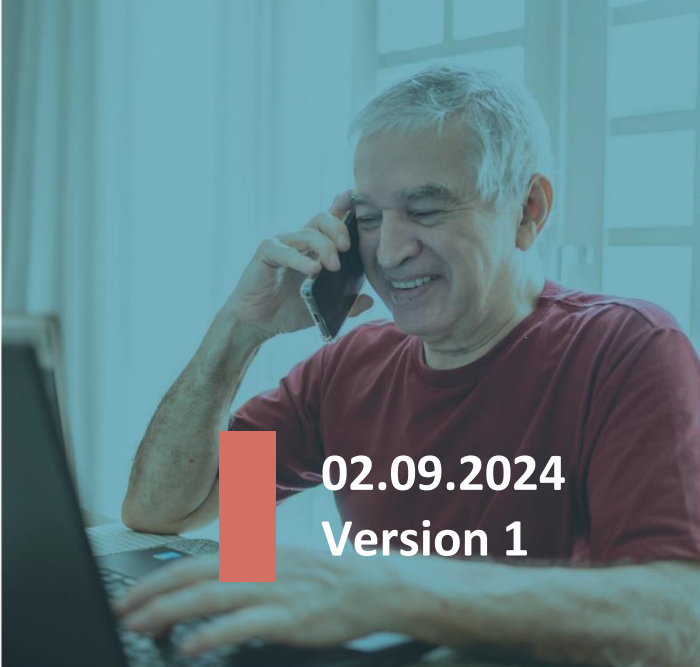




# Fostering Service Statement of Purpose 2024-2025



02.09.2024  
Version 1

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# Introduction

## 1. Statement of Purpose and Function:

The Statement of Purpose sets out the framework for the Milton Keynes City Council Fostering Service and has been developed and produced to meet the requirements of the Fostering Services 2011 Regulations, regulation 3 and National Minimum Standards 2011 standard 16.

The Statement of Purpose sets out the aims and objectives of the service and the facilities and services to be provided, as stipulated in legislation. It aims to provide information about the fostering service to foster carers, children, young people, parents, staff, and other professionals. The service is inspected by Ofsted and a copy of the Statement of Purpose is sent to them. The Statement of Purpose is reviewed and updated annually and is available to download from our website or on request.

Milton Keynes City Council (MKCC) has been a Unitary Authority since April 1997 and became a city in 2022. The Fostering Service operates within the Corporate Parenting Service and recruits, assesses, and supports carers to provide placements for children and young people.

In Milton Keynes City Council there is a real commitment to promoting the wellbeing of children and young people. We have introduced the Child First approach to ensure that children's voices are listened to, and decisions are taken in their best interests.

We have the vision of MK as a place where everyone has an equal chance to be healthier, happier, safer, and more prosperous through growth that creates opportunities for all, with a particular commitment to those children and young people for whom we are corporate parents. We have legal and moral responsibilities towards them, and we need to be the best possible parents we can. We must help all our children to thrive and flourish; reach and exceed their potential; and expand their life chances. We must provide help and support when and where this is needed whilst creating opportunities to develop resilience and independence as they move towards adulthood. (Sufficiency Strategy 2022-25)

The Fostering Service is committed to ensuring quality outcomes for vulnerable Children and Young People. The service is delivered in accordance with the principles outlined in the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services and the Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011).

### 1.2 The Legal Framework:

The Milton Keynes Council Fostering Service is managed within the standards and best practice set out in:

- The Children Act 1989
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review
- Care Standards Act 2000
- The Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005
- Independent Review of Determinations (Adoption and Fostering) 2009
- Family and Friends Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities 2010
- Fostering Services Regulations 2011 and amendments 2013
- Staying Put Guidance 2013
- Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011 (NMS)
- The Children and Families Act 2014
- The Care Planning and Fostering Regulations 2015
- The Care Standards Act 2015
- Social Work Act 2017
- The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: Transition to Adulthood (2022)

The primary function of the Fostering Service is to embrace the principles in meeting the dimensions of developmental needs of children (Children Act 1989 Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review 2010) under the categories of:

- Health
- Education
- Family and Social Relationships
- Emotional and Behavioural Development
- Identity
- Social Presentation
- Self-Care skills

## **Aims and Objectives**

### **2.1 Aims**

Milton Keynes City Council Fostering Service is committed to providing high quality safe foster care placements for children of all ages which addresses their social, emotional, educational, health, cultural and identity needs and will enhance and maximise their life opportunities. They are referred to as 'looked after' children and young people.

The Fostering Service aims to ensure:

- Children and young people's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of all foster care provision.
- A stable and safe environment, ensuring that children and young people are protected from abuse and neglect.
- That children and young people live in a loving environment that can meet their developmental needs.

