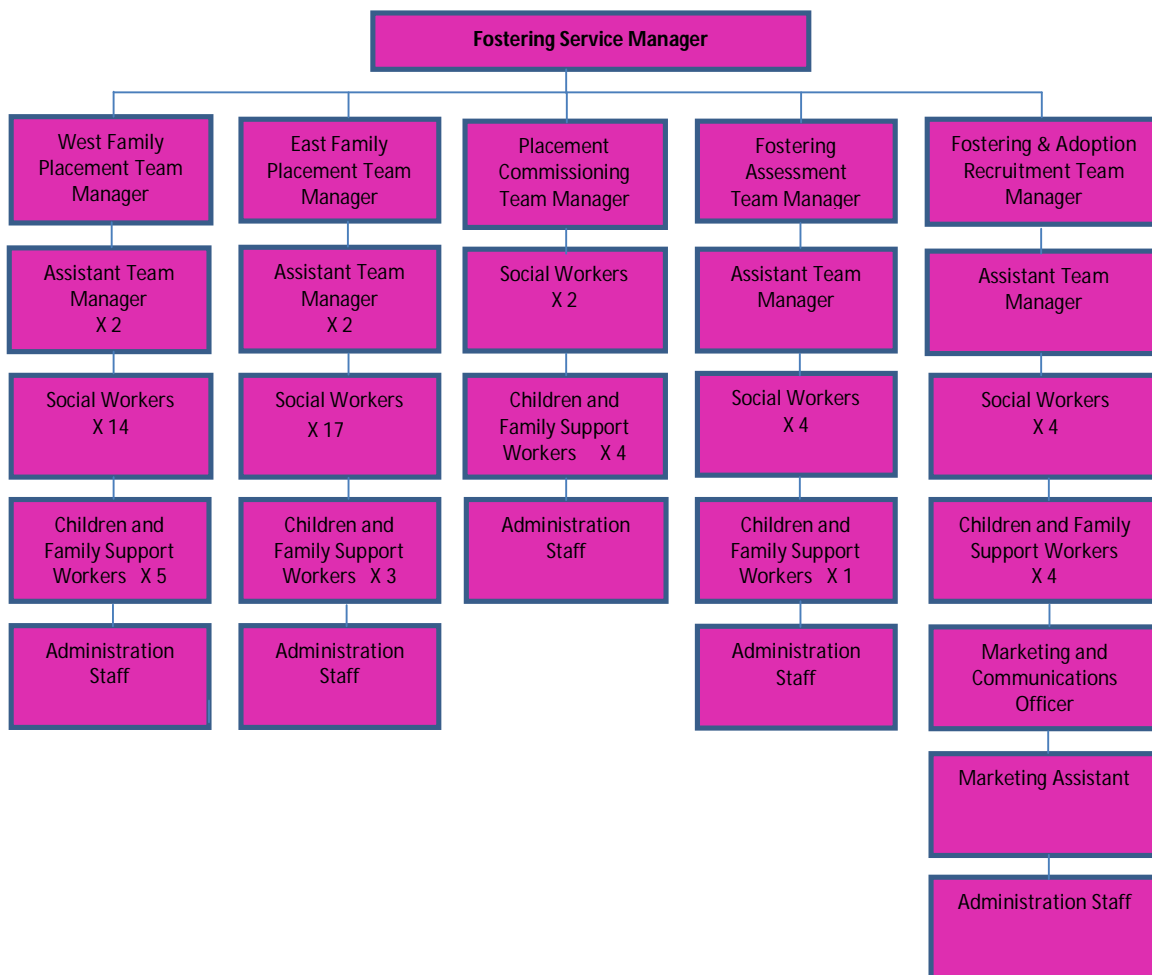
## Management Structure

The Fostering Service is part of Hampshire County Council's Children's Services Directorate.

The Head of County Services is responsible for the placement of children and fostering services. Day-to-day operational management of the service is the responsibility of the Fostering Service Manager and team managers.

Team managers lead the work of social workers, children and family support workers and the administration services to support foster carers within their geographic area of responsibility.

The Fostering Service comprises 72 members of staff, including both full and part time workers (excluding administrative staff).



