



# **Essex Fostering Service Statement of Purpose April 2022**

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## Foreword

National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011, section 16, requires that Essex Fostering service has a clear statement of purpose which is available to, and understood by, foster carers, staff and children. It must be focused on how the service will meet outcomes for children and must also be available to any parent or person with parental responsibility.

All reference to 'foster carer' throughout this document includes all Essex registered foster carers, supported lodgings carers and temporarily approved foster carers.

This Fostering Statement of Purpose details our; vision; aims and objectives; the way we recruit, approve, train, support and work collaboratively with foster carers; the diversity of our foster care service; services that support fostering and foster carers and the structure of the Fostering Service. All of which underpin the provision of an efficient service that meet the needs of Essex children in care.

The Statement of Purpose is reviewed by the Lead Cabinet Member for Children and Families and the Executive Director for Children, Families and Education.

**Cllr. Beverley Egan, Cabinet Member for Children and Families**



Signed:

Date: 15.07.2022

**Helen Lincoln Executive Director for Children, Families and Education**



Signed:

Date: 15.07.2022

## Introduction

Essex Fostering Service believes that Essex children, who require foster placements, benefit from being placed with Essex County Council foster carers. This enables us to take full responsibility for ensuring children are placed with families who are subject to the highest possible standards in recruitment, training, support and monitoring. It ensures that children are placed with carers we know well, enabling appropriate matching, maximising the potential for placement stability and providing the optimal conditions for children in care to thrive.

This document is intended to provide information to:

- Essex registered foster carers, supported lodgings providers and temporarily approved foster carers.
- Prospective foster carers.
- Children placed with and the birth children of Essex County Council Foster Carers.
- Essex County Council staff and other professional partners.
- Any parent or person with Parental Responsibility.
- The public.

Essex County Council's Fostering Service aims to meet the requirements of the:

- National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011.
- Fostering Services Regulations 2011.
- National Care Standards Act 2000.
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013 which amend the Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011 with respect to the assessment and approval of foster carers for looked after children.
- The Children and Families Act 2014 and the Training, Support and Development Induction Standards for Foster Care.

## Section One: Our Vision

In Essex we are committed to supporting children to remain within their families. We do so by working with them to bring about change, so that parents and carers are able to provide good parenting, firm boundaries and emotional support. Where children cannot safely remain with their families, we seek to provide high quality substitute care, preferably within family settings but otherwise in suitably matched high-quality residential units, as near as possible to the child's home locality to maintain links with their families and communities. We aim for children to be in care for the shortest time possible to achieve a sustainable exit from care that meets their needs, whether that is a return home or a permanent alternative family arrangement.

We want the same things for the children and young people we look after as any good parent would want for their child. We want children to be healthy and happy in childhood. We want them to feel valued for who they are and to feel loved. We want them to enjoy learning and to have a good experience of education. Our aim is for them to: grow into well adjusted, emotionally resourceful individuals who will experience positive relationships; be responsible and economically independent citizens; be successful parents should they choose to be parents; have ambition and high aspirations and achieve their full potential. We will achieve this by providing the highest quality of care delivered through the partnership of services for which we are both responsible and accountable. We will also work together with children and young people and with partner services to promote a positive image of care to counteract discrimination that can take place and that has a negative impact on children and young people's self-image and self-esteem.

Essex Fostering Service believes that children should receive care from foster carers who are therapeutically minded and can effectively meet children's emotional needs. Our vision is to have a whole service culture of therapeutic and trauma informed parenting where all staff and carers understand children's behaviour in the context of the trauma they have experienced. (Please see model in appendix A)

### Our Aims:

- To have 95% of Essex fostered children placed in-house, with Essex County Council foster carers by March 2028.
- To have 74% of all Essex children in care placed with Essex County Council foster carers by March 2028.
- To have foster carers who provide placements that will meet the full range of Essex' sufficiency needs including older children, children with complex behaviours, sibling groups, children with disabilities, parent and child placements.
- To recruit foster carers who are emotionally intelligent, self-reflective, and have the potential to develop and provide Essex children in care therapeutic and trauma informed parenting.
- To provide high quality supervision, and training to fostering households that fully supports them in their role and is therapeutic and trauma informed.
- To allocate supervising social workers who have manageable caseloads of no more than 12 fostering households, which enables them to practice relationship based, responsive social work.
- To proactively review, streamline and innovate processes, forms and recording systems to limit the time social workers and foster carers spend undertaking administrative tasks.

- To provide foster carers and social workers with access to clinical consultations and supervision from Mental Health Co-ordinators and clinical leads based in the fostering teams.
- To provide 24-hour support for all foster carers from supervising social workers within the fostering service who provide a consistent trauma informed response.
- To provide a service consisting of managers, practitioners and support staff who are appropriately qualified, safeguard checked, and registered with their professional regulatory bodies.

#### **Our Objectives:**

- To ensure best practice that is compliant with Fostering Services Regulations 2011, as amended by The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review and Fostering Services (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013. National Minimum Standards and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010.
- To provide foster placements for children that are appropriately matched, resilient to unplanned breakdowns, that meet children's emotional needs and that enable children to thrive.
- To provide foster placements for children that expertly support their care plan whether that is for reunification with birth family, transition to an alternative permanent family, or remaining long term with their current foster carer.
- To provide a diverse range of fostering households that aligns, as far as possible, with the diversity of our children in care population. To ensure all fostering households positively promote children's racial, cultural, religious and linguistic heritage as well as considering their needs arising from gender, sexuality or disability.
- To provide the potential for young people to "Stay put" in their foster home beyond their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday when appropriate.
- To work with the Involvement Team, Children in Care Council, Essex foster carers, Child Care teams, and other partners to share our vision and ensure meaningful consultation informs all Fostering Service development.
- To communicate effectively and work collaboratively with our foster carers through engagement with Essex Foster Carer Association, providing foster carer forums within each quadrant and regular fostering Board meetings.
- To seek innovation and remain committed to continuous development informed by national and local interest groups, Eastern Region forums, the Department for Education and Partners in Practice work.



## Section Two: Pre-approval

### Recruitment and Approval

The financial year 2021 - 2022 was another challenging year for the fostering recruitment teams. We recruited 40 new households but experienced a net loss of 7 households. This is significantly lower than our target which was to recruit 60 households with a net gain of 30. Deregistration figures increased significantly throughout the Covid pandemic and this higher level of exits did not decline, as hoped, during 2021-2022. Recruitment figures have continued to be suppressed since the Covid pandemic and this has been further compounded by the rise in the cost of living in the last quarter of 2021-22 (*please refer to the Fostering Service Annual report 2020-2021 for further details and analysis on recruitment figures*)

In 2022- 2023 we will undertake a review of our fees and allowances and will implement an uplift if the review indicates it is necessary. We will also explore opportunities to strengthen retention; for example, through additional outreach worker support, training officer posts, expansion of Oasis Network etc. All viable ideas will be presented to Essex Transformation Board in September 2022 to request further investment in the fostering business case to maximise the potential for us to expand the use of in-house foster carers to meet the sufficiency needs of our children in care.