- Educational attainment, progress and school attendance of all children and young people in foster care placements is promoted and supported.
- Children and young people are supported to develop their emotional, intellectual, social, creative, and physical skills through the stimulating environment created within the foster home.
- The child or young person's racial, religious, linguistic, and cultural needs are recognised and supported by endeavouring to recruit and retain foster carers from a diversity of backgrounds and experiences.
- Anti-discriminatory practices are in place that promote equal opportunities for all and value diversity of both foster children and carers regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, age, religious beliefs, disability, or marital status.
- The particular needs of disabled children and children with complex needs will be fully recognised and taken into account.
- The significance of relationships with birth parents and the wider family, including siblings, half-siblings and grandparents is recognised and supported for children and young people. The foster carer's role in this is crucial.
- The Fostering Service works in partnership with all parties in the team that supports the child or young person in a fostering placement.
- There are clear expectations between the Fostering Service and Foster Carers which are set out in the signed Foster Carer agreement.
- That foster carers have full information about the child or young person they are looking after.
- Foster carers are provided with supervision, support and training to enable a child or young person to maximise their opportunities for education, health, personal care, leisure and sporting activities to develop their skills, confidence and self-esteem and work towards addressing any past negative experiences.
- Foster carers are trained and skilled so they can offer stable, high quality, confident and thoughtful care to the children and young people in the care of Milton Keynes City Council.
- The Fostering Operations Manager will in consultation with the Local Authority Designated Officer and Safeguarding service discuss any allegations or appropriate notifications to Ofsted in relation to schedule 7 to ensure notifications are made.

## **2.2 Objectives:**

- To prepare, supervise, support and train foster carers to enable them to provide high quality foster care to those placed with them and to assist the carers in developing their professional practice.
- To optimise, through a robust imaginative and inclusive recruitment programme, the opportunity for foster placement choice which will meet the diverse needs of the Milton Keynes children in care population.
- To prepare, train, supervise and support kinship foster carers to enable them to provide high quality care to those placed with them and to assist the carers in developing their practice.
- To 'family find' for children requiring planned permanent stable foster placements, who are unable to live with their birth family.

- To ensure regular monitoring of foster placements, for example, through household reviews, supervision, and unannounced visits to determine whether children's needs continue to be appropriately met.
- To ensure that complaints and allegations about foster carers are rigorously investigated and that procedures relating to allegations are fully adhered to.
- To make sure that the work of the Fostering Service reflects identified need and emerging priorities and takes account of Children's Social Care service plans and objectives.
- To ensure that all Private Fostering placements are monitored in line with government regulations and that all private foster carers are suitable for this role.
- To provide support for children and their carers who are subject to Special Guardianship Orders or Child Arrangement Orders.
- To ensure that all staff employed within the Milton Keynes Fostering Service have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to carry out their duties and ensure that each member of staff has a personal development plan which supports opportunities for training and developing their skills and that staff are regularly supervised and their performance reviewed.

### **2.3 The Foster Carer's Charter:**

Milton Keynes Fostering Service has a Foster Carer's charter which sets out clear expectations for how foster carers should be treated, trained and supported which is agreed by the Head of Corporate Parenting Service, Fostering Service and Foster Carers. Its intention is to build understanding between those involved in delivering care to children, promoting more cohesive working in the team around the child and improving experiences and outcomes for children in care.

## **Management and Staffing structure**

### **3.1 Management:**

Overall responsibility for the Fostering Service is with the Head of Corporate Parenting Service, who is directly accountable to the Director of Children's Services.

The Head of Service, the Fostering Operations Manager and two Deputy team Managers provide the management capacity for the team and drive both the operational management and strategic direction of the Fostering Service as a whole. The team is subdivided into Recruitment and Assessment and Support and Supervision with each team being managed by a Deputy Team Manager.

### **3.2 Fostering Team Staff Establishment:**

The Fostering Service Support and Supervision and Recruitment and Assessment teams come together under the Fostering Operations Manager. The two Deputy Managers undertake the day-to-day operations of both sides with oversight and strategic development from the Fostering Operations Manager. Chairing of Foster Carer Household Reviews is undertaken by the Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer. There is a Fostering Panel Adviser.

The Recruitment and Assessment Team comprises of 6 Social Workers (5.4FTE) a Social Work Assistant, and a Fostering Recruitment Officer. The focus of the team is the recruitment and assessment of mainstream foster carers, initial viability assessments, kinship assessments, special guardianship assessments and private fostering.

The Support and Supervision Team comprises of 7 (6.3 FTE) Social Workers and 2 Social Work Assistants. The focus of the team is the supervision and support of mainstream foster carers and kinship carers. There is a fixed contract Recruitment social worker to support the recruitment of foster carers who is DfE funded. Two members of staff provide the special guardian support service.

### **3.3 Support to Fostering Service Staff:**

In accordance with recruitment guidelines contained in Fostering National Minimum Standards (2011), all Fostering Service staff have a coordinated induction programme, to introduce them to the policies and procedures of Milton Keynes City Council and Children's Social Care.

