

people like you

Fostercare



Statement of Purpose

2013 - 2014



www.hants.gov.uk

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 Family Placement (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 Plan.

- **Children first**

All work within the Family Placement Team 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'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 Team.

Wherever possible a child will be placed with a foster carer who can meet their needs. If this is not possible, for example in an emergency, foster carers will be assisted by Hampshire County Council to meet the child's needs in the short term and will address the needs more appropriately in the longer term.

- **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**

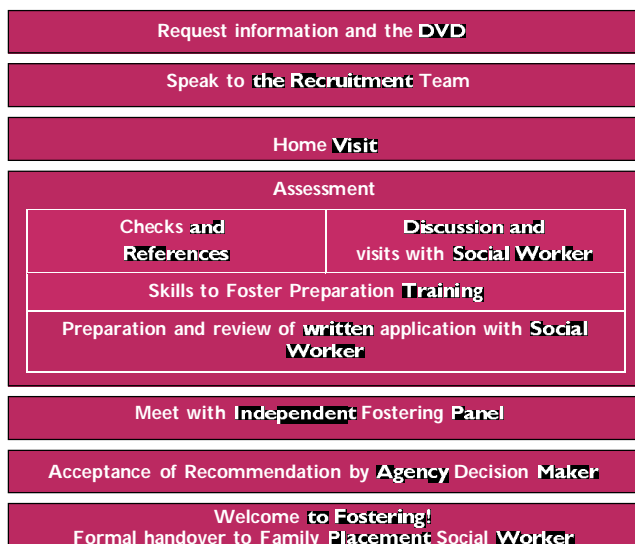
The Family Placement team work with a range of other teams and departments to ensure good quality care for the children looked after by foster carers and support for foster carers. We work as partners with agencies and services in specialist fields such as children in care and children in need social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

As part of the wider directorate of Children's Services, the Family Placement team also work closely with the Strategy and Commissioning Officers to develop robust policy, 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 British Association of Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) and Fostering Network.

Following an initial enquiry, many prospective applicants are visited at home so they can further discuss their interest in fostering with Hampshire County Council. Once a formal application is received, an assessing social worker is allocated to undertake a competency-based assessment with the prospective carer (based on the BAAF process).

This assessment involves discussion with family and others who are regular visitors to the home. Statutory and best practice checks are undertaken; these include a number of formal checks with agencies such as police, health and education. Personal references and home, health and safety assessments are also undertaken. During the assessment prospective carers attend a three day 'Skills to Foster' training course. This training is an essential element in the preparation of foster carers for the task of looking after children and young people.

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 to undertaking the fostering task. They are 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 that foster carers 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's Workforce Development Team.



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. Alongside this, Hampshire's procedures indicate situations in which further reviews should be undertaken, for example in the case of serious complaint or if a change in approval is recommended.

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 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 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.

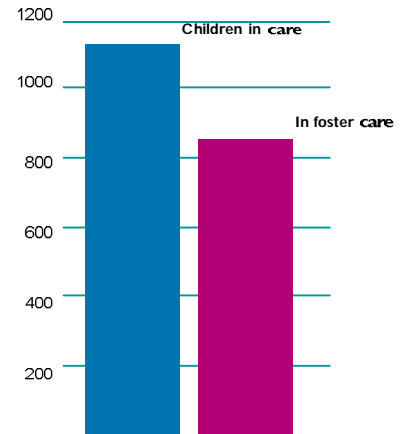
Practical support

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 supervising social worker. In addition to formal support, foster carers are encouraged to participate in informal support and social activities organised by other foster carers.