We will continue to focus our recruitment and assessments on carers who can meet our sufficiency needs; older children, children with complex behaviours, sibling groups, children with disabilities. We will not assess carers who want to care solely for children aged 0-2 years. We monitor our sufficiency needs very closely within each quadrant and open assessment for carers wishing to care for children 0-2 only when this is required.

### Our marketing strategy

In 2022-2023 based on marketing data and insight our strategy will continue as an 'always on' approach. This means that we will have a continuous digital presence designed to nurture interest throughout the year and position Essex as the provider of choice in a highly competitive market. We will review our branding use the voice of our current carers to strengthen the messaging about what we do well; for example highlighting feedback about our outstanding training courses etc.

Each year we have three bursts of campaign activity to drive traction at a time that most resonates: January, Foster Care Fortnight in May and September. Campaigns are highly targeted and will reflect the needs of the service at the time. This year we will focus on; older children, children with complex behaviours, sibling groups, and parent & child placements. We will also focus on proactively reaching out to potential applicants from the LGBTQ+ and BAME communities.

The 'always' on approach gives us the opportunity to engage with prospective carers regarding specific types of fostering such as fostering children with disabilities and recruiting Supported Lodgings Providers. It also provides opportunity to maintain an emphasis on our trauma informed, therapeutic approach to parenting.

There are two key phases of activity across both the 'always on' activity and the targeted campaigns:

- **Inspire** – inspirational videos and stories harnessing the transformational power of fostering

- **Inform** – videos and content designed to dispel myths and position Essex as a provider of choice.

The tactics we use are:

- Paid: social media, digital display, dynamic audio, out of home, paid search and radio.
- Earned: PR, online and print press, hyper local, radio, social media, TV, word of mouth and advocacy.
- Shared: social media, PR, events, e-newsletters and partnership packs.
- Owned: social media, video, e-newsletters, internal communications, ambassadors and web content.

This strategy means we're better nurturing interested people and engaging them at the different stages of their fostering journey from 'consideration and prospecting' phases to 'active' and 'ready to take the next step'. We now have a continuous flow of enquiries and can keep people engaged with Essex County Council.

### **The recruitment teams**

The Service has two dedicated Recruitment and Assessment Teams that deal with all aspects of marketing, recruitment and assessment of new fostering households.

We maintain a dedicated recruitment information telephone line, where our Initial Enquiry Workers operate extended hours from 9am – 8pm Monday to Thursday, 9am - 4.30pm on Friday and 9 – 12 Saturday mornings. We have an informative website which is regularly updated and a recruitment newsletter to communicate with families who have expressed an interest in becoming Foster Carers but are not yet ready to commit to assessment.

We have a vibrant group of Foster Carer Ambassadors who co-construct social media and marketing campaigns, support recruitment events, jointly facilitate 'skills to foster' courses and initial visits; and buddy up with potential applicants to guide them through the process. We also plan to engage the whole service in providing us with details of positive outcomes for children, positive feedback from household reviews, training events or case file audits to create ongoing social media content.

### **The Assessment Process**

Our Initial Enquiry Workers manage the "front door" promptly and provide ongoing communication with potential applicants. If the enquirer wishes to proceed, a home visit by a social worker is arranged by the Recruitment Team. This is undertaken alongside a current approved Foster Carer. Following the home visit the enquirer completes their application form and must give consent for us to make relevant safeguard checks to assess their initial suitability to become a Foster Carer.

The process for assessing a person's suitability to foster consists of two parts. These can be carried out concurrently,

**Stage 1:** Information required within stage 1 must be sought as soon as possible and the decision about whether an applicant has successfully completed stage 1 must be made within 10 days of receiving all relevant information in that stage.

Safeguard checks undertaken:

- Disclosure and Barring Service checks on all members of the household aged 18 or over and regular visitors to the household. This will involve disclosure of information about any criminal convictions or cautions and other information which may be held by the police or government agencies relevant to the protection of children.



- The applicant will also be required to have a medical examination completed by their GP and the report will be made available to the Essex County Council Medical Adviser their comments about the health of the applicant and any impact on their potential to foster.

Once the applicant indicates a wish to proceed, they will be invited to attend our 'Skills to Foster' training.

**Stage 2:** After attending the skills to foster training, applicants will be assigned an assessing Social Worker, who will begin their assessment.

Further safeguard checks will be undertaken including:

- verification of identity and personal history;
- County Council database checks including enquiries to all relevant Social Care Departments and Child Protection Registers;
- Enquiries to other relevant agencies including NSPCC and Probation.
- At least 3 personal referees who will provide both written references and be interviewed.
- Employment referees.

During the assessment the allocated Social Worker usually visits on six to eight occasions to meet and collect information about all members of the household. The assessment will explore; the family composition; the experiences of the applicants own upbringing; their motivation for becoming a foster carer, their skills in relation to parenting or communicating with children. The assessment especially focuses on the applicant's potential to provide emotionally attuned parenting.

During the assessment applicants will also attend our 'Fostering in the Modern World' training.

All information and observations obtained from the assessment, safeguard checks, reference checks and training will form the basis of an assessment called Essex Fostering and Supported Lodgings Assessment. This report is shared with the applicant and then presented to the Fostering Panel. Applicants are invited to attend the Fostering Panel when their application is being considered. The Fostering Panel makes recommendations about the suitability of the applicant to be approved as Foster Carers.

The Agency Decision Maker who in Essex is the Head of Permanency, Placements & Sufficiency, receives the recommendation of the Fostering Panel and on behalf of the Service makes the final decision about approval. Applicants are informed verbally and in writing of the Service's decision.

The full assessment process, on average, takes five to six months. Every effort is made to ensure there are no avoidable delays. All information is held on a secure file and can be viewed by the applicant, on request. References from external agencies and personal references, which are provided in confidence, cannot be shared without permission of both the subject and the relevant referee.

### **Professional Development for Foster Carers**

Parenting any child is demanding work, being a Foster Carer adds many more layers of complexity. All children in care have experienced trauma and require skilled, therapeutic parenting from emotionally resilient and reflective Foster Carers. In addition, Foster Carers must understand a wide range of issues such as the impact of discrimination; the importance of the child's ongoing relationship with their birth family; how to work effectively with others in the child's network; etc.

The provision of good quality pre and post approval training for Foster Carers is, therefore, vital. Essex provides a wide range of learning opportunities to enable Foster Carers to be effective in their role. A Fostering

Training Focus group, which includes Foster Carers, meets regularly to constantly review, develop and innovate our training offer to Foster Carers.

It is our expectation that Essex Foster Carers are committed to and take responsibility for their ongoing personal development throughout their time as registered Foster Carers. When fostering as part of a couple both carers must engage with personal development, even when there are clearly defined 'primary' and 'secondary' carer arrangements within a household.