Fostering Service staff receive regular formal supervision from their line manager in accordance with the Milton Keynes City Council Children's Social Work policy. Fostering Service staff also have access to the services of a clinical psychologist, who is available to offer support and guidance about personal or case-related matters via either individual or group sessions.

Fostering Service staff performance and progress is considered over the year and reflect on issues encountered. 1-2-1's are used as a means to support and develop staff continually and to identify and challenge performance issues as the earliest opportunity.

Fostering Service staff have access to a comprehensive annual training programme, and opportunities for continuing professional development. There is a range of opportunities available for qualified and non-qualified staff.

The Fostering Team welcomes regular student placements from the social worker degree and apprenticeship programme, which enriches the whole team's practice.

Milton Keynes City Council provides an independent Employee Support Service, accessible to all Milton Keynes Council employees.

## **Service Provision**

### **4.1 Overview**

The Milton Keynes Fostering Service offers children and families a wide-ranging source of support for children and young people who require a short term or long term looked after foster care provision including kinship care. The team also oversees those children placed in private fostering arrangements.

The range of placements include:

- Short Term foster carers: short-term placements for children whilst their permanency is being secured. Short term foster carers also provide respite to other foster carers and to children, where required.
- Remand placements: for those young people remanded to the care of the local authority.
- Kinship placement of a child or young person who is 'connected' to the applicant: These are assessed both as emergency (Regulation 24) and planned placements following a positive assessment.
- Permanent fostering placements: through active family finding, we identify appropriate permanent foster carers for children and young people, which provide the best possible match in respect of their identified needs.
- Parent and Child: assessment based foster placements for young parents and their child/ren in a family-based environment where parenting skills are able to be modelled and observed in line with a placement agreement.
- Foster to Adopt: placements for babies and children where their permanence plan is or is likely to be adoption, but who might also be reunited with their birth family. These carers are approved and supported via Adoption Connects.
- Supported Lodgings: we offer young people aged of 16 plus accommodation to meet their support needs as they move towards independence.
- Staying Put: this scheme offers the opportunity for those young people aged over 18 years to remain with their current foster carers for a specified period of time in order that they complete education or training and who are supported further due to their vulnerability
- Private Fostering: assessments, monitoring and support of private fostering arrangements
- Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs): assessment and support of Special Guardians and preparation of reports as requested either by the court during care proceedings or as an avenue to secure permanence for a child or young person outside of the care system.

### **Working in Partnership**

The Fostering Service works in collaboration with fellow professionals based in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, Family Support Teams, the Children in Care Team, 16-25 Team and services across the council. This enables direct access to support children with their overall needs and supporting good outcomes.

### **Support for Carers**

Milton Keynes City Council proactively engages with foster carers throughout the year, through monthly support groups for foster carers, including kinship carers, and specific social events including fun days and other events. A mentoring scheme is in place for newly approved carers, whereby support is available from an experienced carer to assist with the initial process of settling in. This is being further developed through the SE Recruitment Hub Fostering Ambassadors scheme.



Out of hours support is available through the Emergency Social Work Team, whereby foster carers can access support over the phone from a Supervising Social Worker.

Feedback and participation are encouraged through formal supervision, annual household reviews, coffee mornings, and other events.

Foster carers are involved in recruitment by helping with recruitment events and the refer a friend scheme.

There is a wide range of mandatory and additional training to enhance carers knowledge and practice which are accessible either classroom based or online.

The Fostering service works closely with the Milton Keynes Foster Carers Association and foster carers are encouraged to join for support and events.

#### **4.2 Safeguarding:**

All children and young people in care must be protected from abuse and neglect. Children and young people should feel safe and be safe; children should understand how to protect themselves and are protected from significant harm including neglect abuse and accident (NMS 4 2011). The robust vetting and assessment of foster carers and supported lodgings providers provides the basis to safeguard children and young people and the following further procedures to protect children are promoted by the Fostering Service:

- Fostering National Minimum Standards 4 and 19 (2011)
- Safer Caring Policy
- Promoting and Safeguarding the Welfare of Children training
- Missing from Care Procedure
- Milton Keynes Together (Safeguarding Children's Board) policies and procedures
- Child Sexual Exploitation Guidance

'Safer Caring' training is made available for all foster carers and is part of the mandatory training following approval as carers and carers complete a safer caring family policy. All children in care are subject to regular independent statutory reviews in line with Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 and 2013.

The Fostering Service has a detailed Allegation against Foster Carers procedure, which is followed if an allegation is made against a Foster Carer regarding any child who is or has been in their care. The service works closely with the Local Authority Designated Officer service to ensure allegations are investigated and processes are followed. An investigation is undertaken and a report taken to Fostering Panel alongside a Household Review in order to consider continued approval following an allegation.