Service Statistics

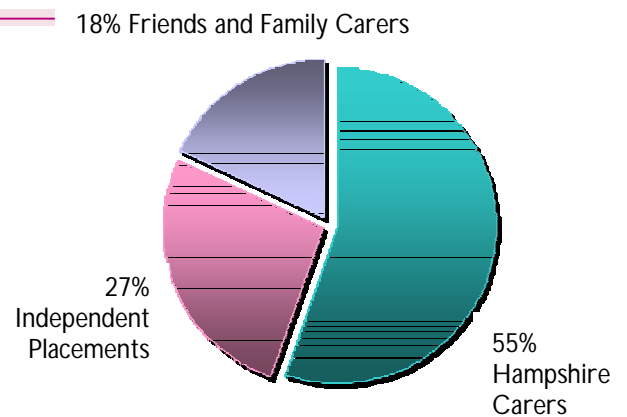
Children living in care

At the end of January 2013, there were 1113 children in the care of Hampshire County Council. The number of children placed in foster care was 826. Around 55% live with Hampshire County Council carers, 27% in placements commissioned through independent agencies and 18% were placed with Friends and Family carers.



Family Placement Service

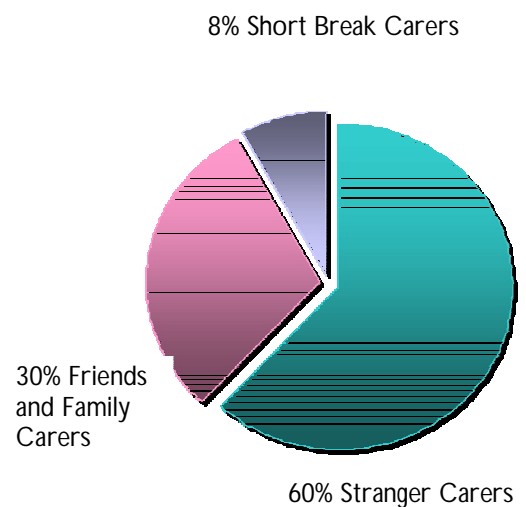
From 1 April 2012 to 31 January 2013 there were a total of 843 requests for placements through the Family Placement Service. This includes multiple placement requests, for example for family groups, children who may be moving to long term placement etc.



Foster carers

At the end of January 2013, Hampshire County Council retained a pool of 542 foster carers to support young people who require foster placements.

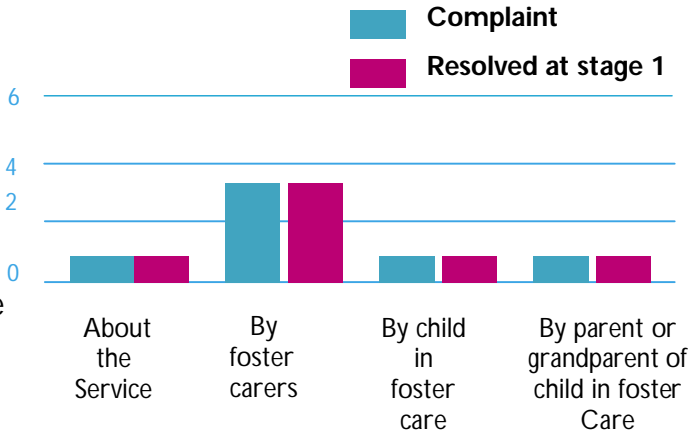
Of these 62% are general or stranger carers - this means that the foster carer will not be known to the child placed with them; 30% are Friends and Family foster carers who are approved to foster named children. 8% of foster carers support Short Breaks by offering respite care or supporting disabled children through the Family Link scheme.



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 Compliments Procedure' and know how to raise concerns.



In 2012 the Family Placement Service received five formal complaints about the service. These were generally about operational aspects of the service such as policy, procedure and or service delivery.

One complaint was received from parents or grandparents of children living with foster carers. Two complaints were received from foster carers, one complaint from prospective foster carers and one was from a child or young person in care.

All of the complaints regarding the Family Placement Service were resolved in Stage1of the formal 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

Complaints against foster carers

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 2012, two formal complaints were made against foster carers. All were resolved during Stage 1of the complaints procedure.

In supporting foster carers, the Family Placement Service employs Barnardo's Independent Fostering Support Service to aid foster carers who are subject to investigation following a Level 2 or Level 3 complaint.