### **Pre-Approval training:**

- **Skills to Foster**

The course comprises four sessions run over two days. We run this jointly with foster carers on all sessions. We keep groups small and as interactive as possible.

The Sessions cover:

1. Introductions and Identity
2. Attachment and Secure Base – from a trauma informed perspective.
3. Safer Caring
4. Transitions

We ensure that we cover areas such as why children come into care, legal context, support for Foster Carers, record keeping and contact. The skills to foster training emphasises our trauma informed therapeutic approach to parenting. We plan to maintain fortnightly face to face courses throughout 2022 -2023.

- **Fostering in the modern world**

This 1 day 'taster' training session will be run every 6 weeks on Zoom to prospective foster carers, introducing issues relating to 'hidden harm' exploitation, gangs and social media as well as providing additional information about our trauma informed approach.

## Section Three: Post approval

### **Post Approval Training:**

The training offered is devised and overseen by a 6 weekly Training focus group. Courses for carers are facilitated by Mental Health co-ordinators, Supervising Social Workers, subject area expert trainers or lecturers commissioned through Essex Social Care Academy and once recruited, by our Clinical leads.

The training programme includes learning available through distance learning, e-learning, clinical consultations, supervision as well as a wide range of face-to-face courses (which resumed in person during 2021-22). Courses vary in length and depth, from half day workshops to a programme that run weekly for 10 weeks. All learning provided is underpinned by our belief that foster carers should provide therapeutic and trauma informed parenting and all courses have been reviewed to ensure compliance to this approach. We removed Fostering Changes from our curriculum due to its predominantly behaviouralist approach to parenting and have replaced it with Non Violent residence training that we have adapted for fostering. .

### **First year of registration:**

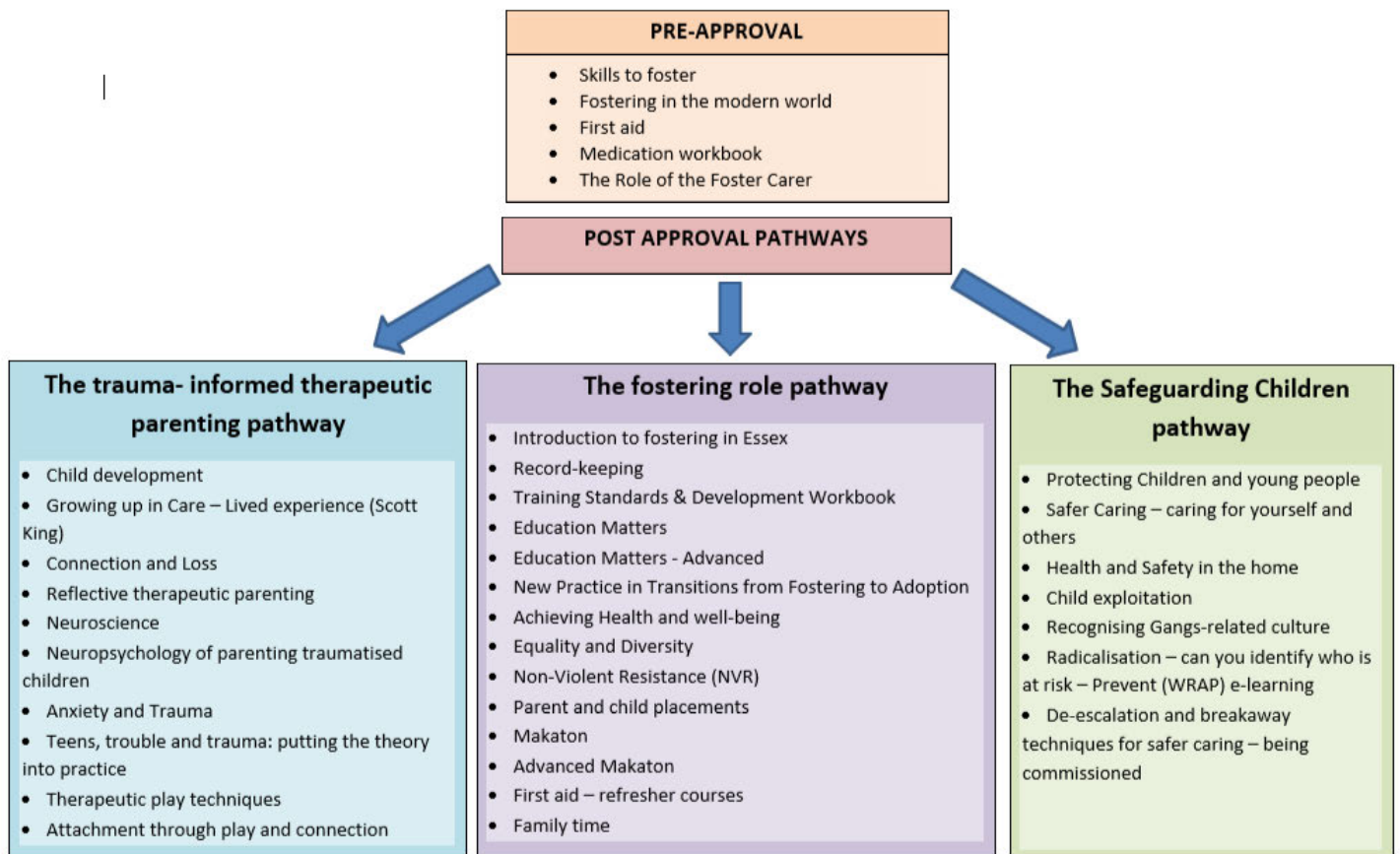
All newly approved carers should complete a minimum of 6 training / learning activities in their first 12 months of approval or within 18 months for short break or 'narrow' approved carers. All newly approved Supported Lodgings carers should complete a minimum of 3 training/ learning activities including mandatory WRAP training.

After the first 12 months all carers, including Supported Lodgings carers, should complete a minimum of 3 training /learning activities a year for the duration of their continued registration. Each foster carer will have a Personal Development Plan (PDP) devised by the carer in consultation with their Supervising Social Worker, which is updated annually. This plan will outline each Foster Carer's development needs and detail how this learning will be achieved.

### Curriculum training programmes.

There are separate curriculums set up for carer 1, carer 2 and supported lodgings carers. These support the different types of carers to access relevant courses in order and within realistic timescales. The curriculum training programme encourages completion of essential courses as a priority before embarking on other 'recommended' courses. .

### Foster Carer Training Pathways 2022/2023



### Other Areas of Development

There are many opportunities for Essex Foster Carers to develop and gain skills beyond caring for our vulnerable children. We have **Ambassador** schemes for recruitment, **Mentor** schemes for carers in assessment, carers moving children to live with adoptive families, carers reunifying children with their birth families. We have an Emergency Duty scheme a PACE bed Scheme, a Short Break scheme, the **Oasis Network** which is a peer support / extended family model of care. Foster Carers also co-present some of our key training courses and help run support groups and events. All these initiatives rely on Essex Foster Carers becoming involved and developing their expertise and knowledge.