### **4.3 Health:**

The Fostering Service promotes the health and development of children and young people living in foster care. The Looked after Child Nurses are based within the Children in Care Team. Fostering staff and foster carers have direct access to these professionals. We have recruited a part time psychologist who will support with ensuring children's mental wellbeing is promoted and needs are met.

It is an expectation that all children and young people are registered with a GP and dentist. Foster carers are made aware of their obligation and responsibility to support children to attend medical, dental and other health appointments. Each foster carer is provided with a medical card specific to the child in their care. Foster carers are given delegated authority to agree to action to meet the specific medical needs the child or young person may have.

All health care information for each child is provided to the foster carer prior to a child being placed in their care and specific training is provided where it is required to individual foster carers. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) offer a dedicated service to children in care providing one to one work with children and foster carers. We are working more collaboratively with CAMHS and have set up regular consultation meetings where we can discuss children who we have concerns about.

Foster carers have access to clinical supervision with Juliet Kesteven, available on request, monthly slots available.

### **4.4 Promoting Educational Achievements:**

The Fostering Service prepares and encourages foster carers to support each child's individual educational achievements whilst in a foster placement.

The Virtual School Team - fostering staff and foster carers have direct access to this professional team. This team provides support for carers and direct work to children and young people.

Foster carers are expected to undertake core training as part of their induction post approval. This training includes promoting the educational achievements of children in care. Foster carers are also encouraged to attend further training to support the educational attainment of those children placed in their care. Foster carers are required to provide home environments that stimulate, encourage and value the experience of learning and educational achievements.

As part of its pledge to looked after children, Milton Keynes City Council ensures that children and young people have access to a computer.

### **4.5 Family and Social Relationships:**

Family Time (Contact) arrangements are a significant vehicle for developing and maintaining key relationships in the child's life. As most children will return to their birth family, it is very important to support family relationships, particularly those of siblings, as these are the longest relationships children will experience throughout their lives. Foster carers facilitate and support the child within their agreed contact arrangements and care plan

#### **4.6 Emotional and Behavioural Development:**

It is vitally important to nurture good mental health and emotional stability for each child in foster care. The Fostering Service strives to provide nurturing and secure environments with opportunities for positive activities which build self-esteem and attachment. For children in need of clinical or therapeutic input the Fostering Service secures the input of the Primary Mental Health Worker based in the Children in Care Team and can also access other resources through CAMHS.

The Fostering Service provides a wide range of learning and development opportunities, which aim to assist foster carers in gaining a deeper understanding of, for example, attachment issues, which may impact on the emotional and behavioural development of children.

#### **4.7 Identity:**

The Fostering Service recognise that a child's sense of self is made up of many factors which includes culture, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, sexuality, and disability and looks to place children in the best possible fostering family match available.

The Fostering Service offers training and assistance to foster carers to support children in recognising who they are and where they come from by the specific use of life story work training. Identity is a common thread that runs through all foster carer training including such topics as; building self-esteem and resilience; valuing the child for who he/she is; valuing difference and positive personal identity building. Ongoing Life Story books and Therapeutic life story work are offered to support children in care and those leaving care through permanence.

#### **4.8 Social Presentation:**

The Fostering Service recognises the importance of the healthy living and communal interaction that leisure and social activities offer children and young people. It is important that children have the opportunity to learn a range of social skills, including the way in which they present themselves in different contexts. Foster carers offer and support children and young people in a range of social activities and opportunities where they can learn what is appropriate in different situations.

All children and young people are allocated specific 'life chances' money from the weekly allowance to support these activities.

#### **4.9 Self Care Skills and Moving Towards Independence:**

As children and young people grow older, they should be given greater responsibility for looking after themselves, their living space, clothes, and possessions and for making decisions about how they spend their time and money, although the timing of this may vary with individual children.

The Fostering Service provides training to foster carers to develop their skills regarding how to help young people prepare for adulthood and independent living. Foster carers are expected to provide young people with positive life experiences and to provide information, practical skills and advice that will support them in their transition to adulthood. This work is supported by the 16-25 Leaving

Care Team who provide services and support to young people, including the development and implementation of a Pathway Plan.

#### **4.10 Participation:**

Participation is having opportunities to be part of decisions that are important to you and may lead to changes". Definition created by young people at the SEND Young People's National Conference, 2019

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child says that children should be able to express their views on decisions which affect them, and that their views should be given due weight, in accordance with their age and maturity. This right applies to both decisions affecting individual children, as well as broader strategic decision-making.

At Milton Keynes City Council we want to incorporate and promote the voice of the child, family and carer in all Council activity and see participation embedded in our culture and practice. We want to see children and young people shaping their lives now and for the future; and the services and support they and other children and young people receive. We want to ensure the specific involvement of our Looked After Children, Care Leavers, children subject to child protection plans, to those who have offended and those who have SEND to get opportunities to have their voices heard. (Participation Report 2022)

These principles underpin the delivery of the Fostering Service.