## Area based services

**Eastern Hampshire**  
Team Manager

**Mike Earls**  
02392 256 822

**Western Hampshire**  
Team Manager

**Paula Haynes**  
01256 362 080

### County-wide services

Fostering Service Manager  
**Amber James**  
01489 587 549

Adoption Service Manager  
**Maureen Edwards**  
01489 587 549



## Staff Qualifications and Experience

Service managers and team managers have both social work and management qualifications to support their extensive experience in providing services for children. They are registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC).

Social Workers all hold relevant professional qualifications and are registered with the HCPC, as well as having experience in supporting children in need and Looked After Children. Children and families support workers do not hold a professional social work qualification but have experience of working with children, young people and families gained from working with a range of services. They work under the close supervision of social workers or team managers.

All Hampshire County Council employees and contractors are subject to rigorous selection, assessment and checking prior to commencing work within their teams as set out in regulations. The recruitment process for the Fostering Service is also monitored by Ofsted.

## Highlights From 2013 - 2014

### Achievements of Hampshire Fostering Network (HFN) in 2013

Written by the Chairman of Hampshire Fostering Network

It's been a busy year for HFN, with changes to the committee due to people retiring which have been offset by the new carers coming on board. This has meant that the committee has remained static at 12 members over the year, but we are keen to gain more volunteers.

The main event this year was certainly the HFN conference which was held in September. This was well attended by both carers and social workers and built upon the good start made the previous year.

That said, improvements with communications last year are transforming the way HFN interacts with carers. With a new website now on-line offering basic information and contact addresses, foster carers can now communicate directly with their organisation. Supporting the website, the launch of a monthly e-newsletter helps strengthen bonds, which, coupled with an expanding database of foster carers, means that contact between all foster carers has never been easier.

HFN have also ensured that foster carers have a voice on the Hampshire Safeguarding Board, with HFN committee members sitting on all the Care Matters board sub- groups and the main Safeguarding board to ensure that foster carer's views are taken into consideration when making policy decisions for looked after children

HFN have also been responsible for initiatives such as the redesign of the advice payslips, ensuring that carer's bank details are no longer printed upon them and improving the layout to make them easier to read and support local events with funding and other help.

### Foster e-Comms

The logo for 'Foster e-Comms' features the word 'Foster' in a large, bold, black sans-serif font. Below it, 'e-Comms' is written in a smaller, black, lowercase sans-serif font. The 'o' in 'Foster' and the 'o' in 'Comms' are highlighted in a vibrant pink color.

Hampshire County Council's dedicated website for foster carers is still in existence. We are currently looking into new, easier ways to communicate with our foster carers and this will be an on-going project.

### Ofsted inspection highlights

In February 2014 our Children's Services was inspected by Ofsted under Ofsted's new framework. The overall quality rating was '**good**' with some aspects judged as '**outstanding**'. This is a fantastic recognition of the quality of our service provided by staff and foster carers. Inspection is the main way Ofsted check the quality of services for children and young people. The purpose of inspections is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

### **Here are some of the report highlights:**

*Action to recruit and retain foster carers is well targeted. The profile of Hampshire's foster carers reflects the ethnicity of its looked after children.*

*Hampshire's existing in-house foster carers are very well supported to develop their skills in meeting the needs of looked after children. They variously described the support they receive from their family placement social workers (FPSWs) as 'fantastic', 'excellent', and 'amazing'.*

*Carers have very good access to relevant training, which is targeted at meeting their own individual needs and those of the children for whom they are caring. Foster carers report that they feel fully included as part of the professional team responsible for looked after children, and that their own children are effectively engaged in the fostering process.*

For more information or to view the full report visit [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

### **Fostering recruitment**

We always need new carers to ensure we are matching children with the best carers for their needs. We hold a number of recruitment events and stands throughout Hampshire every year.

Our excellent team of foster carers have continued to support recruitment events in 2013, helping us to inform the public about fostering, sharing experiences, combatting myths and encouraging people with the right skills and attitude to consider fostering.

In 2013 we worked closely with HFN to build on these foundations and continue to promote fostering with Hampshire.

We actively support Foster Care Fortnight which is an annual campaign led by the Fostering Network to raise the profile of fostering and attract new foster carers. This year we will be holding daily recruitment stands throughout the campaign.

New exciting initiatives during 2013-14 included the introduction of our Foster Care Car, weekly recruitment stands, new Twitter and Facebook pages and our very own geo-caches.