## **Training, Support and Development (TSD) Induction Standards**

The Central government Department for Education have created Training, Support and Development Standards to provide guidance for Foster Carers on the requirements for their initial training and their ongoing continuous professional development.

It is a requirement that all Fostering Agencies ensure foster carers complete a TSD induction workbook. There are three TSD induction workbooks for carers, one for Foster Care, one for Short Breaks Care and one for Family and Friends Care.

All newly approved Foster Carers and Short Break Carers have 12 months to complete these from when they are approved as Foster Carers. All new Connected Persons carers have 18 months to complete these from the time when they were approved as Foster Carers.

Essex run workshops and Supervising Social Workers are available to support Foster Carers to complete these books and to support understanding of the expectations that Foster Carers engage in Continuous professional development.

## **Supervision and support for Foster Carers**

- **Allocated Supervising Social Worker**

Each fostering household is allocated a Supervising Social Worker (SSW). In Essex SSWs have a maximum of 12 fostering households to supervise. This allow them the time to develop meaningful relationships and to respond when challenges arise. The Supervising Social Worker's role includes; providing regular formal supervision; working with each member of the fostering household, including birth children, to support carers in all aspects of their fostering role; helping foster carers in their liaison with other teams within Children and Families Services as well as with other agencies

Supervising Social Workers visit Foster Carers regularly and have capacity to visit frequently when required. During these visits Supervising Social Workers read the notes completed by the foster carers concerning the children in placement and discuss any matters arising. During visits the Supervising Social Workers are observant of any health and safety, child protection, and standards of care issues which need to be addressed.

Supervising Social Workers offer advice on how to manage children in a way that is mindful of the trauma they have experienced and supportive of our therapeutic parenting approach. Essex Fostering Service believes that when parenting traumatised children Foster Carers will experience things that 'trigger' memories from their past and when Foster Carers are experiencing difficulties in their own lives this these inevitably impact on their relationship with the child and the care that they give the child. It is therefore imperative that Essex Foster Carers can reflect on their past and are open to discussing their emotions and feelings with their SSW.

- **Mental Health Coordinators & Clinical lead posts.**

Within each quadrant Mental Health Coordinators and Psychologists are an integral part of the fostering team and are fully dedicated to Fostering. They provide expert advice and support through direct work, consultations, clinical supervision and training to support Foster Carers and Social Workers to understand and manage children in care. They support the whole service to maintain and promote understanding of the impact of trauma on children and to ensure that children receive parenting that is, in essence, therapeutic.

- **Therapeutic Fostering Team (TFT)**

The Therapeutic Fostering Team provide 'wrap around' support, alongside the quadrant fostering team including the SSW, Mental Health Coordinator and Psychologist, to foster carers who take a child who was formally in a residential care, or who has experienced multiple placement breakdowns. The TFT work with the

quadrant Fostering Teams and the Principal Psychologist to 'family find' and make the best possible match for children who are 'stepping down' from residential care.

- **Support Groups, Foster Carer Forums, Meet and Greet Sessions.**

Each fostering team runs local support groups which provide a forum for learning, peer support and networking. Groups offered include, daytime, evening, CWD groups, connected carer, sons and daughters, male foster carers, supported lodgings,

Each quadrant runs forums or sessions where foster carers can meet their Director for Local Delivery and other senior staff and can discuss with them directly all relevant issues impacting on their fostering role. Issues raised at these forums feed into the Fostering Board in order to improve practice.

- **Foster Carer Newsletter**

A monthly central newsletter ensures that foster carers are kept informed of all relevant issues and that consistent and clear messages were shared with all foster carers and supported lodgings carers across Essex.



The Oasis Network provides an 'extended family' model of support to Foster Carers and their children. The 'Oasis Carer' provides support, social events and regular respite to up to 10 'Network carers'. Essex have 6 Oasis Networks running, with active plans for 2 more. They have been hugely successful at maintaining foster carer satisfaction as well as supporting placement stability. The fostering business case review includes plans to request funding for further Oasis Networks.

- **Fostering Out of hours Support line**

An out of hours telephone support service for Foster Carers is provided by Social Workers and Fostering Managers in the fostering service. This covers periods when the office is not usually open (17.30 until 9.00 during the week and over weekends and bank holidays).

- **Emergency Duty Service (EDS)**

The Emergency Duty Service deals with all emergency social care referrals and situations out of working hours, and it covers the whole of Essex. It also deals with emergencies in adult and children's social care.

Emergency Duty Service can be contacted on 0345 606 1212.



All Essex Foster Carers have membership to The Fostering Network paid for by Essex County Council. The Fostering Network provides newsletters and regular information, consultation, updates on national developments and training.

A helpline is available to members on 020 7401 9582 from 10.00am - 3.00pm Monday to Friday or you can email them at [info@fostering.net](mailto:info@fostering.net)

Foster Carer members of The Fostering Network can access a **24-hour legal helpline** for expert advice on allegations and help with any legal queries on 01384 885734 and a completely confidential **stress support service** on 01384 885734. (Please ask to be put through to the stress helpline)

The Fostering Network also provides **independent support for foster Carers if there has been an allegation** against them. All Essex Foster Carers facing an allegation can access independent support, via their supervising social worker. The Fostering Network will allocate an independent support worker within a day or two to provide their expertise and guidance until the allegation or complaint against is resolved.

Find out more about [The Fostering Network's independent support service](#).



- **The Essex Foster Care Association**

is an independent charitable trust run by local authority Foster Carers for local authority Foster Carers. Membership is offered to all Essex local authority Foster Carers at approval. Members benefit from: a quarterly newsletter, sons and daughters support, Quadrant based committees and fundraising activities. More information is available via the [EFCA website](#) or by calling 0300 777 1234.

- **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service**

Provides emotional wellbeing and mental health advice and support for young people and their families across Southend, Essex and Thurrock. Foster Carers would usually access this support for their children in Care in liaison with the child's allocated social worker.

- **Staff benefits**

All Essex Foster Carers are entitled to Essex County Council 'staff benefits' to enabling them access to a wide range of discounts and rewards.

- **Capital funding**

Registered Foster Carers, who we know well and who have evidenced their fostering skills are able to apply for capital funding which can be used to extend their property to expand their fostering offer.

### **Assessment of foster carers' ongoing suitability to care for children.**

Fostering Household Reviews are undertaken annually. They are also held when there has been a significant change of circumstances or when an allegation or concerns raised about the care a Foster Carer has provided.

Fostering Household Reviews are organised and chaired by the Household Review team who are independent from the Fostering Service in consultation with the foster carer and SSW. They provide a high level of appropriate independent scrutiny and quality control of the work undertaken by the Fostering Service to support the Fostering household, as well as the work undertaken by Foster Carers.