The Fostering service is directly engaged with the Participation and Engagement Team to facilitate our children in care, young people with care experience and carers involvement. For young people this can include informal settings such as the different youth clubs available to them, a more formal setting in the Raise Your Voice (Children in Care Council) and through 1:1 interaction with Social Workers, Supervising Social Workers, Participation Workers and the Independent Reviewing Officer and Virtual School teams. The Voice of the Looked After Child feeds into the wider Participation work on the views of young people across MK. To strengthen and add weight to the voice of the child Milton Keynes City Council has adopted the Champion Model, where elected members Champion key areas of work, including Fostering, Voice of the Child and Children in Care.

A participation worker offers children and young people in foster care the opportunity to meet up, have fun and a place to discuss the matters that affect them in regular participation groups. Participation groups are split across the age ranges to maximise attendance and to gather the views of matters specific to the age range of the child.

#### **Raise Your Voice – Children in Care Council:**

Raise Your Voice meets regularly, both formally and informally to discuss key issues that are affecting our children in care and care leavers. To ensure as many children in care and care leavers input into Raise Your Voice, representatives regularly attend our New2UK football group that meets every Monday. After the young people have played football they gather for refreshments, socialising and often have discussions on their experiences of being in care, challenges, and positives. These views are fed back into Raise Your Voice.

Similarly Raise Your Voice members attend the Children in Care Youth Club to gather the views of the young people that attend there. For our children in care and care leavers who are out of area or cannot attend Raise Your Voice, our participation workers offer phone calls to receive the views of these young people and ensure they are fed into the wider discussions.

Raise Your Voice meets with senior managers to ensure decision makers hear the views of young people. Our Chair of Children in Care Council attends Corporate Parenting Panel to represent Raise Your Voice.

#### **4.11 Coming into Care Booklet (Children's Guide)**

A Coming into Care booklet (children's guide) is provided to all children in care, when placed, when they are of sufficient understanding to be able to benefit from the information contained in the booklet. The aim of the booklet is to provide information about what it means to be fostered, what social workers do and what children can do if they are worried about anything or are unhappy in their foster home. This is given to children, when placed, by their social worker. Foster carers are also provided with the coming into care booklet which they can use to support the child during the settling in process. The Coming into Care Booklet is reviewed annually, and a copy is sent to Ofsted and all the fostering service foster carers.

## **Recruitment and Assessment**

### **5.1 Recruitment and Assessment:**

The Milton Keynes Fostering Service actively welcomes enquiries from all individuals who are interested in fostering, regardless of age, marital status, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or disability. The fundamental criteria is whether prospective foster carers will be able to compassionately meet the complex needs of a child in care as set out in our Fostering Recruitment Policy.

The Fostering Service has a Fostering Recruitment officer who leads on recruitment, including social media campaigns, recruitment events and enquiries, with other staff supporting. The Fostering Operations Manager agrees a Recruitment Strategy/Action Plan at the beginning of each financial year. In order that this service is best placed to meet the needs of the growing numbers and changing needs of looked after children, the Recruitment Strategy/Action Plan is informed by data analysis trends in the changing looked after children population including placement sufficiency.

The Fostering Service has a landing page on the Council Website, where initial information on fostering is provided. An initial inquiry can be completed online and submitted. This is then sent to the central fostering recruitment hub and is followed up by the Recruitment Officer. The Fostering Duty system provides an alternative route of a phone call for individuals making an initial enquiry to become a foster carer. Following initial screening an initial visit is arranged by the Recruitment Officer and Recruitment social worker to discuss the application further. If both the applicant and the Recruitment Officer feel the application should proceed, this is agreed by the Deputy Team Manager for Recruitment.

Stage 1 and Stage 2 are sometimes undertaken together, depending on the information needed to progress to stage 2. Enhanced DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks are undertaken together with positive

identification checks. During this time an Assessing Social Worker is allocated to undertake the fostering assessment, support the applicants to Panel and ensure a smooth handover to their supervising social worker.

### **Timescales:**

- Initial enquiries will be responded to within one working day
- Information Packs will be sent out within one working day
- A follow up telephone call will take place within five working days
- Initial home visit offered within ten working days

From application to Fostering Panel should meet Fostering National Minimum Standard of eight months. (Fostering NMS 13:2011) The Fostering Service aims to complete any foster carers assessment within six months.

### **Assessment**

Recruitment of foster carers is carried out according to the statutory requirement that the welfare of the child is the primary consideration. Applications are welcomed from couples in stable and enduring relationships and single adults.

Prospective foster carers are assessed thoroughly, sensitively, and openly by staff who are appropriately qualified and supervised. Foster Care regulations and The Fostering minimum standards 2011 form the basis of the assessment. To meet these requirements the Fostering Service assesses potential foster carers using the Coram BAAF Form F format.

For children placed with a connected person, the Fostering team will complete the full assessment in 16 weeks or up to 24 weeks in some circumstances, in line with Regulation 24 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010.

The following conditions must be met when applying for general approval as a foster carer. All adult applicants and their household will be required to undertake statutory checks which include:

- DBS Check (Disclosure and Barring Service) on applicants and all adult members of the household aged 18 and over
- Systems check for MKC to ensure children are not known to child protection
- Health
- Schools if you have children of school age
- Previous partners
- References (personal and employment)
- Financial
- Pet assessment
- Social media check

### **Stability and Age**

Applicants must be at least 21 years of age. Applications from couples are unlikely to be accepted where the duration of their relationship has been for less than 12 months.

Applicants will need to show that they have a broad experience of life to meet the demands of this challenging role. Applicants will also need to show that they are fit and healthy enough with high energy levels to care for the young people who are fostered.

### **Accommodation**

The assessment of the accommodation will consider the safety of the child and whether there is sufficient space for all the family. It is expected that all foster children will have their own bedroom unless the child chooses to share with a sibling of a similar age and gender or is very young. These arrangements will be based on a risk assessment. It is expected that a carer will have security of tenure.

### **Contact**

Applicants must have a personal telephone number and email address. They must have the use of a home computer, to access online information such as the Foster Carers Handbook and to support children with homework.

### **Pets**

Applicants must not keep dangerous pets. All carers being assessed will have to complete a detailed Dog/Pet questionnaire.

### **Weapons**

Applicants must keep any dangerous weapons secure and in compliance with the relevant regulations, including holding a relevant up to date licence.

### **Financial security and Working Carers**

Applications from people on all levels of income including state benefits are welcome. Applicants must understand that registration as a foster carer is not a form of employment and therefore there are no guarantees regarding income. It must be considered as part of an assessment that foster carers are not paid when they do not have a child in a placement.

Applicants who work are encouraged to apply to foster but will need to evidence that they will be available to care for a child before and after school, or if the child is ill or excluded from school. They will also need to be available to attend meetings, training, and support groups. (Including facilitating the school run) if a child is ill or excluded from school and to attend planning and other meetings relating to a child/ren. Carers will also need to be available to attend training and support groups. Applicants may be able to undertake some part time work

Consideration will need to be given to other caring commitments and how these can be balanced with the fostering role.

## **Applicants' Children**

Applicants will need to ensure that becoming a foster carer will not negatively affect the welfare of any other children living with them. Milton Keynes City Council is committed to considering and supporting the welfare of applicants' children in relation to the fostering placements that are made. Foster carers birth children will be supported and seen regularly by the fostering social worker and at annual reviews. There is a regular support group for birth children.

## **Health and Smoking**

A medical will be undertaken for all applicants. Health factors that may impact on applicants' capacity to care for children will be considered when assessing applicants. These issues are important with regards to how they may impact on the applicant's capacity to care for the child/children. All medicals will be reviewed by the agency medical advisor.

With reference to current policy, due to the known health risks associated with secondary smoking Milton Keynes City Council's aim is to provide a smoke free care environment for Children in Care.

Existing carers are therefore proactively encouraged to stop smoking. Applications will not be accepted from people who smoke/vape, or have smoked in the past 12 months, for children under the age of five or disabled children. Electronic cigarettes will be classed as the same as smoking. Fostering placements will not be made in smoking households of children who are suffering from asthma or other respiratory problems, heart conditions or glue ear.

In addition, successful applicants would be expected to have a household smoking policy that prohibits smoking indoors, and that promotes a healthy understanding of the risks to health of both passive and active smoking.

Applicants will also be required to demonstrate how they will encourage young people not to smoke when they, themselves, are smokers or use E-Cigarettes. Foster Carers should not encourage children/young people to smoke or purchase tobacco under the legal age limit. Where carers are aware that young people in their care may be drinking and or smoking, they should advise the child's social worker.

## **Drugs and Alcohol**

Where Carers are prescribed drugs for purposes of treatment, they must ensure that they are properly secured in a locked medicine cabinet and present no risk to fostered children/young people. If the drugs need to be kept in the fridge, a lockable cash box is a useful way of keeping them secure. The illegal use of drugs by Foster Carers whilst they are responsible for the care of children/young people is expected to result in de-registration. Such matters will be referred to the Fostering Panel.

Foster Carers must not collude in any way with the taking of drugs by young people in their care. Carers must advise a young person's social worker of any concerns they have regarding their use of drugs.



Foster Carers must ensure that if they are drinking alcohol, this does not result in the inability to be responsible for children in their care. The service has a specific alcohol policy that is shared with Foster Carers to assist their understanding of the services expectations.

Foster Carers should be aware that many children/young people will associate alcohol with inappropriate care because of their personal experiences, and therefore may be fearful when they see Carers drinking. Foster Carers should not encourage children/young people to drink or purchase alcohol under the legal age limit. Where Carers are aware that young people in their care may be drinking alcohol, they should advise the child's social worker.