The Fostering Household Review analyses feedback from as many people as possible including; the Foster Carer; the Supervising Social worker; Children in Care and their parents; the Child's social worker and the child's Independent Reviewing Officer; relevant health and education professionals, this provides a breadth of information to facilitate explorative discussions and will inform recommendations. It also ensures that all statutory safeguarding checks have been undertaken, for example; that each member of the fostering household continue to hold a clear DBS; unannounced home visits have been carried out; a home Health and Safety check has been carried out etc.



A review event is attended by the Foster Carer, Supervising Social Worker and Household Reviewing Officer. This meeting explores the Foster Carer's experiences of fostering each child, how each member of the household is contributing to the fostering task, whether they are receiving the support they need from their SSW and the Fostering Service; any issues and concerns that have arisen and whether the Foster Carer's terms approval remains appropriate.

All **first** Household Reviews must be presented to the Fostering Panel. Fostering Panel will also need to consider Reviews if the Foster Carer's terms of approval need to change, if there have been allegations made since the last review, or if the Fostering Service is recommending de-registration. Foster Carers will be invited to attend the Fostering Panel alongside their Supervising Social Worker.

### **Refusal or Termination of Approval**

Prospective Foster Carers and registered Foster Carers can make representation to the Fostering Service or ask for an independent review of their case if they do not agree with the decision of the Agency Decision Maker following Fostering Panel. They can request that Fostering Panel reconsiders their case or alternatively can ask for an independent review from the national Independent Review Mechanism. In these circumstances Essex Fostering Service recommend that Foster Carers make use of The Fostering Network's Independent Support Service.

## **Section Four: Placements, Fees & Allowances**

### **Placements and Types of Fostering**

Essex Fostering Service provides placements for children and young people who need to be looked after in accordance with the Children Act 1989, the Care Standards Act 2000 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services and Fostering Services Regulations 2011. Essex Foster Carers provide emergency, short term, long term linked, respite and short break placements, Connected Person Foster placements as well as supported lodgings placement which are an available option for young people 16 – 18 years old.

When an Essex child requires a foster placement, their social worker makes a referral to the centralised Children and Young People Placement Service (CYPPS) A detailed matching process identifies the child's needs and a risk assessment is completed. CYPPS work with each Essex Fostering Team to seek a suitable in-house Essex County Council Foster Carer. This is always the priority; Essex County Council Foster Carers therefore have the maximum choice and potential to find a child that matches with their family.

When it is not possible to find an appropriately matched placement for a child with an Essex County Council Foster Carer, CYPPS will liaise with Independent Fostering Agencies or residential providers.

Essex County Council has a range of services, schemes and projects aimed at meeting the needs of children, including:

- A specialist Fee Paid Short Break scheme for children with disabilities
- The PACE Bed scheme ensures that children do not remain in police custody unnecessarily.
- An Emergency Bed scheme provides foster placements for children out of office hours.



## Fees and allowances

Our fee structure was reviewed with significant uplift received by most carers in 2018. In 2020 there were minor amendments made to some specialist fees which included increases in carers for CWD. Our allowances increase each year in line with inflation (on the 31<sup>st</sup> Dec) This April allowances increase by 4.8%

In year 5 of our fostering business case, a further review of our fees, allowances and expenses entitlement is underway to incentivise recruitment and to response to the rise in cost of living.

### 2022 – 2023

#### Paid per child per week

##### Mainstream fostering fees

- £200 + allowance for children 0-10 years
- £250 + allowance for children 11-18 years

##### Supported Lodging fees

- £250 + £61.05 personal allowance for children 16+  
(as of April 22 there is an additional personal allowance £20 Covid top-up)

##### Specialist fees

- £250 + allowance for children 0-10 years with **highly complex needs** (details below)
- £350 + allowance for children who; '**step down**' from residential, to '**break the cycle**' of multiple placement breakdown, require a '**solo**' placement (details below)
- £350 + allowance (0-18) for placement of children with diagnosed disabilities **and** associated highly complex needs who are **not allocated** with the children with disabilities teams (details below)
- £500 + allowance (0-18) for placements of children with diagnosed disabilities who are allocated within the **Children with Disabilities** teams
- £1000 + allowance (0-18) for placements of children allocated with the **Children with Disabilities** teams who require a high level of **2 to 1 care or waking night care**
- £12.91 per hour and £90 overnight rate for **CWD short breaks**
- £500 fee for **Parent & Child Placements** + allowance x 2 for both parent and child if under 18 (if parent is over 18 the allowance is negotiated dependent upon the parents' benefit entitlement)

##### Specialist schemes

- £500 + £90 overnight rate **Fee Paid Short Breaks Scheme - 5 nights**
- £300 + £90 overnight rate **Fee Paid Short Breaks Scheme - 3 nights**
- £250 per week duty payment + allowance & fee (when a child is placed) for being on the **PACE Bed Scheme** rota
- £350 per week duty payment + allowance & fee (when a child is placed) for being on the **Emergency Bed Scheme** rota

##### Narrow fee

- £50 + allowance (0-18 years)

*This level is for carers with narrow approval e.g., carers registered for named child/ren only; or 0-2 years only; or registration excludes children from specific groups of need/behaviour.*

### 2022 – 2023 Allowances

#### Paid per child per week

Aged 0-4 years	£165.55
Aged 5-10 years	£188.65

Aged 11-15 years	£234.71
Aged 16+ years	£249.76

Allowances increased on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 by 4.8%.  
Essex allowances are above the government recommended allowance rates.

### Foster Carer Expenses

The child's fostering allowance covers the costs of looking after a child. However, there are many additional costs not normally associated with being a parent for which Essex fosters are entitled to claim as additional expenses. These include mileage allowances for transporting children to family time and school (outside of catchment) mileage for carers to attend training and meetings. Carers can also claim an hourly rate when they support the service with activities such as recruitment, or when they provide day care.

(See Appendix B for full details.)

## Section Five: Developments

### Developments undertaken in 2021/22

On the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 there were 532 fostering households within Essex Fostering Service including 53 connected person carers, 29 supported lodgings carers, and 21 early permanency carers (foster to adopt). This is 10 fewer households than at March 31<sup>st</sup> 2021

On the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 we had **1161 Children in Care** of which 836 were in foster carer and 615 children were fostered within Essex Fostering Service, including children placed with connected carers and with supported lodgings carers. 217 children were fostered with Independent Fostering Agencies.

We aim to have 95% of fostered children placed in-house, with Essex County Council foster carers by March 2028. At the end of Year 4- 2021/22, we had 74%. This is a 3% decrease from end of Year 3, demonstrating disappointing progress towards our 10-year goal. We aim to have 74% of **all** children in care placed with Essex County Council Foster Carers by March 2028. At the end of Year 4- 2021/22 we had 53%. This is a 3.6% decrease from the end of Year 2 again demonstrating disappointing progress towards our 10-year goal.