## **Transport**

Providing transport for Children in Care is an integral aspect of the role of foster carers. If approved, applicants will be required to transport children to school, medical appointments, contact and other meetings as required. They will need to have access to a car that is properly taxed, insured, maintained, and equipped at all times. Where a carer does not drive, they will need to evidence that they can transport children as required.

### **5.2 Kinship/Connected Persons Applicants:**

Kinship carers will be required to meet the same rigorous standards as mainstream applicants although there is some discretion within the assessment for these carers where that is in the interest of the child for whom they wish to care.

Relatives and friends will be treated with respect, and an acknowledgement of the difficulties of the family situation which has led to the child becoming looked after. In some cases, the child's social worker will complete a short viability assessment of the prospective carers to ensure that there is a degree of confidence in the arrangement that is being offered.

A full fostering assessment will be completed jointly by a fostering social worker and the child's social worker prior to the child being placed. In an emergency, where it is necessary for the child to be placed first, then a temporary assessment, will be undertaken and temporary approval must be agreed by the Nominated Officer.

Full approval must be given by the fostering panel and decision maker no more than 16 weeks after the child is placed (unless there are exceptional circumstances when an 8-week extension can be made), if the carers are not approved in this time, then the child must be removed from their care.

Each applicant is required to undertake a full health check (using the Coram BAAF AH form) to ensure they are fit to carry out the fostering duties. Personal and employment references are also sought.

If at any stage, the social worker considers that the assessment should not continue, this will be discussed in supervision with their line manager and then shared with the applicant(s) as soon as possible. Reasons for this decision will be provided in accordance with regulations and where appropriate a brief report will be presented to the Fostering Panel.

Subject to the Foster Panel recommending approval, the Agency Decision Maker will make the final decision regarding approval and the foster carers will receive clear terms of approval in writing.

An agreement setting out the terms of the contract between Children's Social Care and the foster carers is drawn up and signed by both parties. The terms of reference for the 'Foster Carers Agreement' are set out in the regulations and define the roles and responsibilities of Children's Social Care and foster carers.

### **5.3 Non acceptance of Applications:**

Applications will not be accepted from people who:

- Are in a household with a transient resident population – i.e. guest house or one taking students
- Wish to continue to be approved to foster for another local authority or independent agency
- Wish to continue to privately foster children

### **5.4 Fostering and Permanence Panel:**

Milton Keynes Fostering and Permanence Panel operate in accordance with relevant fostering regulations and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011.

The Panel is chaired by an independent Chair who is experienced in Fostering and there is a diverse range of experience represented on the Central List, which is regularly reviewed and recruited to.

The Panel considers the approval of prospective foster carers, reviews of current carers, the matching of children and young people into permanent fostering arrangements, where allegations made against foster carers and the termination of approvals.

New applicants and existing foster carers are invited and encouraged to attend panel when their application or review is presented to panel.

The panel has a quality assurance role and monitors the standard of reports presented to it and feeds back any issues or concerns to the Fostering Operations Manager. The panel makes recommendations to the Fostering Service and these recommendations are referred to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for a decision.

If the panel or ADM is minded not to recommend approval not to recommend approval applicants are issued with a qualifying determination and advised that they can request their case is reconsidered by the panel or apply to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM) for a review of their case.

## **5.5 Supervision, Support and Training to Foster Carers:**

Foster carers have the most important role to play within the Fostering Service and are critical to Milton Keynes City Council efforts to achieve positive outcomes for children and young people in care.

Milton Keynes City Council actively seeks to recognise the very important contribution made by foster carers through provision of supervision, training, and formal recognition. We support our carers throughout their journey, recognising the challenges they face in their first year.

All approved carers are supported once approved during the transition period of transfer from their assessing social worker to their supervising social worker. This recognises the handing over period and enables the worker with the established relationship can aid a lot of the settling process. It is important for carers to feel safe and supported during this transition as there is a lot of learning and systems to understand. It provides an opportunity to reflect on their assessment and begin matching with children and young people. Furthermore, it provides a blueprint for thoughtful transitions that carers can understand when it comes to moving a child on.

Newly approved carers have access to our Mentoring programme and can be matched with a trained and experienced foster carer. All approved foster carers are given a welcome pack.

All foster carers receive appropriate allowances which cover the cost of caring for any child placed with them and are linked to the Department of Education National Minimum Standards. In addition foster carers are entitled to a tier based professional fee which is related to their skill level. There is a separate financial policy on foster carer allowances.

All approved foster carers have access to the comprehensive training programme. All mainstream foster carers are expected to complete the training support and development (TSD) Induction Standards within the first year's training. Kinship foster carers have 18 months to complete the standards. Training workshops are regularly run to assist foster carers in completing this task.

Foster carers have access to emergency out of hours support which is provided by staff from the fostering service and runs through the night and at weekends and on bank holidays.