Analysis shows this is due the continuation of high de-registration rates (since the Covid pandemic) and lower recruitment rates than the first 2 record high years after the launch of the business case. The current cost of living crisis is also likely to impact negatively on applications to a service that cannot guarantee an income (carers are self-employed and payments made when children are in placement) Despite the setback during the pandemic and the continued slow recovery from Covid exacerbated by increases in the cost of living, we remain focused on our 10-year goal of 95% of fostered children being placed in-house. However, we intend to extend the timeframe of delivery which considers time for recovering from the pandemic. Plans and financial costing will be presented to the Transformation Board in Sept 2022.

The Fostering Project Board continued to monitor the fostering business case targets throughout 2021/ 22. Slow progress against the 2028 targets and concerns about the cost-of-living crisis triggered senior managers to request a review of our fees, allowances and explore other investment ideas that might strengthen in-house fostering sufficiency.

A digital workstream has maintained focused on Information Technology, recording and system processes to digitalise carers interactions with the service. Online expense forms and recording forms launched in 2021, have been reviewed and improved and further digital forms are now being considered. Exploration of domain name email addresses is underway to improve our communication methods alongside improving cyber security.

We have reviewed the clinical service, engaging relevant leaders across children and families to design a model which explains our vision of a 'whole service culture of trauma informed therapeutic care' (please see appendix A)

We have redesigned the role of the 'clinical leads' to attract the right people to the posts. We have renewed the clinical governance and prepared the service to make best use of the Clinical Lead's unique contribution to children's mental health, wellbeing and placement stability.

We have developed Non-Violence Resistance training for foster carers. This is a 10-week, trauma informed programme facilitated by supervising social workers. It has replaced our Fostering Changes programme as the behavioural approaches and techniques taught were at odds with our therapeutic approach.

The Therapeutic Fostering Team created a pilot project in the North quadrant, offering a short term, emergency therapeutic response to foster families at risk of a child experiencing an unplanned move

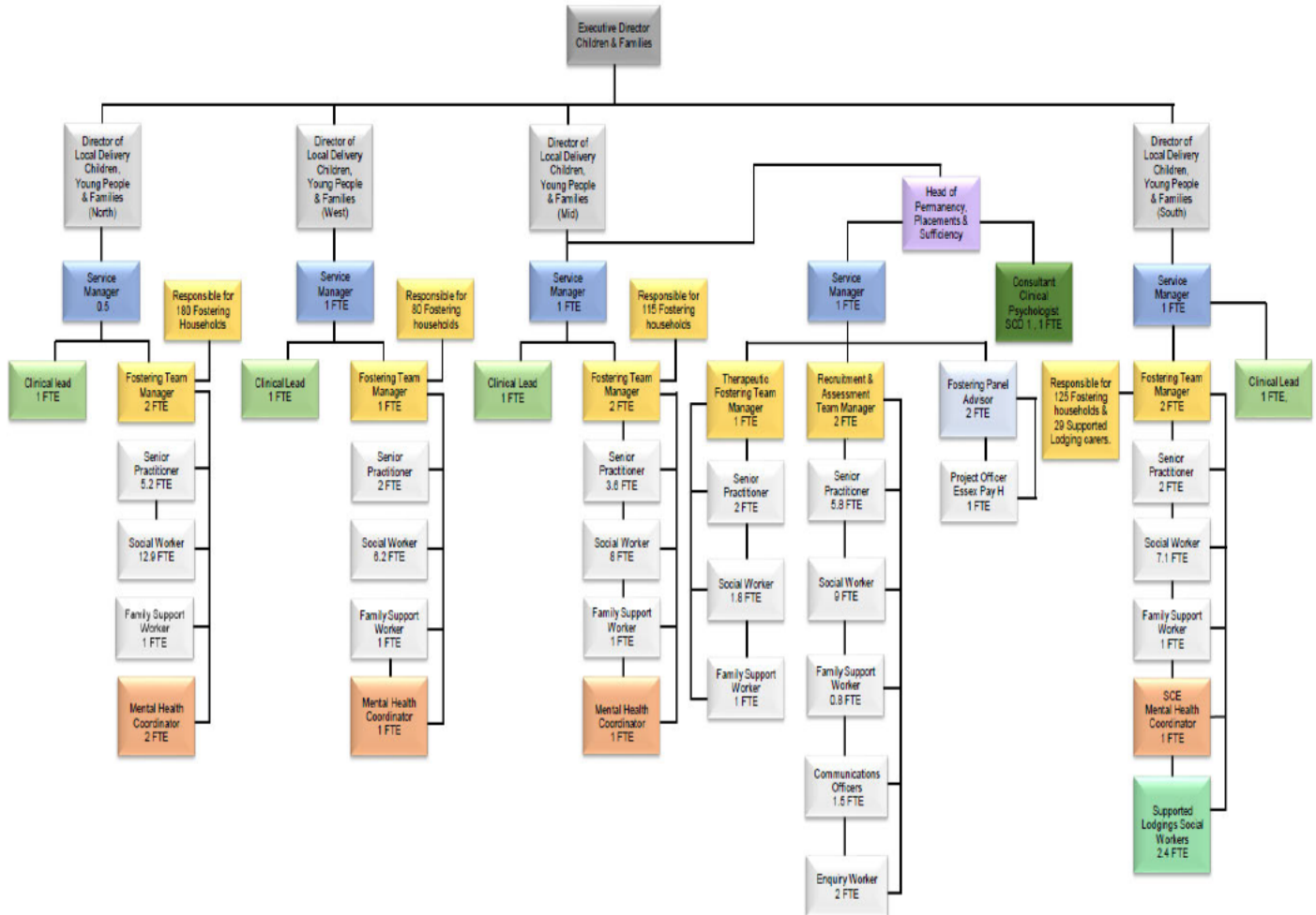
Two new Oasis Networks were launched creating 6 Networks across Essex. Each Oasis Network provides an 'extended family' model of support to up to 10 fostering households. Funding is in place to develop a further 2 networks in 2022/23.

A full-time Occupational Therapist was recruited to fostering service to strengthen the recruitment, supervision and learning for foster carers who take children with disabilities. The post holder has been instrumental in ensuring adequate support, training and home adaptations for carers who provide homes or short breaks for children with disabilities.

Our new allegation policy was launched in June 2021 following a significant review in consultation with LADO, The Fostering Network and Essex Foster Carer Association. This is now undergoing a 6-month review.

We have worked with The Fostering Network to sustain the Eastern Region fostering recruitment forum and have developed a separate Eastern Region supervision and support forum. Both have gained momentum over the year and have consistent participation from most Eastern Region Local authorities.

## Section Six: Structure of the fostering service



### Description of Fostering Service

The service is led by the Head of Permanency, Placement and Sufficiency who is managed by the Director for Local Delivery, Mid Quadrant. There are seven Locality Fostering Teams across four quadrants:

- |                      |                |
|----------------------|----------------|
| 1. Colchester        | North quadrant |
| 2. Clacton           | North quadrant |
| 3. Basildon Team 1   | South quadrant |
| 4. Basildon Team 2   | South quadrant |
| 5. Chelmsford Team 1 | Mid quadrant   |
| 6. Chelmsford Team 2 | Mid quadrant   |
| 7. Harlow            | West quadrant  |

These teams are responsible for the supervision of their local foster carers, post approval, including kinship, connected person carers. They are managed by area quadrant Service Managers, who are also responsible

for other childcare teams and supervise the clinical lead posts. These quadrant Service Managers were managed by their respective quadrant Director for Local Delivery.

There are two Fostering Recruitment Teams (see section 2)

The Therapeutic Fostering Team who works countywide to family find and provide intensive therapeutic support alongside the allocated quadrant fostering team for children who need to 'step down' from residential care, who have experienced multiple placement breakdown or where a placement is vulnerable to breakdown.

The central Fostering Service Manager is the Ofsted Registered Fostering Manager and line manages the Recruitment Teams and Therapeutic Fostering team. They also have strategic responsibility for fostering, including overseeing policies, allegations, training and communication with foster carers and ensuring consistency in practice across the whole Fostering Service.

#### **Clinical leads and Mental Health Coordinators**

To support our whole service culture of trauma informed therapeutic care in addition to the central Therapeutic Fostering Team, we have a clinical lead post and mental health coordinators based in each quadrant who provide social care staff and foster carers with clinical consultations, training and direct work with children and or foster families where a referral to the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service is not appropriate.

#### **SGO and Connected Person Service**

Essex now has a separate service comprising 3 teams dedicated to SGO and connected persons assessment and SGO support. These teams undertake all SGO and connected carer assessments. Once approved as foster carers, connected carers are transferred to the seven locality Fostering teams.

## **Section 7: Fostering staff qualifications and experience.**

The Fostering Service has a wide range of qualified and unqualified members of staff with experience in both fostering and other social work settings. The list of current staff and their relevant qualifications and experience will be made available to the Ofsted Inspection Service on request.

#### **Registered Manager for Fostering -**

**Julie Macer-Wright, Fostering Service Manager**

#### **Qualifications**

BA(hons) Social Policy Leeds Polytechnic 1992

DipSW Goldsmiths College London 1997

MA Social Worker Goldsmiths College London 1997

Practice Teachers Award, University East Anglia 2008

Multi-Agency Approaches to Systemic Supervision, Compass 2017

Certificate in Systemic Leadership & Management, Institute of Family Therapy 2019

#### **Experience**

Childcare Social Worker London Borough Camden 1998-2002

Fostering Social worker London Borough Waltham Forest 2002-2006

Fostering Senior Practitioner, Suffolk County Council 2006-2010

Fostering Manager, Suffolk County Council 2010-2018

Fostering Service Manager, Essex County Council since 2018



**Agency Decision Makers -****Sarah Carter, Head of Permanency, Placements & Sufficiency****Qualifications**

DipSW, Anglia Ruskin University 1998

BSc (Hons) Anglia Ruskin university 2002

Practice Teaching Award, University of East Anglia 2006

MA in Advanced Social Work Practice & Planning, University of East Anglia 2007

ADCS / Virtual Staff College Aspiring Leader's Programme 2013

ILM Level 7 certificate in Leadership and Management 2014

**NAAS Accredited Children and Family Practitioner 2020 Experience**

Childcare Social Worker 1998 – 2004

Management posts within Children's Social Care in Essex since 2004

**Sukriti Sen, Director of Local Delivery Mid Quadrant****Qualifications**

CQSW Polytechnic of North London (London Metropolitan University) 1992

MA Health and Social Care Management – London Metropolitan University 2008

Advanced Award in Social Work – London Metropolitan University 2008

**Experience**

Social Worker in children and families service until 1999

Looked After Children Co-ordinator from 1999-2002

Team Manager for Looked After Children Team 2002-2005

Senior Manager positions in 2 London authorities and in Essex Since 2005

Trustee on Frontline Board Since 2015

**Nicky Oshaughnessy, Director of Local Delivery North Quadrant****Qualifications**

BA (Hons) Applied Social Studies, Hatfield Polytechnic 1989

CQSW, Hatfield Polytechnic 1989

Accredited Practice Teachers Award – Portsmouth University 1993

Client First Certificate in Management 1998

NVQ Assessor Award – D32/D33 2003

Post Graduate Certificate in Management 2003

ILM Level 7 Certificate in Executive Coaching and Leadership Mentoring 2013

Leadership Development, Ashridge Business College 2013

Trained and Approved LGA Peer Reviewer 2014

Systemic Leadership, Institute of Family Therapy 2015

NAAS Accredited Children and Family Practitioner 2020

**Experience**

Generic Social Worker, then Childcare Social Worker and Senior Practitioner in 3 authorities until 1996

Management posts in 2 authorities

Senior Management posts in Essex since 2004

**Michelle Hayden-Pepper, Director of Local Delivery North Quadrant****Qualifications**

BA (Hons) International Social Work, University of East London 1999

Diploma in Social Work, University of East London 1998

Post Graduate Diploma in Systemic Practice, Bedford University 2014

Trained and Approved LGA Peer Reviewer 2019

Systemic Leadership, Institute of Family Therapy 2015

Systemic supervision accreditation Institute of Family Therapy 2014

NAAS Accredited Children and Family Practitioner 2020  
 Family Group conference accredited coordinator, Family Rights Group 2006  
 Restorative Justice accredited practitioner, Family Rights Group 2005  
 Practice Leaders Development Programme, Centre for Systemic Social Work 2018

### **Experience**

Childcare Social Worker and senior practitioner in child protection teams across three boroughs, set up and delivery of FGC and crisis intervention service in a London borough, duty senior, team manager and service manager in child protection in Essex between 2010-2016. Head of service in London borough between 2016 and 2021.

Director in Essex since Jan 2021.

### **Gaye Cole, Director of Local Delivery South Quadrant**

#### **Qualifications**

DipSW Essex Ruskin Unison Route 2005  
 BA Children and Families Norwich University 2009  
 Emerging leaders Cambridge Downing College 2013  
 Diploma Systemic Supervision Institute of Family Therapy 2015  
 Systemic Leadership institute of Family Therapy 2016  
 Teaching Award Level 3 NVQ 2019  
 Practice Leaders Development Programme 2020/21