The service holds regular meetings with Milton Keynes Foster Care Association where foster carers have the opportunity to meet and exchange views with senior managers and help contribute to service development. The fostering service provides regular social events for foster carers and their children.

Milton Keynes pays for all its foster carers to have individual membership with Fostering Network allowing them access to an unlimited and exclusive range of independent support services. Milton Keynes will also spot purchase Fostering Networks Advice and Mediation Service to provide additional independent support to foster carers when needed.

Foster carers have access to the Foster Carers handbook which contains useful information for foster carers in relation to fostering issues.

A regular newsletter is provided to foster carers keeping them up to date on current issues, forthcoming training/events, new policies etc.

The fostering service arranges various support groups for foster carers/kinship/SGO carers and regular events for children of foster cars.

Foster carers also run their own Foster Carers Association which is supported by Milton Keynes City Council.

## **5.6 Foster Carers Household Reviews**

The approval status of foster carers is reviewed annually or whenever there is a change of circumstances or concerns about the standards of care. First annual Household Reviews are presented to Fostering and Permanence Panel and then 3 yearly. Foster Carers are invited to and encouraged to attend panel for their review. All other reviews are presented to the ADM for decision about ongoing suitability to foster. Where there is a change in carers 'terms of approval' or where there has been a complaint or allegation a Household Review is completed and presented to the Fostering and Permanence Panel for consideration.

## **Complaints and Allegations**

### **6.1 Complaints:**

Milton Keynes City Council has a clear commitment to dealing with complaints through listening, discussion and early resolution.

Under Section 26 of the Children Act 1989, children and young people who are receiving specific services from the Council, have the right and opportunity to complain if they consider that the service has not adequately provided for them, or about which they have not been consulted. It also gives parents and carers the chance to complain on behalf of the child/young person. An independent advocacy service is available to all Milton Keynes children in care.

Sometimes, the distinction between a complaint and an allegation is not always clear. If there is doubt, Fostering Services will err on the side of caution and will follow the protocol for allegations.

### **6.2 Allegations against Foster Carers:**

There is a clear and robust protocol to be followed should an allegation be made against a foster carer or a member of their household. This could be in relation to `a child currently in placement or a historical issue.

The Fostering Allegations Policy 2021 is made available for all carers.

The welfare of children remains of utmost importance and all allegations are viewed as extremely serious. From notification, a member of the management team will contact the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), to ensure that the allegation is considered independently and procedurally appropriately. LADO information packs are provided to carers. This sets out LADO role and responsibility, access to Fostering Network, independent support and advice and mediation support.

Following the conclusion to an investigation (and, where appropriate, once a completed risk assessment is available) a completed household review will be presented to the Fostering Panel for their consideration.

The service recognises the particular stress foster carers experience when they are the subject of an allegation. The supervising social worker remains the first port of call for fostering households and holds the primary function of supporting a family through this time and beyond – understanding the very real impact of allegations on emotional wellbeing.

If an Internal Investigation is required, this is undertaken by an assessing social worker. The service recognises the need for independent advice and support to carers in this situation and funds the individual membership of Fostering Network for each of our approved foster carers. Through this service, foster carers can access the services of the Fostering Network Advice and Mediation worker, in addition to their 24/7 legal help line, should an allegation or complaint be made against them or a member of their family.

### **6.3 Quality Monitoring**

The Service is subject to Inspection by Ofsted. Regular quarterly reports will be provided to the Corporate Parenting Panel providing the executive side of the Council with information/data relating to the activities of the fostering service. This information along with audits and customer feedback is constantly scrutinized/evaluated by the fostering management team to judge its ongoing effectiveness and make changes where necessary.

The Panel Advisor provides scrutiny and feedback as does the Fostering Panel Chairperson. The Fostering management team monitor data about incidents of concern in foster care including complaints and allegations made against foster carers or any unattended absences or restraints made regarding children in their care.

The Fostering Operations Manager monitors Schedule 6 &7 requirements of the Fostering Service Regulations.

The quality of the work of the Fostering Service is monitored through staff/case supervision which includes monthly recorded visits to foster carers, including unannounced visits, annual reviews, feedback from training sessions, case recording and peer/management audits.

### **6.4 Arrangements for the revision and review and circulation of the Statement of Purpose**

The Fostering Operations Manager will keep under review, and where appropriate, revise the Statement of Purpose and will notify the Chief Inspector of any such revision within 28 days. Staff and foster carers will be consulted on proposed revisions as appropriate.

The Statement of Purpose will be available to all staff via the Councils Intranet and to members of the public via the Milton Keynes City Council website.

## **7. The Registration Authority**

The Registration Authority is;

**Ofsted**

**Piccadilly Gate,**

**Store Street**

**Manchester**

**M1 2WD**

**Telephone: 0300 123 1231**

**[Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)**



**Milton Keynes**  
City Council