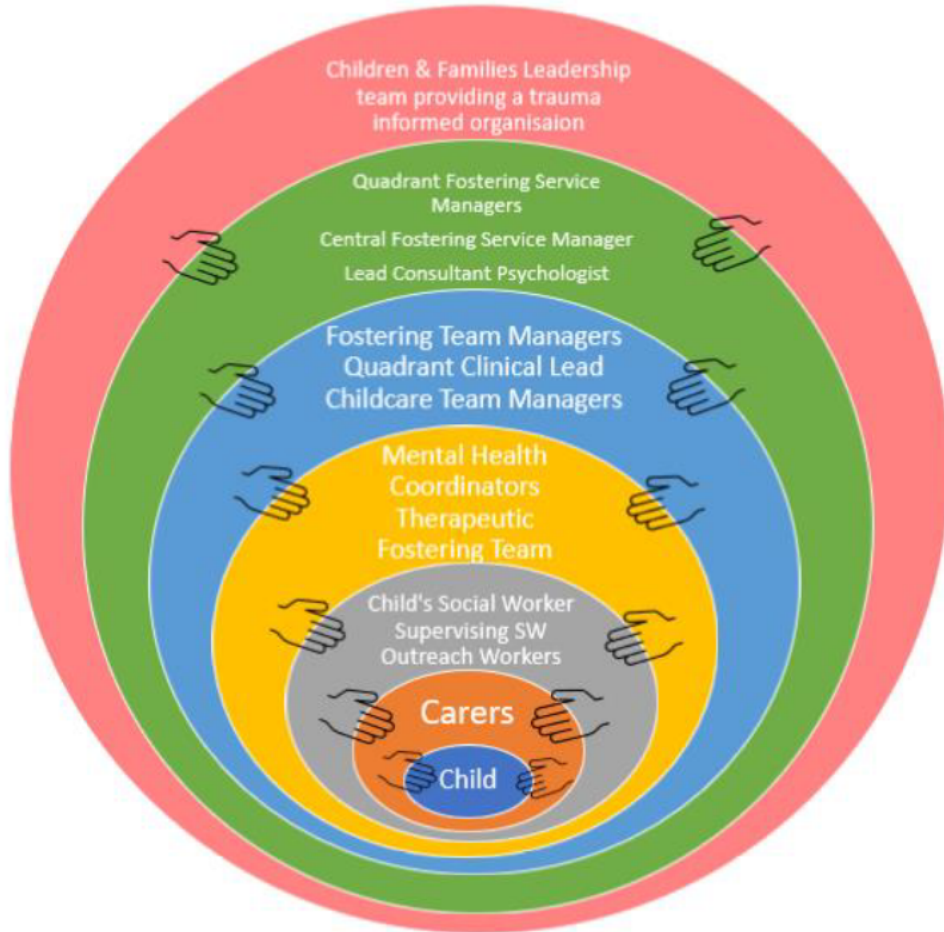
#### **Experience**

Social Care Direct 1999 -2004  
 2005 -2009 Social Worker in Assessment and Children in Care  
 2009-2010 Team Manager of Children in Care  
 2010-2012 Local Authority Designated Officer  
 2012-2016 Team Manager Children in Care  
 2016-2019 Service Manager Assessment and Children with Disabilities teams  
 2019-2020- Partners in Practice Consultant.  
 2020- Interim Director of Local Delivery South



# APPENDIX A

## Whole Service Culture of Trauma Informed Therapeutic Care



Whole Service Culture of Trauma Informed Therapeutic Care		
Who?	What do they do?	How do they do it?
Children & Families Functional Leadership team (FLT)	<b>FLT provide</b> a trauma informed organisation within which a whole service culture of trauma informed; therapeutic care can thrive.	<b>FLT do this by:</b> endorsing this approach and encouraging others in the organisation to understand and practice in a trauma informed way.
Quadrant Fostering Service Managers  Central Fostering Service Manager  Lead Consultant Psychologist	<b>All 3 roles provide:</b> Strategic leadership of trauma-informed, therapeutic approach  <b>The Lead Consultant Psychologist provides:</b> Specific clinical expertise around ways to apply knowledge around trauma, child and adult psychology, therapeutic parenting and amelioration of psychological discomfort to the care of children looked after + their application at a strategic level	<b>Service Managers do this by:</b> Reflective supervision of Team Managers Line management of psychologists Development days to support understanding of whole service culture. Trauma-informed, therapeutic thinking within all fostering / CIC policies  <b>The Lead Consultant Psychologist does this by:</b> Strategic clinical leadership of the service. Clinical supervision and strategic clinical leadership of the quadrant <del>clinical</del> leads. Strategic clinical leadership of MHCs & the Therapeutic Fostering Team Clinical consultations on complex cases or issues Oversight of the therapeutic pathway training programme
Fostering Team Managers  Quadrant Clinical Leads.  Childcare Team Managers	<b>Quadrant Clinical leads provide</b> Specific clinical expertise and knowledge on trauma, child and adult psychology, therapeutic parenting and amelioration of psychological discomfort to the care of children looked after + their application at a quadrant level  <b>Team Managers provide:</b> A team environment that promotes trauma informed therapeutic approaches.	<b>Quadrant Clinical leads do this by:</b> Clinical supervision of Mental Health Coordinators Clinical consultations to individuals and teams Therapeutic pathway training for staff and carers: delivery Direct clinical work with and assessment of complex cases Contribution of clinical viewpoint to the local / quadrant strategic thinking Links-making and joint planning with local mental health care providers Recruitment of MHCs  <b>Team Managers do this by:</b> Reflective supervision of Social Workers. Audits / effective feedback loops to encourage therapeutic work Expectation that all staff attend the Staff therapeutic pathways training programme. Encouraging staff to make proactive use of the clinical support available to them
Mental Health Coordinators. (MHC)  Therapeutic Fostering Team (TFT)	<b>MHCs provide:</b> Specific clinical expertise around ways to apply knowledge around trauma, child and adult mental health, therapeutic parenting and amelioration of emotional discomfort to the care of children looked after + their application at a team level  <b>TFT provides:</b> Intensive therapeutic parenting support to foster families alongside their allocated SSW	<b>MHCs and TFT do this by:</b> Clinical consultations to social workers and carers Therapeutic interventions / Direct work Delivering training for staff and carers Links-making and joint planning with local mental health care providers Joint working with SSW to strengthen the support provided to the fostering household Team Around the Placement (TAP) meetings that engage the network around the child to strengthen placement stability.
Child's Social Workers  Supervising Social Workers  Outreach Workers  Personal Advisors in LAAC	<b>All roles Provide:</b> Carers and children with the emotional containment needed and structures that are focused on stability through effective matching, planning and responsive social work	<b>All workers do this by:</b> Providing Carers with emotionally attuned, trauma informed reflective supervision & support Placement Planning Meetings that incorporate trauma and therapeutic approaches. Team Around the Placement meetings (TAP) Delivery of Non-Violent Resistance training and other courses throughout the 3 different fostering training pathways. Encouraging carers to make proactive use of the therapeutic training pathway and clinical support available to them.
Foster carers  Supported Lodgings carers	<b>Provide:</b> <b>Children with trauma informed, therapeutic care which meets their emotional needs &amp; maximises stability for the child.</b>	<b>Carers do this by:</b> Engaging in learning and support available on trauma informed therapeutic approached. Understanding a child's behaviour in the context of trauma, adapting their responses to prevent escalation / placement breakdown and proactively Using the support around them for the emotional scaffolding needed to care for a traumatised child.
<b>The child</b>	<b>Receives</b> Care that meets their emotional needs, provides stability and the conditions within which they can thrive, bearing in mind their individual and trauma-linked difficulties and characteristics	

## APPENDIX B



Foster Carer  
Expenses Guidance .p